Students' Problems in Writing Academic Article: A Case Study in Academic Writing Class

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify challenges faced by students in writing academic articles. Thirty-six students enrolled in an Academic Writing Class participated in the research. Data were gathered through the administration of a questionnaire and conducting interviews. Descriptive analysis was employed to interpret the study's findings, revealing that students encounter difficulties in the article-writing process. The predominant issues identified include a lack of knowledge in organizational structure, vocabulary usage, and grammar, coupled with motivational issues. Additionally, students reported experiencing anxiety while engaged in the article-writing process.

INTRODUCTION

Writing articles is a topic that has received much attention in the educational community over the past decade. Although considerable research suggests that writing educational articles is necessary for students, more is needed to know how to produce a good quality article. However, there are still a lot of students who need help with writing, especially when they write articles. At the same time, writing skill is essential to create good communication. Communication itself is divided into two forms: (1) spoken form and (2) written form (Alsaawi, 2019). The spoken form is a form of direct speech involving sound, while the written form relates to the exchange of information through writing. Basically, written forms are more

formal. To carry out written communication, understanding how to write well is necessary.

Writing is an activity to express ideas, feelings, or views in the written form containing certain information (Yovie, 2019). It is a general fact that good writing cannot be produced instantly. This skill is taught in stages in universities. For instance, Universitas Tidar has Writing Intensive Course, Introduction to Paragraph Writing, Paragraph Writing, Introduction to Essay Writing, Essay Writing, and Academic Writing. These courses are given to train students and enable them to produce quality writing. Students will learn to construct simple sentences, make good paragraphs, then create a meaningful essay. After passing through these stages, students will actively begin to write scientific articles in the Academic Writing class.

Writing brings many advantages, both for the reader and also for the writer. It will help students convey their great ideas rationally (Ecarnot, 2015). Automatically, they will achieve critical thinking. In Universitas Tidar, the most significant benefit of writing articles is that the students will get a higher score in Academic Writing Class if they can publish the article in nationally accredited journals. For sure, it is an excellent opportunity for them. To get that fantastic chance, they try hard to finish articles related to education, linguistics, or literature.

However, the academic writing process does not always run smoothly. Researchers have claimed that some obstacles may arise in the process of writing. These obstacles can come from within and outside the students. In addition, Lesmana and Ariffin (2020) have claimed that students' internal problems are related to vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. These three things are the main components of composing an essay. They are connected to one another. If a student has difficulty mastering one or all three components, the writing will be less than perfect.

Furthermore, Blankenstein (2019) found that motivation greatly impacts students' writing. A writer who enjoys the process of writing will produce a better quality of

text. It is also stated that a student needs a shorter time to finish his writing when he has much motivation. Even though this motivation will not last forever, it is crucial to set a specific goal. As a result, students will keep their motivation in mind and try their best to put their brilliant ideas into writing form.

Similarly, Cheung (2018 proposed that motivation improved self-confidence in the writing course. Students' skill has increased as they begin to write and spend a lot of effort. It will grow over time. Then, this will be strengthened if followed by high self-confidence. In other words, a student will not hesitate to tell the world about a unique perspective.

Lastly, Rofiqoh et al. (2022) & Williams and Beam (2019) have increasingly become a topic of interest in knowledge because of their contribution to the writing process. It has become commonplace to argue that students cannot write what he does not know. Therefore, the student has to learn about a specific material first, whether it is from printed books or using technology to find it. For example, a student wants to write about ideational meaning. Then, the student explores that topic deeper to know the definition, types, and so on. After that, the student analyzes the ideational meaning and rephrases it.

On the other hand, based on Silvina's (2020) research, external factors may influence a teacher's teaching style, materials, writing aspects, and classroom atmosphere. First, the teacher's teaching style as an external factor can affect students' abilities and motivation in writing skills. A teacher who is a role model for students in the class must have broad competence and knowledge to impart knowledge to students. Therefore, good teaching is a very personal attitude and is also important as a teacher. If students understand what is taught and learn the material in class, then students can easily carry out the assignments given, especially in the context of writing. Every teacher must recognize the differences in skills among students, not to be generalized. Therefore, learning must be made more effective in the teaching and learning process. Effective learning in the classroom depends on the teacher's ability to maintain the interest that brought

students to the subject in the first place (Erickson, 1978). However, not all students can be motivated by the same values, needs, and desires. Some other students are motivated by the approval of others or by taking on challenges.

