

# An Analysis on Undergraduate Students' Theses Background Writing in English Study Program at IAIN Bone

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## **Abstract**

The goal of this study was specified to analyze the development of writing aspects of undergraduate students' theses background in English Study Program at IAIN Bone. This research used descriptive qualitative method. The sample of this research was 10 undergraduate students' theses background. The undergraduate students' compositions were analyzed and reviewed frequently using Jacob et al. (1981) rubric. The findings revealed that all undergraduate students developed their background in inductive way; they first stated the general premises of their idea and then form a specific conclusion at the end, they organized their sentences and paragraphs by using cohesive device. The researcher also found that undergraduate students had various writing problems such as lack in organizing their ideas, grammatical mistakes that were tense, agreement, word order, article, and preposition, mistake usage of vocabulary that were inappropriate words and word placement, and mechanical mistakes that were spelling, punctuation and capitalization. As a result, the researcher found that, in this degree, undergraduate students still encountered problems in writing their theses background. Thus, English lecturers at IAIN Bone could more aware and focus on their students' writing compositions by looking, improving, and guiding their students on how to develop their content, organize their sentence and paragraph, use appropriate vocabulary, use correct language use and mechanic aspect.

Keywords: *Analysis, Content, Organization, Writing.*

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## **1. Introduction**

Writing is usually avowed as a difficult task by the students. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), writing is about how to develop and organize ideas through the use of a specific "choice of vocabulary, sentences, grammar, paragraph organization, and how to turn ideas into readable text." It meant that writing was not simply a matter of writing things down on paper. Writing was very complex and difficult to learn. Hung (2006) stated that writing in a foreign language is significantly more difficult since it involves dealing with the target language's rules, which include grammar and use rules, vocabulary,

and discourse, which are often different from those of one's first language.

In tertiary education level, especially for English Education Program Students, writing, as the primary method for learning had played a crucial role. Before graduating with a bachelor's degree, students were required to compose a research paper, also known as an undergraduate thesis, as their final examination scientific project. Paltridge (2012) stated that academic writing in this progression degree, students are not only writing their ideas down on paper, but also, they had to understand the writing patterned well. It meant that while the students were writing, they had

to comprehend the pattern, that there was a mutual connection between thinking and writing. It was a crucial part of getting across their thoughts to evolve understanding.

According to Oshima and Hogue (2007), English Academic writing is probably contrasting from academic writing in other languages. The words, grammar and also the way ideas organized are probably different from what non-native students are used to. In the opinion of Strongman (2013), Academic writing is about carefully selecting words to express complicated concepts to a wide range of readers and audiences. Many non-native students, then, do not find it easy to write up their academic work into acceptable form.

Many studies had investigated students' problem in writing academic product. Several of them were Abdulkareem (2013); Alfaki (2015); Albarak (2017). Most of the findings reported various factors influence students writing quality. Abdulkareem (2013) found that students struggle with sentence structure, vocabulary, and ideas in academic writing, with errors ranging from high to low percentages. Alfaki (2015) identified language issues, usage errors, and mechanical mistakes, as well as cognitive and graph motor issues. Besides, Al Mubarak (2017) identified articles, punctuation, prepositions, irregular verbs, weak expressions, consistency paralleled structure, and verb tense as additional challenges faced by students.

Those kinds of problems were also found in one of undergraduate theses background written by undergraduate students of English Study Program at IAIN Bone. Based on preliminary observation, it showed that the thesis background was not well-organized; the idea was not clearly stated, and there was incorrect usage of grammar.

With regard to the issues above, it is critical for lecturers who worked with student writers to understand their students' individual challenges in order to assist them develop their writing skills. Thus, the identification and

examination of students' writing components is a first step toward resolving students' challenges with writing in a foreign language.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Academic Writing**

Academic writing refers to prevalent form of writing in educational institutions such as universities, colleges, and research facilities. It is always a form of evaluation that requires you to demonstrate your knowledge and mastery of specific disciplinary skills in reasoning, interpreting, and presenting. explains Irvin (2010). Murray (2005) defines academic writing as the conventions used when publishing a paper or composing a thesis in a specific discipline. Academic writing is distinguished from personal and creative writing (Oshima and Hogue, 2007). Academic writing is, in an essence, a form of written expression with distinct intellectual boundaries and areas of expertise.

