

## Unleashing the secrets of academic writing: exploring Indonesian language courses in higher education

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received Dec 12, 2023

Revised Mar 11, 2024

Accepted Mar 20, 2024

#### Keywords:

Academic writing  
Character education  
Higher education  
Indonesian Language  
Project-based learning

### ABSTRACT

Academic writing has been a widely substantial course in higher education as it plays a vital role in cultivating students' academic writing skills. Drawing on qualitative descriptive study, this study aims to explore the fundamental requirements for academic writing to base the creation of an effective learning framework. Data consisted of teaching materials, semester learning plan (SLP), assessment tools, and guidelines for academic writing from three universities in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. Findings reveal that learning materials and the SLP have both strengths and weaknesses. Despite these, there is diversity in learning and assessment methods. Adopted teaching methods encompass project-based learning, problem-solving, and lectures, while learning assessment includes portfolio techniques, project assessment, and written exams. These findings provide insight into the imperative of academic writing in the academic setting. This serves as a basis for the development of more effective learning methods. Thus, the proposed model for academic writing adopts a project-based approach to improve students' writing by integrating indigenous wisdom to promote students' character development.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesian language course in higher education aims to shape the characters. Apart from character building, the course also focuses on enhancing the students' academic writing skills [1]. Academic writing skills are fundamental for the improvement and enrichment of students' skills [2], [3]. However, in writing scientifically, they encounter difficulties in academic writing, whether it be related to language or publication [4]. Moreover, plagiarism poses a challenge [5]. Understanding the typical structures of academic writing that, which include abstract, introduction, method, finding and discussion, and conclusion are particularly challenging for them [6].

Prior studies on academic writing in Indonesian language course in higher education have investigated on language errors [7], foreign cultural content [8], developing e-module and evaluating effectiveness [9]; [10]. Additionally, previous research also focused on developing mobile learning to enhance the quality of Indonesian language learning [11] and technology-based learning planning [12]. However, there is still a gap that needs to be addressed by studying academic writing learning in higher education, which serves as a preliminary step in developing effective learning strategies.

The quality of teaching materials or textbooks is essential for improving the students' skills. This quality can be evaluated based on content, writing method, and other aspects [13]. The contribution to its

quality can also be influenced by the time of publication and the way the materials are used [14]. Additionally, linguistic aspects play a role in determining the quality of the materials [15]–[17]. Despite many aspects that contribute to material quality, the content deserves careful consideration [18]. Textbooks can be considered high in quality if they meet the following criteria, such as usability, writing objectives, legality, organization, learning activities, flexibility of learning activities, and learning assessment [19]. On the other hand, some argue that a high-quality textbooks should encompass these elements, including content, presentation, language, and graphical feasibility [20].

The planning phase is one of the most essential aspects to construct effective learning [21]. It involves arranging learning outcomes that meet the need of students [21]. The essential aspects to consider in teaching include SLP, core competencies, learning outcomes, learning materials, teaching methods, learning assessments, and learning resources. Furthermore, it is crucial to implement a learning model that is relevant and tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of students. Among the suitable learning models are project-based [22], competency-based [23], collaborative [24], problem-based [25], flipped classroom [26], inquiry [27], and blended learning [28], which are commonly chosen for a higher education. In assessing writing, various techniques can be employed, including rubric [29], peer [30], portfolio [31], project [32], performance [33] assessment, and other types of assessment, which are believed to be relevant.

Despite several studies that have explored various aspects of academic writing learning, including e-module, lesson planning, and learning media, there is still a lack of comprehensive research in this area. Therefore, the aims of this study are to address this gap by analyzing the learning materials, SLP, learning processes, and assessments of academic writing in the Indonesian language. The findings of this study will be beneficial for developing a project-based academic writing learning model in the Indonesian language course. Project-based academic writing learning has an impact on students' academic writing skills and proves useful for them in completing other writing tasks.

## 2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the quality of learning material, SLP, learning process, and assessment of academic writing in the Indonesian language course [34]. Data consisted of the strengths and weaknesses of the learning materials, SLP, learning processes, and the assessments of academic writing in the Indonesian language course. Data sources included learning materials, SLP, learning processes, and the assessments of the Indonesian language course in the three higher education institutions in Surakarta. The selection of these higher educations was based on their accreditation, which included superior, excellent, and good.

Data collection was done through observation and document analysis. The observation focused on the methods used during academic writing learning process, while the documents analyzed include textbooks or learning materials, SLP, and assessment instruments. Regarding the instruments, the researchers used analysis and observation guidelines. The analysis guidelines were used to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of learning materials, SLP, and assessments of academic writing in Indonesian language course. On the other hand, the observation guidelines were used to analyze the methods implemented. For data analysis qualitative were analyzed using an interactive method consisting of four steps, including data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing [35].

