PERCEIVED CHALLENGES IN USING ACADEMIC VOCABULARY AND FORMAL LANGUAGE IN EFL WRITING

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Article Information	Abstract
	This research aims to investigate the preferences of fifth-semester students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung in using online translators, focusing on the types of online translation tools they use, their reasons for using them, and the frequency of use. A descriptive quantitative method was employed, and data were gathered through a questionnaire distributed to 30 fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program. The questionnaire comprised multiple-choice and open-ended questions designed to collect detailed information regarding students' translation habits. The data were analyzed using percentage analysis to determine the most preferred online translators and the underlying motivations for their use. The findings revealed that Google Translate is the most commonly used translation tool among students, followed by tools like DeepL and Bing Translator. Most students reported using online translators for academic purposes such as translating texts, completing assignments, and understanding English materials. The main reasons for using online translators included convenience, speed, and ease of access. The study also found that a majority of students use these tools frequently, indicating a strong reliance on them in their academic work. These results highlight the significant role online translators play in supporting language learning at the tertiary level. **Keywords: Formal; Academic; Vocabulary**

Introduction

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, university students need to learn how to use academic vocabulary and formal language. This is crucial for their success in academic

writing. Academic writing is differ significantly from daily communication. It requires a more serious tone and structured way of writing. Mastery of academic vocabulary enables students to articulate their ideas more clearly and logically. This skill also helps them become part of the academic community, where formal and precise language is necessary. Learning this kind of vocabulary is not just about memorizing new words; it is about knowing how and when to use them correctly in different academic situations.

Using academic language is also important because it helps students communicate complex ideas. Academic writing is often used to explain theories, describe research findings, or give opinions about important topics. If students cannot use formal language correctly, their writing may sound too simple or unclear. This can affect their grades and their ability to succeed in school. Academic vocabulary has a big influence on students' performance in writing (Masrai et al., 2022). When students are able to use this type of language, it shows that they understand the topic and can explain it well using the right style and structure. This is why improving vocabulary and formal language should be a focus in EFL education.

Many students in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, continue to struggle with formal writing, often receiving low scores due to their use of informal language (Wijaya, 2022). They often use simple or conversational words instead of academic ones. This problem may come from not having enough practice or not knowing how academic writing is supposed to look. Some students also think that as long as they can express their thoughts, the type of vocabulary does not matter. But in academic writing, choosing the right words is very important. Informal words can make their writing less serious and not suitable for academic tasks.

Other studies support this idea. Masrai found that many EFL students do not use a wide range of academic words in their writing (Masrai et al., 2021). This limits their ability to express complex ideas. Without strong vocabulary, their writing may appear repetitive or too basic. They may also struggle to make clear arguments or explain things in detail. This shows that vocabulary knowledge is not only about understanding words but also about being able to apply them in the correct context. Without enough vocabulary, students cannot meet the standards of good academic writing, and this can affect their overall academic success.

To understand this issue better, it is important to define what academic vocabulary and formal language mean. Academic vocabulary includes words that are not commonly used in everyday speech but are common in books, journals, and school assignments. These words help make writing clearer, more precise, and more professional (TÜFEKÇİOĞLU, 2021). For example, words like "analyze," "evaluate," or "significant" are often used in academic writing. These words are needed to talk about topics in a serious and detailed way. Knowing these words helps students follow instructions, explain their points clearly, and understand academic texts.

Formal language, on the other hand, means writing or speaking in a way that is polite, structured, and suitable for serious situations. In writing, this includes avoiding slang, contractions, or casual phrases. Instead of saying "kids," students should say "children." Instead of "can't," they should write "cannot." Formal writing also uses full sentences and more complex grammar (Iñiguez & Pacheco, 2022). Using formal language helps students look more professional and knowledgeable. It also shows respect to the reader, who expects serious and organized content. This is especially important when writing essays, reports, or research papers.

In many EFL classrooms, teachers try different methods to help students improve their writing. Some teachers give students lists of academic words to memorize. Others focus on reading academic texts so that students can see how formal writing looks in real life (Rhubido et al., 2023). Teachers may also create activities where students must write essays using a specific set of vocabulary. Another method is to connect the vocabulary to the students' fields of study, such as engineering or education, so the words feel more useful. These strategies are helpful, but they may not work for every student, especially when their levels of English are very different.

