

Perspectives on Academic Writing among Indonesian EFL University Students

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords: Academic writing, English for Academic Purposes, English as a Foreign Language, Genre Instruction, Student Perspective DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v11i1.2704 How to cite: Afifi, N. (2026). Perspectives on Academic Writing among Indonesian EFL University Students. <i>Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics</i>, 11(1), 133-148	<i>This study investigated students' and teachers' perspectives on English academic writing in an English Education Department of an Islamic State College in Indonesia, with a particular focus on a supplementary Literature Review (LR) course. Employing a classroom-based action research design, the study involved fifteen EFL undergraduate students (all female) in their seventh semester of study. Data were collected through questionnaires administered at the beginning and end of the LR course, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with five students and four teachers. Questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while interview data were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns. Findings revealed that students held largely positive attitudes towards English academic writing in terms of interest and enjoyment; however, they demonstrated a marked lack of confidence in their writing ability. Lexicogrammar, particularly grammar and vocabulary, emerged as the most frequently identified area of weakness, while affective factors such as motivation were more commonly cited as strengths than actual writing skills. Both students and teachers identified the absence of explicit genre instruction, particularly regarding the literature review genre, as a significant curriculum gap. It is recommended that explicit, genre-focused instruction be introduced earlier in the curriculum to develop students' genre knowledge and confidence in academic writing.</i>

1. Introduction

For students learning to write in a second language, academic writing has long been regarded as the most challenging (Reid, 2002) and difficult (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 303) skill to master (Leki, Cumming, & Silva, 2008). Therefore, in universities with EFL students, English-language academic writing has been a crucial concern in their language and learning centres,

realised in the form of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses to help students write academically valued texts in their discipline area (Woodward-Kron, 2009, p. 165).

Academic writing is a fundamental aspect of EFL students' development, and of their intellectual, social, and language learning in their chosen disciplines of study (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Hyland, 2007, 2021; Swales, 1990). Academic writing allows such development due to the intimate connection between the ability to write well and the ability to think well (Elder & Paul, 2006, p. 38) and to read with understanding. The ability to write well requires students to generate and organise ideas, expressing them in texts with careful grammatical, mechanical, diction, and discourse choices (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 303) and 'concern for accuracy, voice and audience' (Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007, p. 809). On the other hand, the ability to think well involves 'integrating disparate ideas, synthesizing perspectives, and extending theory which demands higher-level construction skills and perspective-taking' (Lavelle & Bushrow, 2007, p. 809), 'sustaining arguments and synthesizing ideas' (Hyland, 2007), and active engagement with the facts and principles of a discipline (Rose, 1985).

Regardless of its role in the curriculum, academic writing is clearly important for tertiary students in EFL contexts, not only as a measurement of their learning progress but also as an important part of the learning process itself.

Faculty use student writing frequently as a vehicle to assess and scrutinize their students' understanding of, and engagement with the course content. The EAP emphasis for teaching writing, in contrast, has necessarily more to do with learning how to write successfully in the disciplines. For students, the process of writing term papers and assignments can be a catalyst for learning, clarifying and developing their understanding of subject matter. (Woodward-Kron, 2009, p. 166)

A widely-understood purpose of EFL students in academic writing courses is to learn how to write effectively within their discipline of study, eventually leading to their academic success. One contribution to achieving this is by taking student perspectives into account in curriculum design and classroom teaching, since research on student perspectives has revealed the crucial roles they play in the evaluation of such programmes (Abas & Abd Aziz, 2016; Al-Khairi, 2013; Al-Fadda, 2012; Dooey, 2010; Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002). Students' voices also help faculty and EAP organizers to understand what they need and value as students (Dahl, 1995, p. 124). Further, Dahl contends that student perspectives, which she defined as student attitudes, viewpoints, concepts, and general stances, are realised in students' beliefs and decisions (1995, p. 124).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teacher and Student Perspectives on Academic Writing

Research on teacher and student perspectives on various aspects of academic writing shows that their perspectives are often different (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002; Huang, 2010; Yoshida, 2010; Asadifard & Koosha, 2013). On academic writing needs, Huang (2010, p. 526) found that undergraduate students differed from their teacher in perceiving the importance of 'the use of background knowledge, reference or non-text materials, personal viewpoints and other sources appropriately to support and analyse ideas and refine arguments, and demonstrating

a facility with a range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic. While the teachers rated the first as one of the most important skills in academic writing, the students did not include it among their most important skills. On the other hand, the students rated the latter as one of the most important skills, but the teachers did not consider it as such.

