

## Investigating Academic Writing in EFL Contexts: Students' Voices on Complexities and Coping Strategies

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### Abstract

This research aimed to investigate students' voices regarding the complexities that contribute to challenges and the coping strategies that address academic writing challenges they use in academic writing. Through a qualitative method, four female students majoring in English Education in the eighth semester at a private university in Indonesia were chosen as participants in this study's interview. Data analysis techniques employed include analyzing the data, coding the data, and interpreting the data. The findings indicated that twelve complexities contributed, namely learners' low motivation, lack of lecturers' feedback, lack of translation, lack of references, lack of time, lack of research background, low students' self-confidence, lack of experience in writing, lack of proficiency in reading, lack of critical thinking skill, lack of proper preparation in writing, and lack of a supportive writing learning environment. Students used twelve coping strategies for organization, ideas development, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. These strategies included exercises, feedback, reading academic papers, extensive reading, Google Translate, QuillBot, Grammarly, and Mendeley for arranging academic style. The implication of this research has been discussed here.

**Keywords:** academic writing; English students; students' voices; complexities; coping strategies

### Introduction

Many studies have examined academic writing in terms of challenges. However, little research still discusses academic writing in terms of complexities and coping strategies students use in each aspect of the challenges. Academic writing complexity refers to the elements that lead to academic writing challenges. In contrast, academic writing coping strategies refer to

conscious efforts to overcome academic writing issues. Due to an increasingly globalized world, English is used more frequently in academic writing. Students need to practice academic writing and find suitable topics even though there is a short amount of time to do academic writing. At international universities, students' writings about research designs were inconsistent with the topics and research questions, and they were even found writing

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conclusions before conducting research (McKinley, 2019). To prepare students for writing demands, universities can portray their role in L2 English programs according to the curriculum and complexity of writing (Al Hilali & McKinley, 2021). In China, the most challenging language skill for students is writing because there is no adequate training to write academic writing, even though the assessment of student success at university is academic writing (Zhou et al., 2022). One of their difficulties is using a proper academic style, correctly expressing English ideas, and writing references. Academic writing is supported in part by the availability of tutors who can help students give relevant comments. In China and Indonesia, complexity in academic writing also appears. In Indonesia, university assessment standards also look at students' academic writing, but they have complexities in critical thinking (Islamiyah & Al Fajri, 2020). Therefore, EFL students must use the proper L2 writing system in their academic writing. However, they must also go beyond and develop their ability to construct and communicate ideas in ways accepted by their field of study.

Globally, English students experience problems in their academic writing, especially EFL students, because they are expected to have the ability to adapt their writing to academic writing conventions. Students must be able to structure and develop their thinking as a critical thinking tool in academic writing so that it demands their intellectual engagement. At the university level, EFL students must succeed in their productive skills; however, many students struggle with their writing abilities because these skills need to be prepared (Budjalemba & Listyani, 2020). Some details must be attended

to, and the students are unsure of how to write, making it difficult to write what they intend. One of the challenges they encounter is grammar, formulating ideas, paraphrasing, and summarizing, among other aspects. The students' poor writing proficiency, lack of desire, and limited knowledge make academic writing courses one of the most difficult subjects for writing before they are prepared to write a thesis. According to Sajjad et al. (2021), the significance of academic writing is to demonstrate the student's ability to communicate effectively, intelligence, problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and method of expressing ideas because the outcomes of their academic writing are viewed as their accomplishments. Additionally, the value of academic writing can be determined by examining how well students convey their knowledge of various disciplines, how well they express their opinions as a form of self-expression about these topics, and how well they learn to construct coherent sentences that are relevant to the issue they have raised.

A growing interest in researching coping strategies and complexities in academic writing has emerged due to research studies published in reputable journals in the last four years. First, Bui et al. (2023) completed research about coping strategies in academic writing research conducted on EFL pre-service teachers in Vietnam. They have done rhetorical, metacognitive, cognitive, and social affective strategies. In rhetorical strategy, the variation in organizing their ideas begins with the main idea sentence. It is reinforced by supporting sentences by providing conjunctions between ideas. In metacognitive strategies, there are several steps, such as planning scripts that can

help their writing process provide more informative ideas, compiling scripts by seeking feedback from lecturers and peers, monitoring and evaluating by reconsidering the relevance of their ideas, and revising grammar and lexical errors. In cognitive strategies, they record concepts that can support their arguments and translate them into the target language—in social, affective strategies, asking for feedback from their lecturers, who are experts in a certain field of research, to intensify the quality of content and use of language. The next strategy is to mitigate anxiety by resting to calm their minds.

Second, Lin & Morrison (2021) researched to examine academic writing coping strategies. They discovered that engineering graduate students employed various coping strategies, such as reading and imitating writing models, getting assistance from others, using Google Translate, making careful plans, and consulting dictionaries and grammar books. Their most used strategy is to read research articles and use them as examples for their research articles. It can increase the quality of the content of research articles. Help from others can aid correct errors that the writer was not aware of. Google Translate helps to speed up the translation process into the target language. Then, the right plan can direct the idea of writing a research article. Moreover, using dictionaries and grammar books as supporting tools can check spelling and grammar in writing.

Third, according to Alkhuzae et al. (2019), there are some barriers faced by university students in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in academic writing. Their first barrier is their research background which includes a lack of research expertise and interest. This complexity causes

them to have difficulties in determining research design, collecting data, and analyzing research data. The second barrier is academic writing requirements, including inflexibility and time-consuming academic writing. Writing rules in academic writing that must be obeyed take up time for thoroughness in writing. The students also lack knowledge in academic writing. This deficiency causes them to be hampered in strengthening the quality of the research articles. The last barrier is literature. They have difficulty finding appropriate literature, filtering the right information, and avoiding plagiarism.

