

Exploring undergraduate students' difficulties in EFL academic writing

Atikah Wati¹, Kardi Nurhadi², Ahmad Lukmanul Hakim³

English Education Department, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education Science, Universitas
Wiralodra

Corresponding author

Email: atikah_wati@unwir.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to explore undergraduate students' difficulties and how they cope with difficulties in EFL academic writing. Despite much research revealing the difficulties of undergraduate students in academic writing, relatively few studies implied academic writing difficulties in the higher education context. To fill this gap, this present study focused on exploring EFL students' difficulties and how they cope with the difficulties in terms of lexical difficulties, grammar and punctuation, avoiding plagiarism, and text structure. This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological case study design. Three undergraduate students were recruited as participants for this study. The data were collected through interview sessions employing open-ended questions adopting a three series of interviews by Seidman (2013) consisting of thirteen questions. The result showed similarities and differences in difficulties and the ways to cope with it. The result of this research is expected to support the lecturer to consider the students' difficulties and their ways to cope with the difficulties where it can be applied in academic writing subject. Moreover, the difficulty in academic writing is important for students to examine the effective ways to cope with difficulties to become better academic writers.

Keywords: Undergraduate students; Academic writing; Academic writing difficulties

INTRODUCTION

At the higher education level, academic writing is commonly described as scientific writing, which is represented by organized research practiced and employed by the researcher (Al-Mubarak, 2017). Academic writing is considered different from the other forms of writing in terms of purpose, structure, style, audience, and word choice (Singh & Lukkarila, 2017). According to Oshima and Hogue (2007), academic writing is clearly different from personal or creative writing, which is a kind of formal writing used in high school or college classes. One of the purposes of writing academic texts is to fulfill the requirements of college, university, conference, and publication (Poudel, 2018). At Wiralodra University, academic writing is one of the courses that English students take in the fourth semester. Since academic writing is beyond how to use correct tense and verb form, it becomes more challenging than writing activities in general (Mumtaz, 2021). In

this case, many EFL learners consider academic writing a difficult subject to master even though they have been taking the English course for four years (Noori, 2020). Many university students find academic writing difficult and the learning process is considered a problematic activity (Nawel, 2021). Moreover, the difficulties encountered by undergraduate students appear to be caused by the academic writing process that involves special ways and also complex thinking in organizing and presenting the writing (Nation, 2020)

Prior research on exploring the students' difficulties in academic writing found some important findings. Noori (2020) found that students of Afghan universities faced several difficulties in academic writing. The difficulties are in terms of language, structure, and content. This study implies that in terms of language, students lack the ability to use fitting linking words, appropriate vocabulary, and the use of similar vocabulary. In terms of structure, the students faced difficulties in providing text citations, organizing the content, planning to structure, and organizing ideas sufficiently. In terms of content, students cannot differentiate types of genres, analyze the task's requirements, and present adequate main and minor supporting points effectively. Mumtaz (2021) revealed that students cannot use appropriate vocabulary. This study implies that the students are not able to express themselves in their own words, and their works look patchy due to a deficiency in academic writing skills. Moreover, Shokirjonovna (2020) revealed that several students spell words incorrectly, write the incorrect plural forms of nouns, write poorly constructed sentences, and ignore grammar, such as capitalization and punctuation. In this case, students find it difficult to construct a well-organized piece of writing.

Despite much research revealing the difficulties of undergraduate students in academic writing, relatively few studies implied academic writing difficulties in the higher education context, especially in Wiralodra University students. To fill this gap, this study is purposed to look into the complexity of academic writing that is perceived by English students of Wiralodra University and how they cope with their problems.

Academic writing

The term academic writing, in general, is a genre of writing that emphasizes the formality of language and is used in the academic context. Academic writing refers to any writing assignment accomplished in the academic context such as an academic journal, dissertation, conference paper, research paper, and thesis. One of the purposes of writing academic texts is to fulfill the requirements of college, university, conference, and publication (Poudel, 2018). Since academic writing is accomplished in an academic context, it differs from other kinds of writing such as creative or personal writing. It considers the formality of the language used in the academic text. According to Oshima and Hogue (2007) cited in Poudel (2018), Academic writing is clearly different from personal or creative writing which is a kind of formal writing used in high school or college classes. The academic writing style uses a specific expression with intellectual boundaries and the area of expertise.

