Quality of Ideas or Language First? Novice EFL Writers' Standpoint

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Keywords:	**ABSTRACT**
Ideas, Language, Academic Writing, Novice EFL Writers	This study aims to explore the novice EFL writers' perspectives on the importance of ideas and language in writing scientific papers and which ones they think should take precedence for the efficiency of the writing process. It was a case study in which three students and an academic writing lecturer were involved as research participants. By using interview guidelines, it was identified that students realized the importance of integrating good ideas and using the correct language in developing scientific writing. Between these two important aspects, novice EFL writers tend to prioritize ideas to direct their writing process rather than the quality of language, so this results in difficulty understanding the ideas they write due to the inappropriate language use. Thus, novice EFL writers need to be equipped with writing practices so that their ideas are able to carry important meaning used as a scientific study material.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge and science develop to some extent from humans' creative and innovative ideas to capture, analyze, and interpret particular cases. The cases are studied and generate certain implications that humans can learn and apply to support their daily needs. It could be as simple as facilitating humans to complete their work easily (Conner, et al., 2018), and it could also be as complex as creating a notable reform that becomes the starting point for the rearrangement of human life order. This argumentation, therefore, indicates the pivotal role of humans' original ideas in the process of scientific development which all the benefits also return for the improvement of their life quality.

Ideas are one of the essential products produced by humans as the beginning of many sustainable actions. In an academic context, ideas are the root of any academic output that is systematically designed and formulated like scientific writing. Ideas also play an important role in determining the direction of writing. Through structured ideas, individuals are able to create a scientific paper with quality arguments that can be accounted for (Crossley, et al., 2016; Galbraith, et al., 2005). Thus, scientific writing as one of many works that can be created by individuals is very dependent on the quality of ideas so that the direction of writing is clear and leads to one particular concept to be used as material for scientific discussion.

Scientific writing is part of the lecturer's obligations at a certain level and also part of the learning activities for students in higher education. This is a form of effort to form a productive academic atmosphere in educational institutions, especially universities. In addition, scientific writing

is one of the productive skills that requires individuals to be able to formulate their ideas, knowledge, and experiences into one weighty piece of writing with good arguments (Çetin & Eymur, 2017). That way, they are trained not only to understand one particular concept, but also to try to transfer their understanding in written form to others.

In the era of globalization which demands that every individual has good English skills (Rao, 2019; Kramsch, 2014; Ahn, 2015), scientific writing skills must also be adapted to be written in English. However, individual's mastery of English varies greatly depending on learning patterns, environment, habits, abilities, and so on. Moreover, writing is one of the productive skills besides speaking whose level of difficulty has been recognized by many English learners (Fareed, et al., 2016; Hyland, 2016; Harris, et al., 2015), so not many people are able to write down their ideas and ideas in English properly.

Writing skills in English are considered difficult because of several things such as language structure, vocabulary, word choices, punctuation, and so on (Ismayanti & Kholiq, 2020; Pratiwi, 2016; Setyowati & Sukmawan, 2016). This is because writing can be read over and over and every little mistake in both the structure of the language and other aspects of writing is easily detected by the reader. Slightly different from direct speaking skills, writing communicates ideas comprehensively that need to be understood in detail, whereas conversation is only oriented towards conveying messages whose interpretation must be in accordance with the characteristics of each speaker. It is this difference which then has an impact on writing that must be structured, systematic, and ideas-oriented and talks which are flexible with orientation towards the efficiency of message delivery.

Writing for novice EFL learners is quite a challenge. Besides that they must have sufficient ideas to be formulated in written form, they are also required to understand the correct pattern of writing English in accordance with the prevailing rules of language structure. Hence, two challenges need to be solved simultaneously to produce scientific writing with qualified ideas and correct writing quality.

Many previous studies have discussed the importance of quality ideas and correct language use in scientific writing (Stapa & Majid, 2012; Gilliland, 2015; Wahyudin, 2018). However, not many have examined similar topics from the perspective of novice EFL writers. Therefore, this study aims to explore the perspectives of novice EFL writers on the importance of ideas and language in writing scientific papers and which ones they think should take precedence for the efficiency of the writing process. The research questions raised based on this objective are "How do the novice EFL writers perceive the importance of ideas and language in academic writing?" and "What comes first in writing for the novice EFL writers, ideas or language?"

METHOD

This study is qualitative research using case study method. This method was chosen based on the consideration of the specific cases raised in one particular unique context, namely the lecture context where the final product is not just an ordinary essay or article, but scientific articles in English to be forwarded to publication. Besides, the students have just received academic writing and research methods courses, so the challenge is much tougher as a novice EFL writer.

Three students and one lecturer were involved as participants in this study. These students were selected based on 2 main criteria, namely (1) having a good level of mastery of writing skills and (2) having completed academic writing and research methods courses. Meanwhile, the lecturer who participated in the research was academic writing lecturer to find out whether the teaching of writing skill was oriented towards strengthening ideas or language as a student's writing capital.

