

# EXPLORING GRADUATE STUDENTS' PRACTICES OF WRITING FOR SCHOLARLY PUBLICATION

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**Abstract:** The demand of writing for scholarly publication as a part of graduation requirements has now been apparent in many graduate programs. The present study attempted to discover the English Language Teaching (ELT) graduate students' practices in writing for scholarly publication. This present study employed case study to further disclose the graduate students' perceived discursive and non-discursive constraints as well as the way they learn how to write for scholarly publication. To collect the data, a synchronous interview session was conducted to two ELT master's students from a state university in Central Java, Indonesia. Drawing on the theory of discourse community and legitimate peripheral participation, the participants challenges and learning process of learning process were scrutinized. It is expected that this study provides new insights for policy making in a postgraduate context and for the teaching of EAP to support writing for scholarly publication.

**Keywords:** writing for scholarly publication; graduate students; discourse community; legitimate peripheral participation.

The recent trends of global competition for academic excellence has pushed researchers around the globe to have their journals published in reputable journals (Flowerdew, 2013). This implies that any related parties involved in the academic community such as professors, lecturers, researchers and postgraduate students are demanded to meet the aforementioned challenges. As part of such community, postgraduate students are also required have their research articles published. Lei and Chuang (2009) assert that one graduation requirement of graduate students has now been a research article

publication in a scholarly journal. In Indonesian higher education context, the obligation for masters and doctoral students to write for academic publication is accentuated by the Minister of Research and Higher Education regulation number 50/2018. For master's degree students, they should be able to publish an article in Indonesian accredited journals or reputable international ones. On the other hand, doctoral students are obliged to write in a reputable international journal.

Literature has suggested that conducting extensive research in the area of academic

literacy education and the process of emerging scholars as a new member of academic society is considered pivotal (Hyland, 2009). One main reason supporting the aforesaid argument is that the language of scientific publication has predominantly used English whilst there has been a growing number of plurilingual writers who use English as an additional language (EAL) (Englander & Corcoran, 2019; Hultgren, 2019; Hyland, 2015, 2019). In writing for academic publication in English, additional linguistic challenges are often faced by those EAL writers (Flowerdew, 2019; Hyland, 2016). Thus, a growing body of literature in the area of writing for scholarly publication as well as English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP) has identified the practices of postgraduate students, in particular doctoral students, in their research publication journey (Chien, 2019; Fazel, 2019; Habibie, 2015; Ho, 2017; Lei, 2019; Lei & Hu, 2019; Mu, 2018; Rezaei & Seyri, 2019). However, there has been little research into the practices of master's students, who are considered as new to the academia, in completing the demand of writing for publication as graduation requirement.

The area of writing for scholarly publication can be regarded as a part of discourse community. Swales (1990) defines discourse community as people having mutual or "shared" social conventions who "who link up in order to pursue objectives that are prior to those of socialization and solidarity, even if these latter should consequently occur." (p. 24). In a much simpler way, discourse community is a community which consists of people having the same values and ideas who interact using a same language set which rules their interaction within the community. Furthermore, Silver (2006) mentions those shared lexico-grammatical features which characterize a discourse community includes lexis, styles, ideologies, epistemological assumptions, etc.

Swales (1990) then develops six major aspects of a discourse community. They are 1) having common public goals, 2) denoting common intercommunication mechanism, 3) utilizing mechanism of participation, 4) sharing community-specific genre, 5) employing highly specific terminology among its members, and 6) showing high level of content and discursual expertise as performed by its members.

Concerning the field of scholarly publication, such activity shares six pivotal characteristics of a discourse community. They include common goals as reflected by the goals of publication, mechanism of intercommunication as shown by the review process, participatory mechanism characterized by journal subscription, genre to accomplish its goals represented by the use of academic genre, specific lexis realized by the use of academic lexis, and content and discursual expertise as characterized by the existence of emerging and established scholars in the academia.

