

## INVESTIGATING ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN RESEARCH ARTICLE WRITING

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the difficulties faced by students in the English Language Education program when writing research articles, a mandatory requirement for degree completion. Using an explanatory sequential mixed- methods design, data were collected from questionnaires completed by 66 students and semi-structured interviews with four selected participants from universities in Malang, Indonesia. The study explored the types of writing difficulties experienced by EFL undergraduate students and identified the key factors contributing to these challenges. The findings reveal that language problems, particularly grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, are the most significant difficulties in research article writing. Content-related challenges, such as organizing ideas coherently and developing detailed arguments, also significantly affect students. Additionally, students struggle with understanding the structure of research articles and with citation and referencing conventions. Psychological and procedural factors, including limited supervisor feedback and poor time management, exacerbate these difficulties. These results provide valuable insights for educators to develop targeted strategies that address both technical and psychological barriers, thereby supporting students in improving their academic writing skills and succeeding in research article writing.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In tertiary education, students must complete a final project to fulfill their degree requirements, which typically takes the form of a thesis. In the English



department, this final project is specifically required to be written as a research article. However, not all students are able to complete their final projects in a timely manner. This challenge arises because the expectation to produce a research article represents a new skill set for many students. For instance, at one reputable state university in Malang City, this requirement is implemented within the English language department. As students advance in their writing class, their duty is to participate in engaging research activities that can enhance their ability to write of research articles. Unfortunately, many English language students face significant obstacles throughout this process. Students demonstrate their insight in university settings, where assessment is largely based on written assignments. The high expectations placed on students to produce research articles thus introduce significant challenges, highlighting the importance of further study on their difficulties.

Despite the centrality of research article writing, many students struggle to complete their final projects on time, particularly because the expectation to produce a research article represents a new and demanding skill set for many. In academic writing (Jacobs et al., 1981). *Testing ESL Composition a Practical Approach*. London Newbury Publishers House. - References - *Scientific Research Publishing*, n.d.) identify five essential elements, one of which is content; students must present meaningful content that conveys the main topic and ensure that it is logically structured and flows smoothly. The challenge is even more pronounced at institutions such as a private State Islamic University in Samarinda City, where a decreasing number of students submit thesis titles each year, a trend attributed to limited knowledge, low motivation, and weak writing skills (Fauzan et al., 2022). Furthermore, Pardede (2024) notes that writing in a foreign language is particularly difficult for students, making English a foreign language for these students a significant barrier to successful academic writing.

Previous studies have investigated EFL students' challenges in research article writing in various regions, identifying a range of difficulties such as issues with content development, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. These obstacles are often rooted in students' limited writing practice, low self-confidence, and psychological barriers like low motivation and writing anxiety (Riadel, 2023; Saputra et al., 2021; Toba et al., 2019). Language barriers, especially grammar and vocabulary, are also frequently cited as major obstacles Amrullah et al. (2023), and technical challenges such as composing proper in-text citations and references persist Puspita (2021) and Riadil (2023). However, most existing research focuses on general

academic writing or thesis writing, rather than the unique context and challenges faced by students in Malang City when writing research articles for their final projects.

There is a clear gap in the literature regarding the specific experiences of English Language Education students in Malang City, Indonesia. Most research does not address which aspects of research article writing these students find most difficult, nor does it explore the factors they identify as the primary causes of these difficulties in their local context. Focusing on students in Malang City is essential, as their experiences may differ significantly from those in other regions due to local academic expectations, institutional policies, and linguistic backgrounds. Understanding their specific challenges will enable educators and policymakers to develop targeted support strategies, ultimately enhancing students' academic writing skills and improving their success rates.

