

**An Analysis of Student' Writing Difficulties in Online Learning During COVID-19 Pandemic At 4<sup>TH</sup> Semester in Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu**

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**Abstract**

Writing is a complex and essential skill that plays a significant role in communication, education, and professional endeavors. However, many students encounter various difficulties when engaging in writing tasks, especially in covid-19 pandemic. The aim of the research is to find out student's writing difficulties in online learning during COVID-19 pandemic at 4<sup>TH</sup> semester in Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu. The design of this research was descriptive method. The instrument of the research was questionnaire. The result showed that there are four factors that make fourth semester students have writing difficulties in online learning during pandemic Covid 19, namely : organization, content of the text, grammar and vocabulary mastery. The dominant factor of the students writing difficulties is vocabulary mastery. It implies that the students need to practice regularly and set aside dedicated time for writing practice. In addition, the students can seek support if they are still facing persistent challenges in writing, consider seeking additional support from lecturers, counselors, or professionals specializing in learning writing difficulties to help them in personalizing strategies and interventions tailored to the students' specific needs especially enhancing their knowledge about organization, content, grammar and add their vocabularies.

**Key words: Writing, Online Learning, Writing Difficulties**

**INTRODUCTION**

Learning English in Indonesia in this current situation, especially in Muhammadiyah University Bengkulu, is experiencing considerable challenges because learning that usually done face-to-face has stopped and is diverted to online learning. It's a different technique to keep the effectiveness of English learning consistent. Educators must be innovative when building appealing learning materials for online learning in Covid-19 so that students can understand the topic and are not bored.

Online learning is a new style of learning that uses the internet to construct a study environment or system without the need to be physically present in a classroom. According to Prayudha (2021:189) said that online learning has become the best alternative in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic like this to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As a result, both lecturers and students must be able to use a variety of learning tools to keep up with their studies, this online learning has its own restrictions and varies by user, thus some people have difficulties understanding the online learning

offered by the teacher, while others are quick to understand the online learning. Especially when it comes to studying English, which is centered on four skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. According to Nurcholis et.al (2023) in general there are several factors that cause academic stress experienced and acknowledged by these students, namely first, lecturers who did not want to be met in person. They wanted to do guidance only online through technology applications from home (WFH); Second, it is the difficulty in collecting research data; Third, lecturers who always crossed out revisions that have been made, think they are still wrong and did not understand what is being suggested, so it is difficult to get recommendations for the thesis trial; Fourth, the lecturer asked to look for some suggested literature; Fifth, the lecturers were busy and only asked the student under his guidance to put the thesis on his desk or entrust it to someone at home. Here, students were just waiting for a response from the lecturer which tends to be slow; and at last, lecturers who did not understand the health conditions, academic abilities, psychology, and economics of students' parents.

Writing is a process to get product. Writing necessitates more sophisticated mental processes. When beginning to write, one must consider and construct the concept of what they will write. Developing writing ideas can be difficult at times, causing someone to abandon the project halfway through. According to Hadley (1993), writing requires composing, which implies the ability either to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narrative or description, or to transform information into new texts as in expository or argumentative writing. So, the students have to more practice writing to make them understand how to write good writing.

But, when online learning the students difficult to writing practice. They difficult to communicate with the lecturer and the other students to ask or discuss about writing subject. Moreover, the students are more motivated when they can study together in class. According to Thenmozhi and Ponmozhi (2017) the students are only given a portion of the content without explanation, and they must then continue to study on the questions that the teacher has delivered to them via learning media. Not only the students, the teacher also has an obstacle for the learning in creating explanation, strength, material enrichment and the clarification of the material.

Based on interview some students in fourth semester when they learn writing subject online, it found that the students difficult to understand the writing material. They difficult to finish the exercise from the lecturer and difficult to communicate with the lecturer and the other students.

