

The Students' Strategies Used to Overcome the Problems in the Paragraph Writing Course

Rini Isnaeni Sakkir, Muh. Tahir*, & Ryan Rayhana Sofyan

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia

Abstract

This study investigates the strategies employed by second-year students at Universitas Negeri Makassar to overcome challenges in the Paragraph Writing course. The research identifies key strategies such as personal approaches to practice, utilizing additional references, seeking help from peers and lecturers, planning and outlining before writing and improving vocabulary and grammar. These strategies provide valuable insights into how students navigate writing difficulties and improve their writing skills. The findings can inform teaching practices, offering practical suggestions for enhancing writing instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Students applied five strategies, namely: (1) personal approaches to overcoming writing difficulties, such as repeated practice and revising work; (2) utilizing additional references like books, internet resources, and academic articles to enhance their writing; (3) seeking help from lecturers and friends to clarify writing rules and improve their writing skills; (4) planning and outlining before writing to better organize ideas and ensure a logical flow; (5) improving vocabulary and grammar through activities such as reading English texts and using language-learning applications.

Keywords: Students, challenge, strategy, paragraph writing.

1. Introduction

In the academic environment, writing is a vital skill for students' success, as it is essential for expressing thoughts, engaging with complex ideas, and communicating effectively in various academic disciplines. At Universitas Negeri Makassar, the Paragraph Writing course is an integral part of the curriculum for second-year students in the English Education program. Writing, particularly paragraph writing, forms the foundation for developing more complex writing skills, such as essay writing and research papers. However, many students face significant challenges in mastering this skill.

The challenges in paragraph writing are often multifaceted. As discussed in Article 1, students struggle with understanding the materials, generating ideas, mastering grammar and structure, and managing time effectively. These obstacles are further compounded by psychological barriers, such as writing anxiety, which can hinder students' engagement with the writing process and their ability to produce coherent written texts.

Despite these challenges, students in the Paragraph Writing course develop various strategies to overcome these difficulties. According to Weigle (2005), writing strategies are essential for students to become proficient writers, particularly in an EFL context where writing requires the mastery of language skills, content development, and the ability to communicate ideas clearly. Writing strategies are often personal and vary from student to student, but they can be categorized into specific approaches such as repeated practice, seeking external help, and planning before writing.

Understanding these strategies is crucial for improving writing instruction. By identifying the methods students use to overcome challenges, educators can develop more effective teaching strategies that help students refine their writing skills. This article explores the different strategies that students in the Paragraph Writing course at Universitas Negeri Makassar employ to address their writing difficulties and improve their overall writing performance.

This study also aims to bridge the gap in existing research on writing strategies in higher education, especially in the context of Indonesian universities. While previous studies have focused on general writing strategies, few have

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: muhammادتahir@unm.ac.id

specifically examined the strategies employed by students in the context of paragraph writing, particularly in EFL settings. By exploring these strategies, the study provides valuable insights into how students can be better supported in developing their writing skills.

2. Literature Review

Research on writing strategies in EFL contexts has highlighted the importance of various approaches that help students overcome writing difficulties. According to Graham and Perin (2007), effective writing strategies involve planning, organizing, drafting, and revising, and they play a crucial role in improving the quality of students' written work. Several studies have identified common strategies that students use to address challenges in writing.

One common strategy is the use of external resources, such as books, online references, and academic articles. As noted by Melani (2021), students who rely on additional resources can enhance their vocabulary, improve their understanding of writing techniques, and strengthen their overall writing skills. In EFL contexts, access to such resources allows students to expand their language knowledge and gain exposure to various writing styles and structures.

Peer and teacher feedback are also critical strategies in the writing process. According to Hadi and Kusuma (2020), feedback from peers and instructors helps students identify errors in grammar, structure, and content. Peer feedback, in particular, has been shown to enhance students' writing skills by allowing them to receive constructive criticism from their classmates. Winarto (2020) emphasized the importance of feedback in improving writing performance, suggesting that students who actively seek and incorporate feedback tend to produce higher-quality written work.

Another key strategy is planning and outlining before writing. As Oshima and Hogue (2006) highlight, effective writing requires careful planning and organization. Many students find that creating an outline helps them organize their ideas, ensure logical flow, and prevent their paragraphs from becoming disjointed. Planning also helps students focus on the main idea of the paragraph and develop supporting details effectively. This approach is consistent with the writing process model proposed by Flower and Hayes (1981), which emphasizes the importance of prewriting activities such as brainstorming and outlining.

Improving vocabulary and grammar is another essential strategy for overcoming writing difficulties. As Winarto (2020) suggests, a strong vocabulary and a solid understanding of grammar are crucial for producing coherent and accurate writing. Many students in the study reported using language-learning apps, reading English texts, and reviewing grammar rules to improve their writing proficiency. These activities help students enhance their language skills and express their ideas more clearly and accurately in their written work.

Psychological strategies, such as reducing writing anxiety and building self-confidence, are also important for overcoming writing challenges. Cheng *et al.* (2021) argue that students with high levels of writing anxiety often struggle to generate ideas and organize their thoughts, resulting in poorly written texts. Strategies such as mindfulness exercises and collaborative learning have been shown to reduce anxiety and improve writing performance by helping students feel more confident and engaged in the writing process.

This literature suggests that a combination of cognitive, linguistic, and psychological strategies is essential for overcoming the challenges faced by students in paragraph writing. The strategies identified in this study align with these findings and offer practical solutions for students who struggle with writing in EFL contexts.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to explore the strategies used by students to overcome the challenges they face in the Paragraph Writing course. The research design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the students' experiences and the strategies, they employ to address writing difficulties.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 14 second-year students enrolled in the Paragraph Writing course at Universitas Negeri Makassar. The students were selected using purposive sampling, with a focus on those who had demonstrated significant difficulties in writing. The sample size was determined based on the qualitative research guidelines of having 10 to 30 participants, ensuring a diversity of perspectives while maintaining the depth of data analysis.