Researchers can identify two distinctive characteristics of academic writing: (i) discipline-specificity and (ii) evidence-based. The characteristic 'discipline-specific' refers to academic writers who strictly adhere to the procedures and traditions of the discipline, including typeface, style, organization, and format of writing. In this approach, superior academic writing identifies the academic community of the author. Similarly, the term 'evidence-based' denotes that the assertions and opinions presented in an academic examination are supported by credible sources. Arguments and thoughts of the author are supported by factual, verifiable data and real-world examples. Moreover, according to Bailey (2003), academic writing is for all students in English-medium colleges and universities who are required to compose essays and other assignments for exams or courses.

## **2. 2. Characteristics of Academic Writing**

Irvin (2010) defines academic writing as a literacy work, and he analyzes two crucial elements of this complex literacy task:

### **a. Academic writing is a justification**

Academic writing focuses on presenting logical arguments, which are organized to support a point of view. These arguments resemble a conversation between two people seeking a better understanding of the subject matter (Irvin, 2010, p.10). A well-written paper emphasizes the importance of an ordered argumentative presentation with solid supporting evidence, resembling a conversation between two people seeking a better understanding of the subject matter.

### **b. Academic writing is an analysis**

In academic writing, a point of view is analyzed and interpreted analytically, with an emphasis on "how and why" inquiries rather than "what questions." Open inquiry, recognizing the topic's important components, and analyzing their connections are the three main actions of this presentation.

Academic writing, A well-structured piece of writing, takes audience, purpose, organization, style, flow, and presentation into account (Swales & Feak, 2012, p. 3). The selection of information, arrangement, explanation, example, and terminology is influenced by the audience's personality. The how question tackles organization, style, presentation, and idea flow whereas the purpose question focuses on the overall objective or message. To ensure that readers can understand the writing, it should be broken up into three sections: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. The writing must be concise and precise, using appropriate language and terminology. Avoiding conventions like contraction, negation, weak endings, multi-word verbs, and repetitions is necessary when writing in a formal setting. Writing academically well requires using appropriate citation and

referencing styles, professional spelling, and grammar.

## **2. 3. Aspects in Writing**

Jacob (1981) points out five significant components in order to make a good writing: they are content, organization, vocabulary, language use/grammar, and mechanic.

### **a. Content**

The ideas or meanings in a piece of literature are commonly referred to as content. According to Freedman (1979), content is the development and logical consistency of ideas. Sadek (2011) defined content as ideas centered on the topic throughout the essay, developed through reason, facts, explanations, examples, details, statistics, opinions, and/or anecdotes. According to Jacobs et al. (2011), excellent to very good material is defined as knowledgeable, substantive, complete elaboration of thesis, and relevant to assigned topic.

### **b. Organization**

Text organization, according to Beare (2017), relates to how text is ordered to help readers follow and understand the information offered. Fluent expression, concepts clearly presented, properly structured, rationally sequenced, and cohesiveness in writing are all examples of organization, according to Jacob et al.

### **c. Vocabulary**

The breadth and variety of terms used in a text is referred to as vocabulary diversity (McCarthy & Jarvis, 2007). Vocabulary, according to Jacob et al., should demonstrate sophisticated range, effective word / idiom choice, and usage. The wording conveys the intended meaning. Words were used correctly in terms of their function.

### **d. Language Use/ Grammar**

Language use is rules in making sentence. Language use consisted of effective complex

construction, agreement, tense, number, word order, function, articles, pronouns, and preposition in writing.

#### b. Mechanic

Mechanic is the mastery of conversation like spelling, punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing and handwriting.

## 2. 4. Background

According to McMillan (2004), the background section exposes the researcher's motivation for doing the research and ideas that support his or her findings, becomes the core information pertaining to the study to broader domains, and concisely signifies the extension of the research topic.

The context section defines and describes the history and nature of a well-defined research topic with reference to existing literature. The background section should describe the problem's origin, its appropriate context in relation to theory, research, and practice, its scope, and the extent to which previous studies have successfully investigated the problem, noting in particular any gaps that your study seeks to fill (Fitterling). It indicates that the background section of a thesis should include a review of the area being examined, current knowledge about the topic, and important historical information about the subject. Ideally, the research should properly present the researchers' thesis problem's history and background information.