There are some previous studies support this research, they are: first, Simanihuruk and Silalahi (2021) Students' Writing Difficulties in Online Learning during Covid-19 Pandemic. They found that the students have difficulties in writing recount text during online learning at situation of Covid-19 pandemic. The difficulties in four aspects of writing, they are sentence construction, organizing text, paragraphing aspect and text cohesion aspect. It is supported by the degree of percentage score of the questionnaires scores they are sentence construction aspect with Agree scale 55.2 %, organizing a text and paragraphing aspect with Agree scale 51.95 %, text cohesion aspect with Agree scale 51.95% and register/style aspect with Strongly Agree scale 47.5 %. Second, Mohammad et.al (2020) Difficulties of Writing in English Encountered by Iraqi EFL Learners at University Level. They found that "incorrectness in using mechanics of writings" occupies the top of difficulties faced by Iraqi university EFL students in writing English, followed by "lack of assessment rubrics

and marking scheme tools". The third rank of items was "lack of ideas", while 'Grammar Difficulties' ranked fourth. Other items 'Lack of help', 'Lack of materials for Consulting', 'Unsuitable methods of teaching writing', 'Topic inappropriateness', and 'Time restriction' were almost similar in rankings. The last, Alisha et.al (2019) Students difficulties in writing EFL. They revealed that the most significant problems are because of their lack of vocabulary mastery and language used. They assumed that they had limited knowledge in constructing sentence grammatically and also their lack of vocabulary mastery made them felt confused in choosing the word. Besides, they also had problem in spelling. They often left hesitant in writing English word and assumed their spelling is not good enough.

Studies on writing difficulties have found students problem in writing skills, however no one of them conducted this topic in different period and different circumstances like in pandemic era because it is important to recognize the impact of the pandemic on writing skills and address the associated challenges. Lecturers can provide additional support, foster a sense of community through virtual platforms, offer targeted feedback and guidance, and adapt instructional strategies to promote writing skill development in remote or hybrid learning environments. According to Vygotsky's (1997) states that learning and development are shaped by social and cultural factors. In the pandemic era, this theory is relevant as it emphasizes the impact of the social and cultural context on students' writing development, including the challenges they may face. Therefore, In this study, the researcher interested to conduct the research about **"An Analysis Of Student' Writing Difficulties in Online Learning During COVID-19 Pandemic At 4<sup>th</sup> Semester in Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu."**

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Design

This research used qualitative research as the research design. Lune and Berg (2017, P 22-26) said that qualitative research is research on collecting non – numeric primary data such as word and pictures that function as their own instruments making qualitative research suitable for providing factual and descriptive information

### Subject

The subject of this research was the fourth semester students in English Education Program who have taken writing skill subject

### Instrument

The instrument of this research was questionnaire. The questionnaire adapted from Alisha et.al (2019) and Habibi (2017) research about students difficulties in writing. Total of the questionnaire was 25 item.

### Technique of Collecting the Data

The data collected by using steps below:

1. The researcher made questionnaire in google form
2. The researcher met the students in online way Whats App
3. The researcher distributed the link google form of questionnaire to students, asked them to answer it
4. The data will be collected

### Technique of Analyzing the Data

First, the data was classified and evaluated by using percentage formula. Second, the data was analyzed and described. The last, the researcher made the conclusion regarding the result of the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**a. The Total Result of the Student' Writing Difficulties in Online Learning During COVID-19 Pandemic At 4TH Semester in Muhammadiyah University Bengkulu**

In this part, the researcher found the factors of Student' Writing Difficulties in Online Learning During COVID-19 Pandemic At 4<sup>th</sup> Semester in Muhammadiyah University Bengkulu. The data can be seen from the table below:

**Table 1 The total of Result**

Factor	Responses (%)	
	Positive	Negative
Organization	62%	38%
Content of The Text	59%	41%
Grammar Mastery	56%	44%
Mechanic	32%	68%
Vocabulary Mastery	64%	36%
	55%	45%

As indicated in table 1, there are four factors that make the students have writing difficulties in online learning during pandemic Covid 19 namely: organization, content of the text, grammar mastery and vocabulary mastery. The dominant factor of the students writing difficulties is vocabulary mastery. It indicates that the student have limited vocabulary so that they find writing skills as one of problematic skills in learning English. By knowing and understanding the factors that contribute to success in writing tasks, you can approach your writing endeavors with clarity, purpose, and a strategic mindset, ultimately enhancing your overall writing skills and achieving better results.