In academic writing, undergraduate students, particularly EFL learners, encounter a difficult situation in developing their ideas through writing. According to Celik (2020), EFL learners, as non-native language people, face a more complex situation in expressing their ideas through writing where the ability to present the idea and argument logically, concisely, and clearly is essential for academic writing. It indicates that the students should be able to think critically to build their arguments and gain much information to develop their opinions in academic texts. The information gained by undergraduate students should also be verified to avoid misinformation for the readers when interpreting the academic text. In addition, academic writing is a process in which the researcher needs specialized skills (Celik, 2020). Trzeciak & Mackay (1994) pinpointed several important skills to make academic writing activity more effective, such as the ability to locate the material, summarizing skills, synthesizing materials, writing ethics to avoid plagiarism, knowing the standard in citation and referencing, and the ability in organizing and laying out the written text. So, based on its complexity, undergraduate students at higher education levels need more effort when accomplishing the assignment from an academic writing subject.

EFL learners' difficulties in academic writing

Writing is a challenging skill, especially for foreign language learners. It becomes challenging because it requires more time to think and several aspects to be considered. According to Harmer (2004), students need lots of time to think in a writing activity. They spend more time thinking than they do in oral activities. Besides that, several considerations, such as dictions, spelling, and grammar, should be corrected. Thus, students need to consult grammar books, dictionaries, or other references to help the students in correcting the written text. That is why writing is not easy; students often find errors in their written text. As a result, Nurfidoh & Kareviaty (2021), in their research about students' difficulties in writing revealed that major errors produced by students are related to verb tenses, wrong dictions, miss-ordering, spelling, punctuation, and preposition.

Since academic writing is considered a product of the mind, it involves mental and cognitive activity (Alfadda, 2012). In academic writing, students have several difficulties related to academic writing activity. According to Shokirjonovna (2020), the difficulties of nowadays students in academic writing involve lexical difficulties, grammar and punctuation, plagiarism, and text structure. These problems commonly appear in the academic writing field. According to Noori (2020), university students face difficulties in academic writing subjects where the difficulties involve the language term as the highest result of students' difficulties among the structure and content terms. As EFL learners, students tend to face difficulties in language terms, such as the utilization of vocabulary and discourse markers to express their ideas. Therefore, according to Mwangi (2017), technology can be used to enhance students' effectiveness in learning to write. Writing is a challenging skill, especially for foreign language learners. It becomes challenging because it requires more time to think and several aspects to be considered. According to Harmer (2004), students need lots of time to think in a writing activity. They spend more

time thinking than they do in oral activities. Besides that, several considerations, such as dictions, spelling, and grammar, should be corrected. Thus, students need to consult grammar books, dictionaries, or other references to help the students in correcting the written text. That is why writing is not easy; students often find errors in their written text. As a result, Nurfidoh & Kareviaty (2021), in their research about students' difficulties in writing, revealed that major errors produced by students are related to verb tenses, wrong dictions, miss-ordering, spelling, punctuation, and prepositions.

METHOD

Grounded in a qualitative approach with a phenomenological case study design, this research aims to explore the difficulties of undergraduate students in EFL academic writing and how they cope with the difficulties. The researcher used a phenomenological case study, which focuses on explaining a phenomenon of the event (Yin, 2014). Phenomenological case study design represents several individual's meaning of their live experience of a phenomenon (Mourlam et al., 2019). Out of 20 undergraduate students who participated in academic writing courses, 2 female and 1 male undergraduate student were purposefully recruited as participants for this study. The consideration was referred to their academic writing score in a semester. The data were collected from interview sessions using open-ended questions. The interview was conducted offline and online. The offline interview was conducted at Wiralodra University, and the online interview was conducted through the WhatsApp application. The data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis method by Marshall and Rossman (1999). The data analysis method consists of four steps, organizing the data, generating categories and themes from the interview data, testing emergent understanding toward the data, and searching for alternative explanations from different theories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research explored undergraduate students' difficulties and how they cope with the difficulties in EFL academic writing. The data in this research were collected through interview sessions with sixth-semester students. The researcher limited the findings to the difficulty in lexical difficulties, grammar, punctuation, avoiding plagiarism and text structure.