Lastly, Altınmakas & Bayyurt (2019) demonstrated that some complexities influence the difficulty of undergraduate English students in Turkey in academic writing. The first complexity is the lack of student experience in academic writing, which causes them anxiety. Students have difficulty developing their L2 writing because of insufficient provisions in previous writing practice. They also did not receive constructive feedback from their teacher, so they felt less confident about their writing. The next complexity is translating into their second language, which causes them difficulties in presenting their ideas. Lack of time is also a complexity that makes it challenging for students to write to the best of their abilities and puts pressure on them. Furthermore, students are lacking in reading, so they do not have adequate background knowledge. The last complexity is the lack of critical thinking skills, so students cannot organize their ideas coherently.

In conclusion, the previous studies demonstrate the significance of examining the complexities and coping strategies that students face when writing academically. Since academic writing is crucial in English classes, this research

can help students, particularly those majoring in English Education in Indonesia, improve their academic writing. The first and second previous studies focused only on coping strategies in academic writing without discussing the complexities of academic writing. The third and fourth previous studies focused only on the complexities of academic writing without discussing coping strategies. Therefore, this research was conducted in Indonesia, especially among English Education students, by discussing complexities and coping strategies in academic writing because previous studies were not conducted in Indonesia and did not discuss complexities and coping strategies all at once in academic writing.

Academic writing has several aspects: organization, logical development of ideas, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). However, previous studies did not focus on each coping strategy used by students for every aspect of the academic writing difficulties they faced. In contrast, this study focused on knowing in depth what coping strategies students use for each aspect of their academic writing difficulties. Considering these problems, two research problems were addressed: what complexities contribute to their academic writing difficulties and what coping strategies students use to deal with their academic difficulties.

## Method

### Research Design

This study used a qualitative design because it is consistent with the research context,

namely, to discover students' voices about the complexities and coping strategies in academic writing. In addition, this method was used to obtain more comprehensive and objective data regarding the complexities and coping strategies in academic writing faced by EFL students so that the research design is robust.

### Participants

The chosen individuals were eight-semester students since they had five semesters of prior academic writing experience in the form of essays, research articles, thesis proposals, and a thesis. Four students with high academic writing scores were interviewed. Purposive sampling was employed in this study to select the students for interview because it was tailored to the research goal, namely by choosing participants with high scores who were most aware of the complexities and coping strategies in their academic writing. They were also selected because they contributed to the most comprehensive understanding of the information on this research topic. In addition, three succeeded in publishing their research articles in proceedings, and one succeeded in publishing an article in a journal.

The data of the interviewed participants are shown in the following table. The researcher selected three participants using the considerations described in Table 1 below. The considerations used were their good writing grade and experience publishing their research articles in proceedings when they followed international conferences and published research articles in reputable national journals. Students with grades ranging from 80 to 100 got an A.

**Table 1***Interviewees' Profile Data*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Writing Grade</b>	<b>Other Learning Academic Writing Experiences</b>
Participant 1	22	Female	A	Publishing research an article in an international conference proceeding
Participant 2	23	Female	A	Publishing research an article in an international conference proceeding
Participant 3	23	Female	A	Publishing research an article in an international conference proceeding
Participant 4	21	Female	A	Publishing research an article in a reputable national journal

**Instrument**

The interview was the instrument. An interview was conducted to obtain students' perceptions of the complexities that contribute to their academic writing difficulties and the coping strategies they use to overcome each aspect of difficulties in academic writing. Researchers used semi-structured interviews because researchers wanted to find out informants' perceptions more openly. The interview was conducted individually using English. These interview questions were developed and validated by the Academic Writing course lecturer. There were 16 interview questions covering what complexities influence their difficulties in academic writing and the coping strategies they use in an introduction, a review of literature, a method, a finding and discussion, a conclusion, an abstract, expressing logical ideas, coherence, and cohesion, vocabulary, summarizing, paraphrasing, grammatical aspects, linking sentences, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, and academic writing style.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected through interview transcripts. Data were collected from students at a private university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. To collect research data, three participants answered 16 interview questions. Participants were questioned about their experiences with academic writing when composing research articles, particularly regarding the complexities and coping strategies they used in academic writing. The duration of the interview for each participant was thirty minutes. The length of the interview lasted for two hours. Interview data were recorded using the Zoom Meetings application, allowing each participant to participate remotely from home. Following was a description of how the interview was performed. Before conducting the interview, the researchers opened the interview flow and conducted the interview. After that, the researchers confirmed the interview results to the participants and ended the interview. Lastly, the researchers noted the interview results in field notes and identified follow-ups based on the interview results.

## Data Analysis

The information from the interview was analyzed using the theory from Creswell (2009). The researcher organized and analyzed the data, coded the data, and interpreted the meaning of the coded data as part of the interview data analysis process. In the first stage, the researcher made interview transcripts from interview recordings to analyze which data were important and related to the research question. In the second stage, the researcher coded the data by searching for keywords from the interview transcripts related to the topic to make a systematic description. In the third stage, the researcher determined the data results as a form of interpretation of the topic by explaining whether the results were in line with previous research.

## Findings and Discussion

### Findings

#### ***Complexities in Academic Writing***

Four participants were interviewed and related to the complexities that influence their difficulties in academic writing. When asked why they struggled writing academically, they provided the answers below. When Participant 1 was tasked with writing a research article, the work was done when it was close to collecting the assignment. The attitude shown by Participant 1 shows low motivation in academic writing. Academic writing lecturers also do not provide any feedback during the writing process and at the end of writing. Participant 1 experienced the challenge of translating an article into English, so Google Translate was required. Another complexity faced by Participant 1 is the difficulty in finding sources of

research articles that are relevant to the research topic.