Divergent perspectives between students and teachers also occurred on the important skills for foreign language learning. The teachers considered the importance of developing both linguistic and cognitive skills for effectively learning a foreign language, while the students saw personality, aptitude, and linguistic development as the contributing factors. In addition, students considered critical thinking as an important measure in learning their particular discipline, but did not consider it as important in foreign language learning (Yoshida, 2010). Disagreement also occurred on the perception of factors contributing to academic writing reluctance (Asadifard & Koosha, 2013): while the teacher considered task difficulty as the most influential factor in writing reluctance, the students identified lack of readership on top of other contributing factors.

Perspectives on success in EAP also differed between students and teachers in an EAP programme in a New Zealand university (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002), where students tended to underestimate their achievement compared to the teachers' measurement. The study also revealed that students' perspectives on the construct of success differed from one another and also from their teachers' (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002). In summary, the various areas of disagreement between teachers' and students' perspectives on academic writing indicate the value of covering both sides in designing and implementing an academic writing course.

2.2 Student Perspectives on Writing Difficulties and Learning Factors

Apart from differences in teachers' and students' perspectives on academic writing, research into EFL academic writing has also focused specifically on students' perspectives on academic writing difficulties, facilitating and hindering factors in English academic writing, and attitudes towards academic writing (Al-Fadda, 2012; Al-Khairi, 2013; Singh, 2016; Ismail, 2011; Abas & Abd Aziz, 2016).

Regarding student perspectives on difficulties in English academic writing, most Saudi EFL undergraduate students in one study listed appropriate vocabulary, grammar, use of irregular verbs, use of prepositions, and spelling as problems (Al-Khairi, 2013). While these student perspectives related to lexicogrammar, Malaysian graduate students identified difficulties in discourse features and text construction, i.e., writing the literature review, methodology, and findings/analysis sections; using appropriate academic style; writing coherent paragraphs; and expressing ideas in correct English (Singh, 2016). In addition, postgraduate students in Saudi Arabia identified differences between spoken and written styles of English as the cause of difficulties in academic writing (Al-Fadda, 2012).

Within the Indonesian EFL context specifically, Pasaribu et al. (2024) examined the errors made by third-semester students in a private Indonesian university while writing scholarship application essays. Their analysis revealed that syntactic errors were the most prevalent, accounting for 61.69% of all errors, followed by punctuation and capitalisation errors (23.37%) and morphological errors (14.94%). Native language interference was identified as the primary source of these errors, alongside students' limited prior exposure to academic writing conventions. These findings are particularly relevant to the present study, as they point to

systemic and institutional factors, not merely individual ability, as the root cause of writing difficulties among Indonesian EFL students.

Research has also revealed EFL students' perspectives on facilitating and hindering factors in writing academic texts. Facilitating factors include the use of computer-assisted writing instruction (Al-Fadda, 2012), the use of multiple teaching techniques, diagnosing the students' writing problems, the availability of modern teaching facilities, and more language courses (Al-Khairy, 2013). Hindering factors include the use of different writing styles (Al-Fadda, 2012), an insufficient number of language courses in the university, few opportunities to use English outside the university, insufficient audio-visual facilities in the classroom, insufficient writing practice, and inappropriate teaching methods (Al-Khairy, 2013).

2.3 Student Attitudes towards Academic Writing

Student perspectives on academic writing include their attitudes towards learning it (Dahl, 1995, p. 124). Studies on attitudes toward foreign language learning have explored many aspects, including the relationships between attitude, motivation, aptitude, and language learning success (Cochran, McCallum, & Bell, 2010; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

EFL student attitudes toward English academic writing also vary from person to person and from context to context. Abas and Abd Aziz (2016) reported a case study on two Indonesian graduate students in a Malaysian university. Both participants had positive attitudes toward English academic writing; they either liked it or considered it as important because of enjoyment in constructing sentences and paragraphs in English or because of thesis and assignment requirements respectively. However, neither participant was confident in academic writing. Comparing education and humanities Saudi EFL students, Ismail (2011) found that both groups of students placed high importance on ESL writing skills for their academic study and future career. However, humanities students had a more positive perspective compared to education students.