Considering its element of discourse community of academic publication, every aspect is represented by different activities. Firstly, scholarly publication has some common goals which have been maintained by its members. One of the goals of publication is disseminating the scientific knowledge across the globe (Beck et al., 2019). Secondly, peer review has become the intercommunication mechanism since its primary function is to help journal writers improve the quality of their paper (Woodrow, 2019). Seen from the perspective of participatory mechanism, journal subscription has been a means to maintain such mechanism as pointed out by Swales (1990). Research article published in academic journals typically follow genre conventions and discipline-specific norms which characterize their linguistic elements (Habibie, 2016). Further, he argues that both terms are reflected in the form of "disciplinary and stylistic requirements of the journal academic genre" (p. 75). Hyland (2002) believes that the discourses of the academy involve a wide array of subject-specific literacies including any words which are often employed in such specific fields as academic texts in applied linguistics, business, engineering, education, medicine, natural science, and social science. Within its community, there is an apparent distinction between "experts" and "novices" (Swales, 1990). This distinction is evident since there is survival mechanism in that community.

To capture the struggle of postgraduate students with writing for scholarly publication as part of graduation requirement, the idea of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) in present study is utilized. Legitimate Peripheral Participation is proposed by Lave and Wenger

(1991) who postulate the process of a newcomer in joining a community of practice (CoP). In such process, Lave and Wenger emphasize that “learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership” (p. 51). In other words, LPP sees learning as a social process through which an interaction between less experienced with more experienced members happens. This interaction is primarily aimed at gaining more expertise in the respective area. In order to achieve the aforesaid goal, Uzuner (2008) outlines three basic requirements of such interaction to occur. Those requirements require the “newcomers” to obtain knowledge, tune their enterprise, cultivate new identity, repertoire, style, and discourse through interacting with experts in an apprenticeship-like stages.

The emergence of LPP theory is particularly evident in the process of co-authorship and peer review process in which the novice writers of academic learn to build their academic identity to be a part of academia through their interactions with their supervisors and journal reviewers. In regard the status of masters' students, LPP considers them as the ones seeking legitimation of becoming potential members of academic community. This is primarily because they are considered as emerging scholars with limited experience of interaction in the world of scientific publication. This view is in conjunction with Habibie (2016) who asserts that LPP pinpoints the importance of offering support mechanism in writing for publication among graduate students as well as foreground the crucial roles of academic members in providing mentorship for them throughout the process. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), the practice of novice writers learning from academic members who offer them mentorship is often referred to as apprenticeship. Further, Kirk and Kinchin (2003) believe that apprenticeship sees learning as collaborative process which is not an individual process in nature.

To extend empirical research on writing for scholarly publication, a case study investigating the practices of EAL master's students in writing for scholarly publication in multilingual contexts, particularly in Indonesia, needs to be undertaken. The findings of study in such contexts contribute to the understanding of their “disadvantage” as emerging scholars who use English as an additional language (Habibie,

2015). Such disadvantages realized as some linguistic challenges faced by those writers in writing for academic publication (Flowerdew, 2019; Hyland, 2016). Considering the aforementioned encountered challenges, another contribution of the present study is to provide understanding on how supporting trainings for emerging scholars such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Research Publication Purposes (ERPP) course could be offered to ease their journey of publication. Therefore, this study set out to disclose the masters' students' practices of writing for scholarly publication. To guide the exploration, two research questions were (1) what challenges do the master's students encounter in writing for scholarly publication? (2) How do they learn writing for scholarly publication?

## METHOD

The current study was part of a larger study investigating the ELT master's students writing for publication practices, with the case study design adopted to guide the initial exploration (Yin, 2018). Creswell (2013) defines case study as an investigation that “explores real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes” (p. 97). Additionally, the goal of this methodological framework is mainly to make expansion and generalization of theory through analytic generalizations as it is not intended to make probability estimation by statistical generalization (Yin, 2018). Therefore, this design helps the researcher scrutinize a case without having to apply the results to the larger population.