*“I am not too motivated in academic writing, so I do it when the deadline is close. After that, my lecturer did not give feedback when I was in my third semester writing essays and in my fourth semester when I wrote my first research article. I just got feedback in the seventh semester when I was writing a thesis proposal. I am still having trouble translating the sentences I made in the source language into the target language correctly, so I use Google Translate. I do not know how to find many articles that are relevant to my research” (Participant 1).*

The complexity faced by Participant 2 is time constraints. The time given by the lecturer is very short because, for undergraduate students, writing a research article is the first task which certainly requires sufficient time for beginners. Participant 2 also lacked confidence in writing research articles because Participant 2 thought her research skills were lacking. Apart from that, Participant 2 is the same as Participant 1 because they do their assignments when the deadline is approaching. Therefore, Participant 2 did not have proper preparation in academic writing, so Participant 2 did not have a timeline for planning and drafting a manuscript. So, Participant 2 lacks proper preparation in writing.

*“My lecturer gives only a short time to write an article. If calculated, he only gives two months to write a research article. I am not good at doing research. Besides that, I am not so confident with my writing. I am confused about when to plan and compile academic papers because usually I work on them when the deadline for writing the article is only a few days. Usually, my idea arises to write research articles when the deadline for writing research articles is only a few days.*

*However, without any planning and preparation of the manuscript, it makes me anxious and worried if I cannot finish it on time.” (Participant 2).*

Lack of writing practice is also a complexity in academic writing, shown by Participant 3. In addition, Participant 3 has difficulty developing ideas when writing research articles, which is caused by another complexity, namely a lack of reading. This lack of reading also raises another complexity: the lack of critical thinking. Furthermore, Participant 3 stated that although a quiet learning environment can increase focus in doing research articles, there is an obstacle that affects the speed of completing academic writing because Participant 3 feels sleepy, especially after completing much other coursework. Therefore, Participant 3 also experienced another complexity in academic writing: the lack of a supportive writing learning environment.

*“I had not written much before, so I had a challenge with academic writing. I also do not read every day, so I have a hard time coming up with ideas when I write, and critical thinking becomes challenging for me. I can write research articles fluently usually because I am looking for a quiet learning environment so I can focus on doing it. However, sometimes even in a quiet place, I get anxious, especially after I finish a lot of my coursework. So this usually makes my articles finish late.” (Participant 3).*

Participant 4 said that even though Participant 4 had prepared a schedule for completing his research article, it turned out that the completion of the research article was not following the specified schedule. Participant 4 stated that working on this research article was very long. The work that did not follow this

schedule was also due to the many assignments that semester. Therefore, Participant 4 experienced complexity in academic writing, namely the lack of time management. Participant 4 and Participant 2 have the same complexity in the time section. Apart from that, Participant 4 also experienced the same complexity as Participant 1, namely the difficulty in getting feedback and getting detailed explanations about the sections in academic writing, which created challenges in writing research articles. So, another complexity of Participant 4 is the lack of feedback.

*“Regarding time management in working on research articles, I usually set a target that this week I should be able to complete the introduction section. Then next week, I should be able to complete the method part. Then, I collect research data within two weeks. After that, I write the results and discussion sections. The last, I write the conclusion and abstract. Even though I had arranged all the parts according to the date I had planned, I could not complete the time management on time according to the plan I had drawn up. This is because I have assignments from other courses that prevent me from completing them on time. Next, when I have difficulty working on a research article, I seek help from my friends. I asked them about every provision that had to be met in each part of the research articles, from the introduction to the conclusion, even with an abstract, to make sure whether any of the provisions in each of these parts were left out. However, they are sometimes reluctant to tell me the terms of each section because they find it difficult. When I ask the lecturers about the part of writing a research article that I do not know, sometimes the*

*lecturers reply and sometimes do not reply because they are busy.” (Participant 4).*

From the data above, it could be concluded that twelve complexities contribute to their difficulty in academic writing. The first complexity was a lack of motivation. The second complexity was the lack of lecturer feedback. The third complexity was the lack of translation. The fourth complexity was the lack of references. The fifth complexity was the lack of time. The sixth complexity was a lack of research background. The seventh complexity was a lack of self-confidence. The eighth complexity was a lack of experience in writing. The ninth complexity was a lack of proficiency in reading. The tenth complexity was a lack of critical thinking skills. The eleventh complexity was the lack of proper preparation in writing. The twelfth complexity was the lack of a supportive writing learning environment.

### ***Coping Strategies to Support Academic Writing***

After that, the interview with four participants continued to learn more about their particular coping strategies. The participants' responses about the coping strategies they applied to the organization are listed below. Participant 1 experienced difficulties in the structural aspect because writing rules had to be obeyed in writing articles. Writing exercises are the right coping strategy to deal with difficulties in the structure section because the writing process becomes easy.

*“For me, it is difficult because I have to require a proper sentence and structure, and we are not free to determine the length of our article. There are a lot of other rules like word count and font. I do more writing exercises as my*

*frequent coping strategy because it makes my writing perfect” (Participant 1).*

After the writing practice strategy, Participant 2 asked for feedback from lecturers and colleagues as a coping strategy in this organizational aspect. The suggestions obtained in writing articles from lecturers and colleagues will construct a good writing structure, provided that the feedback is clear and comprehensive.

*“If I find difficulties, I will ask my lecturer. I also ask my friends to get feedback. So, my coping strategy is that talk to my lecturer and my friends to get their advice if I encounter any issues” (Participant 2).*

Because in the organizational aspect, students must be able to write an introductory part to a conclusion following the provisions of article writing, they must have much literature as their reading source. Therefore, Participant 3 has a coping strategy in this aspect by reading a lot so that the understanding of the research topic raised is right. Even though reading research articles in a research journal cannot be understood with one reading, students must practice continuously to practice their reading comprehension.