The interviews were designed to explore the strategies students used to overcome difficulties related to grammar, idea generation, paragraph structure, time management, and feedback implementation. In addition to the interviews,

writing samples from the students were analyzed to identify common patterns and strategies used in their writing. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying recurring themes and categorizing them to answer the research questions.

4. Findings

The strategies students used to overcome difficulties in paragraph writing were identified based on their responses collected through interviews and observations. The findings revealed five main strategies that students employed in the Paragraph Writing course:

a. Personal Approaches to Overcoming Writing Difficulties

Students adopted various personal strategies to deal with challenges in paragraph writing. Some engaged in repeated practice, while others took time to reread and revise their work to improve clarity and coherence. This can be seen in the following interview results:

Extract 13

“Belajar menulis paragraf di rumah.”

“Learning how to write paragraphs at home.”

(Respondent 1)

b. Utilizing Additional References

Many students relied on external sources such as books, online resources, and academic articles to enhance their writing skills. Additionally, some students sought assistance from friends or classmates to gain a better understanding of writing techniques. This can be seen in the following interview results:

Extract 14

“Ya, tentu, saya biasa menggunakan internet jika saya kesulitan mengerjakan tugas atau bertanya kepada teman saya yang kebetulan mengerti tentang materi tersebut.”

“Yes, of course, I used to use the internet if I had trouble doing the assignment or asked my friend who understand about the material.”

(Respondent 1)

Extract 15

“Saya biasanya menghabiskan waktu untuk membaca berbagai macam hal di internet, jika ada opsi buku maka saya akan lebih memilih buku.”

“I usually spend time reading various things on the internet, if there is a book option then I will prefer books.”

(Respondent 2)

c. Seeking Help from Lecturers and Friends

Some students frequently consulted lecturers or friends when they encountered difficulties in writing. They asked for clarification on writing rules, structure, and grammar, which helped them refine their paragraphs and improve their writing skills. This can be seen in the following interview results:

Extract 16

“Cukup sering, apalagi ketika sering menemukan kendala yang sulit dipecahkan sendiri.”

“Quite often, especially when encountering difficulties that are hard to solve on my own.”

(Respondent 1)

d. Planning and Outlining Before Writing

Several students reported that they created an outline or draft before writing their paragraphs. This strategy helped them organize their ideas more effectively and ensure logical flow in their writing. Techniques such as brainstorming, mind mapping, and listing key points were commonly used. This can be seen in the following interview results:

Extract 17

“Iya, pertama saya akan menulis semua ide yang ada setelah itu saya akan mulai menulis paragraf dengan memperhatikan setiap kosakata, tata bahasa, dan struktur paragraf tersebut.”

“Yes, first, I will write down all the ideas, and then grammar, and structure of the paragraph.”

(Respondent 1)

Extract 18

“Iya, biasanya saya menentukan ide utama, poin-poin pendukung, dan urutan logis sebelum mulai menulis.”

“Yes, usually by determining the main idea, supporting points, and logical order before starting to write.”

(Respondent 2)

e. Improving Vocabulary and Grammar

To enhance their vocabulary and grammar, students engaged in various activities such as reading English texts, practicing writing regularly, and using language-learning applications. Some students also kept vocabulary journals and reviewed grammar rules to strengthen their writing proficiency. This can be seen in the following interview results:

Extract 19

“Mungkin dengan belajar dan mencari informasi di internet jika mendapatkan kosakata yang kurang dipahami.”

“Perhaps by studying and searching for information on the internet when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary.”

(Respondent 1)

Extract 20

“Membaca buku, artikel, jurnal atau sumber lain dalam bahasa yang ingin ditingkatkan.”

“Reading books, articles, journals, or other sources in the language that needs improvement.”

(Respondent 2)

5. Discussions

The strategies identified in this study are consistent with best practices in writing instruction. Personal approaches, such as repeated practice and revision, are essential for reinforcing writing skills and improving the quality of written work. Utilizing additional references is also an effective strategy, as it allows students to expand their vocabulary and gain exposure to diverse writing styles. Peer and teacher feedback plays a critical role in helping students identify areas for improvement and develop more accurate and coherent writing.

The importance of planning and outlining before writing cannot be overstated. By organizing their ideas in advance, students can ensure that their paragraphs are well-structured and logically coherent. This strategy aligns with the writing process model, which emphasizes the importance of prewriting activities in producing effective written work. Additionally, improving vocabulary and grammar through reading and practice is crucial for enhancing writing accuracy and fluency.

The findings also suggest that psychological strategies, such as reducing writing anxiety, can be effective in improving students' writing performance. Students who feel confident in their writing abilities are more likely to engage with the writing process and produce high-quality work. Teachers can play a key role in fostering a positive writing environment by providing constructive feedback and encouraging students to adopt effective writing strategies.

6. Conclusions

There were several strategies used by students to overcome these problems. Students applied five strategies, namely: (1) personal approaches to overcoming writing difficulties, such as repeated practice and revising work; (2) utilizing additional references like books, internet resources, and academic articles to enhance their writing; (3) seeking help from lecturers and friends to clarify writing rules and improve their writing skills; (4) planning and outlining before writing to better organize ideas and ensure a logical flow; (5) improving vocabulary and grammar through activities such as reading English texts and using language-learning applications.

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