Undergraduate students' difficulties in writing the academic text

Lexical difficulties

In academic writing, the consideration of lexical choice needs to be considered. It refers to the word choice that corresponds to being used in the academic text. Besides that, linking words must also be considered to make the sentence coherent (Shokirjonovna, 2020). From the interview data of participants, the difficulties of lexical choices are revealed in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' lexical difficulties

Participant	Lexical Difficulties
1	<i>Lexical difficulty is related to the difficulties of word choice when writing a journal. The difference between academic text and non-academic text is located in its formality. So, for the difficulties, I still have a limited vocabulary. I was afraid that the words I had chosen were not formal. That is the difficulty. Then, I was confused about placing the linking words, such as where I should place, therefore, in addition, and hence. (Participant 1, offline interview 23/06/2022).</i>
2	<i>It seems like I was not too familiar with lexical difficulties. The difficulty is there are many repeated linking words when writing the academic text because I only know a few suitable words. Sometimes, I need a deep understanding to find appropriate linking words. (Participant 2, online interview 25/06/2022).</i>
3	<i>I have heard about lexical difficulties. In the academic writing subject, I was assigned to create a mini-research with a specified number of words. There are so many words for me. The difficulty was from the vocabulary. I was not careful with the use of vocabulary and linking words. (Participant 3, online interview 22/06/2022).</i>

Grammar and punctuation

In the context of writing, grammar, and punctuation are necessary considerations that make the sentences organized, and the readers can understand the text's message easily (Bram, 1995; Hirai, 2010). Shokirjonovna (2020) argued that grammar and punctuation difficulty is a great problem among students. The data of interviews from participants in terms of students' grammar and punctuation difficulties are revealed in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' grammar and punctuation difficulties

Participant	Grammar and Punctuation Difficulties
1	<i>I know. I know a little bit about punctuation and grammar rules—the difficulties in determining grammar and punctuation in academic writing. The difficulties were from grammar in the use of tenses like the tenses that use “have” and continuous. So, I used the simple one. I have not experienced using complex grammar. For the punctuation, I have difficulty with the use of quotation marks. I often misplaced full stop/dot when using quotation marks. (Participant 1, offline interview 23/06/2022).</i>
2	<i>I know a little bit about grammar and punctuation, but I often misspell it. Difficulties in determining grammar: I was confused to determine. Grammar. For instance, when I got an assignment, I was confused about determining the tenses. Which tenses should I use, simple present tense or anything else? For the difficulty, I need to develop my understanding of the use of grammar and punctuation. (Participant 2, online interview 25/06/2022).</i>
3	<i>The rules of grammar and punctuation are like using past, subject, verb, and adverb. In punctuation, we need to be careful when using exclamation marks, colons, and question marks. The difficulties in determining grammar were difficulty in memorizing the vocabulary and a lack of understanding of grammar. (Participant 3, online interview 22/06/2022).</i>

Avoiding plagiarism

Shokirjonovna (2020) described that plagiarism referred to the act of borrowing passages from books, articles, or websites without identifying the source sentences. Plagiarism is concerned as a complex problem for the majority of students. The participants face difficulties in developing their ideas (Noori, 2020). The data of interviews from participants related to the difficulties in the term plagiarism is revealed in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' difficulties in avoiding plagiarism

Participant	Grammar and Punctuation Difficulties
1	<i>Plagiarism: Besides not citing the source, plagiarism is also copying without paraphrasing. Besides respecting the writer, we must create original sentences based on our ideas to develop ourselves. The difficulties related to plagiarism are how to paraphrase. I have to think a lot about paraphrasing the sentences. There are lots of sentences. Then, I had to paraphrase all of them. I think it is difficult to paraphrase from the experts. (Participant 1, offline interview 23/06/2022).</i>
2	<i>In my opinion, plagiarism in academic writing is something that should be avoided. Plagiarism means copying the theory or sentences from someone. The difficulty related to plagiarism is paraphrasing sentences because I feel that I still lack vocabulary. So, to paraphrase the sentences, I need a deep understanding, and also, when finding the English journal, I have to understand it by translating it into Bahasa. (Participant 2, online interview 25/06/2022).</i>
3	<i>Plagiarism is like copying sentences from other sources or journals as if it was self-composed. I think avoiding plagiarism is important in writing academic texts because it is like stealing someone's theory. The difficulty that I found when avoiding plagiarism was that I often lacked ideas while writing the academic text. (Participant 3, online interview 22/06/2022).</i>

Text structure

Shokirjonovna (2020) described that structure in the academic text, whether a thesis, essay, or article, typically comprises three components: introduction, main body, and conclusion. In addition, each component elaborates on different passages following the nature of the content purpose. Many students struggle to structure their work, such as the inability to draw up every single part and arrange the content on each part. The data of interviews from participants in the term of students' grammar and punctuation difficulties are revealed in Table 4.