Therefore, this study was conducted to fill this gap by investigating the real difficulties experienced by English Language Education students in Malang City universities and the factors they most frequently report as causing these difficulties. By identifying the most pressing challenges and their underlying causes, this research aims to offer practical recommendations for both instructors and students. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) what difficulties do English Language Education students experience when writing research articles for their final projects? and (2) What factors do students identify as most frequently causing these difficulties?.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Developing research paper writing is seen as a complex and challenging task by EFL students. Several studies have pinpointed multiple primary issues in research article writing. The difficulties include content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics (Muamaroh et al., 2020). The writing obstacles are typically rooted in students' poor self-esteem regarding their writing proficiency and insufficient writing exercises. Findings from Toba et al. (2019) and Riadil (2023) research expose that aspects play a substantial role in EFL students' hardship in conveying clear and structured arguments. Those include a lack of writing initiative, writing disinterest, and stress related to writing.

Issues related to language barriers are another primary challenge in writing an academic report for EFL learners. Components such as grammar and vocabulary

become the most typical writing difficulties. Those aspects function as an essential core in an academic setting to create impactful communication engagements. Proficiency in developing properly constructed sentences and articulating complex thoughts will be hindered when students lack understanding about language structure and vocabulary (Amrullah et al., 2023). Besides, psychological influences in the form of creating anxieties in making errors and insecurities support EFL students' struggles in writing, specifically during independent writing activities (Saputra et al., 2021).

Difficulties in creating literary works with well-structured unity and coherence are seen as distinguished content issues in academic writing. EFL students' inability to produce smooth and clear writing is caused by their lack of proficiency in constructing and refining logical thoughts (Sasmita & Setyowati, 2021). Additionally, writing a discussion section is considered to be a perpetual difficulty in developing a research report when students have problems in terms of content development Hasanah et al. (2023) Notably, students should pay attention to their ability in time management. It is a key aspect for constructing comprehensive and meaningful writing content (Syafriyadin et al., 2023). Therefore, writing with shallow and incomplete expression will be produced when students are enabled to manage their time in the planning, drafting, and revising process.

Developing research article sections becomes another writing hurdle for students. The main aspects, such as literature review, methodology, and data analysis part are where students find it difficult to write. The issues related to the process of selecting applicable theories, displaying data clearly, and abiding by the formatting conventions of academic reports. Besides, self-hesitation when selecting research topics and during reviewing relevant studies causes students to have challenges in creating solid components of a research article (Puspita, 2021). Therefore, they should master their technical writing ability and self-awareness, for those are vital aspects that support their involvement in academic writing.

Lastly, the other research article writing problems for EFL students are composing in-text citations and references. Academic integrity in formal writing is reflected in the precise way of referencing and citation. However, comprehension of proper formats in citation is still a part of students' struggle. Misunderstanding about format in referencing and unconscious anxieties in conducting plagiarism are frequently undergone, specifically by those who lack explicit exposure to matters in writing Riadil (2023) and Puspita (2021). Therefore, students' self-assurance and their research articles can be weakened by those challenges. Thus, highlighting the necessity

of practices in terms of citation and referencing is needed to support students' writing ability purposes.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a methodological triangulation design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties faced by English Language Education students in research article writing. Methodological triangulation was chosen to enhance the validity and credibility of the findings by combining data from a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. This study implements the one with explanatory sequential. The mixed method has a function to gain understanding which is better, than just using one method only (Sugiyono, 2016). This design was chosen to first identify general patterns in students' difficulties with research article writing through quantitative data, and then to gain deeper insights into the reasons behind those patterns using qualitative data, resulting in a more thorough understanding of the issue.

The participants are Eighth-semester students who were studying in Malang City and those who have graduated from some universities in the same city and outside the city in East Java, Indonesia. The participants are Eighth-semester students who were studying in Malang City and those who have graduated from some universities in the same city and outside the city in East Java, Indonesia. There were 44 females and 22 males who responded to the questionnaire. Of the 66 participants, 49 were still in the process of writing their research articles, while 17 had already graduated. The questionnaire was distributed online by sharing the survey link through WhatsApp to my friends, who then further shared it with their peers in the English Language Education Program. From all of the participants, 4 participants were involved in the interview session, 2 Females, they are Andini and Aulia (one is still studying and the other one has already graduated) and 2 Males, they are Dimas and Hendra (one is still studying and the other one has already graduated). The interview participants were selected based on some criteria, levels of writing difficulty, and willingness to participate in the interview sessions. Specifically, the levels include two categories: students who experience many difficulties and those who experience moderate difficulties in writing a research article.