*“The coping strategy I typically employ requires me to read more. I must be aware of how to acquire more information and sources to prevent a lack of comprehension” (Participant 3).*

Participant 4 also struggled with academic writing, particularly the introduction section. The writer must be able to compile prior theories or academic research that is pertinent to this section's research topic. To write an introduction, participant 4 finds it challenging to locate pertinent literature. The coping strategy used by Participant 4 is the same as Participant 3's, which is to read numerous articles.

*“Finding relevant theory is the challenging part of creating an introduction. A coping strategy I utilize is finding numerous articles that are relevant to the subject I am discussing to get around this” (Participant 4).*

It could be concluded that the students used three coping strategies for the organization. Writing exercises were the first coping strategy. Asking for feedback was the second coping strategy. The third coping strategy involved reading academic papers.

The responses from the participants regarding the coping strategies they used for developing the ideas are listed below. Participant 1 developed critical thinking skills by reading lots of research articles. In developing ideas, students must understand the topic under study by reading and understanding source articles from various reputable databases. Extensive reading is needed to hone students' critical thinking skills so that their schemata can develop.

*“My coping strategy for success is to gather a lot of sources and read them. I study and comprehend them. So, I can develop my critical thinking” (Participant 1).*

Apart from reading many research articles, Participant 2 outlines to map out the ideas to write. Mind mapping is carried out from a general discussion to a detailed discussion. This mapping can hone their critical thinking skills and also assist them in writing down their ideas.

*“I organized my thoughts using a spider web-like sketch. In this case, I start with the general concept. Then, I move up to the more detailed one” (Participant 2).*

From the data above, the students used two coping strategies concerning ideas'

development. Extensive reading was the first coping strategy. Outlining was the second coping strategy.

Participants' responses regarding the vocabulary strategies are outlined in the next paragraph—participant 2 experienced difficulties translating due to a lack of vocabulary. Vocabulary used in academic writing is formal vocabulary or also known as academic vocabulary. Accuracy is needed in using vocabulary in writing articles, so online translation tools are needed, such as Google Translate and online dictionaries. The use of these applications helps students to overcome gaps in their vocabulary.

*“I have difficulty translating. Google Translate and online dictionary are coping strategies I utilize although it is difficult to use instant translators like them, which are not 100% correct” (Participant 2).*

Apart from using Google Translate and an online dictionary, another coping strategy used by Participant 3 is to use QuillBot. Using QuillBot aids them in varying their vocabulary to make it cooler. In addition, QuillBot is used to speed up the paraphrasing process so students can avoid plagiarism.

*“The difficulty is how to find suitable or effective words. I also have difficulty making a sentence with my own words because it will have related to plagiarism. My coping strategy is using QuillBot” (Participant 3).*

Participant 4 had difficulty reading the research articles because of some difficult vocabulary. Participant 4 could not capture important points from the research articles that were read due to a lack of academic vocabulary. The coping strategy used by Participant 4 is to

highlight difficult vocabulary and look them up in the dictionary.

*“My ignorance of the words' definitions in the research articles presents a challenge. I want to find out what a word in the research articles means before using it or describing it. So I use the dictionary to look up any unfamiliar words after highlighting them” (Participant 4).*

The students used two coping strategies concerning vocabulary. Using Google Translate and online bilingual dictionaries was the first coping strategy. Using QuillBot was the second coping strategy.

The responses made by participants regarding grammar and mechanics are listed below. Participant 1 has difficulties in the aspect of grammar, namely connecting sentences. Proofreading is a coping strategy used by Participant 1 to overcome challenges in grammar. Students carry out this coping strategy by re-reading their writing to ensure the sentences are connected, and the grammar is appropriate. Apart from that, this coping strategy is also used to correct their mechanics mistakes.

*“To check the grammar and mechanics of my writing, I do proofreading by myself. My problem is how to relate sentences to one another effectively. The way I check whether a statement is clear enough is to read it aloud again” (Participant 1).*

Participant 2 also experienced the same challenges as Participant 1: difficulty finding grammar and mechanics errors. To overcome these difficulties, Participant 2 uses a different coping strategy: Microsoft Word. Microsoft Word can help students correct grammar and mechanics mistakes by displaying red and blue lines in the writing if errors are found. In

addition, Participant 2 using the monolingual dictionary can also overcome difficulties in grammar and mechanics aspects because it assists students in seeing examples of sentences with correct grammar and can be used as a spelling confirmation tool.

*“Because of my low ability in grammar and mechanics, I have difficulty finding errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. To make it easier, I use Microsoft Word and an English monolingual dictionary” (Participant 2).*

The coping strategy used by Participant 3 is using Grammarly. This application helps students find grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors by providing appropriate corrections. In addition, the use of Mendeley guides students to be able to produce appropriate references and citations.

*“I use Grammarly to proofread my writing for grammar and mechanics because it allows me to check spelling, punctuation, and grammar. After that, I use Mendeley to make my writing style the correct citation” (Participant 3).*

Participant 4 has problems in academic writing, especially in the grammar and mechanics sections. To ensure and minimize errors in that part, Participant 4 uses Grammarly. This application helps Participant 4 not only in the grammar section but also in the mechanics section. The coping strategies conducted by Participants 3 and 4 are the same, namely using Grammarly.

*“Grammar and mechanics are challenging for me. Since I am only human and occasionally make mistakes when checking my language, I use Grammarly to help me with my academic writing challenges” (Participant 4).*

Regarding grammar and mechanics, students employed some coping strategies. The initial

coping strategy was proofreading. The next coping strategy was using Microsoft Word. The third coping strategy was using an English monolingual dictionary. The fourth coping strategy involved using Grammarly. The last coping strategy was using Mendeley.