Table 4. Students' difficulties in terms of text structure

Participant	Text Structure Difficulties
1	<i>The text structure is text arrangement in academic writing, such as starting with an introduction, then a literature review, methodology, and findings, and then writing the abstract. Due to the difficulties, we had to write abstracts clearly and concisely. It is also difficult to conclude the overall finding. We also have to make the introduction short. In writing the introduction I feel difficult to find the problem and research question. In the literature review, I find it difficult to categorize what will be elaborated, like grouping the topic. (Participant 1, offline interview 23/06/2022).</i>

2	<i>Text structure in academic text is like a sequence in certain text in which each part has different content. The difficulties started from developing the idea. Sometimes, I can develop my idea in a deadline situation. Then, to write them, I need a deep understanding of academic writing. Also, I find it difficult to think critically. (Participant 2, online interview 25/06/2022).</i>
3	<i>Text structure in the academic text is like an introduction, literature review, and abstract. When creating mini research, I was confused with the content of the introduction and the content of the literature review. In the introduction, I find it difficult to provide a detailed explanation of our research. I was often lack of ideas. In the literature review, I find it difficult to find out the previous problem. The conclusion must be in line with our research, so I often lack an idea. (Participant 3, online interview 22/06/2022).</i>

The ways of students to cope with the difficulties

In terms of students' way of coping with the difficulties, the researcher categorized how students cope with the difficulties in lexical difficulties, grammar and punctuation rules, avoiding plagiarism, and planning text structure. The participants conveyed various answers related to the four aspects.

Lexical difficulties

Referring to the difficulties in terms of lexical, the participants conveyed several ways to cope with the difficulties. It is utilized as a solution for the participants to enhance their opportunity to minimize their mistakes when facing difficulties during the writing activity. The interview data of participants related to the ways participants cope with the difficulties revealed in Table 5.

Table 5. Students' ways to cope with lexical difficulties

Participant	The way to cope with the difficulties
1	<i>To cope with the difficulties, I have to read many journals and learn about the linking words from the articles such as in addition, hence, and therefore. I usually use them for the journal that I made. I consider the linking words; I think it is suitable to put here... but I do not know it specifically. (Participant 1, offline interview 23/06/2022).</i>
2	<i>To overcome the difficulties, I used to use Google to find out it. I used Google Translate. I typed Bahasa first, then translated it into English. I read it and then copied the sentences. If there were any in-corresponding words, I would change them in Google Translate. (Participant 2, online interview 25/06/2022).</i>
3	<i>In my opinion, to overcome the difficulties, I have to do reading and writing a lot, and learn to develop my vocabulary. (Participant 3, online interview 22/06/2022).</i>

Grammar and punctuation

Relating to the difficulties in terms of grammar and punctuation, the participants stated the ways to cope with the difficulties. It refers to the solution for the participants to enhance their understanding of grammar and punctuation. So, it would help them to increase their academic writing skill. The interview data of participants related to the ways participants cope with the difficulties revealed in Table 6.

Table 6. Students' ways to cope with grammar and punctuation difficulties

Participant	The way to cope with the difficulties
1	<i>I used to use simple tenses to cope with the difficulties in grammar. I did not use the complex ones because I was worried about the mistakes. So, I used the simple ones. Regarding the punctuation, I think it is okay. I can use Google to check the use of punctuation. (Participant 1, offline interview 23/06/2022).</i>
2	<i>To cope with this difficulty, I may need to understand more to determine grammar and the use of punctuation. So, I have to learn more about it. (Participant 2, online interview 25/06/2022).</i>
3	<i>The solution is the same as the previous one. I have to enhance my vocabulary, read a lot, and learn more about grammar. (Participant 3, online interview 22/06/2022).</i>

Avoiding plagiarism

Regarding the difficulties in avoiding plagiarism, paraphrasing was mostly considered a complicated activity requiring certain techniques. Furthermore, the participants presented several ways to cope with the difficulties of avoiding plagiarism. The interview data of participants related to the ways participants cope with the difficulties revealed in table 7.