This study employed two instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire, administered in English, was designed to explore

students' perceptions of difficulties in writing research articles. The questionnaire items were grouped into five categories: writing problems, language problems, content problems, and problems related to research article components, and issues with in-text citations and references. Each category consisted of five items, and responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, using a score between 5 to 1. The score stands for Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree, respectively. The "Neutral" option was included to let respondents express genuine uncertainty or ambivalence, which helps improve the reliability and validity of the results (Kankaraš & Capecchi, 2025).

All these categories are considered components of general composition problems, encompassing the broad range of challenges students face in academic writing. While the questionnaire focused on these technical and compositional difficulties, psychological factors such as motivation, anxiety, and time management were not included in the questionnaire items. The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four selected participants. The interviews aimed to provide deeper insights and complement the quantitative findings by exploring additional factors influencing students' writing experiences.

In the analysis of the data, each option of the questionnaire is given a value. Therefore, the maximum score is 125 and the minimum is 25. Those are from the questionnaire's items. The mean of the responses was used to indicate the tendency of the respondents' perceptions of their difficulties in writing a research article. The mean is interpreted using 5 levels based on the range of the scores as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.**

Table of the Interpretation of the Mean

| Mean        | Interpretation     |
|-------------|--------------------|
| 4.21 – 5.00 | Very Serious       |
| 3.41 – 4.20 | Serious            |
| 2.61 – 4.20 | Fair               |
| 1.81 – 2.60 | Not Serious        |
| 1.00 – 1.80 | Not Serious at All |

Before conducting the main analysis, a reliability test was performed. It is for assessing the questionnaire's technical consistency. Then, each of the five categories were calculated by Cronbach's alpha. It's computation for each of the categories indicated that all coefficient scores are above 0.70, more particularly for writing problems (0.770), language problems (0.771), content (0.836), research article

components (0.721), and in-text citation references (0.825). These results confirmed that the items within each category consistently measured the intended construct, thus validating the use of the questionnaire for data collection.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

This study investigated EFL undergraduate students' perceptions of difficulties in writing research articles, focusing on various aspects grouped under the umbrella of general composition problems by first collecting data through a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was structured to identify students' perceived challenges across five main categories: writing problems, language problems, content problems, and issues related to research article components, and difficulties with in-text citations and references. These categories reflect the key dimensions of academic writing where students most frequently encounter obstacles. To enrich and validate these findings, in-depth interviews were then conducted with four selected participants (Andini, Aulia, Dimas, and Hendra) allowing for a deeper exploration of the specific factors and personal experiences underlying the challenges identified in the survey a detailed overview of the areas that require further attention and support.

### **What difficulties do EFL undergraduate students perceive in their research article writing?**

Writing a research article presents a range of challenges for EFL students, which can be systematically understood by examining the specific areas where students most often struggle. To identify these difficulties, this study first employed a questionnaire adapted from previous research, which covered five categories: writing problems, language problems, content problems, research article components, and in-text citation and referencing issues. Each category included several items to highlight the most common obstacles faced by students. The results for each category are presented in the following tables to provide a clear overview of students' perceptions regarding their research article writing difficulties. Below are the results tables from the questionnaire survey, which summarize students' responses in each category of research article writing difficulties.

