

## ONLINE LEARNING ON ACADEMIC WRITING: IMPLEMENTING THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING APPROACH

**Benny A. Pribadi**

bennyp@ecampus.ut.ac.id

### **Abstract**

This present study aims to elaborate on the use of the experiential learning approach that can facilitate students in fulfilling their academic writing assignments. Writing an academic paper requires not only knowledge of the substance, but also the skills to write. Most of the students have no idea of what to write and how to write the proper academic paper. The Academic Writing Course is one of the courses which is offered to students. This course offered an online tutorial program to help the students to master their academic writing skills. This present study involved 30 participants. Those were the students who took an instructional online course on Academic Writing offered by the Educational Faculty of the Universitas Terbuka. The online course was designed and developed by implementing the principles of experiential learning which was aimed to facilitate the participants to write a proper academic paper. At the end of the program, the participants must submit an example of the written assignment of an academic paper. In this study, the papers were assessed and graded based on the rubric of the standard for academic writing papers. The results of the study indicate that implementing the experiential approach in academic writing courses facilitates the students in achieving the competencies in writing the proper academic paper.

Keywords: Online learning, academic writing, experiential approach.

### **Background**

Recently, online learning has been used as a delivery mode of courses by many higher education institutions. Universitas Terbuka (UT), a higher education institution that implements the open and distant learning system, uses an online mode to support students' learning process. Online tutorial programs are offered to facilitate the students to attain the predetermined learning competencies. The Academic Writing Course is one of the courses which is offered to students. This course offered an online tutorial program to help the students to master their academic writing skills.

Academic writing skills are required for students since the majority of them face difficulties or problems in writing the proper academic papers. Karavas and Zorbas (2019) in this sense noted that one of the most disconcerting and dreadful moments for any college student is the laborious preparation and prompt submission of the academic writing assignment.

Most of the students have no idea of what to write and how to write the proper academic papers. Writing academic papers require not only knowledge of the substance, but also the skills to write. There are ten principles of writing a good standard of academic papers which include (1) clear purpose; (2) analytical period; (3) informative purpose; (4) audience engagement; (5) clear point of view; (6) single focus; (7) logical organization; (8) strong support; (9) correct APA style; and

(10) using formal words (Whitaker, 2009). These principles of academic writing must be applied to produce a good standard of academic paper.

Academic writing requires real experience and continuing exercise for the students. Indeed, the learners have to be involved in real learning activities to be able to write academic papers properly. Universitas Terbuka (UT) offers an academic writing course as a compulsory credit for all study programs. The students have to submit an academic paper as one of the requirements for completing their study program at UT.

Since the students have difficulties in writing the papers, UT must find an instructional approach that can be used appropriately to facilitate the student's learning process in writing the academic papers. It is assumed that the students have meaningful learning experiences to master their academic writing skills.

One of the instructional approaches that can be implemented to solve the students' learning problems in writing the paper is exposing the students to experiential learning. This approach provides the students with the opportunity to engage in the authentic experiences and activities of writing the academic paper. This present article will elaborate on the use of the experiential learning approach to facilitate students in fulfilling their academic writing assignments.

### **Research problems**

The research problems that will be elaborated on in this present study include:

1. Does the experiential learning approach contribute to the student learning process in writing academic papers?
2. How to implement experiential learning that can facilitate the student's learning process of academic writing?

### **Literature review**

#### *Academic writing*

Academic writing is, of course, any formal written work produced in an academic setting (Valdes, 2019). In addition, Oshima and Hogue (2017) note academic writing as the kind of writing used in high school and college classes. Academic writing is different from creative writing. The purpose of academic writing is to inform, analyze, and persuade the reader to engage critically in a scholarly dialogue. Valdes (2019) also noted that academic writing has the following specific characteristics such as (1) Literary analysis; (2) Research paper; (3) Dissertation; and (4) Impersonal tone.

Every paragraph and sentence of the academic paper related to that previously stated focus. The academic paper includes background or contextual information. The whole content of the academic paper is directed to support the stated thesis statement.