The role of intrinsic motivation in shaping student attitudes towards academic writing has received growing attention. Nazim (2024), in a study of EFL students at a Saudi university, found that allowing students to self-assign writing topics or write about subjects of personal interest significantly enhanced their intrinsic motivation and overall writing engagement. The study concluded that topic-based interest is a powerful driver of writing effectiveness, underscoring the importance of student agency in academic writing instruction — a factor that has implications for curriculum designers who seek to sustain student engagement beyond surface-level interest.

Overall, studies on student attitudes suggest that students with positive attitudes are more likely to succeed in their second/foreign language learning. On the other hand, Ellis (1994, pp. 198–199) concludes that success in language learning is highly likely to strengthen positive attitudes, and conversely, lack of success will have an effect on negative attitudes. It can be concluded, then, that attitudes and achievement in foreign language learning have a reciprocal influence, and this is an important aspect of student perspectives.

In conclusion, these studies show the diversity of EFL student perspectives on learning English academic writing. They also demonstrate that student perspectives often differ from their teachers' perspectives. Investigating student perspectives, and taking them into

account, is likely to help the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process in specific contexts.

Despite this growing body of research, several theoretical, contextual, and methodological gaps remain. Theoretically, most studies have examined EFL student perspectives on academic writing in isolation, without connecting these to students' specific genre knowledge deficits or the broader curriculum structure. Contextually, research on Indonesian EFL students in Islamic higher education institutions, particularly regarding the role of explicit genre instruction, remains limited (Abas & Abd Aziz, 2016; Nadhifah et al., 2023). Methodologically, few studies have employed classroom action research to trace how students' perspectives evolve before and after targeted genre instruction. The present study addresses these gaps by examining both student and teacher perspectives in a specific Indonesian EFL context, with particular attention to how curriculum design shapes students' self-reported strengths, weaknesses, and confidence in academic writing.

3. Research Methodology

This paper reports on part of a cycle of classroom-based action research aimed at implementing lasting curriculum change. Classroom action research was selected for its emphasis on practitioner-led inquiry within a specific educational context and its capacity to generate locally relevant, contextualised knowledge (Hyland, 2021). In the implementation of a new short course on literature review writing, this paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What were students' attitudes towards learning academic writing?
2. What were students' perspectives on the previous course and the new course?

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a classroom-based action research design, which involved a cycle of planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting. The present paper focuses on the observation and reflection phases, drawing on data collected at the beginning and end of a supplementary Literature Review (LR) course. This design was chosen because it enables teachers to investigate their own practice systematically while collecting data on student outcomes and perspectives within the authentic classroom context.

Curriculum Context

The study took place at the English Education Department of an Islamic state college in Indonesia. The curriculum of the department follows the Indonesian national qualification framework, adapted to the local context. From 160 credits to be taken during the undergraduate degree, 102 credits are devoted to English-related subjects. In their first semester, students are enrolled in an English intensive course. In the second semester, the units offer a focus on the four English macro-skills — reading, writing, listening, and speaking — staged across their next four semesters (e.g., Writing 1, 2, 3, etc.), along with some Islamic studies units. Content units (e.g., Second Language Acquisition, Sociolinguistics) begin from the second year, while research-related units are offered from semester four onwards.

There are fewer credits devoted to English-related units compared to similar departments in other state-owned universities. This requires the department to design and execute the

teaching-learning process effectively to yield graduates that meet Indonesia's national qualification framework.

Course Context

In the context of this study, an academic writing course named Scientific Writing was the final course of the writing course sequence (Writing 1, Writing 2, Writing 3, and Scientific Writing), given from semester two to semester five. The first three writing courses focus on 'general' writing skills, covering types of sentences, kinds of paragraphs, and essay writing. The Scientific Writing unit has an explicit focus on academic writing as opposed to other kinds of writing (e.g., technical writing, informal writing, fiction). Another academic writing course, Thesis Proposal Writing and Seminar, was offered in semester seven. These two courses were the main courses aimed at helping students write a research proposal covering three aspects of a thesis: background of the study, literature review, and methodology.

The Scientific Writing course was conducted as a regular class. Three lecturers convened this subject, each with their own syllabus. The Thesis Proposal Writing and Seminar course was conducted differently: groups of five to fifteen students were assigned to one lecturer to guide them in writing the proposal. The following table presents an extract from one Scientific Writing course curriculum.