Once the data were collected, data reduction was conducted to select only the data relevant to the focus of this study, which includes the quality of learning materials, SLP, and assessments of Indonesian language course. Any data that did not pertain to the focus of this study were disregarded. After the data reduction, the findings related to the quality of learning materials, SLP, assessments, and processes were displayed and briefly explained. Finally, the conclusion was drawn based on each of these aspects to complete the interactive model of data analysis.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. The quality of the learning materials

The analysis of the learning materials reveals strengths and weaknesses in their content, presentation, and graphic feasibilities. However, the language used is considered flawless. Further details can be found in Table 1, which provides an overview of the academic writing learning materials used in Indonesian language course. Based on Table 1, the concepts, definitions, and procedures in terms of content feasibility are presented in a clear and chronologically manner. However, there is still room for improvement. It would be beneficial to include more questions, illustrations, and exercises to help students better understand the material. Moreover, the textbooks should provide opportunities for students to enhance their skills [36]. Some materials are missing from the textbooks. Generally, the materials are consistently presented and the information is clear. However, concept maps, which can effectively improve students'

understanding [37]; [38], [39]. This also impacts the overall effectiveness of learning [40]. Moving on to graphic feasibility, the graphics are consistent. However, the materials should be more focused on students' activities. This issue is also present in the Arabic textbook. Thus, revisions to the students' activities need to be made [41].

**Table 1. The analysis of Indonesian Language course learning materials**

Feasibility aspect	Strength	Weakness
Content feasibility	The learning material effectively and efficiently present the concepts, definitions, and procedures in a chronological order. (p. 59-80). Textbooks provide figures or images that student' understanding (p. 163,168, 174, 215, 217)	There are no learning outcomes, exercises, illustrations, and questions (Chapter I-VII). Additionally, there are, no complete materials (SLP for meeting 7, 13, 14, and 15). The figures or images on pages (., 163,168, 174, 215, and 217 are unclear and unidentifiable.)
Presentation feasibility	The materials, including examples, are well presented (p. 14-21). The table of contents correspond to the contents (p. ix-x)	The table of contents does not include the list of tables and figures (p. ix-x). Moreover, the textbooks lack concept maps. Additionally, there is a need for more coherent deductive flow of thinking (p. 14-21).
Language feasibility	The language used in the learning materials is good, simple, and in accordance with Indonesian language spelling, chronological, and comprehensive.	-
Graphic feasibility	The layout of each chapter is consistently and displayed separate paragraph. (Chapter I-VII)	The activity title is written only as "opening", "material", and "closing", without any numerical indication. (Chapter I-VII)

### 3.2. The quality of semester lesson plan

The following analysis pertains to the quality of learning planning. Upon reviewing the SLP, it is evident that there are both strengths and weaknesses in various aspects such as course identity, graduate learning outcomes (GLO), course learning outcomes (CLO), final competences, course contents, teaching methods, time allocations, learning assessments, and learning resources. This information can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2. The analysis result of Indonesian Language course SLP**

Planning Aspect	Strength	Weakness
Course identity	There is information on the course identity, the number of credit units (SKS), and the semesters.	The course codes are not included in the SLP.
GLO	The GLO is in line with SN-Dikti (Directorate General of Higher Education) and Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (INQF). It covers attitude, skill, and knowledge.	The GLO is not in line with the guidelines of Indonesian language course (Directorate General of Higher Education Number 84/E/KPT/2020 regarding Guidelines for the Implementation of Curriculum Mandatory Courses in Higher Education).
CLO	The CLO is well-formulated so that it can be specifically observed, measured, and assessed.	The CLO is not in line with the formulated GLO.
Final competences	The final competences are clear, measurable, and in line with the CLO.	Based on the time allocation, there are final competences that are difficult to achieve.
Course contents	The course contents are in line with the final competence.	Some course contents are not presented.
Teaching methods	There are project-based and problem-based methods employed.	-
Time allocations	Generally, the time allocated is in line with the final competences.	Some time allocations are not logical when it comes to each final competence.
Learning experiences	Learning experiences are demonstrated by the description of the tasks that foster participation and autonomy.	There is still SLP that does not provide learning experiences.
Learning assessment	The learning assessments cover portfolio, rubric, and design project.	Assessment instrument is not available.
Learning resources	-	The learning resources are not integrated with the results of studies and the dedication of lecturers.

According to Table 2, the course identity is rated as good. However, it is necessary to include the course codes. This is essential because it allows readers to easily find the relevant information. In planning a course, this is considered a crucial aspect [42]. The codes indicate whether a course is mandatory, general, or

falls into another category. GLO and CLO, as shown on SLP, refer to SN-Dikti and INQF. GLO encompasses attitude, skill, and knowledge. However, it is also important to refer to the course curriculum to ensure consistency between these two elements. This has also been observed in other studies [43].