They used twelve coping strategies to overcome their difficulties in academic writing in each aspect. The coping strategies for the organization include writing exercises, seeking feedback, and reading scholarly papers. The coping strategies for ideas' development were extensive reading and outline-making. The coping strategies for vocabulary are using Google Translate and QuillBot. The coping strategies for grammar and mechanics are proofreading, using Microsoft Word, using a monolingual dictionary, and using Grammarly. Students used Mendeley as part of their mechanic strategies for organizing their academic style's references and citations.

### Discussion

The analysis informed that ten complexities contribute to academic writing. Participant 1 felt not very motivated to study in-depth academic writing. This low motivation is marked by laziness in reading articles and the low intention to write articles. The learners' lack of motivation was the first complexity. This finding supports Moses & Mohamad's (2019) claim that students have trouble writing academically because they are less motivated to become better writers. Laziness and low intentions are also influenced by topics they do not master when getting duties in academic writing. The way that can make their motivation go up is to choose the topic they master. If students are given freedom in determining their topics, the quality of their academic writing will increase.

On the other hand, Mauludin's (2020) research results stated that students' motivation and writing skills are not interrelated. Therefore, if students' writing skills increase or decrease, their motivation does not affect the increase or decrease in their writing ability because there is no interaction between the two variables. Even though there is no correlation between the two variables, joint construction is a tool to help EFL students achieve learning objectives in writing because it offers students with low motivation to solve problems in their writing through collaborative work with friends and lecturers. After all, EFL students' motivation in learning writing is typically influenced by their enjoyment during the learning process.

Moreover, Participant 1 and Participant 4 did not get feedback for their research articles assignments. The lack of lecturer feedback was a further complexity. Lack of feedback can also cause students to worry that their writing performance is not good. This finding is supported by Rohmah & Muslim (2021), who stated that unclear and brief lecturer feedback makes students confused. This factor will also affect student self-confidence. To help students overcome their problems in academic writing, they must regularly obtain feedback from their teachers (Noori, 2020). Feedback can improve students' writing and motivate them.

On the contrary, Li & Vuono (2019) reported that feedback did not impact the level of student writing either because what students acquired from it was pseudo-knowledge—knowledge that was not comprehensive and did not relate to mistakes in student writing. Another reason why student writing cannot be improved by feedback is that the lecturer cannot identify errors in student writing, and the students

cannot comprehend the lecturer's explanation. Additionally, the comments the lecturers provide do not inspire students.

Google Translate is used by Participant 1 because of difficulty translating the first language into English. Lack of translation in their writing was the third complexity. This finding is consistent with Chung & Ahn (2021), who found that the students used Google Translate to assist them in translating the target language. However, they should understand that machine translation has advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages is the increased translation accuracy in the target language. However, this machine can still give the user a loss because this machine also depends on the user's proficiency level and text genre. Therefore, students should consider using the machine to translate their writing.

Conversely, Lee (2020) stated that lecturers do not receive the employment of machine translation in a learning setting. Some underlying causes stem from the possibility of a trap for less accurate languages, and students rely excessively on machine translation. Since machine translation was not initially intended for language acquisition, lecturers had to help students prepare for language learning challenges in academic writing. The importance of machine translation in language acquisition must be understood by lecturers who guide students' use of technology by outlining its benefits and drawbacks.

In addition, Participant 1 faced difficulty finding the right source for the articles. The fourth complexity was their limitations in finding relevant references for their research. This finding agrees with Barokah & Lisdawati (2023), who discovered that students have difficulty

finding reliable online references and developing their ideas. Students can use Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, and Publish or Perish as machines to get references that fit their topic, avoid plagiarism in their research papers, and easily create student citations. Moreover, Mendeley, Zotero, and EndNote can be used to make it simpler for them to create citations and list bibliographies. Contrarily, Rezaei & Marandi (2022) claimed that more and more literature also shows the lack of competence of students in writing because students are sometimes less analytical in their evaluations of the online materials they use. Lecturers are suggested to teach students how to critically assess and critically examine the literary works they select to introduce electronic-based academic materials from reputable sources. The more literature they encounter from questionable sources, the more they are unable to effectively master academic writing rules and the more untrustworthy the ideas in the literature are. Additionally, as they dislike academic writing and only do their assignments because it is required for their course, students frequently plagiarize to defend their weak views. As a result, even though several literary materials are available, they need to take a lot of skill and experience in academic writing.

Participant 2 got very little time to work on the research articles. Moreover, Participant 4 could not manage time properly, so the tasks that had to be completed were not completed on time. Writing for academic purposes requires meticulous planning, patience, and time. If students are not provided enough time, they will not have much time to think about the research topic, making it harder for them to learn their language. The fifth complexity was a lack of time.

This finding aligns with Budjalemba & Listyani (2020), who claimed that learners lack the time necessary to create high-quality research articles. Due to the need to refine their ideas and write better, students often lack time to work on their research articles.

Furthermore, the proficiency of Participant 2 in research was lacking. Lack of research background was a sixth complexity. This finding follows the research conducted by Alkhuzaei et al. (2019), who stated that a lack of qualification in research is a barrier to academic writing. This barrier is also influenced by students' lack of proficiency in research and their lack of research interest. One way to get around this problem is by allowing them to collaborate. When they encourage one another and broaden their knowledge together, cooperation in research can enhance their academic performance. Contradictorily, Paricahua, et al. (2022) discussed that academics in public and private universities have varying levels of research funding. Additionally, research funding is essential in motivating scholars to finish their duties. Therefore, poor research skills are not the main factor in academic writing complexity because most academics have little background knowledge, insufficient writing experience, an unsystematic execution of the research technique, and a lack of research funding, all of which add complexity to more sophisticated academic writing.