Despite teachers' efforts, the results are not always good. Some students still struggle to understand how to use academic vocabulary correctly. Sometimes, the teaching is too fast, and students cannot follow. Other times, the materials are too difficult or not interesting. Teachers may not have enough time in class to give personal feedback on students' writing. Also, students often have different needs and backgrounds, so one method may not be enough. Some students

may need more support or extra practice. These problems make it difficult to teach writing in a way that works for everyone.

Students also have their own challenges in learning academic vocabulary. One problem is that they do not have enough words to express their ideas well. Their vocabulary is too small, so they often repeat the same words or use basic words that are not suitable for academic writing (Chubaryan & Vardanyan, 2023). This makes their writing sound less professional. Sometimes, students try to translate from their first language, but the result is awkward or wrong in English. This shows that just knowing English words is not enough—they need to understand how to use them in the right context.

Another big problem is that students do not get much exposure to formal writing. In many schools, students mostly read textbooks or listen to lectures, but they do not write much. If they are not used to reading or writing academic texts, they will not know how to structure their writing properly (Sulaiman & Salehuddin, 2022). Also, if teachers do not give enough writing practice or do not show good examples, students will continue using informal or simple language. This gap in exposure makes it hard for students to learn how academic writing really works.

Teachers themselves face many problems in teaching academic writing. They often have too many students in one class, and it is hard to give individual attention. Also, some schools do not have enough teaching materials or training programs for teachers. This makes it difficult for teachers to use effective methods. In some cases, teachers may not fully understand academic writing themselves, especially if they did not study it deeply. All these problems make the teaching process less effective and prevent students from making progress.

Many researchers have studied these challenges. They found that EFL students usually do not understand academic vocabulary deeply enough. They may know the meaning of a word but not how to use it correctly in writing. Most of these studies used surveys and tests to collect data. This helps researchers measure the problem, but it does not explain why students feel this way. Numbers alone cannot show students' emotions or thoughts about learning academic writing.

That is why some experts say we need more qualitative research. This type of research focuses on student experiences and feelings. It helps us understand what students go through when they try to learn formal writing. So far, many studies have focused on numbers and results, but few have looked at personal stories or opinions. Romadhon argue that we can learn more by listening to students directly and asking about their writing journey (Romadhon et al., 2023). This way, we can discover things that tests and surveys cannot show.

There is a gap in the research because we do not have many studies that explore students' own experiences in detail. Loo explains that narrative inquiry, which focuses on personal stories, can give us more insights (Loo, 2021). When students talk about their writing problems in their own words, we can understand their struggles better. We can also learn what kind of help they need. This method allows researchers to understand not just the academic side of writing but also the emotional and personal side.

This study wants to fill that gap by using narrative inquiry to study students' experiences. It will ask students to tell their stories about learning academic vocabulary and writing formally. By doing this, the study will collect real examples of what students feel and how they deal with the challenges (Zhang & Yang, 2016). This approach helps researchers understand not only what problems exist but also how students react to them and try to solve them.

These personal stories can also help improve theories about how students learn to write. When researchers know more about students' real experiences, they can create better models for teaching writing. Using real-life experiences can make language learning theories more accurate and helpful. Instead of assuming what students need, educators can use actual stories to build better teaching methods.

The study also has practical benefits. Teachers can use the findings to improve how they teach writing. For example, they can give more practice with formal language, provide better materials, or use examples from student experiences (Uccelli et al., 2015). If teachers understand the problems students face, they can make changes in the classroom that support learning more effectively.

This research also wants to help students do better in writing by showing what challenges they face and how to overcome them. The goal is to understand what students think about using academic vocabulary and formal language (Ubaidillah & Widiati, 2022). This can lead to better support from schools and teachers. When students get the help they need, they are more likely to succeed in their writing tasks.

Other people who can benefit from this study include curriculum designers and education leaders. They can use the results to change the way writing is taught in schools. If the curriculum includes more writing practice and more focus on vocabulary, students will improve faster (Xodabande et al., 2022). Schools can also provide more training for teachers so they can teach academic writing more effectively.