Second, material and aspects of writing as external factors also influence students' writing process. The material presented and taught by a teacher can make students interested and feel challenged in the writing process. The suitability of the material that has been taught will be relevant and in accordance with the real problems faced by students in the writing process. General research proves that authentic material is beneficial for students and teachers (Al Azri & Al-Rashdi, 2014). In the context of language learning in Indonesia, the use of materials for teaching writing has been widely studied, such as Styati (2016) investigating the effect of authentic materials on students' writing abilities. This shows that materials affect students' skills in the writing process. In this case, besides the material, the writing aspect is also an important thing that must be considered. Based on Hyland's (2007) classification of writing knowledge, the five aspects of writing knowledge are process, system, content, genre, and context knowledge. These aspects are fundamental for students to understand and learn in the process of writing and affect the writing results of the process, aspects, and material that has been obtained.

Academic writing is one of the writing classes of writing skill, which require students' skill to communicate their thought about an issue. As Fang (2021) wrote, Academic writing is writing aimed at academic purposes. Also, in this class, students are expected to write an academic or formal writing text. In line with Pangliwangan (2017) thought, he argued that Academic writing is a highly mechanical form and leaves out human emotion. In other words, to write academic writing, students must obey the requirement of formal style and strict adherence to express their thought in written form.

Adapted from Brown and Bailey (1984) in Brown (2004), some aspects must be full fill in writing; content, organization, vocabulary, syntax, and mechanics. The content comprises students' ideas cohesively connected to each sentence and

paragraph. The organization is students' ability to organize written ideas well. Vocabulary requires students' vocabulary knowledge to use the appropriate word in writing their ideas. Syntax includes grammatical and language features that allow students to write accurately. Last, mechanics require students' mastery in punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and so on. Moreover, these aspects are crucial in writing and are connected to others. As a result, the writing became coherent.

However, applying the component takes more work for students to write a text. Some students still encountered difficulties in writing aspects. Alisha et al., (2019) states that 30 students have significant problems, such as limited language knowledge and vocabulary mastery. Moreover, they found that these students have problems constructing sentences grammatically and choosing the appropriate vocabulary. In specific, 75.68% of participants have difficulties in creating sentences because lack of ability in grammar. 77.84% of participants made a mistake in choosing words in their work, indicating that a lack of vocabulary is crucial. This study shows that students still face difficulties in writing based on the writing aspect view.

Along the same line, Toba et al. (2019) study found that 52 students IAIN Samarinda of academic essay writing have good ability in writing, yet they experience difficulties in the writing aspect. One of the aspects is developing and exploring ideas. In detail, they face challenges in organization, transition words, unstated ideas, undeveloped supporting ideas, structured sentences, and concluding paragraphs. Furthermore, the study aims that personal reason also takes responsibility for their writing result. The personal reason became an issue, namely writing practice, low motivation, dislike of writing, negative writing perception, writing anxiety, insufficient time in writing, and inadequate teaching writing process. These factors became the root of the problem of this research.

Likewise, a study by Aunurrahman (2019), expos that 92 students in a private university in Pontianak experience writing anxiety. With the following details as 49 students experienced low writing anxiety, and 43 students experienced high writing

anxiety. The student experienced writing anxiety in particular points, such as evaluation, stress, and product. Students who face high anxiety levels doubt their abilities and fear writing. On the other hand, students who feel confident in writing believe that their environment, lecturer, and classmate will help them to improve their writing skills.

The lack of knowledge and the personal problem became the root problem of the writing process and product. Lack of prior knowledge gives students insight into composing the writing text. Meanwhile, the personal problem takes responsibility for student confidence in writing. These factors became a frequent challenge in writing. Also commonly found in another study as an issue in writing text.

To overcome this problem, Jawas's (2019) article that discusses writing anxiety believes that collaborative work can minimize anxiety. Besides, preferred strategies that are given to a student to choose to give student privilege to manage their writing anxiety. The collaborative work and preferred strategies show that students need a space to deliver their idea in written form.