## 3. Research Methodology

In this study, the researcher applied qualitative. In the most basic term, Qualitative research method gave room to a deeper understanding of the subjects' matter (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Miles et al., 2014). Type of qualitative research method which was applied in this research was descriptive. Gay (2009) defined descriptive research as research that determined and described how things are. This research was aimed to describe undergraduate

theses writing components development in order to perceive undergraduate students' issues in writing their backgrounds. Total of sample size of 10 undergraduate students' theses background were appropriated.

After collecting the data, undergraduate students' theses background is assessed using analytic rubric which is developed by Jacobs et.al (1981). The rubric assesses the aspect of content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and writing mechanic.

Furthermore, to analyze the data, the researcher employs procedure or stages Miles, Huberman, and Saldana' concept (2014), where the data analysis consisted four flows that are collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

#### a. Data collection

Data collection could be defined as information that had been gathered. In this study, the data were collected in the documents form.

#### b. Data reduction

Data reduction is the process of focusing, simplification, abstraction, and transformation of the data in a written-up field note or transcript (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). In this study, the data are first in the form of document. Next, the data are transcribed into written form. Then, they are identified, selected, classified based on the analyzing needs which are relevant to the research questions.

#### c. Data display

Data display is the process of showing simply data using words, sentences, narrative, table, or etc. In this research, the data display is described using sentences.

#### d. Conclusion

Conclusion is the last step after data reduction and data display.

## 4. Findings



### 4. 3. Vocabulary

There are only a few mistakes made by undergraduate students. The common mistake that is found on undergraduate students' theses background is mistakes on choosing the appropriate word to complete the sentence meaning. Another mistake found is incorrectly word placement. The examples are presented as follows:

*in addition, other factors that **make** English students' difficulties to hold speaking skills according to Lukitsari are problems in pronunciation, stress, overall rhythm, or intonation.*

(T8)

The sentence above showed an example of improper word choice used by undergraduate students. The word "make" do not fit the context of the sentence, thus it should be replaced by the word "cause" in order to give the proper meaning.

*the junior high school faculty students in Sajoanging Kab. Wajo also are having the problem.*

(T7)

The word placement of "faculty" made the sentence above ambiguous. In order to fix the ambiguous meaning, the word "faculty" should be sheer off.

### 4. 4. Language Use

Grammar is shown to be the most common mistake which is found in undergraduate students' theses background. Undergraduate students made mistakes with tense, agreement, word order, article, and preposition.

#### a. Tense

Undergraduate students inaccurately used tense as a result of the data they gathered. In particular, loads of mistakes are found in past tense nominal and verbal phrases. The examples are shown as follows:

*The findings showed that students **are** lack of interest in learning...*

(T3)

#### b. Agreement

Based on the analysis, the researcher found that some of undergraduate students made mistake in using subject-verb agreement and noun-pronoun agreement. The examples are shown as follows:

*English is one of the foreign languages **are** spoken by people around the world.*

(T6)

From the script above, it is found agreement error which is subject-verb agreement. The word "English" is a singular subject. It must be followed by singular verb. In T6, it is shown that the undergraduate student used a plural presents tense verb which is "are" instead of using singular verb "is".

*They prove the numerous **effect** of victimization...*

(T7)

The example above shows agreement error used in a sentence. The word "effect" should be written in plural which is "effects" because it is preceded by the word "numerous" which is indicated as plural adjective.

#### c. Word order

Based on the analysis, it is found minor word order mistake on undergraduate students' theses background. For example:

*...the **media** narrative audiobook...*

(T7)

In the example above, the word "media" is in an incorrect position in the sentence; it should come after the word "audiobook".

#### d. Article

Based on the analysis, the researcher found that misuse of article is often held by the undergraduate students. This mistake is found in six of ten undergraduate students' theses background which are the first, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and ninth background. The examples are shown as follows:

*the English...*

(T6)

In the example above, it shows overuse article. It should be zero article applied to names of languages. So, article "the" should be removed.

... an freelance author...

(T7)

From the script above, it is found misuse of article "an" in the sentence. the undergraduate student should use article "a" instead of using article "an" because the adjective that came next began with a consonant sound which is "freelance".

#### e. Preposition

After breaking down the undergraduate students' theses background, it is found misuse of preposition. The example is provided as follows:

...Web Quests, which can be accessed over the internet, are one of the various media

(T5)

From the script above, it shows that the use of preposition "over" is not appropriate. The word "internet" in the sentence is indicated as a location, so the right preposition to complete the sentence meaning is "on".