Academic writing requires a logical and straightforward structure. In general, it consists of an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The introduction describes the background of information, lays out the essay's scope and purpose, and states the thesis. The body paragraphs of the academic writing support the thesis statement. Every paragraph of academic writing elaborates on the supporting point. The conclusion part of the academic writing refers back to the thesis, summarizes the main points, and highlights the implications of the paper's findings. Each sentence and paragraph is related to the next to present logic and a clear argument.

Academic writing needs well-informed arguments. The written statements must be supported by evidence from scholarly sources or quotations from a primary text. The use of evidence in academic writing provides credibility to the argument.

The purpose of academic writing is to communicate a logical argument from an objective standpoint. Emotional, inflammatory, or otherwise biased language must be avoided in academic writing. Agreement or disagreement with the idea must be presented accurately and objectively in academic writing.

The students must be involved in real writing experiences to master academic writing skills. It involves continuous practice and real-world experiences to be able to write the proper academic paper. The authentic learning approach must be implemented to facilitate the student's learning process of academic writing.

### ***The experiential learning approach***

#### *Online learning*

Online learning has been used by many educational institutions in the world. This new approach to teaching promises many advantages both for faculties and students. Online learning is defined from many perspectives. Online learning is defined as a new domain of learning that combines distance education with the practice of face-to-face instruction utilizing computer-mediated communication (Harasim, 2017).

Bakia, et.al. (2012) noted that online learning refers to instructional environments supported over the Internet. Online learning comprises a wide variety of programs that use the Internet within and beyond school walls to provide access to instructional materials as well as facilitate interaction among teachers and students.

As a new model of teaching and learning, the use of online learning has some characteristics that promise advantages to support effective learning activities. Dull and Sakshi (2017) noted the following advantages of using online learning: “ 1) Accessibility, 2) Personalised learning, 3) Develops cognitive abilities, 4) Cost-effectiveness, 5) Promotes research, 6) Basic computer skills, 7) Equal opportunity to all, 8) Self-pacing, and 9) Globalization.

Nevertheless, Dull and Sakshi (2017) also noted the disadvantages of using online learning as follows: “ 1) Poor communication, 2) Feeling isolated, 3) Lack of motivation, 4) Lack of quality, and 5) Poor accessibility in Remote Areas.”

To avoid the disadvantages of using online learning, it is necessary to design and develop the program in advance. The whole components of online learning – instructors, curriculum, students, methods and media, and supporting facilities – must be integrated to ensure that the program works well to enhance learning effectiveness.

Online students benefit greatly from the online learning program in the following ways: (1) because of their connectivity with one another, they can share knowledge and fulfill common goals, which can reduce students’ dropout rates; (2) the relationship and interaction between the instructor and learners and among peer learners can increase student performances and their satisfaction of the course; and (3) learners can receive supports and help from their peers, and at the same time they can add their knowledge base through their interactive actions (Yuan & Kim, 2014)

The use of online learning has to engage the students in previously designed and developed learning activities. The students’ learning engagement is one of the important factors determining the success of online learning.

The most powerful instruction is interactive and generative.

Interactive instruction actively engages the learner with the resources and learning context to construct new knowledge and skills. Generative instruction, like generative assessment, brings learners with different perspectives together to produce shared understandings. (Jones, B.F. et.al, 1995)

Media and technology, one important feature of using online learning, can be used to increase students’ learning engagement in online learning. Appropriate selection of using media and instructional strategy enables the students to attain the learning outcomes.

Sun and Chen (2016) noted that the effectiveness of online instruction is dependent on well-designed course content, motivating interaction between the instructor and learners, and well-

prepared and fully supported instructors. With our thorough analysis of this matter, this study further confirms that teachers definitely and indisputably play a crucial role in online education.

### *Experiential learning*

Experiential learning is considered the idea that experiences are triggered through our intensive interactions and engagement with our real world. Learning in this sense is viewed as an inevitable product of experience. This learning theory is different from cognitive and behavioral learning theories as it takes a more holistic approach.

Experiential Learning is defined as the process of learning by doing. By engaging students in hands-on experiences and reflection, they are better able to connect theories and knowledge learned in the classroom to real-world situations. Implementing experiential learning provides benefits for students in terms of 1) a **better grasp of concepts**, 2) **the opportunity to be more creative**, 3) **the opportunity to reflect**, 4) **Students' mistakes become valuable experiences**, 5) engaging students' emotions as well as enhancing their knowledge and skills. (<https://www.easchooltours.com/blog/experiential-learning-learn-through-experience>).

