Exploring Students' Difficulties on Writing English Paragraph at English Education Study Program of FKIP UKI Toraja

Desi Ippun [1*], Sushy Teko Patanduk [2], Normalia Sirande [3]

[1, 2, 3] Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja, Indonesia

* desiippun@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine and understand the difficulties faced by students in writing English paragraphs in the English Education Study Program at FKIP UKI Toraja. In this study, the researchers used quantitative method. The researcher took data from students of UKI Toraja English Study Program in the 2023/2024 academic year. Who have passed the Writing paragraph course. The author chose 20 students majoring in English at UKI Toraja. To find out what are the difficulties faced by students of English education study program FKIP UKI TORAJA in writing English paragraphs, the researcher used questionnaire with Likert scale. Based on the results of the data analysis, overall, most students found difficulties in writing paragraphs generally positive, where the majority of students experienced difficulties in writing paragraphs especially in finding ideas (80%), limited vocabulary, and lack of confidence. In addition, 70% of respondents faced challenges in connecting ideas, as well as problems of motivation and boredom while writing. Difficulty starting sentences, maintaining the flow of writing, and concerns about grammar and clarity were also major concerns. Anxiety towards the writing task and the tendency to procrastinate indicated the need for emotional support and better time management strategies.

Keywords: *Writing Difficulties, English Paragraph, Students' Challenges, Vocabulary Limitation*

Introduction

In today's era of globalization and increasing digital connectivity, the ability to communicate effectively is considered a key skill in both academic and professional contexts. Among the four fundamental language skills—listening (Strain-Moritz, 2016), speaking, reading, and writing writing is often regarded as the most cognitively demanding. Unlike speaking, which can be spontaneous and informal, writing requires careful organization, precise vocabulary, accurate grammar, and mastery of writing mechanics such as punctuation, spelling, and paragraph structure (Haidari et al, 2023). This complexity often causes students difficulty and challenges. Writing in a second language, particularly English, presents even greater challenges for university students in Indonesia. Aside from linguistic limitations, they also face differences in rhetorical structures between English and their native language. For instance, paragraph development in English typically follows a linear structure: a topic sentence, supporting details, and a concluding sentence an organizational logic that is often unfamiliar to students accustomed to more flexible structures in their native language (Nenotek et al, 2022). As a result, many students struggle to organize ideas logically and coherently in a paragraph.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Indonesia, writing is often perceived as the most demanding of the four language skills (Setiani et al, 2023). While

listening and reading are receptive skills and speaking allows for spontaneity, writing demands not only a grasp of vocabulary and grammar but also critical thinking, idea development, coherence, and revision. For university students, particularly those training to become future English teachers, the ability to write clear, well-organized paragraphs is a fundamental academic and professional requirement. However, mastering this skill continues to be a significant challenge. Several studies have documented that EFL students, especially at the tertiary level, often struggle with paragraph development due to a combination of linguistic and pedagogical factors. For instance, academic writing conventions are not only foreign but are rarely taught explicitly in secondary education, leaving students unprepared for the rigors of university writing. In Indonesia, English writing instruction is often textbook-centered, with limited emphasis on process-based or student-centered approaches. As a result, students typically lack practice in brainstorming, drafting, peer review, and revising key components of effective writing instruction.

Another important dimension is the role of students' prior writing experience. Many Indonesian students enter university with minimal exposure to extended writing in English. Their experience is often limited to grammar exercises, sentence translation, and short-answer questions. When asked to produce longer, structured pieces such as paragraphs or essays, students frequently rely on memorized phrases or translation from their native language, which can result in incoherent or awkward writing. Moreover, without familiarity with standard paragraph components such as topic sentences, supporting evidence, and transitions students may fail to structure their writing logically. In addition, access to writing resources can greatly influence students' development. In some universities, writing centers, digital platforms, or trained tutors are available to support students, but this is not always the case in smaller or under-resourced institutions. In such settings, students may rely solely on their instructors for feedback, which is often limited due to time constraints and large class sizes. This lack of ongoing, formative feedback can hinder progress and reduce students' motivation to improve.