## 4. 5. Mechanic

Based on the finding, the researcher perceived that most of the mistakes laid on spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.

#### a. Spelling

Based on the analysis, spelling mistake is the fewest mistake of mechanical errors that is committed by undergraduate students. It is found that there are four undergraduate students who committed this mistake. This mistake is found in the first, second, seventh, and ninth paragraphs. Those words are *complety, listeneng, sciolinguistics, beside, scanning, conprehension, furthemore, contect, and sates*. Those words should be *completely, listening, sociolinguistics, besides, scanning, comprehension, furthermore, content, and stated*.

#### b. Punctuation

After breaking down the undergraduate students' theses backgrounds, the researcher

found that punctuation is the most common mistake that undergraduate students made on mechanic aspect. Such as misuse of apostrophe, comma, full stop, and semicolon. The examples were presented as follows:

*Boud, Keogh and Walker, state that reflection...*

(T1)

From the sentence above, it is found that the use of a comma is not incorrectly to its function. The use of a comma in the middle of the sentence above should be sheer off to give clear meaning.

*WhatsApp had its own ease of use for students'*

(T9)

Based on the example above, it is found the misuse of apostrophe. The use of apostrophe should be erased since the sentence do not show possession or omitted letter.

#### c. Capitalization

Based on the analysis, some of capitalization mistakes are found on undergraduate students' theses background. The examples are shown as follows:

*According to Astri., Z. And Fian sociolinguistic is the study...*

(T2)

The sentence above shows a the incorrect used of capitalization. The conjunction "And" should be written down in lowercase form which should be "and".

..., Students are lack of understanding...

(T7)

Another incorrect used of capitalization is found in T7. The letter "S" in the word "Students" should not be written using capital letters.

## 5. Discussions

### 5.1. Content

By examining the topic and details of the backgrounds, the researcher found that all the undergraduate students developed their backgrounds in inductive way. It meant that they first stated the general premises of their idea and then form a specific conclusion at the

end. first, they introduce the topic and indicate the particular focus of their background. They give an outline of the background and set the scene for the main body, as well as defines important concepts and terms. Next, they developed their paragraphs by using reliable source and by giving evidence to support their idea. Last, they present the results of the investigation which are the background findings, and provide a solution to the problem that has been set, it also suggests further areas of investigation.

However, based on the data, the researcher found that most of the undergraduate students could develop their content of their background as whole, but as the researcher looked more closely to each paragraph of the background, the researcher found that the undergraduate students could not develop their topic really well. Most of undergraduate students' theses background were briefly indicated what topics were going to be discussed, but they did not use specific details to be thorough to be convincing. Another problem was that undergraduate students' theses background had poor organization.

According to Brown (2004), the content puts emphasis on the logical elaboration of the ideas which is described by the writer. In line with Jacob et.al. (1981), he stated that content must be knowledgeable and relevant to the assigned topic. The term "content" refers to precise information that come to support or develop the topic of discussion in a paragraph. A paragraph's supporting sentences must be structured so that they cohere or cling together.

## **5. 2. Organization**

Based on the finding, the researcher found that there are two ways on how undergraduate students organized their text. First, the undergraduate students repeated the key noun of the idea in the text. Second, the undergraduate students used transition signals to connect their ideas. According to Beare (2017), organization refers to how text is structured so that readers can follow and

comprehend the information presented. Excellent text organization demonstrated fluent expression, distinct ideas, organization, logical sequence, and cohesion in writing (Jacob et al., 1981).

However, the fact revealed that the existence of some cohesion device used by undergraduate students did not make their ideas in the text move smoothly and logically. In other words, the undergraduate students do not communicate their ideas in good organization. They wrote sentences that are perplexing and unclear. The concepts they wrote are disjointed across sentences and paragraphs. As a result, their phrases are difficult to grasp.

## **5. 3. Vocabulary**

Writing relies heavily on vocabulary. Writers cannot express their ideas in written form unless they master vocabulary. Good writing is informed by the use of appropriate words for the topic. According to Jacob et al. (1981), mastering vocabulary enables writers to select effective idioms, word choices, and usage. Based on the analysis, the researcher determined that the vocabulary level of the undergraduate students' theses ranged from good to average.