In addition, Kolb and Kolb (2005) provide more insight into the definition of experiential learning through propositions of experiential learning theory. These propositions include 1) learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes. 2) all learning is relearning. 3) learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world. 5) learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world. 8) learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment. 7) learning is the process of creating knowledge. (p. 194).

### **Methods**

This present study involved 30 participants. Those were the students who took an instructional online course on Academic Writing offered by the Educational Faculty of the Universitas Terbuka. The online course was designed and developed by implementing the principles of experiential learning which was aimed to facilitate the participants to be the ability to write a proper academic paper. In this course, the participants wrote exercises systematically with real writing activities as experiential learning. The participants had to complete every step of the academic writing assignment for example introduction, research problem, research objective, literature review, research method, findings, discussion, conclusion and recommendation, and references. Every step of the student's assignment was graded and provided constructive learning feedback.

At the end of the program, the participants must submit an example of the whole written assignment of the academic paper assignments. In this study, the papers were assessed and graded based on the rubric of the standard for academic writing papers. The rubrics of the academic writing standard can be shown in the following tables.

**Table. The Academic Writing Standard**

NO	STANDARDS	COMPONENTS
1	Problem Definition and Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statement of the research problem, the aims of the paper, and the significance of the research. Explanation of the scope of the study.</li> <li>• Use of a research methodology appropriate to the task.</li> <li>• A discerning selection of the relevant, current, and seminal law (legislation, cases, main texts, and journal articles)</li> </ul>
2	Analysis and Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of the research sources used to address the research problem.</li> <li>• Discussion of implications of the analysis and its relationship to the research problem.</li> <li>• Use of logical argument.</li> <li>• Suggestions for law reform, directions of future research, or other avenues to promote the resolution of the issues (as appropriate to the specific task).</li> </ul>
3	Structure and Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulation and progression of major components or sections of the project.</li> <li>• Maintenance of the overall theme or point that gives the project coherence and significance.</li> <li>• Clarity, precision, and economy of writing.</li> <li>• Accurate use of academic language and writing conventions appropriate for the specific task.</li> </ul>
4	Presentation and Referencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good overall presentation of paper as appropriate to the task.</li> <li>• Appropriate pagination, layout, margins, typographical accuracy, consistent and appropriate citation style, use of headings, etc.</li> <li>• Correct attribution of sources through citations.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• References are listed in the bibliography.</li></ul>
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In addition, the questionnaires and interview sessions were used to gather information regarding the students' perception of experiential learning in academic writing. The questionnaires and interview guide were based on the components of authentic learning shown in the following tables.

### **Research findings and discussion**

The results of the study indicate that implementing the authentic learning approach in academic writing courses facilitates the students in achieving the ability in writing the proper academic paper. The provision of systematic steps in completing the academic writing helped students improve their understanding of writing the academic paper or article.

Real learning exercises during the process of academic writing were provided to facilitate students to complete their drafts of academic writing papers or articles. 95 % of the student achieved 85 % of the determined passing grade based on the academic standard rubrics. Students learned the substance or content better when they are allowed to encounter the real experience of academic writing (Kolb, 2014).

The systematic processes of writing an academic paper were introduced to students. The processes of writing include

In addition, Hill and Macdonald (2016), noted that constructive feedback provision during the academic process of learning facilitated the learners to improve their learning performance. Providing constructive feedback enables the students to learn and correct their academic writing assignments during the process of learning.

Throughout the study that implements the process of experiential learning, the learner engaged in posing questions actively, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning, and is challenged to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results. Students construct their knowledge of writing an academic paper by interacting with instructors, peers, and learning materials.

The analysis regarding students' perception of using experiential learning in writing academic papers indicated that the majority of the students were enthusiastic and enjoy the whole learning process. They are involved in the elements of experiential learning such as concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Kolb proposes the relationship between the elements of experiential learning in the following figure.



Gambar. Elements of Experiential Learning

<https://www.google.com/search?q=learning+process+with+experiential+learning&rlz>

## Conclusions

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