Table 1. Scientific Writing Sample Curriculum Extract

Week	Topic / Activity
1–2	Introduction to scientific writing; choosing and narrowing a topic; brainstorming
3–4	Quoting, referencing, and avoiding plagiarism
5–6	Paraphrasing, summarising, and note-taking
7	Thesis statements; planning a literature review
Mid-semester	Literature review submission
8–9	Understanding the styles of research and conceptual articles
10	Reviewing a research article: introduction, body paragraph, conclusion
11–12	Revising, editing, and proofreading; writing a final draft
13–14	Consulting with an advisor; preparing for final submission
End of semester	Conceptual article submission (1,500–2,000 words)

As can be seen from the extract above, the course objective was for students to write literature reviews and articles for journals. The syllabus revealed, however, that students were not taught a literature review as a genre; instead, they were taught skills considered enabling for writing one. One session in Week 10 titled 'reviewing a research article' was given after the students had already submitted their literature review for the mid-semester examination. The syllabus presupposed that discrete skills and knowledge needed to write a literature review are the same as those needed for any piece of academic writing — a point students themselves raised in the interview data, discussed in the results section.

3.2 Participants

This study is part of a larger classroom action research project on teaching literature review writing, undertaken in response to the syllabus requirements of the Scientific Writing and Thesis Proposal Writing and Seminar courses and recurring student difficulties in writing effective literature reviews. Fifteen students participated in a supplementary LR course conducted outside the set curriculum, in addition to their normal studies. The project was conducted in semester seven, after the students had completed all writing courses, including the Scientific Writing course in semester five, and at the same time as they were enrolled in the Thesis Proposal Writing and Seminar course.

All fifteen participants are female; fourteen speak Javanese as their first language, and one speaks Madurese. The first language is the one they speak and hear at home from birth, and also in and around their village. All participants also speak Bahasa Indonesia as their second language. Nationally, Bahasa Indonesia is the official language for formal situations. As Nababan (1991, pp. 117–119) notes, it is common among Javanese children to begin being exposed to Bahasa Indonesia in school rather than at home. Additionally, all participants read but do not speak Arabic as a foreign language, primarily for religious and academic purposes. Finally, all speak English as a foreign language, formally learned in school and university. Most students have been learning English for more than ten years. Four student participants provided TOEFL scores ranging from 393 to 490, indicating lower-intermediate to intermediate proficiency.

Table 2. Demographic Information of the Student Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	G	DoB	L1/L2	FL	LLE (yrs)
Siri	F	1996	Javanese / Bahasa Indonesia	Arabic, English	12
Dema	F	1996	Javanese / Bahasa Indonesia	Arabic, English	11
Fani	F	1996	Javanese / Bahasa Indonesia	Arabic, English	12
Rifa	F	1997	Javanese / Bahasa Indonesia	Arabic, English	10
Kaqi	F	1996	Javanese / Bahasa Indonesia	Arabic, English	12
Nusa (teacher)	F	—	Javanese / Bahasa Indonesia	Arabic, English	—

Note. G = Gender; DoB = Date of Birth; L1/L2 = First/Second Language; FL = Foreign Language; LLE = Length in Learning English (in years). Names are pseudonyms. Table 2 presents only key participants referenced in the findings; all fifteen students shared the same language background.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

For the purpose of investigating student perspectives on the LR course, questionnaires and interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of the LR course. The questionnaire at the beginning included questions about participants' identities, their perspectives on their academic writing experience, and their perceived strengths and weaknesses. The end-of-course questionnaire focused on students' evaluations of the LR course — including its suitability, perceived impact, and suggestions for improvement. Both questionnaires contained 5-point Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The questionnaires were

adapted from instruments used in prior EAP perspective research (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002; Dooley, 2010) and were piloted with a small group of students prior to administration to ensure item clarity.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five students and four teachers at the end of the LR course. Interview questions were developed based on recurring themes in the initial questionnaire data and were reviewed by two EAP practitioners to ensure content validity. Interviews were conducted in a combination of English and Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

Questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reporting frequencies and percentages for Likert-scale items and categorising open-ended responses thematically. Interview data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), involving iterative coding to identify and refine emerging themes. Member-checking was employed with three participants to enhance the credibility of the qualitative interpretations. In terms of limitations, the small sample size ($n = 15$) restricts the statistical representativeness of the quantitative findings. The all-female, mono-institutional sample also limits transferability to other EFL contexts. Nonetheless, the richness of the qualitative data provides meaningful contextual insights into student and teacher perspectives within this setting.

