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by Ari Khairurrijal Fahmi

Students Need in Arabic Academic Writing during Pandemic COVID-19 in Indonesia

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Abstract

Students in Indonesia must submit academic papers to complete their studies. However, academic writing is a difficult skill, especially if it is written in Arabic. This research is a pilot study that looks into the requirements needed to study Arabic and write academic papers in universities and colleges. The 4th-semester students were used to explore certain models learners studying Arabic need. This study used a convergent parallel mixed method and a qualitative approach to conduct surveys and interviews for data analysis. The results showed that students need a unique learning model for Arabic academic writing based on the Learning Management System. This includes writing exercises, theory, digital tools, peer review processes, and skills in searching scientific articles. These results will be the basis for developing a learning model for Arabic students in Indonesia.

Keywords: Students Need, Academic Writing, Arabic, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Although part of Arabic language skills, academic writing is complex to learn mainly because of its different sentence structures (Dajani, 2015). Consequently, this causes language interference, making it hard for students to transform their writings into Arabic. Academic writing is different from ordinary writing, and as such, specific learning methods have been developed in various countries to address this problem (Hasa, 2016). In Australia, academic research is influenced by particular learning interventions (Al-Asadi, 2015). According to Bacha (2017), Lebanese learners studying foreign languages require a special method to perfect their academic writing skills. Oakey applied the learning interventions method, and the results show that academic writing in a foreign language needs to start from the phrase (Oakey, 2020).

Bailey argued that academic writing is intended for college students with academic demands required for specific achievements (Bailey, 2006). However, the selection methods for learning in Indonesian universities are still inappropriate. In principle, teaching writing skills cannot be equated with teaching listening skills (Wahab et al., 2018). The choice of the learning model becomes even more difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic (Leach et al., 2021).

The development of learning models should be conducted in stages (Dick et al., 2005). The first stage involves the identification of instructional goals. It is followed by conducting instructional analysis, analyzing learners and contexts, and writing performance objectives. The other steps include developing assessment instruments, developing instructional strategy, developing and selecting instructional materials, designing and conducting a formative evaluation of instruction, and revising instructions. The final stage is about designing and conducting a summative assessment. Several studies on academic writing that use model development certainly must start with analyzing the needs of students. For instance, Setiadi (2017) developed a writing learning model using peer-reviewed techniques.

Various studies regarding the development of academic writing learning models have been conducted. Previously, the focus was more on learning models before the pandemic, where the role of peer tutors (peer assessment) has been tested through experiments and confirmed as one of the best academic writing learning models (Shen et al., 2020). The model was also developed with contextual-based development. This study also proves that the learning model for academic writing can be created using various approaches (Abdul Hakim, 2018). The whole research development is undoubtedly preceded by identifying the needs of students. This forms, the first step towards the inception of a learning model.

The factors analyzed in the needs assessment include local school conditions, the books for both students and teachers, curriculum, and student characteristics (Hartik et al., 2021). Additionally, the needs assessment extends to instructors (Seema et al., 2021; Pulungan et al., 2021). This paper will focus on the needs of students studying Arabic academic writing in universities.

Students require alternative learning methods during the pandemic, especially those residing in remote areas. There is a need for blended and hybrid learning methods during these unpredictable times (Prahmana et al., 2021; Mufidah et al.,

2019). Also, access, interaction, lecturer support, equity, and investigation form valid and reliable Online Classroom Learning Environment Inventory (OCLEI) needed by the students (Rahayu et al., 2021).

The Arabic structure of competence based on the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) for special abilities in Arabic writing and other special skills are needed for students to perform well in academic writing (Abdul Wahab, 2016). Zulharby et al. (2021) developed teaching materials, while Shen designed academic writing learning models (Shen et al., 2020).

This pilot study analyses students' needs for Arabic academic writing during the pandemic in Indonesia. This study aims to address the following research questions:

Q1 What are the necessary requirements in the Arabic academic writing classroom?
Q2 What difficulties do students encounter in Arabic academic writing?
Q3 What objectives do students want to achieve in Arabic academic writing?
Q4 What teaching materials do students need in Arabic academic writing?
Q5 What are the students' needs during the learning process?

METHOD

Context and Participant

This pilot study took place at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka, Jakarta, Department of Arabic language education, Faculty of Islamic studies. The study was developed in the middle of the pandemic between April-May 2021. Virtual platforms such as Google forms and video conferencing tools, including zoom, were used to collect data.