This research focused on one research instrument to collect the data needed to achieve research objectives, namely interview guidelines. This instrument was used to obtain comprehensive and in-depth data so that it could be used as discussion material in response to research questions. Each participant was scheduled for an interview separately so their perspectives could be explored more effectively. Interview data were analyzed using three data analysis techniques according to Miles, et al. (2014), namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Novice EFL Writers' Perception of Ideas and Language in Academic Writing

The research data was collected through interviews with three students as the main participants whose responses were expected to be able to answer the two research questions. The

first question attempts to explore students' perceptions as novice EFL writers regarding the position of ideas and language in the process of writing articles which are in fact the final project of the academic writing and qualitative research courses. Their understanding regarding this matter has been studied through several previous writing courses, because academic writing is the final level course that studies writing. In terms of the level of importance, Student A revealed that ideas and language are in the same position because both of them must go hand in hand and help each other improve the results of writing. It is very relevant in the context of writing in foreign languages, especially English (Stapa & Majid, 2012). A brilliant idea does not bring any meaning if it is written in an irregular English structure since it could not be understood. Conversely, sentences with the correct English structure also do not carry important messages if they are not based on ideas thought out in a structured way.

According to Student C, ideas are the main source of the writing process so that the results of the writing carry an important meaning of certain topics to be discussed. It is consistent with that of Crossley, et al. (2016) who confirmed that the quality of writing is mainly associated with the quality of ideas generated by the writer. This indicates that ideas must be constructed and developed effectively in order to be able to be formulated in a valuable written form (Wahyudin, 2018). Due to many factors, each individual has a different way of finding and developing ideas. Student H, for example, finds it easier to gather ideas through social media he often uses, while student C often gets ideas from her curiosity about something which she then connects with her prior knowledge so that it creates an interest in studying this matter more extensively.

In addition to the importance of formulating quality ideas, Student H also emphasizes that the aspect of language is the main medium for communicating ideas so that the context is easily understood by readers. Some aspects of this language include grammar, word choice, cohesion, coherence, connecting words, and punctuation. Of all these aspects, grammar, cohesion, and coherence are aspects of language that students think are very important in determining the readability of their writing, while punctuation is in the last position. In English writing, particularly, the inaccuracy of the use of language aspects may affect the willingness of the reader to learn more about the entire writing (Shen, 2017), so that the impact on the message contained in the writing is not conveyed.

Overall, students realize the importance of formulating ideas and implementing the proper use of every aspect of language in writing. Brilliant ideas help direct their writing to more comprehensive topics and scopes to be developed into scientific study material, while the language aspect helps communicate these ideas in a format that is neater, structured, and easily understood by readers. Thus, the ideas and aspects of language complement each other in developing the writing results of novice EFL writers.

What Comes First in Writing Between Ideas and Language for Novice EFL Writers

This section is the result of interviews with students and an academic writing lecturer who teaches techniques for writing scientific papers with the output of draft articles ready for publication. This data answers the second research question that seeks to describe which aspects novice EFL writers prioritize to improve the efficiency of their writing process, quality of ideas or language aspects. Several students answered that writing by developing ideas first helped them determine the direction of writing so that the topics discussed developed more comprehensively. This finding corroborates the ideas of Galbraith, et al. (2005) who affirmed that developing ideas as a part of planning process positively impact on the writing quality. Student A, for example, stated that in order, ideas are always thought of at the beginning when starting writing to determine general topics, so that the writer has an idea regarding the direction of writing.

Different from some of the other students, Student H stated that in the context of qualitative and academic writing course assignments, the topic of the article was not counted in the idea development process because there was intervention and assistance from the lecturer to formulate the topic. He begins the writing process by prioritizing the neatness of the language structure so that the ideas he writes are easier to understand when re-read. This argument is also supported by the academic writing lecturer who state that for novice EFL writers, the skills of precise scientific writing are prioritized over the quality of ideas. This can be seen clearly when many students have good ideas while presenting orally but are unable to put them into good writing format. Consequently, when they re-read the results of the writing, the idea is elusive and meaningless. That way, the learning system implemented in academic writing course focuses more on training in writing

techniques first. After a lot of writing practices, the lessons begin to focus on developing ideas so that their writing leads to articles for publication.

Based on the results of interviews with several students and the lecturer's description of the quality of student writing, it can be seen that the majority of students prioritize ideas in developing their writing. This is illustrated by the good ideas they bring in writing when presented orally to the lecturer. However, the ideas they convey orally are not clearly reflected in their writing due to the use of inaccurate writing techniques, making it difficult for the reader to understand the ideas and reducing the quality of the resulting writing.

CONCLUSION

This research provides an overview of how novice EFL writers view the importance of ideas and language in academic writing and which ones they prioritize to improve the efficiency of the writing process. The results of the study concluded that students realized the importance of integrating good ideas and using the correct language in developing scientific writing. Brilliant ideas determine the direction of writing, while accurate language use is the main medium for communicating these ideas so that the meaning is conveyed clearly to the reader. Between these two important aspects, novice EFL writers tend to prioritize ideas to direct their writing process rather than the quality of the language, so this results in difficulty understanding the ideas they write due to the use of inappropriate language. Thus, novice EFL writers need to be equipped with a lot of training and learning related to writing techniques so that every idea they want to put into writing can contain high value and carry important meaning to be used as material for scientific study.

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