On the other hand, learning materials based on the formulated GLO, it becomes evident that there are still some incomplete course contents. It is crucial that these contents specifically refer to the GLO [44]. This shows that the contents effectively facilitate the achievement of the GLO. The learning experiences are described through tasks that promote students' autonomy. However, it is essential to double-check these tasks to ensure that students have the intended experiences. This is crucial for enhancing the overall learning experiences [45]–[49]. A good learning experience is one that is meaningful.

The implemented learning assessments are in line with the GLO. However, there is a lack of helpful instruments to effectively assess learning [50]. Without these instruments, it becomes difficult to achieve of the instruments, objective assessments become challenging. Lecturers rely on textbooks as learning sources. It is important to integrate the results of studies and the dedication of lecturers into the learning sources, as this helps foster a broader perspective for students. Similarly, some studies indicate that higher education institutions do not incorporate study fundings into their learning sources [51]. In this digital era, the integration of studies and technologies is crucial due to their accessibility [52]. Additionally, it motivates students by utilizing learning sources directly from the lecturers.

### 3.3. The quality of the learning process

The following analysis relates to the learning process. It examines the different methods used by lecturers, such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, or lectures. The findings of this analysis are further explained in the following Table 3.

Table 3. The analysis result of the Indonesian Language course learning methods

Learning Method	Strength	Weakness
Project-based learning	Methods implemented are aligned with the learning outcomes: scientific paper, essay, and research proposal.	Some learning activities, such as monitoring the project development, are not conducted resulting in suboptimal learning.
Problem-based learning	Method implemented are aligned with the learning outcomes: scientific paper, essay, and research proposal.	Some learning activities, such as identifying problems and determining the strategies, are not conducted resulting in suboptimal learning
Lecture	Theoretical concepts, such as the concept of scientific paper, are efficiently explained.	Lecturing is not effective to improve the students' academic writing skills.

According to Table 3, three methods have been used in the learning processes. Both project-based and problem-based learning are related to the learning outcomes. The data indicates that project-based learning is effective [53], while problem-based learning is even more effective compared to lecture [54]. Therefore, it is essential to determine which method is most suitable.

### 3.4. The quality of the learning assessment

There are variety assessments are used in this study. There are variety assessments which can be classified into three categories: portfolio, project assessment, and written exam. The results of these assessment are presented in Table 4. Table 4 confirms the relevance of portfolio and project assessment to the learning outcomes. Portfolio is increasingly used for both qualitative or quantitative assessment [55], [56]. Furthermore, portfolio has been shown to successfully reflect the learning processes [57]. Regarding the implementation of portfolio in higher education, it is relevant for enhancing students' new skills as it extends beyond the classroom [58].

Table 4. The analysis result of the Indonesian Language course learning assessment

Assessment Technique	Strength	Weakness
Portfolio	Learning technique are aligned with the learning outcom of academic writing.	Portfolio assessment guidelines are not available.
Project assessment	Learning technique are aligned with the learning outcome of academic writing	Project assessment guidelines are not available.
Written exam	Learning technique is appropriate to examine the theoretical concepts.	The technique is not appropriate for assessing the students' academic writing skills.

Project-based assessment is appropriate for implementing academic writing in the Indonesian language course. This approach allows lecturers to evaluate the entire process [59]. The assessment focuses on the

planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects completed by the students [60]. This is in line with a study showing that the assessment of academic courses should be focused on project-based assessment [61]. Moreover, it is considered the most accurate method for evaluating the students' academic writing skills [62]. Meanwhile, the use of written exams is more appropriate for evaluating conceptual skills. The assessment methods for higher education should be reevaluated [63], [64]. Based on the findings and discussion, portfolio and project-based assessments are relevant tools for evaluating students' academic writing skills.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Referring to the issues discussed in the introduction, learning materials have both strengths and weaknesses in terms of content, display, and graphical feasibility. Therefore, it is necessary to make improvements in order to enhance academic writing skills. Similarly, SLP has strengths and weaknesses in various aspects, such as course identity, core competence, course content, learning method, learning assessment, and learning method. It is essential to revise the SLP by referring to the guidelines stated in the Director General of Higher Education Decision Number 84/E/KPT/2020, which provide instructions for the implementation of compulsory courses in higher education curricula. It would be more beneficial to focus on teaching methods that are relevant for students' students, such as problem-based, case study, and others. As for assessment techniques, portfolios, project-based assessments, and written exams are currently being used. However, lecturers have to develop rubrics and assessment guidelines to ensure the assessment accurately reflect students' academic writing skills.

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