The sample data was drawn from 94 fourth-year students studying *"Al-Kitabah Al-Akadimiyyah"* (Academic writing in Arabic). The students had also studied Information Technology Literacy courses, *Kitabah* 1 (Arabic writing 1), *Kitabah* 2 (Arabic Writing 2), Research Methodology, and Computer Applications for Arabic.

Research tools

Two main instruments were used to collect data from the participants. First, a five-item questionnaire was drafted with different research questions. Each item in the questions had varied indicators totaling 52. Also, the five questionnaires were of two different types. The first type had questions related to necessity and difficulty consisting of a 4-point Likert scale, in which 1 "never" and 4 for "very often." The second type was a questionnaire measuring the needs with 3 choices, namely, really need, need, don't need. Two university professors checked these questions for the validity construct. The questionnaires comprised open-ended questions to help acquire a deeper understanding of the findings sought. This would help arrive at definite conclusions regarding students' needs for Arabic academic writing. Secondly, the focus group interviews technique covered five research questions, which were also checked for validity construct. Open-ended questions were issued to enable students to express their opinion freely regarding what they liked and disliked about Arabic academic writing.

Data Collection

The data for this study was collected during the second semester of the academic year 2020-2021 between April-May 2021. Google forms were issued from April 29, 2021, to May 05, 2021. The participating students had completed Information Technology Literacy courses, *Kitabah 1* (Arabic writing 1), *Kitabah 2* (Arabic Writing 2), Research Methodology, and Computer Applications for Arabic. The questionnaires were distributed among students, whereby only 94 were entirely filled. The focus group interviews took place at the end of May 2021 via zoom cloud meeting with six interview sessions, each taking 15-20 minutes.

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized to analyze the data. The SPSS program was used to develop different kinds of descriptive statistics, while independent sample t-tests were obtained from the quantitative data through the 52 indicators (items). A qualitative analysis was employed to examine the data collected through the focus group interviews. According to Creswell (2003), interpreting the quantitative four-scale Likert questionnaire data was supported by the qualitative data obtained through the focus group interviews. \

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first question results, as shown in Appendix A, table 1 explain the manner in which students should take academic writing courses. Based on the table, students rarely repeat lessons by themselves. According to the statistics, 77.7% sometimes repeat lessons, while 5.3% never repeat the given tasks. Only 17% admitted that they often repeat lessons.

The indicator with the highest percentage was based on scientific journal articles with 46.8%, while the indicator with the lowest percentage (10.6%) uses Mendeley. Ironically, students should use Mendeley to maximize technology in academic writing. This data shows a gap in substantive skills, implying they require a skill to process scientific article data and operate reference management systems, such as Mendeley.

During the focus group interview, many students from the Arabic language department indicated that they needed to repeat lessons regularly by preparing a learning platform that provides these needs. This aligns with Ari Wibowo's (2021) finding, which explained that every student needs autonomous freedom to study what was taught by their instructor. According to Hardyanto (2017), this autonomy can be created in various ways, including the Learning Management System design.

The second research question presented in Appendix A, Table 2 focused on the challenges students face while writing Arabic in universities. Based on the data, writing paragraphs in Arabic was most challenging, as evidenced by the "very often" and "often" answers with 10.6% and 55.3%, respectively. This finding agrees with Zarrabi (2020) that learners have little knowledge in writing sentences as well as making paragraphs. In addition, Luthfiana (2019) found that Arabic writing should be developed starting from paragraphs. According to Helaluddin(2020), paragraph writing difficulties should be solved by making specific guidelines to teach students proper writing skills.

The interview results based on the second question found that teaching in the classroom was not always based on practice. This adds to the challenges students face while developing paragraphs. Writing skills are the most difficult when it comes to learning a foreign language. When it is compounded with a lack of practice, the process of forming paragraphs cannot be realized. The results of this interview are in accordance with many studies that discuss the need for having regular practice to improve productive skills such as writing (Chitashvili, 2007; Rukmini, 2017).

The third research question (Appendix A, Table 3) focused on students' objectives in Arabic academic writing in universities. Based on the data, the highest indicator showed that students should be able to write sentences correctly in Indonesian and Arabic. This was evidenced by the percentage of students who answered that they needed to reach 73.4%. The high-level indicator was for understanding the use of the Google translate application totaling 67%, followed by the understanding academic writing theory indicator with 66% answering that it was necessary. This finding aligns with Ismail et al. (2020), who indicated that academic writing skills need collaboration both with humans and tools in the form of machines.

As per the interview results, many students affirmed that their main goal was to write fluently following correct grammatical rules. Also, they desire to arrange paragraphs systematically starting from word-sentence-paragraph. This is similar to the opinion of Zarrabi (2020), who prioritized writing words and then paragraphs, both in basic and high-level writing.