In addition, to overcome the problem, Arindra (2020) research the correlation between writing anxiety and writing assessment rubric. The result reveals that giving the pre-notification of the writing rubric minimized student anxiety. By knowing the vital aspect of writing a text, the student analyzes, evaluate, and improve themselves. So, students understood the task that must be achieved. That means the level of anxiety can be reduced by giving the student an assessment rubric.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed qualitative approaches for data collection and analysis, aligning with the naturalistic inquiry nature of qualitative research (Hossein, 2020), which closely engages with non-numeric data. In this approach, the focus is on understanding and exploration rather than the explanation and manipulation of variables. The research is both contextual and interpretive, selecting 36 students

from Academic Writing Class 1 (comprising 10 males and 26 females) as subjects. This specific class was chosen based on the assumption that students possess an in-depth understanding of the procedures for writing educational articles, given their active involvement in crafting such articles at that academic level.

To gather data, the researchers distributed close-ended questionnaires and conducted semi-structured interviews, adapting the instruments from a prior study titled "Students' Difficulties in Writing EFL" by Aisha et al. (2019), which addressed students' challenges in writing questions. The collected data were then identified and analyzed, with a focus on three specific writing aspects: organization, vocabulary, and grammar. This narrowed scope allowed for a more in-depth exploration and understanding of the students' challenges in these critical areas of academic writing.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Findings

After collecting the data through questionnaires, the authors classified and analyzed the responses from the students. There were 36 sixth-semester students at Universitas Tidar who filled out the questionnaire. Overall, every student has at least one problem when writing academic articles. This data was collected after the Academic Writing Course, which indicated that some obstacles still arose after the learning process. The writers find that generic structure, vocabulary, and grammar are the most significant problems.

Students' problems in organization

Table 1. Data Analysis Related with Organization

No.	Statement	Yes	NO
		Percentage (%)	
1.	I understand about generic structure, so I occasionally pay attention during writing the text	94.4	5.6
2.	I feel the ideas that I write is clear and well organized	66.7	33.3
3.	The ideas that I write is easy to understand	86.1	13.9
4.	Each paragraph that I write was coherent	83.3	16.7
5.	I pay attention to the arrangement of the sentence in each paragraph	94.4	13.4
	Average	84.98	16.58

Based on the analysis of the generic structure in Table 1, it is known that only a small proportion of students (16.7%) do not understand the generic structure properly. This impacts the structure of the text, which is made to be poorly organized. In addition, as many as 33.3% of students felt the ideas they conveyed were not clear. This has an impact on delivering meaning to readers. Furthermore, 13.9% of students thought their writing was difficult to understand.

Unfortunately, 5.6% of students experience problems composing words into complete sentences. In terms of coherence, 16.7% of the participants found it difficult to connect each sentence to form a suitable whole. They also have difficulty in determining punctuation marks and how to move ideas smoothly. In other words, arranging sentences into whole paragraphs is another difficulty that hinders the process of writing academic articles.

Students' problems related with vocabulary

Table 2. Data Analysis Related with Vocabulary

No.	Statement	Yes	NO
		Percentage (%)	
1.	I rarely did mistakes in deciding the word	36.1	63.9
2.	I do not have any difficulties in delivering the ideas because I mastering the vocabulary	8.3	91.7
3.	I rarely repeat a word in writing the text	58.3	41.7
4.	I rarely use the simple words in writing the paragraph	55.6	44.4
5.	I do not need dictionary when writing a sentence	94.4	13.4
	Average	50.54	51.02

According to the data in Table 2 about vocabulary, 63.9% of students are unsure of determining the appropriate word. This problem became even more significant after 91.7% of students admitted that a lack of vocabulary hindered the transfer of information or ideas through writing. After that, more than half of the students (58.3%) agreed that they tend to repeat the same word continuously. Most respondents, 55.6%, are aware that they still use simple rather than complex sentences in their writing. As many as 94.4% of students think a dictionary is needed in writing to minimize errors in choosing vocabulary.