Table 7. Students' ways to cope with avoiding plagiarism difficulties

Participant	The way to cope with the difficulties
1	<i>It was about paraphrasing. To cope with the difficulty, maybe I have to learn more about the paraphrase technique to ease changing the sentences and word order without changing the original meaning. I also often used synonyms to change the words. (Participant 1, offline interview 23/06/2022).</i>
2	<i>By translating the sentences using Google Translate. After that, change the sentences using your own words in Bahasa first, then translate them back into English. (Participant 2, online interview 25/06/2022).</i>
3	<i>So, avoid plagiarism by reading the journals and ensuring that the journal we use is a trusted source. Then, I often use an anti-plagiarism application to check which sentences need to be changed to avoid plagiarism. (Participant 3, online interview 22/06/2022).</i>

Text structure

Concerning the difficulties in terms of text structure, the participants presented several ways to overcome the difficulties in structuring the text. The solutions were considered to stimulate the participants to enhance their understanding of the structure

of the academic text. The interview data of participants related to the ways participants cope with the difficulties revealed in Table 8.

Table 8. Students' ways to cope with text structure difficulties

Participant	The way to cope with the difficulties
1	<i>Keep reading; you must read several articles like journals or a thesis. So, it will be easy to find out the text arrangement and how to write abstracts correctly. (Participant 1, offline interview 23/06/2022).</i>
2	<i>To cope with the difficulties, I had to translate the sentences and find several references on the internet. I seek an Indonesian journal so I can arrange the sentences using my first language and then translate them into English. But, when I find English journals, I often translate them into Bahasa first, then change them back into English. (Participant 2, online interview 25/06/2022).</i>
3	<i>To cope with the difficulties, I read a lot, such as studying the content in the introduction, the content in the abstract, and other points. (Participant 3, online interview 22/06/2022).</i>

Discussion

The first difficulty is in the term lexical. The lexical aspect considers the utilization of formal words and appropriate linking words or discourse markers. Relating to the term lexical, the difficulty is mostly caused by the lack of students' vocabulary. It includes the difficulty of locating linking words appropriately to connect their sentences. The students need to be concerned with the vocabulary that is commonly used in academic writing. On the other hand, the students often use repeated linking words or discourse markers. It occurs because they are not familiar with the use of linking words. This situation causes the students to use similar linking words repeatedly. This circumstance is related to Noori (2020), who argued that students have difficulties in terms of language, such as the lack of ability to use fitting linking words, appropriate vocabulary, and the use of similar vocabulary. As a result, the students may create deficient sentences in their academic text. It is supported by Mumtaz (2021), who argued that several students are not able to use appropriate vocabulary, which causes their work to look patchy. A deficiency of academic writing skills causes it.

To cope with the difficulties in terms of lexical, the students need several solutions to minimize their difficulties. There are two possible ways for students to cope with difficulties: reading practice and the use of media. Reading practice, such as reading several academic texts, such as journal articles, research proposals, and a thesis, can assist students in comprehending the academic text more. Therefore, the students argued that they should learn the content of the academic text to increase their understanding of vocabulary usage and linking word placement. Besides, using media such as Google

Translate can help students cope with lexical difficulties. Google Translate provides several word suggestions with examples in the form of sentences and synonyms to increase the understanding of the words. Hence, many students utilize Google Translate to help them find correct words in writing.

The second difficulty is in terms of grammar and punctuation. In this context, the students' difficulty is mostly from the use of complex tenses. It is related by Nurfidoh & Kareviaty (2021) who argued that one of the students' difficulties is related to verb tenses. Complex tenses, such as present perfect, past continuous, or past future, are considered complicated and distract their attention in writing. Even though the students are familiar with the grammar rules, they still find it difficult to determine proper tenses in their work. Besides that, the students' difficulty is related to the misplacement of punctuation. The use of quotation marks is likely confusing when placing a full stop or dot at the end of the sentence. The quotation mark is used in academic writing to provide direct citation by writing the expert theory. Sometimes, it is complicated for the students to place the full stop whether inside or outside the quotation mark. The difficulties in the use of tenses and punctuation may create an inappropriate context for the sentence if unsuitable tenses are used in their tenses.

To cope with the difficulties in grammar and punctuation, solutions are generated such as using simple tenses, utilizing media, and enhancing the understanding through reading practice. To minimize the mistakes related to the complexity of tenses, the students often consider using simple tenses, such as simple past, simple present, and simple future. They struggle to fit their sentences with simple tenses. They argued that it can help them provide logical sentences because they use familiar tenses. Besides that, to deal with the difficulties in punctuation, they often utilize Google to check their punctuation in writing. In this case, a platform to check the punctuation is needed which can be accessed through Google. Moreover, reading and writing practice about academic texts is necessary to increase students' academic writing skills. However, the lecturers' guidance is important to help the students increase their understanding of the meaning of certain grammar and punctuation.