**Table 2.**

**Students' Perception on Writing Problem**

| No | Statements  | SA | (%)   | A  | (%)   | N  | (%)   | D  | (%)   | SD | (%)   | Mean |
|----|---|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|------|
| 1  | I face difficulties related to content in writing research articles.                          | 7  | 10.6  | 25 | 37.87 | 25 | 37.87 | 7  | 10.6  | 2  | 3.03  | 3.42 |
| 2  | I struggle with the organization of my ideas in research articles.                            | 12 | 18.18 | 26 | 39.39 | 14 | 21.21 | 12 | 18.18 | 2  | 3.03  | 3.51 |
| 3  | I have challenges with vocabulary when writing research articles.                             | 11 | 16.6  | 28 | 42.42 | 16 | 24.24 | 7  | 10.6  | 4  | 6.06  | 3.53 |
| 4  | I struggle to express my ideas clearly and precisely when using English in research articles. | 7  | 10.6  | 24 | 36.36 | 21 | 31.81 | 11 | 16.6  | 3  | 4.54  | 3.31 |
| 5  | I find rules in writing (e.g., grammar, punctuation) to be a problem in my research articles. | 6  | 9.09  | 13 | 19.69 | 17 | 25.75 | 18 | 27.27 | 12 | 18.18 | 2.71 |

**Scale:** SA (Strongly Agree); A (Agree); N (Neutral); D (Disagree); SD (Strongly Disagree).

Table 2 shows that in terms of writing problems, many students have serious problems with their vocabularies in writing a research article (3.53) and organizing their ideas in research article writing (3.51). The students' mean shows that they have more difficulties in terms of their vocabulary. This finding is consistent with Muamaroh et al., (2020) and Asnas & Hidayanti (2024), who found that EFL students often struggle with content organization and coherence.

**Table 3.**

**Students' Perception on Language Problems**

| No | Statements   | SA | (%)   | A  | (%)   | N  | (%)   | D | (%)   | SD | (%)  | Mean |
|----|--|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|---|-------|----|------|------|
| 1  | I experience difficulties with grammar when writing research articles. | 8  | 12.12 | 28 | 42.42 | 17 | 25.75 | 8 | 12.12 | 5  | 7.57 | 3.39 |



|   |   |    |       |    |       |    |       |    |       |   |      |      |
|---|---|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|---|------|------|
| 2 | I have trouble providing enough explanation and detail to make my ideas clear to the reader.    | 8  | 12.12 | 29 | 43.93 | 20 | 30.30 | 6  | 9.09  | 3 | 4.54 | 3.5  |
| 3 | I find it challenging to use appropriate academic language.                                     | 10 | 15.15 | 29 | 43.93 | 19 | 28.78 | 6  | 9.09  | 2 | 3.03 | 3.59 |
| 4 | I struggle with spelling errors in my research articles.  | 6  | 9.09  | 19 | 28.78 | 23 | 34.84 | 14 | 21.21 | 4 | 6.06 | 3.13 |
| 5 | I have difficulty connecting my sentences smoothly and logically to create coherent paragraphs. | 10 | 15.15 | 31 | 46.96 | 17 | 25.75 | 6  | 9.09  | 2 | 3.03 | 3.62 |

**Scale:** SA (Strongly Agree); A (Agree); N (Neutral); D (Disagree); SD (Strongly Disagree).

Table 3 shows that in terms of Language Problems many students have serious difficulties in connecting sentences smoothly and logically to write a paragraph (3.62) and find it challenging to use appropriate academic language in research article writing (3.59). The students' mean score shows that students have more difficulties in writing paragraphs smoothly and logically. This aligns with Toba et al. (2019) and Riadil (2023) who noted that grammar issues are persistent barriers for EFL writers, impacting the accuracy and professionalism of their academic work. The findings emphasize the need for focused grammar instruction and practice to enhance students' language proficiency and writing confidence.

**Table 4.**

Students' Perception on Content Problems

| No | Statements  | SA | (%)   | A  | (%)   | N  | (%)   | D  | (%)   | SD | (%)  | Mean |
|----|---|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|------|------|
| 1  | I find it difficult to create a thesis statement that presents a clear argument or point of view. | 6  | 9.09  | 26 | 39.39 | 20 | 30.30 | 10 | 15.15 | 4  | 6.06 | 3.30 |
| 2  | I struggle to provide sufficient evidence to Support my arguments.                                | 9  | 13.63 | 26 | 39.39 | 18 | 27.27 | 10 | 15.15 | 3  | 4.54 | 3.42 |