Students' problem dealing with grammar

Table 3. Data Analysis Related with Grammar

No.	Statement	Yes	NO
		Percentage (%)	
1.	Lack of ability in grammar makes it difficult for me to write academic articles	80.6	19.4
2.	I pay a lot of attention in connectors in writing	88.9	11.1
3.	I use action verbs in the past forms correctly	77.8	22.2
4.	I pay attention to grammar when I feel like it	86.1	13.9
5.	Tenses is my biggest problem in writing	75	25
	Average	81.68	18.32

The data in Table 3 contains students' difficulties with grammar. As many as 80.6% of students have problems with a lack of grammar. They have difficulty determining the correct tense for each sentence they make. Another problem is connecting sentences with different tenses experienced by 88.9% of students. Lastly, 22.2% of students are unsure if they have used the action verb correctly. This problem becomes even more severe after 86.1% of students only pay attention to grammar when they feel like it. It can be assumed that they tend to ignore grammatical errors in writing. All of this prompted three-quarters (75%) of students to feel that grammar was the biggest obstacle they experienced when writing educational articles.

Discussion

The researcher found writing problems experienced by students in writing Educational Articles in the Academic Writing Class—per the grouped question related to organization, vocabulary, and grammar. Problems related to organization, the researcher found that most (33.3%) respondents needed help in developing ideas and organizing them. According to Mayasari (2019) 32 participants were involved in the study they had difficulty organizing in writing. This makes their writing results not optimal and reduces their motivation to write. To compensate for this, the writer conducted a study using a graphic organizer. As a result, guidance on a Classroom Action Research (CAR) on using Graphic Organizer effectively improves students' skills in organizing ideas in writing class.

In addition to the methods used by previous researchers, as described above, there are several ways to organize writing correctly. Firstly, outline the research. An outline is the first part of writing a paper that can help map out ideas coherently and precisely (Sulaiman & Muhajir, 2019; Wirantaka, 2022). Secondly, Karim et al (2016) believe that mind mapping has long been used to help students understand the overall essence of their writing. In short, these two methods help make students' writing more directed and organized. This will also make the writing neater and have a clear flow.

Next, 16.7% of students have difficulty making their writing coherent. In the previous study, Choemue and Bram (2021) pointed out that as many as 2,521 Discourse Markers (DMs) are scattered in sixty essays of EFL Thai learners—especially the use of elaborative markers in essay writing. Moreover, the author emphasizes that raising awareness of discourse markers could guide Thai EFL learners in writing coherent and effective sentences. Therefore, discourse markers are recommended, especially in academic writing, to avoid less coherent writing.

Likewise, to minimize incoherent writing, students can use discourse markers in their writing. Ni'mah (2019) stated that Participants who can use Discourse Markers (DMs) correctly use DMs 80 times. As a result, they found that this helped their 28 essays be more coherent. In addition, several ways can improve coherence in writing, such as connecting several ideas so they can flow smoothly. In addition, the use of repetition and transitional will make every sentence, paragraph, and even the whole writing connected.

Another problem is raised when 86.1% of students can write well, but the other 13.9% still have difficulties in clarity. This obstacle made the writing difficult to understand. In writing, knowing what the writer wants to convey is necessary. Besides, knowing the idea that you want to convey is essential. In addition, explaining the word at the beginning would be better instead of writing unfamiliar words where the writer is not even sure of the meaning. Furthermore, 13.4% find difficulty organizing the writing. In writing, arranging the subject matter is

necessary for the writing to have good organization. Organization means that the writing is made according to the author's purpose and is explained coherently so the audience can follow it more easily. An example of it is writing the main point at the beginning of the paragraph, then followed by a supporting sentence, and at the end of the sentence restating the critical points.

The mind mapping technique is another effective way to make writing organized. This is effective for increasing students' organizing ideas. The research proves that mind mapping helps make writing more orderly and well-connected in each cycle. It was further explained that the pre-cycle to cycle one increased by 14.7 points, from cycle one to cycle two increased by 12.3 points, and from cycle two to cycle three increased by 16.6 points (Anggrayani et al., 2015).

Last but not least, composing sentences still becomes a problem for 5.6% of students. Writing a good sentence requires complete writing between the words. So that the writing can be understood well, thus, it will create flow in each sentence that is made. So that it can cause sensibility in the reader; this indicates that a sentence is a good sentence.

This finding is also in line with a study conducted by Aldabbus and Almansouri (2022) on 36 English students who experienced difficulties developing thesis statements, writing coherent paragraphs, and organizing ideas. From both data, writing, developing, and organizing ideas are problems that students encounter.