Beyond pedagogical limitations, socio-affective factors such as fear of failure, writing anxiety, and low self-confidence also play a significant role in students' writing difficulties. Writing in a foreign language can be an intimidating task, especially when students are unsure about grammar accuracy or word choice. Anxiety may lead students to avoid writing or delay their assignments, resulting in rushed or incomplete work. Such behaviors reinforce a cycle of poor performance and negative self-perception, further demotivating students. Given these multiple layers of difficulty, understanding the specific writing challenges faced by students in a particular institutional context is essential. It allows educators to tailor their instruction, provide targeted interventions, and foster a more supportive writing environment. In the case of the English Education Study Program at FKIP UKI Toraja, exploring students' paragraph writing difficulties can offer valuable insights for curriculum design and classroom practices. By identifying the most common obstacles whether linguistic, cognitive, or emotionalthis study hopes to inform strategies that not only improve students' writing proficiency but also their confidence and engagement with academic English.

Moreover, cultural factors may also influence how students approach writing tasks. Learners from high-context cultures may prioritize implicit communication and personal experiences over linear logic, which can create mismatches in academic writing expectations. These factors suggest that students' paragraph writing difficulties are not merely linguistic but also rooted in broader educational and cultural contexts. This is supported by a resesrch result which found that Indonesian EFL students experience challenges not only due to language

structure but also due to limited exposure to academic conventions shaped by cultural and institutional norms (Batubara et al, 2023).

Writing is not just about putting words on paper but a complex form of communication that demands clarity, coherence, and structure. University students are expected to develop ideas, support them with relevant information, and present them using appropriate language and grammar. However, studies show that even after receiving instruction in academic writing, many students still face persistent issues in grammar, coherence, and vocabulary usage (Alostath, 2021). This pattern is also observed among students in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja. Despite receiving instruction in courses such as Reading and Writing for Academic Purposes, many students still demonstrate difficulties in constructing effective English paragraphs. These difficulties include the inability to develop topic sentences, poor coherence, and limited vocabulary. Preliminary observations from lecturers indicate that writing challenges remain prevalent despite repeated practice and feedback. This suggests that students may lack a deeper understanding of paragraph structure and strategies for effective writing (Jamoom, 2021). Additionally, research emphasizes that metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, evaluation, and information management play a significant role in improving students' academic writing abilities (Rosdiana et al, 2023). Their study found that students with higher metacognitive awareness are better able to organize ideas, reflect on their writing, and revise more effectively, leading to stronger writing performance overall.

The researcher's own experience as a former student of the same program supports these findings. Developing ideas and organizing them in a coherent paragraph, particularly in a second language, has always been a challenge. This personal experience inspired the researcher to explore the issue more deeply by examining the paragraph writing difficulties of current students in the same academic setting. Understanding their challenges can help lecturers develop more effective, student-centered writing strategies and classroom interventions. Therefore, this research aims to explore the difficulties faced by students in writing English paragraphs at the English Education Study Program of FKIP Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja. By identifying the specific areas of difficulty and their possible causes, the study seeks to contribute practical insights into improving writing instruction, which is essential for students' academic success and language proficiency.

Method

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive research design to thoroughly explore the challenges encountered by students in writing English paragraphs. The quantitative approach was chosen because it allows for the systematic collection, organization, and analysis of numerical data, thus enabling the researcher to measure the extent of students' difficulties in a clear and structured manner. By employing this approach, the study aimed to provide an accurate and detailed representation of the various obstacles faced by learners in the paragraph writing process. The research was conducted among students of the English Education Study Program at Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja who had completed the Writing Paragraph course in the academic year 2023/2024. The selection of participants was carried out through purposive sampling, a method that was deemed appropriate because it allowed the researcher to intentionally select individuals who met specific criteria. In this case, the criteria included having prior experience in paragraph writing and being available and willing to participate in the study. A total of 20 students were chosen as the sample, as they were considered to be capable of providing relevant and meaningful information based on their learning experiences. The data for this study were collected using a structured instrument in the form of a closed-ended