After breaking down undergraduate students' work, it is perceived that they still encountered various problems. The factors that influenced undergraduate students' level of vocabulary are inappropriate used of word and word placement. Inappropriate used of word was found in half of the data which was five. Mistake of word placement found in two backgrounds. Inappropriate word and incorrect word placement in a text would make the sentence awkward, thus readers can no longer read smoothly.

## **5. 4. Language Use**

Grammar is the study of how words interact; an invisible force that guides us as we weave together words to form sentences (Debata,

2013). Grammar knowledge facilitates the correction of errors and enhancement of written work.

In the findings, there are grammatical errors that negatively impacted the writing of undergraduate students. It contains errors in tense, agreement, word order, the article, and the preposition.

Tension is the most common error detects in the writing of undergraduate students. It occurs in nine out of ten contexts. As a consequence of the collected data, undergraduate students improperly utilized English tense. Particularly, there are numerous mistakes in past tense nominal and verbal phrases. The researcher concluded, based on the findings, that the majority of undergraduate students made errors in tense usage. The majority of undergraduates either lacked knowledge of the past tense or disregarded it.

The second frequent mistake is article which occurred in six backgrounds. Articles precedes the nouns and are used in undefined expression. A, an, and the. A or an is only used with countable singular nouns. Those who started with the consonant letter have "a" tag at the beginning of the word, and nouns that began with a vowel would have "an" tag at the beginning of the word. As writers could not use countable singular nouns alone, thus a/ an was usually used. On the other hand, if writers were writing about specific object, "the" was used. "the" could be used in countable and uncountable nouns. Based on the analysis, the researcher found that misuse of article is often held by the undergraduate students.

The less frequent mistake are agreement, word order, and preposition with each percentage. Agreement refers to a grammatical rule that writers needed to align in number and in gender. Agreement in English are divided into two terms. They were subject-verb agreement and noun-pronoun agreement. Based on the analysis, the researcher found that some of undergraduate students made mistake in using subject-verb agreement and noun-pronoun agreement.

Another less frequent mistake is word order. As we know, each language certainly has its own word order which may differ from one another. Word order is the order or arrangement of words in a phrase, clause, or sentence. Based on the analysis, it is found minor word order mistake on undergraduate students' theses background.

The last frequent mistake is preposition. Preposition is certain words that correlated between two different words or phrase; usually about time and place. It combines a noun or a pronoun with a group of words to complete sentence or a phrase. Based on the analysis of the undergraduate students' theses background, it is found misuse of preposition.

## **5. 5. Mechanic**

Mechanic is rules that standardized certain things in writing. It is simply convention that standardized things like capitalization, spelling, and punctuation (Cowan and Cowan, 1980).

Based on the research findings, types of mechanic error found in undergraduate students' theses background are spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. The most frequent mechanic error was punctuation. It occurred in nine from ten backgrounds. It is followed by capitalization error which occurred in six backgrounds. The least frequent error is spelling which occurred in four backgrounds.

### **a. Spelling**

Spelling is a difficult cognitive activity that involves multiple mental processes. It is not always easy to learn to spell correctly, but it is critical for students learning the language (Oguan & Valle, 2022). Correct spelling facilitates communication and avoid confusion. Based on the data obtained, there are four undergraduate students used incorrect spelling in their thesis background.

### **b. Punctuation**

Punctuation refers to the collections of marks that the writer used to make sentences flow smoothly and express meaning clearly (Rajan, 2021). It often seems to be a minor importance to writers.

Correct punctuation adds clarity and precision to writing.

There are nine undergraduate students who used incorrect punctuation in their thesis background. Types of punctuation error occurred are comma, apostrophe, period, and semicolon. Error in comma seems to be the most frequent error found in undergraduate students' theses background which was eight from ten backgrounds. Error in period is found in two backgrounds. And error in apostrophe and semicolon only found in one background of each.

#### c. Capitalization

Capitalization is only used at the first of word and the next word remained small or lowercase (Straus et al., 2014, Pathan, 2021). It is put at the first word in sentences, for the titles, name, pronoun I, and at the first word to indicate title of paragraphs (Butle, 2007). Correct capitalization informs the reader that a phrase has begun, highlights essential words in a title, and indicates proper names and formal titles.

Based on the data obtained, there are six undergraduate students used incorrect capitalization in their thesis background.

## 6. Conclusion

This research found that all the undergraduate students, in this degree, had issues in the content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanic. This research also shows that the strongest factors inhibiting undergraduate students writing are related to the way they organize their text and their mastery of language use.

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