Furthermore, the research results in Table 2 on vocabulary reveal that most students of Academic Writing find a challenge in choosing words in writing. 91.7% of students have difficulty transferring ideas through word choice in writing due to a lack of vocabulary mastery. Likewise, vocabulary mastery became problematic for eighteen English department students at Universitas Malang. Sasmita and Setyowati (2021) stated that they still have difficulty in three main aspects such as the content, which deals with cohesion, unity, and coherence; the organization includes misspelling, punctuation, and not-well of the ordered sentences; last, the

grammar and vocabulary aspect that deals with choosing an appropriate word in the writing.

In dealing with the lack of vocabulary aspect, the use of technology like Duolingo apps become one of options to enhance vocabulary mastery. The study conducted by Ajisoko (2020) reveals that the apps can improve students' vocabulary at Borneo University of Tarakan. In addition, the apps also give an interesting and responsive experience for the learner so that they can ease student boredom. Moreover, fair feedback from the apps encourages students to learn English, especially vocabulary.

As in the previous discussion, lacking vocabulary mastery leads to a problem. This can have an impact on the occurrence of errors in choosing the appropriate vocabulary, the fact in this study shows that 63.9% of students are wrong in choosing the appropriate word. This was also discovered by Ahmed (2019) that in his findings as many as 84.37% of students claimed that they lacked vocabulary. As a result, the student writing result was poor. Also, the researcher states that using suitable vocabulary is vital for writing an academic essay.

To face this problem, a thesaurus may help students in choosing appropriate words. The thesaurus itself is a collection of words arranged according to the similarity in meaning of the word, both synonym and antonym. In the Oxford Dictionary, a thesaurus means a book resource that provides lists of words in groups of synonyms or have similar meanings. So, students can choose the word that suits the discussion. The thesaurus that can be used is Thesaurus.com, Merriam-Webster thesaurus, and Cambridge Thesaurus.

In the following aspects, 41.7 % of students write repeated words. In previous research, Awwalia and Suhardi (2020) found that the test takers repeated the same word 602 times; this might have happened due to the writer's lack of vocabulary. To answer this problem, the student is expected to re-check the writing that has been made. Moreover, revising and editing can be a step to minimize errors.

The statement number four, more than half of student state that they write academic write the sentence in complex sentence form. The rest of the students usually write in simple sentences. These two types of sentences have advantages when used for particular aims. For example, to mention factors about specific topics, students can write them in simple sentences. On the other hand, when they want to explain these factors in more depth, it would be better if they wrote it in a complex sentence.

In statement number five, the researcher found that 94.4% of students still need a dictionary to write a sentence. This problem is also evident in the investigation conducted by Hastuti (2021) that vocabulary mastery has a close relationship with student writing. From both sides, it can be concluded that mastering vocabulary plays a big role in student writing skills.

Based on Table 3, grammar became a severe obstacle to the student's writing process. This is evidenced by data showing that 81.68% or 29 students experienced it. It was stated by Handayani and Johan (2018) that grammar is the worst nightmare faced by students at all levels of education, especially at the university level, which requires them to produce a lot of academic writing. Furthermore, this study found a significant correlation between grammar problems and EFL university students' writing abilities. In other words, the less a student's mastery of grammar, the worse his writing ability will be. This directly affects the final product that is created.

The explanation above is reinforced by the presence of 80.6% of students who admit that a lack of ability in grammar makes it difficult for them to write academic articles. This makes sense since academic articles are classified as writing with a high level of difficulty. Grammar mistakes and errors can make the writing less scientific because using inappropriate verbs will likely change the ideas that should be delivered. In the research conducted by Azizah and Budiman (2022) it was known that although students understand the importance of publishing academic writings, they still face some difficulties related to grammar.

Even Fitriana and Nurazni (2022) mentioned that this problem encouraged almost all students who participated in the research to find alternatives to help them check

grammar. In the end, they used a tool called Grammarly. However, research conducted in 2022 stated that the tool still had many deficiencies, such as auto-correction and limited features for the free version. Even though students consider this tool very useful, the authors think a human's ability can be superior to a machine's. There is nothing wrong with using Grammarly and other tools, but students must double-check and study grammar more deeply. Studying grammar will encourage students to improve their skills and maximize their writing (Ismawati et al., 2021).