questionnaire consisting of fifteen carefully designed items. The development of the questionnaire was guided by findings from previous research, which identified common difficulties experienced by students in writing. These items were intended to cover a wide range of potential problems, including the ability to generate ideas, mastery of vocabulary, understanding and application of grammatical rules, maintenance of coherence and cohesion within a paragraph, as well as psychological factors such as motivation and anxiety that may affect the writing process. To ensure consistency in responses, the questionnaire adopted a five-point Likert scale, with options ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," which were assigned numerical values from 5 to 1. The responses obtained from the participants were analyzed using percentage-based descriptive statistics. For each questionnaire item, the frequency of responses was calculated and converted into percentages using the formula

$$P = (F/N) \times 100\%,$$

Where P represents the percentage, F is the frequency of a specific response, and N is the total number of respondents, as adapted from (Faradhibah et al, 2017). This process enabled the researcher to determine the proportion of students experiencing specific types of writing difficulties. The percentages were then interpreted to reveal patterns of agreement and disagreement among the participants, which helped in identifying the most common and significant challenges. Finally, the analyzed data were organized and presented in tabular form to provide a clear visual representation of the findings. The use of tables allowed the researcher to illustrate the distribution of responses for each item and to highlight the areas where students experienced the most difficulties. Through this approach, the study sought not only to document the nature and extent of students' writing problems but also to generate insights that could guide educators in developing targeted instructional strategies. By understanding the precise challenges faced by students, teachers can design learning activities that address these weaknesses and foster greater competence in paragraph writing.

Results

There were 15 statements asked about the difficulties faced by English students in writing paragraphs. the results of this study were obtained from a questionnaire that was answered by 20 respondents and then calculated as follows:

Table 1 Percentage of Questionnaire

Statement	SCALE				
	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
I have trouble finding ideas to write paragraphs	50%	30%	10%	5%	5%
I often lack the right vocabulary when writing	55%	25%	5%	10%	5%
I feel insecure about my writing skills	35%	45%	5%	15%	0%
I find it difficult to connect the ideas in the paragraphs into a cohesive whole	25%	45%	10%	20%	0%
I lack motivation to write paragraphs	30%	30%	10%	30%	0%
I have trouble starting the first sentence in a paragraph	25%	35%	15%	25%	0%
I feel that my writing is not clear and easy for readers to understand	35%	30%	25%	0%	10%
I often feel bored when writing paragraphs	25%	30%	20%	25%	0%
It takes me a lot of time to finish a paragraph	35%	20%	25%	15%	5%
I often feel out of ideas when writing paragraphs	35%	35%	20%	10%	0%
I find it difficult to express my ideas in the right word	45%	20%	20%	15%	0%
I find it difficult to keep the flow of writing consisten within a paragraph.	40%	25%	20%	15%	0%
I often doubt whether my writing is grammatically correct	40%	40%	5%	15%	0%
I feel anxious when I have to write a paragraph for an assignment from my lecturer	30%	25%	20%	15%	10%
I prefer to procrastinate on paragraph writing assignments	30%	20%	15%	20%	15%

The results of the questionnaire reveal various difficulties experienced by students in writing English paragraphs. A majority of respondents reported challenges in generating ideas, with 50% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing that they have trouble finding ideas to write paragraphs. Similarly, 55% strongly agreed and 25% agreed that they often lack the appropriate vocabulary, indicating that lexical limitations are a significant barrier to effective writing. Regarding self-confidence, 35% strongly agreed and 45% agreed that they feel insecure about their writing skills, suggesting that psychological factors play a substantial role in students' writing performance. In terms of paragraph cohesion, 25% strongly agreed and 45% agreed that they find it difficult to connect ideas into a cohesive whole. Motivation also appears to be an issue, with 30% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing that they lack motivation to write paragraphs.