For this study, the data were garnered from the practices of master's degree students of a university in writing for scholarly publication as a graduation requirement. The rationale of utilizing the data from those participants was that their writing for publication practice denotes a unique case to be investigated (Yin, 2018). The participants involved in this study were two final-year ELT master's degree students of a university in Central Java, Indonesia. They were required to write for publication in order to earn

the Master of Education degree, along with reporting their research through master's thesis. Both participants, at the time of data collection, had been publishing at least one research article in reputable journals. Also, the topic of their research articles should be closely related to that of their thesis. In regard academic authorship, their research articles also included the name of their supervisors as second and third authors as both participants were under thesis supervisors' mentorship in the journey of publication process.

To reach the participants, the researcher contacted the prospective participants by utilizing the researcher's personal network. As the invitation was sent, the researcher then made further contact with those who were willing to take part in this project. Following the participants' voluntary decision confirmation, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants. The interview ran for approximately 60 minutes. Following this interview, a more informal conversation through the WhatsApp application was conducted to obtain additional information supporting the previous data. The interview was the audio recorded with the permission of the participants. The audio recordings functioned as a means of elicitation of precise or detailed qualitative data adequately (Widodo, 2014). Further, he believes that audio recording will serve as a tool for organizing, analyzing, and interpreting verbal data. In doing the data analysis, Clarke's (2005) selective coding was employed. This coding was primarily chosen to draw scrutinize the challenges encountered by the participants in writing for scholarly publication as well as to examine the process of learning to write for scholarly publication foregrounded in the previous section in the present study regarding the framework of discourse community and legitimate peripheral participation. Specific attention was then given to common themes which were drawn out from the transcripts to be presented in the discussion.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

The participants' challenges in writing for scholarly publication could be codified into two main themes, namely content-related and form-

related challenges. In terms of the former challenges, the emerged theme was closely related to disciplinary aspects of the knowledge. On the other hand, the latter challenges were associated with academic genre aspects. In terms of the learning process of becoming scholarly writers, the participants reported that their own process was generated by personal academic engagement with research and publication, mentorship from academic supervisor, and master's degree coursework structure.

### The Challenges Faced by the Participants in Writing for Scholarly Publication

#### *Constructing Subject Matters within Their Investigated Topic*

Both participants agreed that they encountered challenges related to the subject matter area. This challenge is basically related to developing and expanding knowledge in their particular area of research interests. One prominent issue they faced was related to developing topics and ideas in accordance with their proposed research interests. Riri recounted that her main challenge with the subject matters of her proposed area was exploring a topic in accordance with her research interests to produce rigorous academic work. Whilst Riri encountered challenges in expanding her ideas, Julia found it hard to connect different ideas, knowledge, and concepts as her topic was considered as an under-research area in Indonesian ELT context. Those disciplinary-related challenges are highlighted in the following excerpt.

*In my view, deciding a topic of my paper is quite difficult. We know that publishing an article in a reputable journal requires us to be knowledgeable in various academic topics which are suitable for publication purposes. Thus, choosing a topic which is "publishable" is challenging for me. (Riri)*

*My research area is multimodality use in the hard-hearing learners' reading class. In fact, this topic has not yet been extensively investigated in Indonesia. As a result, I sometimes find it difficult to connect different concepts as my topic is in intersection between different ideas in ELT e.g. reading, multimodality, and hard-hearing students' intervention. Thus, I need some more time by*

*reading many sources multiple times in order to figure out the connection between different aspects in those three aspects. (Julia)*

Another noticeable challenge that both participants encountered was understanding the knowledge of the field in their specific areas. This particularly deals with the fact what has been discovered in the research might not support the theories. Riri expressed her concern over this phenomenon: *"I believe that we should be able to understand the theories or framework used in our research. However, my experience showed that practice might be different from the established theories. This requires possible alternative explanations."* Whilst Riri emphasized a possible mismatch between those two afore-said aspects, Julia raised an issue of connecting and sorting out different ideas as she commented *"When I tried to make connection between theories, I often confused which part should be included and excluded from the framework."*

#### **Understanding Genre of Research Article**

The two participants interviewed also expressed their challenges in academic genre which becomes the conventions of scientific writing, particularly when they wrote certain elements of their research articles. In general, Riri found some difficulties in writing her introduction and literature review. On the other hand, Julia encountered some challenges in writing her findings and discussion section.