|   |  |    |       |    |       |    |       |    |       |   |      |      |
|---|--|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|---|------|------|
| 3 | I find it challenging to maintain focus on the main topic throughout my writing. | 11 | 16.6  | 18 | 27.27 | 30 | 45.45 | 5  | 7.57  | 2 | 3.03 | 3.46 |
| 4 | I have trouble connecting the information from my source to my ideas.            | 7  | 10.6  | 24 | 36.36 | 18 | 27.27 | 13 | 19.69 | 4 | 6.06 | 3.27 |
| 5 | I have difficulty summarizing and synthesizing information from various sources. | 9  | 13.63 | 29 | 43.93 | 17 | 25.75 | 9  | 13.63 | 2 | 3.03 | 3.51 |

Scale: SA (Strongly Agree); A (Agree); N (Neutral); D (Disagree); SD (Strongly Disagree).

Table 4 shows that in terms of Content, many students have serious difficulties in summarizing and synthesizing information from various sources (3.51) and find it challenging to maintain focus on the main topic throughout my writing (3.46). The students' mean score shows that in terms of content, students have more difficulties in summarizing and synthesizing information from various sources. Sasmita & Setyowati (2021) and Hasanah et al. (2023) similarly found that EFL students often struggle with content development, resulting in less detailed and less coherent arguments. Therefore, teaching strategies that promote critical thinking and idea development are necessary to help students produce more comprehensive and insightful research articles.

**Table 5.**

Students' perception on the problem of Research Article Components

| No | Statements  | SA | (%)  | A  | (%)   | N  | (%)   | D  | (%)   | SD | (%)   | Mean |
|----|---|----|------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|------|
| 1  | I struggle with understanding the structure of a research article (e.g., introduction, methods, results). | 3  | 4.54 | 12 | 18.18 | 18 | 27.27 | 16 | 24.24 | 17 | 25.75 | 2.51 |
| 2  | I find it challenging to write a comprehensive literature review.   | 4  | 6.06 | 26 | 39.39 | 26 | 39.39 | 7  | 10.6  | 3  | 4.54  | 3.31 |

|   |   |    |       |    |       |    |       |    |       |   |      |      |
|---|---|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|---|------|------|
| 3 | I have difficulties formulating research questions or hypotheses.                                   | 8  | 12.12 | 16 | 24.24 | 17 | 25.75 | 19 | 28.78 | 6 | 9.09 | 3.01 |
| 4 | I find it difficult to explain my research findings in a way that is easy for others to understand. | 7  | 10.6  | 22 | 33.33 | 25 | 37.87 | 9  | 13.63 | 3 | 4.54 | 3.31 |
| 5 | I struggle with crafting a strong conclusion that summarizes my research effectively.               | 10 | 15.15 | 20 | 30.30 | 23 | 34.84 | 9  | 13.63 | 4 | 6.06 | 3.34 |

**Scale:** SA (Strongly Agree); A (Agree); N (Neutral); D (Disagree); SD (Strongly Disagree).

Table 5 shows that in terms of Research Article Components, many students have many difficulties in crafting a strong conclusion that summarizes their research effectively (3.34), the results also show that many students experience difficulties in writing a comprehensive literature review (3.31) and explaining research findings in a way that is easy for others to understand (3.31). This finding supports Muamaroh et al. (2020) and Wiranda et al. (2024), who reported that EFL students often lack understanding of the structure and purpose of research article sections, particularly the discussion. Explicit instruction and modeling of each research article component, especially the discussion, can help students meet academic expectations and improve their writing quality.