Additionally, the self-confidence of Participant 2 was also lacking. Their hopelessness influences this complexity because of previous experience, lack of practice in writing, and lack of knowledge, so students feel uncomfortable. As a result, the next complexity was the lack of self-confidence. This finding

conforms with Brún (2023), who claimed that the students are not confident regarding academic writing structure, linguistic competence, and developing their ideas. Engaging with critical friends and peer reviews can build student confidence when students are assigned to write through interactive processes such as sharing drafts so that they are given assignments that can be done in the form of group work. In addition, organizing writing workshops can also increase students' confidence in writing. Inversely, lack of confidence in writing is not the only complexity affecting their writing difficulty. However, lack of confidence in reading is another complexity that affects students' writing challenges. Haerazi & Irawan (2020) asserted that students occasionally still believe they cannot comprehend reading texts, which can also impact their writing output. Their past successes and failures, social influence from others, and other people's confidence in their talents are several variables that influence their self-efficacy. Before students start reading, discussing prior knowledge of the covered subject is important to boost their self-efficacy in reading. As a result, their incapacity to read also contributes to their writing challenges.

Participant 3 did not have too much practice in writing research articles. Becoming a good writer takes work and practice; it never happens naturally. As a consequence, lack of writing experience was the next complexity. This finding follows the statement from Budjalemba & Listyani (2020), who reported that knowledge is useless if students only learn skills and never put them into practice. They are required to use their recently gained linguistic abilities through

writing. As they gain experience in writing, students' skill level rises.

Nevertheless, students should remember the sequential steps when practicing their writing skills online. Every online service, like Facebook, has unique distinctions of its own. Suppose the writing processes used on Facebook are not done in a formal writing style. In that case, they will not be done in a way consistent with the formal writing style used in academic writing. Writing down their thoughts in English as a practice exercise is a simple step for students to improve their writing. However, this can backfire because students hesitate to write more when thinking more (Putri & Aminatun, 2021).

Reading proficiency is also required for academic writing. However, students' reading habits were low, making it difficult to be proficient in reading. This complexity occurred in Participant 3, so lack of reading ability was the ninth complexity. This result supports the assertion made by Altınmakas & Bayyurt (2019) that students' inability to think critically is due to the lack of reading sources. The students' reading comprehension was poor, which harmed their writing skills because the language in the research articles was too scholarly and difficult to comprehend. Nonetheless, (Barus et al., 2021) declared that Asking learners to read to practice their reading abilities would be less effective if their reading does not fit their needs and interests. To avoid impeding students' ability to write about what they have read, lecturers should encourage students to choose reading materials that may satisfy their needs and are easy for their imaginations to picture.

Besides that, Participant 3 also had low critical thinking skills. Students face difficulties

like low metacognitive skills, the same mindset, and critical appraisal during critical thinking. Their capacity to think clearly and logically must be strengthened to support their research proficiency. The tenth complexity was a lack of critical thinking skills. This finding aligns with the statement from Indah et al. (2022) that the students have difficulty using their critical thinking abilities, including information analysis by observation, experience, reasoning, and scientific communication. Increasing students' interest in reading, using mind maps in learning, employing group project-based learning, and encouraging students' writing are a few approaches to help them develop their critical thinking skills. Oppositely, students' struggles with academic writing are not solely caused by their lack of critical thinking abilities. There is also a culture of society that creates complexity for students in writing because their culture will also shape their personality in writing. Therefore, society's culture can affect people's personalities in writing and their capacity to think critically (Aslan & Aybek, 2020).

Moreover, anxiety is experienced by Participant 2 as a result of not having enough time to prepare a research article since Participant 2 is working on assignments as the assignment collection day draws near. The second participant has no strategy for structuring the research article writing. The eleventh complexity was a lack of proper preparation in writing. This finding is confirmed by Japah & Sri-utumporn (2020), who stated that students struggle with academic writing due to a lack of preparation because they have little knowledge of the sources they use as topics. Due to its complexity, students are no longer passionate about writing and start

making assumptions in their writing, making it unreliable in their writing. Lack of preparation causes them difficulty understanding what they should write.

In contrast, Ahmetoglu et al. (2021) claimed that knowledge-related work does not always go according to preparation or plan. Time estimates for tasks are often off the mark. Plans are flawed because they often cannot account for all possible outcomes and contingencies. Daily task planning, especially in knowledge areas, often goes wrong. Planning is generally flawed because it is too pessimistic. Consequently, work planning is not accurate.

In addition, Finding a setting for learning that will boost productivity when writing research articles is challenging for Participant 3. The twelfth complexity was a lack of a supportive writing learning environment. Suppose they lack an environment that supports them in writing. In that case, they will find it difficult to devote all their anxiety to writing. This finding is supported by Holmes et al. (2018), who reported that if the lecturers did not allow students to write for fun and share their thoughts about the writing process and experience in academic writing, it could not help to establish a productive writing environment. After the students shared their experiences, the following fifteen minutes were for each student to talk with a peer about their writing anxiety to discuss and solve together. Therefore, students cannot enjoy resolving their issues with academic writing in an insecure writing environment.

On the other hand, Sun & Wang (2020) discussed that although the environment does play a role in writing, the task environment is stressed more. The setting will impact the students' cognitive and affective writing. The

social and physical environments are the two task contexts that makeup writing complexity. Teacher comments or other social diversions make up the social environment. Online writing materials or tasks make up the physical environment.