4. Results

This section reports the findings from the questionnaires and interviews, addressing the two research questions. Student perspectives in this study refer to how students view their own English academic writing and learning. The findings are organised under four sub-themes: student attitudes, student strengths, student weaknesses, and student perspectives on the curriculum.

4.1. Student Attitudes

One aspect of student perspectives is attitude (Dahl, 1995). In this study, student attitudes towards learning academic writing were investigated through questions about interest and enjoyment at the beginning of the LR course. To the statement 'Learning English academic writing is interesting', twelve students (80%) strongly agreed or agreed, two (13%) were neutral, and one (6%) disagreed. In response to 'I enjoy learning English academic writing', ten students (66%) strongly agreed or agreed, and five students (34%) were neutral. These findings suggest that the majority of students are positively disposed towards learning English academic writing.

On the statement 'Learning English academic writing is easy', three (20%) students agreed, six (40%) were neutral, and six (40%) disagreed. To 'I am confident learning English academic writing', four (26%) agreed, nine (60%) were neutral, one (6%) disagreed, and one (6%) did not answer. Thus, despite positive attitudes towards learning English academic writing, a majority of the students appear to find it difficult and/or to lack confidence.

In the interviews at the end of the LR course, students who were not confident and/or did not find the subject easy were able to explain further. Four students used words such as 'confused' or 'lost' to describe their feelings about writing literature reviews:

We were confused of how to make it, our sole reference is only from the previous theses, so our knowledge about it is just from there, nothing specifically discussed about literature review [in the writing courses]. (Siri, post-project interview, student participant)

Another student confirmed this experience:

So, from the beginning we have never been taught that kind of writing, then in the seventh semester we were asked to write thesis proposal which one of the chapters is literature review, we were like lost... (Dema, post-project interview, student participant)

The teacher of the Scientific Writing and Thesis Proposal Writing and Seminar courses also commented on the curriculum gap:

I think we have to introduce how to write academic writing and some aspects that improve in writing literature review in the early stage in early semester than what we introduce in our curriculum now. (Nusa, post-project interview, teacher participant)

Overall, students reported mixed attitudes towards English academic writing. Regarding enjoyment and interest, they showed largely positive attitudes (80% and 66% respectively). Regarding ease and confidence, however, only 20% agreed that academic writing was easy and 26% agreed they were confident, with 'neutral' being the most common response for both confidence (60%) and ease (40%).

4.2. Student Strengths

The survey at the beginning of the LR course found that six out of fifteen students (40%) did not identify any strengths in learning English academic writing. Of those who did identify strengths, five out of nine (55.5%) identified writing-related skills (e.g., understanding structure, finding interesting topics, paraphrasing, and note-taking) as a strength, while four (44.5%) mentioned affective factors such as motivation and interest (e.g., 'I have high motivation in learning academic writing'). The students' writing-related strengths can be attributed to their experience in the English Education Department: understanding structure is consistent with prior courses in English Syntax and Grammar, while finding interesting topics and paraphrasing were practised in earlier Writing and Reading courses.

Overall, the data shows that six out of fifteen students left the strengths question blank, five identified writing-related skills as strengths, and four identified affective factors. Notably, no student mentioned genre knowledge as a strength, which is consistent with the curriculum gap identified in the course context section above.

4.3. Student Weaknesses

The items on weaknesses generated responses from all fifteen participants. The most frequently identified weaknesses were grammar-related problems (ten students), followed by vocabulary (nine students), paraphrasing (six students), and a range of other areas each identified by one student (see Table 3 below). The data shows that the most common weaknesses are in the domain of lexicogrammar (i.e., grammar and vocabulary).

Table 3. Student-Identified Weaknesses in Academic Writing

Weakness	Number of Students (n=15)
Grammar	10
Vocabulary	9
Paraphrasing	6
Summarising	1
Connecting ideas	1
Sentence structure	1
Paragraph structure	1
Expressing opinions	1
Improving explanations	1
Reading	1
Coherence/cohesion	1

A teacher of Scientific Writing and Thesis Proposal Writing and Seminar suggested that students' lexicogrammar weaknesses stemmed from out-of-context grammar teaching:

...it is better the lecturers also have just for example teaching grammar, their orientation is in students' writing too, not only teaching grammar as a separate part of the writing, ... So, we will find that in our campus, or in the English Education Department the lecturers teach with a separate way between writing and also grammar... (Nusa, post-project interview, teacher participant)