The fourth question, as displayed in Appendix A, Table 4 focused on the student need for teaching materials. From the results, 52.1% of the students need easy-to-understand teaching materials. Furthermore, 45.7% said they required explanations regarding the materials provided. Teaching aids such as tutorial videos for technical assistance during Arabic writing, paraphrasing, and translation tools are also necessary. This finding agrees with Altinmaks' (2019), who found that many students desire to be directed on the best methods to use while writing academic papers in Turkey.

Based on interviews results, students need clear guidelines packaged in a learning management system (LMS) to monitor their writing results. This can be available in the LMS according to Hardyanto (2017) and Sa'diyah (2019). With the LMS, the whole process of learning to write can be recorded and assessed according to needs. Students' perceptions play a significant role in the success of academic writing during the pandemic (Montaner-Villalba, 2021).

The fifth question presented in Appendix A Table 5 focused on the learning process needs. Based on the data, students need to learn Arabic academic writing. The indicator providing feedback regarding motivation and suggestions for building self-confidence was highest with 57.4%. The use of various learning media/sources was the second highest with 56.4%, while natural learning environment indicators totaled 50%. This greatly influences the structure of the learning model for writing the Arabic language. From the 13 indicators above, it is easy to formulate a learning model that suits the needs of students. Having regular practices is a primary writing process that must be embraced. Hanifah (2018) developed a

particular format tailored towards the needs of students, especially during the pandemic. This significantly reduces the role of the teacher while the independence of student learning increases.

Based on the interview results, students require a natural process in practicing Arabic academic writing. With minimal supervision, they can monitor their writing with improvements from teachers and colleagues.

CONCLUSION

Overall, there is a need to develop new approaches to Arabic academic writing, especially during the pandemic. The results showed that students require basic skills to write paragraphs. Furthermore, a specifically designed Arabic writing practice guide embedded in an LMS should be provided. Teaching materials integrated with the LMS for academic writing practice will be helpful to learners. The difference in responses was the major problem encountered during this study. Future studies should explore the needs of dynamic students. In times of the pandemic, a clear LMS and writing guidelines should be provided. However, in other times or contexts, it is necessary to deepen the needs based on specifications and criteria for computer programs that help write academic Arabic in Indonesia.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE 1

STUDENTS' NECESSITY IN ARABIC WRITING SKILL

1) The criteria for students' necessity in academic writing lectures

No	Necessity Criteria	Score	Category
1.	Re-review the topic of discussion independently or in groups	0.0%	Very often
		17%	Often
		77.7%	Sometimes
		5.3%	Never
2.	Try writing exercises independently to hone writing skills	3.2%	Very often
		20.2%	Often
		68.1%	Sometimes
		8.5%	Never
3.	Actively explore Arabic academic writing knowledge and skills from easily available sources	2.1%	Very often
		16%	Often
		75%	Sometimes
		6.4%	Never
4.	Refer to articles in journals to help with academic writing	19.1%	Very often
		46.8%	Often
		30.9%	Sometimes
		3.2%	Never
5	Using Mendeley to store articles and automated citation and citation processes	22.3%	Very often
		28.7%	Often
		38.3%	Sometimes
		10.6%	Never

Appendix a
Table 2
Table of students' difficulty

	Necessity Criteria	Score	Category
1.	Very difficult to write in Arabic with computer	9.6%	Very often
		23.4%	Often
		60.6%	Kadang-kadang
		6.4%	Never
2.	Difficulty selecting vocabulary in certain contexts when asked to write in Arabic	9.6%	Very often
		39.4%	Often
		46.8%%	Sometimes
		4.3%	Never
3.	Difficulty making simple sentences in Arabic	3.2%	Very often
		30.9%	Often
		56.4%	Sometimes
		9.6%	Never
4.	Difficulty making paragraphs in Arabic	10.6%	Very often
		55.3%	Often
		33%	Sometimes
		1.1%	Never
5.	Difficulty in asking questions to the Lecturer regarding material that has not been understood	2.1%	Very often
		35.1%	Often
		53.2%	Sometimes
		9.6%	Never
6.	Difficulty carrying out peer reviews with colleagues using Arabic	2.1%	Very often
		35.1%	Often
		48.9%	Sometimes
		13.8%	Never
7.	Difficulty communicating outside the classroom using Arabic both orally and in writing	8.5%	Very often
		42.6%	Often
		38.3%	Sometimes
		10.6%	Never