In the organization aspect, there were three coping strategies. Participant 1 used the writing exercise as the best tactic to overcome challenges in the structure part, so the first coping strategy was the practice of writing. This coping strategy allows them to test their reading skills to get information and helps them avoid plagiarism. This finding is supported by Singh (2019), who said that the more often they practice writing; the easier their writing process will be. Contradictorily, Haerazi & Irawan (2019) stated that writing practice could not develop properly if lecturers do not advise and aid their students in revising and editing their writing of research papers after they have practiced writing independently, intending to treat students' ability to enlarge their thoughts and literacy abilities. Because every student writes at a different pace, their lecturers must coach them on how to write research articles. Two types of feedback—explicit and implicit—are required to improve student writing.

Participant 2 sought assistance on the structure of writing articles from lecturers to gain a thorough understanding of it. The second coping strategy was providing the lecturer's comprehensive feedback. Lecturers can appreciate the students' writing processes by providing guidance and feedback even though technology applications have assisted students. This finding agrees with Irfan et al. (2020), who reported that if the lecturer gives simple

feedback on student writing and only relies on feedback from colleagues, their feedback is less effective because colleagues tend to provide brief feedback. Contrariwise, Li & Vuono (2019) affirmed that students may have negative consequences from feedback, such as lowered self-confidence.

Additionally, because they want to avoid receiving feedback from their lecturers, students often simplify or reduce their writing. Participant 3 and Participant 4 also read more publications to deepen their comprehension of the research issue. The third coping strategy was diligently reading journals even though the journal contained a collection of articles in very difficult language to understand in one read. This finding aligns with Budjalemba & Listyani (2020), who found that the more diligent learners read, the more references they have as material for their writing. Writing and reading were inseparable in academic writing. Contrariwise, Soemer & Schiefele (2019) disclosed that reading has a negative impact if students are unaware of how challenging the content is. The resultant adverse effect is that these students find it difficult to develop ideas that they have in their minds. Texts that are very easy to read are seen as more desirable since the complexity of the text will also harm students' enthusiasm for reading.

As a result, since text difficulty and comprehension are negatively associated, students must pay close attention to it to achieve effective reading comprehension. In the ideas' development aspect, there were two coping strategies. To strengthen their critical thinking abilities, participant 1 engages in extensive reading. The first coping strategy was reading many sources related to their

research. Students need to be urged to engage in extensive reading that helps them build their prior knowledge for critical thinking skills. This finding is supported by Harb et al. (2022), who discovered that reading could help them develop students' ideas.

Furthermore, their critical thinking skills increase because it plays a crucial part in determining the text's quality, impacting how academic writing is developed. In contrast, Yang et al. (2021) delivered that students cannot understand the text if they read challenging content. Furthermore, reading challenging literature causes students' attention to waver, which hinders their understanding—the students' lack of motivation due to this coping strategy. Consequently, the reader's reaction may also be influenced by how simple the text entry is. It is necessary to consider the text's complexity level in extensive reading. Participant 2 maps the ideas to be written so that the discussion to be written can be coherent from the general to the specific. The next coping strategy was outlining to develop their ideas. This finding aligns with Sajjad et al. (2021), who found that their critical thinking skills are honed by outlining first.

In the vocabulary aspect, there were two coping strategies. Participant 2 and Participant 4 use online translation tools because they lack vocabulary expertise. The first coping strategy was using Google Translate. The use of Google Translate can aid students with their lexical gaps. This finding conforms with Lin & Morrison (2021), who claimed that by using Google Translate, students' writing became significantly better in conveying their written content with more advanced vocabulary.

Moreover, students have fewer errors in spelling and grammar. With access to online translation tools, students have increased their use of their vocabulary Musk (2022). Otherwise, Borodina et al. (2021) voiced some translation issues with Google Translate. First, translation blunders can distort the text's original intent. Second, mistranslations risk making it difficult to understand the text's meaning for the readers. Because of these errors, student translations might not be perfect.

Participant 3 employed QuillBot as one of the methods used to produce varied vocabulary. The second coping strategy was using QuillBot. The application helps in avoiding plagiarism and also increases the student's confidence. This finding is in concordance with Nurmayanti & Suryadi (2023), who reported that QuillBot helps students prevent them from being accused of plagiarism. By saving their time and effort, QuillBot can boost students' self-confidence. QuillBot can help students write more effectively and strengthen their English language skills. Contrastingly, Sukma et al. (2023) uttered that when utilized for academic writing, QuillBot has several shortcomings. First, occasionally the sentences that the software generates are illogical. Because of this flaw, users are forced to proofread their work. Second, there are premium features, which make it harder for students to use the application's functions.

In the grammar and mechanics aspects, there were five coping strategies. Participant 1 confirmed whether or not there were errors in the grammar and mechanics aspects by re-reading their writing aloud. This initial way was proofreading. Proofreading done by them is by re-reading their writing by reading aloud. It is used to ensure that their writing makes sense

and that there are no errors in grammar or mechanics. This finding is supported by Pawlak (2018), who reported that proofreading can detect mistakes. Correcting writing itself is a form of cognitive strategy related to the process of learning grammar. However, Min (2021) expressed that traditional proofreading cannot correct English composition. This strategy has the problem that it is difficult to spot common low-level errors like typos and misquotations. As a result, an intelligent proofreading system can also be used to proofread in addition to traditional methods.

By examining whether the red and blue lines showed in their Microsoft Word document, Participant 2 fixed problems in the grammar and mechanics sections. The second coping strategy was using Microsoft Word. Microsoft Word suggests that red lines be displayed beneath errors made by students. This finding is supported by Chandra & Yuyun (2018), who discovered that some of the Microsoft Word feature most frequently used by English learners in writing are spelling and grammar checks because English learners have poor grammar skills and little exposure to the target language. As a result, their work will have fewer spelling and grammar mistakes.