Regarding paraphrasing — the third most commonly identified weakness — one student mentioned lack of practice in the interviews:

It [i.e. paraphrasing] has been taught in our class [i.e. the Scientific Writing course] but I did not feel it sufficient for me because I rarely practice it. So, I feel I need to be taught how to paraphrase. (Rifa, post-project interview, student participant)

4.4. Student Perspectives on the Curriculum

As mentioned in the methodology section, the two main courses aimed at helping students write academic texts are Scientific Writing and Thesis Proposal Writing and Seminar. In the Scientific Writing course, the stated objectives included enabling students to write a literature review and a journal article. However, they were not taught how the overall structure and purpose of a literature review differ from a summary, report, or exposition. A majority of students reported that the courses were at a suitable level: nine (60%) agreed, four (26%) were neutral, and only two (13%) disagreed.

Regarding mastery of course content, one student in the interviews at the end of the LR course said that they had been taught about paragraph development, but not about achieving coherence and cohesion:

... in our class [i.e. Scientific Writing] it was briefly explained that a paragraph must have coherence and cohesion, but what you taught us in the program [i.e. the separate LR course] was more clear how to achieve that coherency and cohesiveness by paragraph development including the strategies: constant, zig-zag, parallel or other. (Fani, post-project interview, student participant)

The teacher quoted earlier also suggested that academic writing skills should be introduced earlier in the curriculum:

The first I think we need to look again at our curriculum especially in Writing subject, we have to adjust the topics or materials that we have from previously, because we sometimes only focus on sentence construction, paragraph writing, essay but we never taught a lot on the academic writing that is [in] one subject — in Scientific Writing. (Nusa, post-project interview, teacher participant)

In addition to problems, students also identified aspects of the Scientific Writing course that were successful:

It's because we have been taught annotated bibliography type A [in the Scientific Writing course], so when you explained it [in the later LR course], it became clearer and made us more understand... (Kaqi, post-project interview, student participant)

From these interview data, students demonstrate explicit knowledge of the curriculum content taught in the Scientific Writing and Thesis Proposal Writing and Seminar courses. Different students had not mastered different aspects of the content, however, and the teacher proposed a solution whereby key content would be introduced earlier and students given more opportunities to practise. In terms of course level, a majority considered it appropriate; yet the interview data reveal that their ability to apply the course content in their writing was limited, raising questions about curriculum design and pedagogical approach.

The findings also reveal that students were not taught how to write literature reviews, a genre they needed for their thesis proposal and thesis, despite this being stated as a course objective in the Scientific Writing syllabus. Students' negative attitudes towards their academic writing ability can be understood, at least in part, by this institutional and pedagogical gap.

5. Discussion

This section interprets the findings in relation to the existing literature on EFL academic writing, student attitudes, and genre-based pedagogy. Three inter-related themes are discussed: the tension between positive attitudes and low confidence; the dominance of lexicogrammar in students' self-identified weaknesses; and the curriculum gap around genre knowledge.

5.1. Positive Attitudes but Low Confidence

The predominantly positive attitudes towards English academic writing — particularly in terms of interest and enjoyment — are consistent with findings from comparable EFL contexts (Abas & Abd Aziz, 2016; Ismail, 2011). However, the substantial gap between students' reported enjoyment (66–80%) and their confidence (26%) warrants closer examination. This disparity aligns with self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), which holds that

positive affect alone does not translate into confidence if learners have not developed a sufficient sense of competence through successful, goal-directed experience. Djatmika et al. (2022) found a parallel pattern among Indonesian EFL undergraduates, confirming that academic writing self-efficacy is significantly related to metacognitive awareness and growth mindset, and that confidence requires directed instructional support — not interest alone.

The interview data provide a structural explanation for students' low confidence: they had been enrolled in writing courses for four semesters without being explicitly taught the genre they were required to produce in semester seven — the literature review. This structural gap helps explain why students described feeling 'confused' and 'lost', a pattern consistent with Singh's (2016) findings among postgraduate EFL students in Malaysia, and underscores that curriculum design is a significant determinant of student affect, not just individual ability or motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

5.2. Lexicogrammar as the Dominant Identified Weakness

The predominance of lexicogrammar (grammar and vocabulary) in students' self-identified weaknesses reflects both their learning history and the feedback cultures they have experienced. This finding echoes Al-Khairy (2013) in Saudi Arabia, and Singh (2016) in Malaysia, both of whom found that EFL students frequently identify grammatical and lexical difficulties as their primary writing weaknesses. Nadhifah et al. (2023), in a systematic review of Indonesian EFL academic writing strategies, similarly found a strong orientation towards lexicogrammatical concerns over higher-order discourse features.