APPENDIX A

TABLE 3

The analysis results of the necessity criteria for the purpose

No	Necessity Criteria	Score	Category
1.	Able to understand Academic Writing theory	66%	Really needed
		34%	Needed
		0%	Not needed
2.	Able to make words (*Al-Kalimah*) properly and correctly both in Indonesian and Arabic	63.8%	Really needed
		35.1%	Needed
		1.1%	Not needed
3.	Able to make sentences (*Al Jumlah*) correctly both in Indonesian and Arabic	73.4%	Really needed
		26.6%	Needed
		0.0%	Not needed
4.	Able to make written text with three parts; introduction, discussion, and conclusion in Arabic	64.9%	Really needed
		35.1%	Needed
		0.0%	Not needed
5.	Able to make abstracts in Arabic	53.2%	Really needed
		45.7%	Needed
		1.1%	Not needed
6.	Able to operate the Rapid Typing program to launch Arabic Typing with	57.4%	Really needed
		40.4%	Needed
		2.1%	Not needed
7.	Understand digital Arabic learning applications on Android, Windows, and IOS operating systems	64.9%	Really needed
		35.1%	Needed
		0.0%	Not needed
8.	Understand the use of Mendeley Citation Software to perfection in every academic writing assignment	63.8%	Really needed
		35.1%	Needed
		1.1%	Not needed
9.	Have an understanding of using google translate	67%	Really needed
		2.1%	Needed
		30.9%	Not needed

APPENDIX A

TABLE 4

THE NECESSITY FOR ACADEMIC WRITING TEACHING MATERIALS

No	Necessity Criteria	Score	Category
1.	There is a competency/design of learning objectives in each learning unit/ video	45.7%	Really needed
		53.2%	Needed
		1.1%	No needed
2.	Have practice/test/assessment for each unit/discussion	37.2%	Really needed
		60.6%	Needed
		2.1%	No needed
3.	Have an evaluation at the end of the chapter/discussion unit	40.4%	Really needed
		58.5%	Needed
		1.1%	No needed
4.	Memiliki kebaharuan materi yang sesuai dg kebutuhan saat ini	41.5%	Really needed
		58.5%	Needed
		0.0%	No needed
5.	Have a tutorial in the form of a video that is uploaded to Youtube	29.8%	Really needed
		59.6%	Needed
		10.6%	No needed
6.	Using terms or vocabulary that are often used in academic writing	38.3%	Really needed
		60.6%	Needed
		1.1%	No needed
7.	Teaching materials are easy to understand independently or in groups	52.1%	Really needed
		47.9%	Needed
		0.0%	No needed
8.	Have examples of academic writing that can be developed independently or in groups.	43.6%	Really needed
		56.4%	Needed
		0.0%	No needed

APPENDIX A
TABLE 5

STUDENTS' NECESSITY FOR THE LEARNING PROCESS

No	Necessity Criteria	Score	Category
1.	The meeting is held in Blended Learning, a combination of synchronous online meetings via zoom and asynchronous via OLU	38.3%	Really needed
		60.6%	Needed
		1.1%	No needed
2.	The material provided on YouTube is a place for students to construct their own understanding	38.3%	Really needed
		56.6%	Needed
		2.1%	No needed
3.	Exercises to compose effective sentences both in Indonesian and in Arabic	48.9%	Really needed
		51.1%	Needed
		0.0%	No needed
4.	Identify the fit between the sentences in the paragraph	42.6%	Really needed
		57.4%	Needed
		0.0%	No needed
5.	Implementing peer learning	36.2%	Really needed
		58.5%	Needed
		5.3%	No needed
6.	Applying peer review	33%	Really needed
		58.5%	Needed
		8.5%	No needed
7.	Watch videos about Mendeley app-assisted academic writing tutorials	36.2%	Really needed
		61.7%	Needed
		2.1%	No needed
8.	There are examples/models of academic writing in the form of articles that can be observed and imitated	38.3%	Really needed
		59.6%	Needed
		2.1%	No needed
9.	There are examples/models of academic writing in the form of Papers that can be observed and imitated	33%	Really needed
		62.8%	Needed
		4.3%	No needed
10.	Allows students to do self-assessment (assess their own writing)	28.7%	Really needed
		63.8%	Needed
		7.4%	No needed
11.	There is a natural learning environment	50%	Really needed
		48.9%	Needed
		1.1%	No needed
12.	Utilizing various media/learning resources	56.4%	Really needed
		43.6%	Needed
		0.0%	No needed
13.	Providing feedback, in the form of motivation and some suggestions to build confidence in academic writing	57.4%	Really needed
		42.6%	Needed
		0.0%	No needed

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