When it comes to initiating writing, 25% strongly agreed and 35% agreed that they have trouble starting the first sentence in a paragraph. Furthermore, clarity in writing was a concern for 35% of students who strongly agreed and 30% who agreed that their writing is not always clear or easy for readers to understand. A notable proportion (25% strongly agree, 30% agree) also admitted to feeling bored when writing paragraphs, which may affect their productivity and creativity. Time management in writing tasks emerged as another challenge, with 35% strongly agreeing and 20% agreeing that it takes them a long time to finish a paragraph. Idea exhaustion is also common, as 35% strongly agreed and 35% agreed that they often feel out of ideas during the writing process. Expressing ideas accurately was problematic for 45% who strongly agreed and 20% who agreed, while maintaining a consistent flow within a paragraph was also reported as difficult by 40% strongly agreeing and 25% agreeing.

Grammar-related concerns were evident, with 40% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing that they often doubt whether their writing is grammatically correct. Anxiety was another psychological factor, as 30% strongly agreed and 25% agreed that they feel anxious when assigned paragraph writing tasks by their lecturers. Finally, procrastination tendencies were noted, with 30% strongly agreeing and 20% agreeing that they prefer to delay paragraph writing assignments. Overall, the findings indicate that students face a combination of linguistic difficulties (idea generation, vocabulary, grammar, cohesion), psychological barriers (insecurity, anxiety, lack of motivation), and behavioral issues (boredom, procrastination, time management), all of which contribute to their struggles in paragraph writing. The findings from the questionnaire offer deeper insight into the challenges faced by students when writing English paragraphs. Each item in the instrument was crafted to explore different dimensions of the writing process, including cognitive, linguistic, and emotional aspects. The responses reveal recurring patterns that highlight the complexity of students' struggles. One of the most prominent issues is generating ideas. A large majority of students (80%) agreed that coming up with ideas for their writing was difficult.

This suggests that students may lack experience with brainstorming techniques or have insufficient reading exposure, both of which are essential for developing content in writing. Furthermore, a similar number of students admitted to frequently losing ideas partway through the writing process, indicating a need for instructional support in sustaining and developing ideas into cohesive paragraphs. Another significant difficulty lies in vocabulary use. About 80% of respondents stated they often lacked the appropriate words to express themselves effectively. Additionally, 65% said they struggled to choose the right words to match their intended meaning. These responses point to limited vocabulary range, which restricts the depth and clarity of students' written expression. This limitation may also affect sentence variety and reduce the overall quality of their writing. Grammatical uncertainty was also evident, with around 80% of

students expressing concern over whether their writing was grammatically accurate. This indicates a persistent lack of confidence and points to the need for reinforced grammar instruction and corrective feedback in writing courses. In terms of organization and coherence, 70% of students reported difficulty connecting their ideas smoothly within a paragraph. Similarly, 65% noted problems with maintaining a logical flow. These findings suggest that many students are not yet familiar with cohesive devices or paragraph structure, making it difficult for them to organize thoughts in a clear and unified way.

Beyond linguistic challenges, the study also highlights the impact of emotional and psychological factors. Many students (80%) felt insecure about their writing abilities, and over half of them (55%) reported anxiety when faced with writing assignments. Moreover, 50% admitted to procrastinating on such tasks, while 60% lacked the motivation to write, and 55% found the process boring or tedious. These emotional responses have serious implications for learning. When students experience anxiety or low motivation, they are less likely to engage meaningfully with writing tasks or benefit from feedback. As a result, their writing development may stagnate, regardless of the quality of instruction. Overall, the data reveal that paragraph writing difficulties are not limited to language proficiency but are also shaped by emotional, cognitive, and motivational factors. Addressing these issues requires more than grammar drills or vocabulary lists it demands a well-rounded approach that includes confidence-building, emotional support, and strategic writing instruction tailored to students' real needs.