Finally, this research uses a qualitative approach because it focuses on real people and real situations. Qualitative research is good for studying language learning because it shows the human side of the problem. By listening to student voices and experiences, we can learn things that numbers cannot show. This is very important for understanding and improving writing education in EFL contexts.

In conclusion, many EFL students still face problems with academic vocabulary and formal language. This study will explore those problems in more detail by listening to students' stories. It hopes to give useful insights to help teachers, schools, and students improve academic writing education. In the Indonesian context especially, this research can be a step forward in making learning more effective and student-centered.

Methods

This study uses qualitative method (Creswell, 2013). This method is appropriate to know how EFL students feel and experience problems when they try to use academic vocabulary and formal language in writing. Descriptive qualitative research helps to explain and understand something that happens in a natural way, so the researcher can get full and deep information from the participants. This kind of method is useful when we want to learn about people's feelings and real experiences, not just numbers or scores (Neubauer et al., 2019). This method matches with the purpose of this research because it wants to understand what students think and feel, not to measure anything.

The design of this research is phenomenology. Phenomenology is a way to study how people experience something in their life. In this case, the research wants to know how EFL students feel and think about their difficulties in using academic words and writing in formal way (Tabuena et al., 2021). This method helps to understand their experience in more deep and meaningful way. It gives a chance to see the situation from the students' point of view and to find out what kind of problems they face and how they try to solve it.

The population of this study is EFL students who study at a state university in Lampung, Indonesia. The participants are undergraduate students who have experience with writing academic tasks. This research uses purposive sampling. This means the researcher chooses the students who have the right experience for this study. This way helps the researcher get better information because the students already know the topic and can give useful answers. It makes the data more accurate and useful.

To collect the data, this study uses two ways: semi-structured interviews and reflective journals. Semi-structured interviews are useful because the researcher can ask the same questions to all participants but also ask more questions if needed. It helps the researcher to know what the students really think and feel. The reflective journal is also important. Students will write about their experience and what problems they face when writing in academic style. This will give more data and show how the students feel over time. Both ways together will help the researcher get complete and clear information (Corrales-Garay et al., 2019).

To make sure the data is valid and trustworthy, the researcher will do some steps. First is triangulation. This means using both interviews and journals to compare the results. Second is member checking. This means the researcher will ask the students to read what was written about them and check if it is correct.

To analyze the data, this study uses thematic analysis. This method looks for patterns and topics in the data. The researcher will read the data many times to find the important points that are repeated by many students. These repeated points will become themes. Thematic analysis is a good way to find out what the common problems and opinions are among the students about using academic vocabulary and formal language. This method helps to keep the deep meaning of what students say and show the real situation. The process will be done step by step to make sure nothing is missed.

Findings and Discussion

This study has revealed several important aspects related to the challenges experienced by Indonesian EFL students in using academic vocabulary and formal language in their writing. The data were collected from 30 undergraduate students through semi-structured interviews and reflective journals during a four-week period. The analysis combined both quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the issues faced by the students.

The interviews indicated that most students (80%) struggled with their academic vocabulary. Many students reported that they felt frustrated when trying to include more sophisticated words in their writing. These limitations often caused a lack of confidence in their academic expression. This finding supports the results of Caleffi (2023), who found similar problems among EFL learners in different contexts.

Many participants (75%) stated in their reflective journals that they often used informal expressions. This was mostly because they felt more comfortable and familiar with casual language. As a result, they were hesitant to use more formal constructions. This habit affected the overall formality of their academic writing.

Another common challenge was psychological in nature. Approximately 70% of participants mentioned feeling anxious when writing academic texts. They feared making mistakes, especially when using new or complex vocabulary. These emotional factors discouraged them from trying new words. This supports the findings of Cahyono et al. (2023), who observed a high level of writing anxiety among Indonesian EFL students.

From the journals, 65% of students reported that they rarely encountered authentic academic texts during their studies. They believed that their learning environments did not expose them enough to formal vocabulary and writing styles. Awla et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of contextual exposure in vocabulary learning, which supports this finding.