Fortunately, sixth-semester students at Universitas Tidar pay great attention to grammar. As many as 86.1% of students know they need to check the grammar they use. In addition, 88.9% of students paid more specific attention to the connectors they used in academic articles. This is a good thing. Because even though they have not mastered grammar completely, they are careful with every little slice they write. According to Kalajahi and Abdullah (2015), sing the correct connector will make writing more cohesive and coherent. Therefore, this is one method students use to compensate for grammar mistakes and errors that arise in writing academic articles.

The next problem is related to tenses. Even though various theories about grammar have appeared, tenses cannot be separated from the campus life of students (Satria & Gatot, 2020). The tenses most often used are future, present, and past. Some verbs have the same form, even though they are used in a different tense. However, some verbs change in different tenses. This means students have to store vocabulary forms in their minds. Unfortunately, there are still 22.2% who use action verbs with inappropriate past forms. The past form requires a second form of the verb.

This problem became even more significant when three-quarters (75% or 27) of participants felt that tenses were the biggest problem in writing. At the beginning level, it is common thing for students to face grammar errors and mistakes (Dhona, 2020). This obstacle keeps sticking to sixth-semester students at Universitas Tidar. It has been published by Lin et al. (2014) who conducted research involving 20 undergraduate students, that the verb tense is one of eight grammar errors (together

with article, subject-verb agreement, singular/plural, word class, sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation. Therefore, recognizing each tense's characteristics, uses, and formulas will help students know how to write in the proper tense (Mu'man et al., 2021).

To sum up, the problems of sixth-semester students at Universitas Tidar in writing academic articles are generally related to three terms, namely organization, vocabulary, and grammar. The average percentage of students who experienced problems in organizing their writing was 84.98%, vocabulary mastery was as much as 50.54%, and grammar mastery was as much as 81.68%. These various obstacles are serious matters that must be considered to avoid producing any kind of writing, primarily academic articles. Therefore, continuing to practice and add references is the most essential thing students can do to reduce or eliminate the negative effects of this. In addition, input from teachers or peers will also make a significant contribution to the success of the student's writing process.

Another problem faced by students is related to the lack of motivation. Based on the results of interviews conducted with five participants, it was found that all of them experienced low motivation when writing. Motivation is an internal and external encouragement that can increase a student's productivity. When in a tall vase, students tend to complete their assignments quickly. The result is much better than when they finished it under pressure.

Of the five participants, it was found that lack of motivation was a big obstacle for them. It destroys morale and raises the desire to procrastinate. The participants also admitted they felt little motivation when writing academic articles. However, the participants used several strategies to overcome this problem.

First, read more articles. When they feel unmotivated to write, some students try to get used to reading. Although initially forced, they believe that a habit will emerge if it is done continuously. It will also provide new knowledge that can support their ideas. Plus, they become motivated to follow suit when they realize others can write and publish great pieces.

Second, the deadlines. The deadline is the deadline for submitting assignments. If missed the deadlines, the students will receive various punishments. Unfortunately, students are used to doing their assignments at the end of the deadline set by the lecturer. At that time, they said their motivation increased drastically, and they were more fluent in writing. The pressures that arise give them the desire to complete the task.

Finally, consult with friends or lecturers. Sometimes motivation comes from outside the students. After getting feedback, the students were eager to revise it. The participants admitted that they often had difficulty finding mistakes in their writing. For this reason, suggestions and criticisms from others become a help.

Apart from the things mentioned above, it turns out that the lack of motivation raises anxiety. Two out of five participants who participated in the interview session explained that low motivation affected the final result of their writing. As a result, they realize that if they do not give maximum effort, the quality of their writing will decrease. Then this causes excessive anxiety. The anxiety that is felt when writing is related to the thoughts of students who fear that they will get a bad grade.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study sought to uncover the challenges encountered by students in writing academic articles, involving 36 participants from an Academic Writing Class. Employing descriptive analysis through questionnaires and interviews, the research identified key difficulties, including a deficient understanding of organizational structure, vocabulary usage, and grammar. Motivational issues were also highlighted as contributing to students' struggles in the article-writing process, leading to heightened levels of anxiety. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address these multifaceted challenges and enhance students' academic writing skills.

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