Riri pointed that the introduction and literature review section was the most difficult element considering its rhetorical structure. Seen from Swales' (1990) rhetorical moves of introduction section as represented in CARS (Creating a Research Space), Riri struggled establishing a niche. That is, she spent a considerable amount of time thinking about what novelty element she could highlight in her study by reviewing what has been done previously. Although this part was not commented by the reviewer, she still felt unsure how to elucidate this point, as she explained:

*In writing my introduction, I still struggle with highlighting the novelty of my research. The point is that, this aspect is difficult to develop as you need to understand the nature of your research in your area and the focus of the previous studies.*

The next hindrance encountered by Riri was writing the literature review section. One element of a literature review is theoretical framework (Jian, 2010). She considered constructing theoretical framework as something quite challenging for her. More specifically, she accounted for uncertainties in both deciding the theoretical framing and merging different theories into one. Also, her difficulties in writing literature review were also stimulated by lack of critical argument in that section.

*I think the hardest part is when you have to literature review as it is not the part where you can simply copy and paste everything. When I wrote my article, I found it hard to marry different concepts used as analytical lenses. Also, writing literature review does, in fact, require your critical argument so that your literature review is not like only a compilation of different concepts.*

The next challenge encountered by the participants in terms of academic genre of scientific publication was writing discussion section. Julia commented that the main hindrance in outlining the discussions of her study was mostly on emphasizing the main findings of her study which she was considered to be still surface in nature. This understanding came up as the reviewer suggested her to consider another alternative by connecting her findings with another theory. Another difficulty she faced in constructing their discussion section was mostly on giving new insights which also reiterated novelty of the research.

*I felt that writing discussion section has been a challenge for me, in particular providing new insights. This part is actually highlights the novelty of our research. However, this part was not commented by the reviewer. Another challenge in writing discussion is highlighting the main finding. The reviewer commented that my main finding is not given any alternative explanation using different possible theory.*

#### **The Learning of Writing for Scholarly Publication**

##### **Mentorship from Thesis Supervisors**

The participants interviewed acknowledged that they obtained the knowledge of writing for publication from their supervisors

who provided mentorship during the publication process. As they are from the same university, Riri and Julia both have got two supervisors for their thesis. Concerning Riri's experiences of writing mentorship with her supervisors, she underscored the balanced roles of her two supervisors as she further explained that she learnt to give strong arguments in her writing through the critical comments given by her first supervisor. Additionally, her second supervisor enhanced Riri's idea in terms of her theoretical framework and any insights offered by previous studies, as she commented:

*My two supervisors were really helpful. In terms of the expertise, I learnt more discourse analysis theories as an analytical tool. My first supervisor were also critical to what I wrote in my paper as she would read every sentence. If I did not support my ideas with strong argument, she would ask me to revise them. My second supervisor was not as critical as the first one, yet she still gave me insight of the frame of theories and the things that have been done in my research topic recently. My second supervisor's network is quite broad so she is really updated with trends in qualitative research.*

Similar experiences are evident in Julia's context, where she contended that her principal supervisor was the one who offered her the thesis topic and thus provided her insightful comments on the process of adapting the research thesis into publishable research articles. Julia emphasized her principal supervisor's expertise in multimodality and digital technology in ELT as an essential element in shaping her knowledge in the field. Supporting Julia's principal supervisor's roles, the associate supervisor shaped Julia's academic writing style. Julia's associate supervisor also gave comments and suggestions of the content of her paper draft, as she described:

*My supervisors are really helpful and are both approachable too. When I have difficulties in writing my papers, they are always there for helping me. My principal supervisor proposed a research topic for my thesis and I granted that. This is because my supervisor's interest is on multimodality, so I want to learn more about that. While my first supervisor was mostly concerned with the ideas, my second supervisor gave me insight in terms of*