The third difficulty is in terms of avoiding plagiarism. In the academic writing class, the students were trained to avoid plagiarism. It is purposed to respect the author by creating their sentences referring to the text citation. Even though the students understand the concept of plagiarism and the importance of avoiding it, they still face difficulties in dealing with it. It is supported by Mohammed & Perun (2015), who argued that the students are familiar with grammatical rules, but they find it difficult to apply them in their sentences based on their language. The students encountered several difficulties in terms of plagiarism. The difficulty is mostly from the paraphrasing technique. Shokirjonovna (2020) described that students could paraphrase their sentences to avoid plagiarism by rearranging their sentences referring to the citation. On the other hand, the students argued that the lack of vocabulary and ideas causes difficulties in paraphrasing sentences when they need to write many sentences. The lack of vocabulary

often prevents students from developing ideas and rearranging sentences. The students stated that it was difficult to find proper vocabulary when arranging their sentences because the sentences that were created should be written in formal form. This indicates that students need to enrich their academic vocabulary to help them arrange their sentences. So, it will provide several ways to paraphrase the sentences by rearranging the sentences.

Drawing on the difficulties of avoiding plagiarism, the students suggested several ways to cope with the difficulties. Regarding the difficulties in paraphrasing the text, the students suggested learning more about paraphrasing techniques such as the use of synonyms, changing the sentence order, translating the sentences, and utilizing media to check the sentences. Using Google Translate as a medium can help the students understand complicated sentences. It enables the students to develop their ideas by providing understandable sentences. Besides enhancing the students' understanding, it also provides word synonyms to help the students choose desired words that are appropriate to be written. Therefore, students often use Google Translate to develop their vocabulary when paraphrasing sentences. In addition, the students suggest an anti-plagiarism checker to check their paraphrased sentences. This study aims to ensure that their sentences are free from plagiarism after paraphrasing them.

The fourth difficulty is in terms of text structure. Related to the text structure, it consists of 3 categories such as introduction, main body, and conclusion. In part of the introduction, students faced difficulties in arranging the abstract and introduction. In writing the abstract, the students need to write clear and concise sentences that illustrate the overall content of the text. In this case, the students argued that it was difficult to write a concise and clear sentence in the abstract that could illustrate all of the text. In this case, teaching the students the essential content of the abstract is important to enhance their understanding. Furthermore, students need to be taught how to draw methods, designs, problems, and findings in the abstract clearly and concisely. In the part of the main body, students faced difficulty in arranging literature reviews. It requires the elaboration of a particular topic related to the research. The students argued that they found it difficult to arrange a literature review. They were confused to elaborate on the related topic. The lack of ideas caused it. The students were not able to develop the idea when arranging the content of the literature review. This difficulty may result in insufficient information being required on the part of the main body. After all, the main reason why the students find difficulty related to the text structure is related to Shokirjonovna (2020), who argued that the students' problem in structuring the text is caused by the inability to draw up every single part considering the singularity of all others. Hence, to help the students develop their ideas, they need to find lots of references that may enable their idea development.

To cope with the difficulty in terms of text structure, the students suggested reading more academic texts such as journals and thesis. It can help them understand more about the essential content in the abstract, introduction, literature review, etc. In this case, the students need to be concerned about the article that they read, which is

necessary to read from a well-written academic text. Besides that, the students consider media like Google Translate to help them construct the content of each part of academic text. The students could use Google Translate to help them comprehend text references, arrange their sentences using their first language, and then translate them back into English to be written in their works.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to explore undergraduate students' difficulties in EFL academic writing, especially in lexical difficulties, grammar and punctuation, avoiding plagiarism, and text structure. Besides that, this research is also expected to explore how students cope with difficulties. The results showed the students' difficulties in certain aspects and how they cope with them. Each participant faced different difficulties and ways to cope with the difficulties even though they were in the same class. The difficulties arise because the students have inadequate time to practice reading and writing, insufficient prior knowledge, a tendency to be concerned with the first language, and time management in accomplishing the assignment. Regarding this phenomenon, students should develop their academic writing skills through regular reading and writing practice, which may be helpful for them. Referring to this issue, it is imperative for the lecturer to facilitate the students' needs to cope with the difficulties in academic writing, which can support the students' learning of the subject. Besides that, providing alternative ways of learning and providing feedback is important referring to which difficulties they have been facing.

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