**Table 6.**

Students' Perception on the Problem of In-Text Citation References

| No | Statements  | SA | (%)  | A  | (%)   | N  | (%)   | D  | (%)   | SD | (%)   | Mean |
|----|---|----|------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|------|
| 1  | I have difficulty properly citing sources within my research articles.                          | 6  | 9.09 | 23 | 34.84 | 15 | 22.72 | 10 | 15.15 | 12 | 18.18 | 3.01 |
| 2  | I struggle with understanding different citation styles (e.g., APA, MLA).                       | 6  | 9.09 | 19 | 28.78 | 14 | 21.21 | 18 | 27.27 | 9  | 13.63 | 2.92 |
| 3  | I find it challenging to paraphrase information correctly while maintaining academic integrity. | 6  | 9.09 | 28 | 42.42 | 16 | 24.24 | 15 | 22.72 | 1  | 1.51  | 3.34 |

|   |  |   |      |    |       |    |       |    |       |   |      |      |
|---|--|---|------|----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|---|------|------|
| 4 | I encounter problems with creating a reference list that adheres to citation guidelines. | 6 | 9.09 | 19 | 28.78 | 18 | 27.27 | 16 | 24.24 | 7 | 10.6 | 3.01 |
| 5 | I have trouble integrating direct quotes smoothly into my own writing                    | 6 | 9.09 | 16 | 24.24 | 22 | 33.33 | 17 | 25.75 | 5 | 7.57 | 3.04 |

**Scale:** SA (Strongly Agree); A (Agree); N (Neutral); D (Disagree); SD (Strongly Disagree).

Table 6 shows that in terms of In-Text Citation References many students find it challenging to paraphrase information correctly while maintaining academic integrity (3.34) and having trouble integrating direct quotes smoothly into their own writing (3.04). Riadil (2023) also found that citation and referencing skills are often neglected in EFL writing instruction, leading to confusion and potential issues with academic integrity. Comprehensive training on citation styles and referencing conventions is essential to help students properly attribute sources and avoid plagiarism.

Based on the data shown in Tables 3-7, the average of the mean of each category can be calculated. The results indicated that the average mean of each category of the difficulties in research article writing is as follows: Writing problem (3.3), Language Problem (3.45), Content Problem (3.39), Problems in Research Article Components (3.1), and Problems in In-Text Citation References (3.06). The means of all categories of the students' perception on different aspects of research article writing are shown in Figure 1.

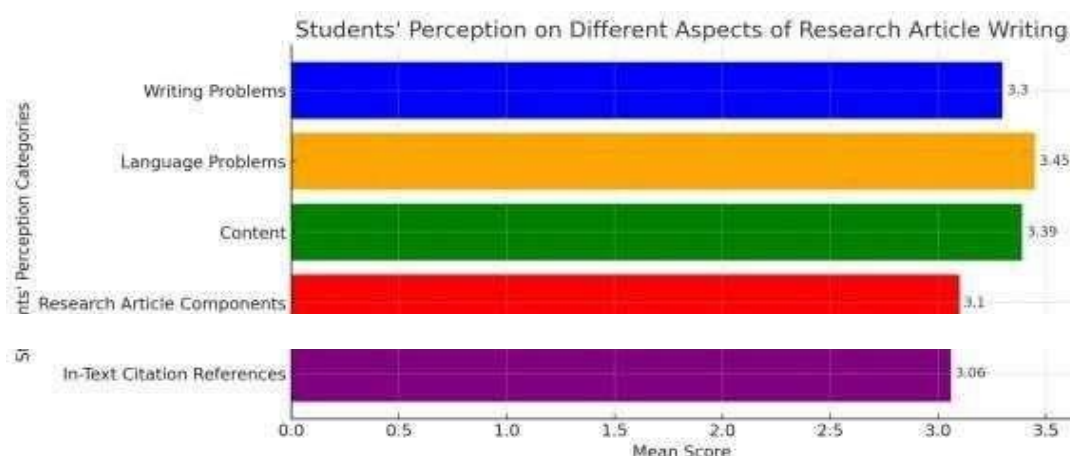


Figure 1. Students' Perception of Different Aspects of Research Article Writing

From the results, it can be revealed that many students experienced Language Problems as the most significant challenge in their writing process, with the highest mean score of 3.45. This indicates that issues such as grammar, vocabulary usage, sentence structure, and overall language proficiency greatly affect their ability to write effectively. In

addition, content, with a mean score of 3.39, highlights their struggles in organizing ideas, developing coherent arguments, and presenting relevant information in their writing. Furthermore, Writing Problems (mean score: 3.3) reflect difficulties in planning, drafting, revising, and editing their work efficiently. Meanwhile, Research Article Components, scoring 3.1, suggest moderate challenges in understanding and applying academic writing structures like introductions, methodologies, and conclusions. The mean score was found by totaling the total score of each category and dividing it by 66, which is the total number of participants.