Discussion

The analysis of the questionnaire responses from 20 English Education students at UKI Toraja reveals several significant challenges in paragraph writing. These challenges encompass idea generation, vocabulary limitations, coherence, grammatical accuracy, and psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of motivation.

Idea Generation and Organization

A substantial number of students (80%) reported difficulties in generating ideas for paragraph writing. This aligns with findings by researcher, who identified limited vocabulary and challenges in organizing ideas as primary obstacles for EFL students (Aljoza et al, 2023). Similarly, noted that students often struggle with organizing their thoughts coherently, leading to disjointed paragraphs (Ahmed, 2019). This difficulty may stem from students' limited exposure to varied reading materials, which reduces their ability to develop and elaborate on ideas. Additionally, the lack of pre-writing strategies such as brainstorming or outlining further contributes to underdeveloped and unfocused writing.

Vocabulary and Grammar

Over 80% of respondents indicated a lack of appropriate vocabulary when writing. This issue is corroborated by Dao and Dan who found that vocabulary limitations significantly hinder students' ability to express their ideas effectively (Dao et al, 2023). Furthermore, grammatical inaccuracies were a common concern, with many students doubting the correctness of their writing. Another research finding emphasized that such grammatical challenges are prevalent among EFL learners and can impede the clarity of their writing (Shahhoseiny, 2015). Limited vocabulary restricts word choice, which leads students to rely on repetitive or overly general terms that weaken the quality of their writing. In addition, insufficient mastery of grammar rules often results in sentence construction errors that make the message less comprehensible to readers.

Coherence and Cohesion

Approximately 70% of students reported difficulties in maintaining coherence within their paragraphs. This is consistent with findings byresearcher, who observed that students often struggle with the logical flow of ideas, leading to fragmented writing (Eyisi, 2016). Researcher also highlighted the challenge of organizing ideas cohesively, which is crucial for effective paragraph writing (Saragih et al, 2017). In line withwhat students in IAIN Makassar faced in terms of coherence and cohesion, specifically in determining and stating their ideas, fulfilling the supporting details, and using the proper signals and spelling as well as punctuation. This lack of coherence may be attributed to students' limited knowledge of paragraph structure and transitional devices. Without clear guidance on how to connect ideas, many students write in a disjointed manner that confuses readers and weakens the overall message.

Psychological Factors: Anxiety and Motivation

The study revealed that a significant number of students experience anxiety and lack motivation when tasked with paragraph writing. Wei discussed the impact of writing anxiety on EFL students, noting that it can lead to procrastination and reduced writing quality (Jia, 2023). Additionally, emphasized the importance of addressing psychological barriers to improve students' writing experiences (Mamarajabova et al, 2023). This anxiety may stem from a fear of making mistakes or being judged, which lowers students' confidence and willingness to take risks in writing. Furthermore, when motivation is low, students tend to avoid writing tasks altogether or complete them with minimal effort, leading to suboptimal learning outcomes.

Collaborative Writing as a Potential Solution

To address these challenges, collaborative writing has been suggested as an effective strategy. Al-Khasawneh found that collaborative writing activities can enhance students' ability to organize ideas and reduce writing anxiety (Anshu et al, 2022). This approach encourages peer support and active engagement, which can lead to improved writing skills. Through collaboration, students are exposed to different perspectives, which enriches their understanding of content and structure. Moreover, the process of giving and receiving feedback in pairs or groups helps them reflect on their own writing and revise it more effectively.

Digital Tools and Writing Centers

Integrating digital tools and writing centers can also support students in overcoming writing difficulties. Researcher highlighted the role of writing centers in providing personalized feedback and resources to assist students in developing their writing skills (Mack, 2023). Moreover, the use of digital platforms can offer interactive and accessible means for students to practice and refine their writing (Fang, 2019). Tools such as grammar checkers, online writing labs, and collaborative editing apps can help students identify their mistakes and improve their drafts independently. In addition, digital environments foster self-paced learning, allowing students to revisit materials and exercises based on their individual needs and proficiency levels.