Critically, the teacher's perspective offered in this study — that grammar teaching had been disconnected from writing context — suggests that students may have been oriented towards lexicogrammar because that is precisely where most of their instructional feedback was directed. This reflects a well-documented challenge in genre pedagogy: when writing instruction emphasises discrete language skills in isolation from the texts students need to produce, learners develop a partial and fragmented understanding of what academic writing requires (Hyland, 2021, 2024; Rose & Martin, 2012). The absence of any student who identified genre knowledge as either a strength or a weakness, despite the literature review being a required genre in their fifth and seventh semesters, confirms the depth of this metalinguistic gap.

5.3. Curriculum Gaps and Genre Knowledge

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is the systematic absence of explicit genre instruction in the curriculum, particularly regarding the literature review. The Scientific Writing course, despite stating the ability to write a literature review as a course objective, did not in practice teach students how this genre differs from other forms of academic writing in terms of its communicative purpose, move structure, or linguistic features. This gap between stated learning outcomes and actual instructional content is a recognised problem in EFL academic writing curricula (Hyland, 2007; Thaksanan & Chaturongakul, 2023; Zagoto et al., 2025).

Notably, students were able to articulate this gap clearly after completing the supplementary LR course — describing what they had not been taught in the Scientific Writing course. This suggests that explicit genre instruction sharpened their metacognitive awareness of their own learning, consistent with the broader literature on self-regulated learning in writing

(Djarmika et al., 2022). Experimental evidence further validates this: Abdel Latif et al. (2024) found that genre-based instruction not only improved Saudi EFL university students' argumentative writing performance but also reduced writing apprehension and enhanced self-efficacy. Aljafen (2025) similarly demonstrated statistically significant gains in rhetorical flexibility, coherence, and academic relevance among EFL students who received genre-based instruction relative to peers who received traditional grammar-focused teaching. This supports the growing evidence base for genre-based pedagogy in EFL contexts (Hyland, 2024; Thaksanan & Chaturongakul, 2023; Rose & Martin, 2012; Zagoto et al., 2025), which argues that learners benefit from explicit scaffolding around the purposes, structures, and linguistic conventions of the genres they are expected to produce. As Swales (1990) established and Hyland (2007) has since elaborated, understanding genre as a socially situated communicative act is fundamental to effective academic writing instruction.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated student and teacher perspectives on English academic writing in an Indonesian Islamic State College, with a specific focus on the connection between those perspectives and the curriculum. The findings reveal a complex picture: while most students hold positive attitudes towards academic writing in terms of enjoyment and interest, the majority lack confidence, particularly in producing genre-specific texts such as the literature review.

The study found that students' self-identified weaknesses were predominantly lexicogrammatical, reflecting a curriculum that had emphasised isolated grammar instruction over contextualised academic writing practice. Crucially, no student — prior to the supplementary LR course — identified genre knowledge as either a strength or a weakness, indicating a fundamental gap in metalinguistic awareness extending beyond lexicogrammar to the level of discourse and genre structure. After receiving explicit genre instruction in the supplementary LR course, students demonstrated a more sophisticated vocabulary for discussing their writing needs and curriculum shortcomings, suggesting that genre-based instruction can raise metacognitive awareness alongside writing competence.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are offered. First, English Education departments in similar Indonesian contexts should reconsider the sequencing and content of writing courses to ensure that students are introduced to the genres they will be expected to produce — particularly the literature review — well before the thesis proposal stage. Second, writing instruction should move beyond discrete skills practice towards an integrated, genre-based pedagogy that makes explicit the communicative purposes, structural conventions, and linguistic resources of target academic genres (Hyland, 2024; Rose & Martin, 2012; Thaksanan & Chaturongakul, 2023). Third, grammar instruction should be contextualised within academic writing tasks rather than taught as a separate strand of the curriculum. Finally, future research should replicate this study with larger and more diverse samples to increase the transferability of these findings and examine how genre awareness and writing confidence develop longitudinally through genre-based instruction.

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