*academic writing style as he focused more on style.*

Considering the role of mentorship in boosting her ability in writing for scholarly publication, Riri shared her experience of becoming her associate supervisor's research assistant while writing her thesis. In the university where Riri and Julia studied, it is not uncommon for professors and lecturers to employ graduate students as their research assistant to help them conduct their research. Throughout her role as a research assistant, Riri benefited from the discussions with her associate supervisor as she noted that *"the opportunity of becoming my second supervisor's research assistant was valuable for me because I learnt a lot during the process because my supervisor discussed some progress of her research including data collection and analysis which I could adapt in my own research."*

#### **Personal Academic Engagement with Research and Publication**

Both participants emphasized that the process of learning writing for scholarly publication was mediated by their own academic engagement with research and publication. Their academic engagement was then to be closely associated with their personal initiative to deepen their knowledge and understanding in this area. Riri pointed out that once she found her research topic she started to read papers in her proposed area extensively. Julia added Riri's point by stressing the importance of being autonomous learners in boosting her academic writing as well as publishing competences. Further, they elaborated their voices in terms of personal engagement as follows:

*When I intended to write a research paper for publication, I began the journey with reading a lot of papers which became the previous studies. I found this effective because I needed to expand my idea and I also had to find appropriate research method. (Riri)*

*Becoming a master's degree students means that you need to be autonomous. I tried my best to apply that principle in writing my article for publication because my supervisors demanded me to be knowledgeable in my proposed topic. So, I browsed many related journals and discovered my own concepts. (Julia)*

### Master's Degree Coursework Structure

The results of the interview reveal that both participants' process of learning writing for scholarly publication was also shaped by their coursework structure in their degree program. Even though Riri and Julia were admitted from different semester intakes, both of them followed the same course structure. As they did the same courses, their course assessments were more likely similar.

Concerning the coursework structure, both Riri and Julia benefited from the two-credit Academic Writing course offered in the first semester. This course according to Riri "enhanced your understanding of rhetorical elements of a research article in English as the lecturer explained the elements in each part in a detailed way." Further, Julia believed that this course improved her ability in writing for scholarly publication as she noted that "the outcome of this course was a publishable article so that is why the lecturer also shared some do's and don'ts in publishing your article. Also, the lecturer discussed the issue of journal reputation and the case of predatory journal in the world of publication." In addition to the those aforementioned knowledge of scholarly publication, Riri also mentioned that this course facilitated both teacher feedback and peer feedback as well so that they could learn not only from her lecturer but also from her classmates. She commented that *"the lecturer in the Academic Writing course always reviewed our work every week and there was also a meeting for reviewing our friends' work, which was great for me."*

Other than the Academic Writing course, Riri and Julia also highlighted the opportunity of publishing their small-scale research project required by other courses in the curriculum structure. Such obligation was seen as crucial point in their curriculum because it provides an opportunity for them to be involved in the publication process. As pointed out by Julia, *"Other courses like ELT Methodology, Assessment in ELT, as well as Discourse Analysis and English Language Teaching required the students to write a small-scale research paper to be submitted in reputable journals at the end of the semester"*.

### Discussion

Writing for scholarly publication has provided both participants in this study oppor-

tunity to participate in an academic discourse community. Swales (1990) argues that in order to enter such communities, discursive norms, rhetorical conventions, disciplinary concerns should be mastered. In terms of the challenges of academic genre as represented in discursive-related challenges, the results were consistent with those of Burgess et al. (2014), Corcoran, (2015), Habibie (2015), Nejad, Qaracholloo, and Rezaei (2019). Such challenge is associated with the proposition that each element of the research article follows different rhetorical structure, posing different levels of difficulty (Swales, 2004). In terms of discourse organization of several elements of research articles in English, the finding of the present study resonated the research by conducted by Chien (2019) where he discovered that the ELT researchers in Taiwan found it problematic to write good some sections of RAs including introduction, literature review, discussion, and conclusion.