Lastly, In-Text Citation References, with the lowest mean score of 3.06, still indicate students' difficulties in adhering to academic referencing standards. The findings highlight the areas where students specifically need support for improving their academic writing skills and confidence. More particularly, given that Language Problems received the highest mean score (3.45), this requires immediate attention, as proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure is foundational for success in research article writing.

### **What factors do EFL undergraduate students most frequently identify as causing difficulties in research article writing?**

When students were asked about the most frequent factors contributing to their difficulties in research article writing, they generally identified both technical and psychological obstacles. The technical factors included challenges such as selecting a topic, managing their time effectively, and difficulties with grammar. As for psychological factors, one student reported experiencing a lack of timely and constructive feedback from their supervisors, which often resulted from limited opportunities for consultation. This lack of feedback was perceived as a significant barrier that hindered their progress and confidence during the writing process. The factors on Writing Problems that caused their difficulties in writing a research article were based on their technical experience, such as time management, confusion on starting a paragraph, and lack of vocabulary. This is evident from what each participant has mentioned.

*Andini: I sometimes find it difficult and exhausting to express my ideas in Writing because I haven't written research articles for quite some time. Aulia: For example, I want to write about ESP, but I don't know where I should start when explaining it.*

*Hendra: Sometimes I struggle because my English vocabulary is limited, and there are so many words to choose from. That's why sometime I don't feel confident enough to write*

When asked about Language Use that caused their difficulties in writing, one of them mentioned that it was a lack of grammar rules, which is one of the important aspects in

writing mechanics. This can be identified in Hendra's statement.

*Hendra: I lack grammar skills and don't enjoy writing; I'm more into communication, like speaking.*

*Dimas: Even if my ideas are good, I worry that my grammar mistakes will make my writing unclear.*

When asked about the Content, some of them had difficulties in finding ideas and deciding on a topic, which makes it challenging for them to maintain focus on a certain topic.

*Andini: I do have difficulties in finding ideas and content for my research article, because of the dilemma that I'm facing.*

*Aulia: The earlier writing process was difficult for me because deciding on a topic and what content to write takes time.*

*Hendra: The less references that I read the more difficult for me to do my research article, because developing the idea and with the lack references is a bit tricky for me.*

When asked about factors on Research Article Components that caused their difficulties in writing research article, one of them mentioned that it was having struggled to express their findings in a clear way. Andini's words show this difficulty.

*Andini: I still struggle on how to write my findings in a way that other people can understand easily, because I need to elaborate the data with my own words.*

When asked about the factors on In-Text Citation References that caused difficulties in writing research articles, include difficulty in properly citing sources within the research articles. The following is the evidence stated by one of the participants.

*Andini: Difficulties in finding the relevant references because the topic that I chose is a bit rare, that's why I need more time on finding the references... even citing from other people's journals seems hard for me. Because I'm afraid of being accused of plagiarism.*

When asked about their psychological factors that caused their problems with research article writing, one person stated that a supervisor is one of the factors that causes issues when writing a research article.

*Dimas: I did not have much time for a consultation session with my supervisor, sometimes I get stressed between work and my research article. So, I end up with procrastination. Time management is a huge factor for me in the process of writing a research article.*

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study show that EFL students in Malang City experience a range of general composition problems when writing research articles, reflected in the categories of writing problems, language problems, content problems, research article components, and in-text citation problems. These categories are widely recognized in the literature as central to the writing challenges faced by EFL students (Muamaroh et al., 2020).