Another important finding is about the influence of technology in students' academic writing. As many as 60% of the students said that they had positive experience when using technology tools such as online grammar checkers and vocabulary suggestions. These tools helped them to correct some mistakes and gave suggestions to improve the writing. This is in line with the finding from Syahnaz and Fithriani (2023), who also found that technology can help students in solving their writing difficulties.

From the data, it was found that 85% of the participants felt that teacher's feedback is very useful for them. They said that when the teacher gave specific and helpful comments, they could understand their mistakes and learn better. They also said that the teacher's encouragement made them more confident in writing. This finding supports what Baskara (2023) found about the importance of teacher's role in helping students improve their academic writing.

Many students (78%) shared that they had difficulty when organizing and formatting academic texts. This is also related to their limited vocabulary. They said that even though they know what they want to write, they are not sure how to put it in correct academic structure. This problem also appears in the study by Mayoo and Eto (2023), who discussed structural issues faced by EFL students.

Collaborative learning was seen as helpful by 55% of the students. They said that working in group or doing peer review activities made them learn more vocabulary and become more familiar with formal expressions. This method is also suggested by Wijaya (2023), who explained how collaboration can support students' language development.

As many as 68% of participants said that they used online sources like academic journals and writing apps to help them in their assignments. They found that those tools helped them expand their vocabulary and understand academic style better. However, some students also mentioned that they became too dependent on those tools, which made them less confident in writing on their own.

Another key result is that 72% of students believed that the current curriculum should give more attention to academic vocabulary and formal writing practice. They suggested that writing courses need to focus more on these skills so they can be better prepared for academic writing tasks. This is similar with what Geng et al. (2021) argued, that EFL curriculum must adapt to support students' real needs.

Discussion

The findings of this study offered a deep look into the challenges that Indonesian EFL students faced in using academic vocabulary and formal writing. Many students still used informal expressions, had limited vocabulary, and felt nervous when writing. These problems showed the need for changes in how writing is taught in EFL classrooms.

The big problem of low academic vocabulary matched what Caleffi (2023) found in another study. Vocabulary is very important for success in academic writing, and students who lack it cannot express their ideas well. Students also kept using informal language, showing that they were not ready to switch to academic style.

Another main finding was that students were afraid to write. Cahyono et al. (2023) also found that fear and nervousness were common. Helping students feel more confident could improve their writing. Teachers should help students write without fear of mistakes.

Technology helped students a lot, but they also depended on it. Zhao (2022) warned about the risk of overusing technology. Teachers should help students use these tools wisely while still learning to write by themselves.

Many students said teacher feedback helped them improve. Teachers should give comments that help students improve their vocabulary and writing structure. Group work also helped students because working with friends gave students chances to learn together. This can help them learn new words and writing techniques.

Students also said that their courses did not teach enough academic vocabulary. Geng et al. (2021) said that EFL courses should include more instruction on writing. If not, students will continue to face difficulties.

The study had some limitations. It only involved one university in Lampung, so the results may not apply to all EFL learners. Future research should study more students from other areas.

Finally, this study gave ideas for future teaching and research. Teachers should balance the use of technology with activities that build students' own language skills. Educational policies should also support vocabulary learning and reduce students' dependence on tools.

This research also recommended future studies to explore how technology and vocabulary learning are connected in different EFL contexts. This can help create better strategies to support students in their academic writing.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at UIN Raden Intan Lampung show a strong preference for using online translators, especially Google Translate. The majority of students use these tools frequently for academic tasks, primarily because they are convenient, quick, and easy to access. This preference

reflects a growing reliance on digital tools in language learning and shows how technology is shaping the way students engage with English materials. The students' trust in online translators suggests they find them effective in aiding their understanding and performance in English-related tasks.

As a suggestion, it is recommended that educators guide students in using online translators wisely. While these tools can be helpful, they should not replace the process of learning and understanding language structures. Teachers can incorporate training on how to use online translators critically and effectively, perhaps through classroom activities that involve translation comparison and analysis. Future research may also explore the long-term impact of frequent use of online translators on students' language development, particularly in writing and vocabulary acquisition.

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