The present study also revealed some non-discursive challenges that the participants encountered in writing their scholarly publication work. One of such challenges dealt with the construction of knowledge in the field. In a similar vein, Habibie (2015) also reported doctoral students' barriers in (sub)disciplinary knowledge as represented in their theoretical framework. As pointed out by Hyland (2012), this evidence shows that the process of academic publication is not "just as the transformation of a text, but also the apprenticing of an individual writer into the knowledge constructing practices of a discipline" (p. 60). The participants' lack of practice in academic writing for scholarly was also documented in Rezaei and Seyri (2019) where the participants narrated that they were not specifically trained to write in writing for scholarly publication. In addition to experiencing deficiency in the writing for scholarly publication purposes, it was interesting to note that dealing with the reviewers' expectations, as experienced participants, was considered problematic. Like the participants in Chien (2019) and Fazel (2019), both Riri and Julia considered engaging with reviewers' feedback as a problematic issue. More specifically, their constraints were mainly on dealing with conflicting comments given by more than one reviewer.

In relation to the process of learning to write for scholarly writing, the results of this study underscored two pivotal elements as the



mediation of learning to write for scholarly publication. On the one hand, Julia and Riri's personal drives of learning was essential in shaping one's identity to become autonomous emerging scholars. This is consistent with Lei's (2019) findings, where individual strategies which arouse from their personal willingness to be autonomous scholars were found to be effective in tackling the hurdles of writing for publication process. On the other hand, master's degree context was also found to be an important aspect of mediating one's learning journey of research publication. This piece of finding is in tandem with that of Corcoran (2015), Habibie (2015), Lei (2019), Lei and Hu (2019). This is associated with the interaction between emerging scholars represented by the master's degree students and their supervisors who become the established scholars who have been in the academia for some periods of time.

Seen from the legitimate peripheral perspectives as proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), the individual academic engagement shown by Riri and Julia has facilitated their struggles to be potential members of academic community. Their personal investment of reading and reviewing research articles independently is seen as a way to enhance their capacity as emerging scholars. The mentorship process and coursework structure of their master's degree program has accentuated Lave and Wenger's conception of apprenticeship-like situations. In such situation, Riri and Julia who can be categorized as novice writers could learn to process of scholarly publication from their supervisors who are considered more experienced and more knowledgeable than them. Further, the established scholars as represented by the supervisors have crucial roles in situating their learning process.

## CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the case of two ELT master's degree students writing for scholarly publication. The participant's experiences in dealing with scholarly publication was scrutinized by Yin's (2018) case study design.

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- Swales' (1990) notion of discourse community and Lave and Wenger's (1991) conception of legitimate peripheral participation were adapted as conceptual framework. The results of this study highlighted that the participants faced two types of challenges in entering academic discourse of community. Their challenges of scholarly publication could be then categorized as disciplinary knowledge and academic genre. In regard the process of learning to write for scholarly publication, the participants benefited from the three mediating sources namely personal academic engagement with research and publication, mentorship from the supervisors, and the course structure of their master's program.
- The current study adopts a case study with two participants. To yield larger and richer data, a much bigger sample is then needed. The context of this study is the process of scholarly publication experienced by ELT master's degree students in one public university in Indonesia. It might be limited as this university applies specific rules to the graduate students' publication process which might be different from other universities offering master's program in ELT. To deeply scrutinize the challenges encountered in writing their publication in English, analyzing the participants' draft of publication which has been reviewed will offer more insights from different perspectives.
- The current study has provided insights to the experience of two ELT graduate programs in writing for scholarly publication. Thus, such information is of importance for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) trainings for graduate-level students. This also raises an issue of course content in such trainings which emphasize on the hindrances experienced by the graduate students. Further, the EAP trainings could be designed so that hands-on experiences are offered in engaging the graduate students with scholarly publication process. In a macro level, the results of this study can be used to develop course structure of graduate program and to enhance mentorship in a graduate-level context so that they can situate the learning of becoming scholarly writers.



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