Writing problems were a persistent challenge for students, including difficulties in generating ideas, organizing thoughts, and achieving coherence in their writing. This is consistent with the work of Muamaroh et al. (2020) and Asnas & Hidayanti (2024), who found that EFL students frequently struggle with content, organization, and mechanics. One Aulia shared, "I often get stuck at the beginning and don't know how to organize my ideas into a logical flow."

Language problems emerged as the most significant difficulty, with students reporting ongoing struggles with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. These issues hindered their ability to express ideas accurately and clearly, echoing findings by Toba et al. (2019) and Riadil (2023), who identified grammar and vocabulary as major barriers for EFL students in academic writing. The interviews supported this, with students expressing a lack of confidence in their language skills. One student stated, "Even if my ideas are good, I worry my grammar mistakes will make my writing unclear." This highlights that language proficiency is a critical issue affecting all other aspects of research article writing. Content problems were also prominent among EFL students. Many reported challenges in developing and supporting their ideas, maintaining unity, and ensuring (Cohen et al., 2019), who found that EFL students often have difficulty elaborating arguments and integrating supporting evidence. Interview responses in this study revealed that students struggled to expand on their points and connect arguments logically.

One participant explained, "I know what I want to say, but I don't know how to develop it or support it with enough references." This highlights the need for more focused instruction on content development and argumentation. Problems with research article components, such as structuring the introduction, methodology, results, and discussion sections, were also evident. Students found it difficult to understand the distinct purposes of each section and to organize their writing according to academic standards. This is supported by Wiranda et al. (2024), who reported that students often struggle with the technical conventions of research articles. Qualitative findings from interviews echoed this, as students expressed uncertainty about what to include in each section. For example, Andini said, "I still struggle with how to write my findings in a way that other people can understand easily, because I need to elaborate the data with my own words". This suggests a need for clearer guidance and practical examples regarding research article structure.

Difficulties with in-text citations and references were also noted. Students struggled to apply citation formats correctly and expressed concern about unintentional plagiarism. (Riadil, 2023) the importance of citation skills for academic integrity, and the present study's

interviews confirmed these concerns. Students admitted to being unsure about citation rules and found referencing tedious and confusing. One participant said, "I'm always worried about making mistakes in my citations and being accused of plagiarism." This underlines the importance of practical training in citation and referencing.

In addition to these writing challenges, time management was also highlighted as a significant factor. Dimas admitted that poor time management led to rushed writing and insufficient revision, with one student stating, "I did not have much time for consultation with my supervisor. Sometimes I get stressed between work and my research article, so I end up procrastinating. Time management is a huge factor for me. This suggests that time management is closely linked to writing problems and can further hinder students' ability to produce coherent research articles.

This discussion not only contextualizes the results within the broader literature but also highlights the importance of addressing both technical and psychological aspects in academic writing instruction. Ultimately, these insights underscore the need for educators to design interventions that foster students' confidence, expand their vocabulary, and provide structured opportunities for academic writing practice, thereby enabling students to overcome the identified challenges and succeed in their research article writing endeavors.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that EFL students in Malang City face a combination of technical and psychological obstacles in research article writing. Among the technical challenges, language and content problems are the most significant difficulties that students encounter, with language issues, particularly grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, emerging as the predominant barrier, and content problems, such as organizing ideas logically, developing arguments in detail, and presenting coherent information, closely. These technical challenges are compounded by psychological and procedural factors, including time management, topic selection, and, most notably, the lack of timely and constructive feedback due to limited access to supervisor consultations. These findings underscore the need for academic writing instruction to prioritize explicit language support, practical training in content development and organization, and comprehensive guidance on academic conventions. Furthermore, institutions and supervisors should enhance the quality, accessibility, and timeliness of feedback and consultations, as these were identified as key psychological and procedural challenges. Since this study focused on students' perceived difficulties and did not evaluate the effects of specific interventions,



future research could usefully investigate the effectiveness of targeted language support programs, structured supervisor feedback strategies, and the influence of psychological factors such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety on students' research article writing outcomes

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