Further Implications and Pedagogical Considerations

The findings of this study underscore the need for a pedagogical shift in the teaching of paragraph writing within EFL contexts such as the English Education Study Program at UKI Toraja. Traditional, form-focused instructional approaches often centered on grammatical correction appear insufficient to address the multifaceted challenges students encounter. Instead, there is a growing need to implement writing instruction that is process-oriented,

learner-centered, and responsive to both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning.

One effective approach is the application of process writing pedagogy, which emphasizes writing as a recursive and developmental activity rather than a final product. Instructional design should include guided stages of writing such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing. These stages encourage learners to engage more meaningfully with content and structure while alleviating the pressure of producing grammatically flawless writing in one attempt. Such a shift promotes reflection and autonomy, thereby enhancing both linguistic and organizational competencies. The study also draws attention to the significant affective factors influencing writing performance, such as low self-confidence, anxiety, and a lack of intrinsic motivation. These psychological barriers may hinder students' willingness to participate in writing tasks and limit their capacity to revise and improve. Therefore, educators are encouraged to cultivate a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment, in which formative feedback highlights progress and effort in addition to correcting errors. Encouraging risk-taking and recognizing incremental improvement may foster a more positive attitude toward writing.

Collaborative writing tasks and peer feedback can also be incorporated to foster interactive learning environments. These methods not only improve students' ability to organize and refine ideas but also promote engagement and reduce isolation. Peer interactions can provide immediate, relatable feedback, and promote greater reflection on both individual and group writing processes. Structured collaboration such as peer review sessions, group editing workshops, or joint paragraph construction can yield substantial improvements in content coherence and logical development. Moreover, findings from this study reaffirm the necessity of explicit instruction in paragraph structure and cohesion. Many students demonstrated difficulty in logically organizing information and maintaining coherence throughout a paragraph. Teachers should therefore provide focused instruction on topic sentence development, use of supporting details, appropriate transitions, and concluding statements. Model texts and guided practice activities, such as paragraph reordering and scaffolded writing exercises, may facilitate deeper understanding of these rhetorical structures.

At an institutional level, the establishment of academic writing support mechanisms such as writing centers, writing tutorials, or peer mentoring programs could serve as an important complement to classroom instruction. Such resources can offer students ongoing, individualized guidance and opportunities for practice beyond formal classroom hours. In the absence of physical writing centers, digital tools such as grammar platforms, collaborative writing software, and online peer-feedback systems can serve as practical and scalable alternatives. In conclusion, the difficulties faced by students in writing English paragraphs are not merely linguistic but are intertwined with cognitive, instructional, and emotional factors. Addressing these issues requires an integrative pedagogical framework that supports the development of writing skills holistically. By enhancing instructional practices and institutional support, English education programs can better equip future language educators to succeed academically and communicate effectively in multilingual, global contexts.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the difficulties faced by students in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja when writing English paragraphs. The findings reveal that students' struggles go beyond grammar and vocabulary, extending to idea generation, organization, and cohesion. Psychological factors such as insecurity, anxiety, and

low motivation were also significant barriers. Many participants expressed uncertainty in vocabulary use, doubts about grammatical correctness, and challenges in connecting ideas smoothly, which often led to frustration and reluctance to write. These results suggest that paragraph writing in a second language is a complex task that involves both linguistic competence and emotional readiness. The implications of these findings highlight the need for writing instruction that addresses both technical skills and students' self-confidence. Strategies such as brainstorming, peer collaboration, and the integration of digital tools can make writing more engaging, while structured feedback from teachers and access to writing support services can guide students toward gradual improvement. However, this study is limited by its small sample size and the use of a closed-ended questionnaire, which may not capture the full depth of students' experiences. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples and incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews or open-ended questions to gain richer insights. Longitudinal studies could also explore how students' writing abilities develop over time in response to targeted instructional interventions.

Acknowledgment

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