Conversely, Blazquez & Fan (2019) asserted that while Microsoft Word can sometimes detect mistakes made by speakers of a second language, it sometimes misses them. Only 52% of Microsoft Word's spell checker errors are successfully corrected. Thus, it may be said that Microsoft Word might not be the best tool for writers and second-language learners. Due to the shortcomings of Microsoft Word's built-in spell checker, most of them utilize Grammarly.

Participant 2 solves problems in this area by looking at examples of monolingual dictionary sentences. Using this dictionary, one can also verify spellings and definitions. The third coping strategy was using a monolingual English dictionary. This software can be used to look up synonyms for paraphrasing and check whether the words were used correctly or not. This finding follows a study conducted by Suryanudin (2020), who discovered that the English monolingual dictionary is a helpful tool that includes features for spelling checks, word definition confirmation, and usage consultation by glancing at example sentences. Inversely, Abbasi et al. (2019) declared that there are drawbacks to using a monolingual dictionary. First, due to their grammatical structure, meanings from monolingual dictionaries are more intricate and challenging to comprehend. Second, the difficulty of learning vocabulary in one reading when learning a language using a monolingual dictionary. Third, the dictionary's language is hard due to its word meanings and challenging symbols. As a result, the monolingual dictionary makes it difficult for students to comprehend already-known language and lowers their proficiency.

In contrast to Participants 1 and 2, Participants 3 and Participant 4 use Grammarly to check for problems in this area. Grammarly can be used to address both mechanics and grammar issues. Utilizing Grammarly was the fourth coping strategy. Grammarly improves users' writing skills in terms of grammar, spelling, and punctuation because it offers explanations of the correct form, and it can help students write with greater confidence and comprehend grammar and mechanics rules. This coping strategy conforms with the

statement from Fitriana & Nurazni (2022), who claimed that the students checked their work for punctuation, grammar, and spelling using Grammarly. To get proper references and citations, Participant 3 used Mendeley, so the last coping strategy was using Mendeley. Students who do not meet the rules in the academic style are usually caused by being lazy, busy, and limited time which causes them to have a reason to plagiarize other people's work. They need to use Mendeley to avoid plagiarism. This finding is in concordance with research conducted by Patak & Tahir (2019), who stated that Mendeley assists students in writing references more efficiently. Furthermore, this application is useful for writing quotations in research.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, twelve complexities contributing to EFL students' academic writing challenges have been discovered—first, students' lack of motivation results from their desire to read and write. Second, the absence of their lecturer's feedback makes students anxious, especially when their feedback is vague and incomplete. Third, because students lack the proficiency to translate their writing into English, students often rely on Internet tools for translation rather than checking the accuracy of the translation output. Fourth, they are limited in finding references relevant to their study since they are unfamiliar with some of the databases that can be used to find various reference sources. Fifth, they do not have as much time to write articles as they would want, which makes it harder for them to elaborate on their thoughts because their lecturers only allow them a certain amount of time. Sixth, the lack of students'

research background due to their lack of proficiency and interest in research. Seventh, the lack of student confidence brought on by insufficient academic writing practice and expertise. Eighth, their writing abilities do not improve since they lack writing experience. Ninth, students' lack of reading proficiency causes their critical thinking skills to be less honed. Tenth, students' poor metacognitive abilities in thinking logically and clearly to examine and evaluate information cause their lack of critical thinking abilities. Eleventh, the lack of preparation for writing causes them not to have a sense of enthusiasm for writing, and they also cannot write down their ideas in an orderly manner. Twelfth, the lack of an adequate writing environment causes students to become anxious so that students cannot build their productivity in writing.

In addition, they use twelve coping strategies to overcome academic writing challenges. There are three coping strategies in the organizational aspect. First, writing practice is a training strategy to facilitate the writing process and practice avoiding plagiarism. Second, comprehensive feedback from lecturers can guide their writing process. Third, reading journals diligently trains them to find many references. In the aspect of developing ideas, there are two strategies. First, reading relevant references can help develop their ideas to think more critically. Second, outlining their ideas aid them in improving their critical thinking skills. In terms of vocabulary, there are two coping strategies. First, the use of Google Translate helps students writing be able to use a wide variety of vocabulary variations by minimizing spelling and grammatical errors. Second, using QuillBot assists them in writing effectively in

paraphrasing to avoid plagiarism. In terms of grammar and mechanics, there are five coping strategies. First, proofreading by reading aloud can aid in finding errors in grammar or mechanics. Second, Microsoft Word can correct spelling and grammatical errors by displaying red and blue lines. Third, the monolingual dictionary is a tool that can perform spelling checks. Fourth, Grammarly is used to check grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Lastly, Mendeley supports students in writing references and citations.

This research has several limitations. First, the research findings cannot be generalized to all students because only three participated. Second, the findings of this study could be biased because the participants were all women. Third, the duration of the interview is not long. With the limitations of this research, some suggestions are proposed for future researchers. First, research in case study design can be carried out to examine students' complexities and their coping strategies in academic writing in depth. Second, future research can take participants from male and female students equally to minimize bias in the research results. Third, the interview duration in further research can be extended to obtain in-depth student perceptions. The practical implications of this research's results will contribute to improving academic writing, especially research articles at the undergraduate level. Hopefully, this research will be useful for EFL students and academic writing lecturers. For EFL students this research is anticipated to be able to help EFL students by being sensitive to the complexities behind their challenges in academic writing, so they can overcome their challenges in academic writing, particularly in writing research articles

using multiple coping strategies. Specific coping strategies are available in each aspect of their difficulties. Lecturers need to encourage or motivate their students further to create research papers by providing thorough feedback and other fresh approaches to help students learn writing easier. Therefore, this research has pedagogical implications.

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