**b. Student' Writing Difficulties in Online Learning During COVID-19 Pandemic At 4TH Semester in Muhammadiyah University Bengkulu**

1. Organization

In this part, the researcher find the organization as a factor of students' writing difficulties in online learning during Covid 19. The data can be seen in the table below:

Table 2 Organization

No	Statement	Frequencies	
		Positive (+)	Negative (-)
1	When learning writing online, students have difficulty understanding the generic structure so they don't pay attention to the generic structure in writing	65%	35%
2	When learning writing online, students feel that the ideas shared are not clear and well organized	61%	39%
3	When learning writing online, students have difficulty understanding what to write	70%	30%
4	When learning writing online while writing students feel that each paragraph is not coherent	52%	48%
5	When learning writing online, students rarely pay attention to the order of sentences in each paragraph	60%	40%
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>62%</b>	<b>38%</b>

As indicated in table 2, it shows that organization is one of factors of students writing difficulties in online learning during Covid 19. It indicates that the students difficult to make good writing because they do not understand about organization of the text such as introduction, body and conclusion of the text. Besides, the students do not understand about generic structure of the text so that the students find it difficult to write because the text was not organized well. Furthermore, the unclear ideas and incoherent text are indicated as two indicators of this problem. In conclusion, the students are still lack of knowledge about organization of the text when online learning so the students are probably confused to make a good writing.

## 2. Content of The Text

In this part, the researcher found content of the text as factor of students writing difficulties in online learning during Covid 19. The data can be seen in the table below:

Table 3 Content of the Text

No	Statement	Frequencies	
		Positive (+)	Negative (-)
1	When learning writing online, students have many problems in writing and determining the main idea	57%	43%

2	When learning writing online, students have problems in arranging words to make supporting ideas	56%	44%
3	When learning writing online, students feel they cannot determine the main idea	48%	52%
4	When learning writing online, students find it difficult to define what items are related to the topic.	74%	26%
5	When learning writing online, students difficult to write supporting sentences to explain the main idea	61%	38%
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>59%</b>	<b>41%</b>

As indicated in table 4, it shows that content of the text is one of factor of students writing difficulties in online learning during Covid 19. It indicates that the students are difficult to write main idea and to arrange supporting sentence because by effectively constructing a clear main idea and organizing supporting sentences, the students can present their ideas in a coherent and compelling manner, making their writing more engaging and impactful for the readers

### 3. Grammar Mastery

In this part, the researcher found grammar mastery as factor of students writing difficulties in online learning during Covid 19. The data can be seen in the table below:

**Table 5 Grammar Mastery**

No	Statement	Frequencies	
		Positive (+)	Negative (-)
1	When learning writing online, students always have difficulty in making good and correct sentences because of their lack of ability in grammar.	61%	39%
2	When learning writing online students do not pay attention to the use of connectors in writing	39%	61%
3	When learning writing online, students often make mistakes in using action verbs in the past tense	61%	39%
4	When learning writing online, students rarely pay attention to grammatical aspects	52%	48%
5	When learning writing online, students always have problems using tenses	69%	31%
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>56%</b>	<b>44%</b>

As indicated in table 5, it shows that grammar mastery is one of factors of students writing difficulties in online learning during Covid 19. It implies that the students difficult to understand about grammar in writing. Grammar mastery is essential in writing as it facilitates clear communication, adds credibility and professionalism, enhances comprehension, and allows for effective editing and revision. It is a fundamental skill that contributes to the overall quality and impact of the students' writing. It is suggested that the students are important to strive for grammatical accuracy and continuously work on improving grammar skills through practice, study, and feedback. Proofreading and editing are also crucial steps to catch and correct grammar errors before finalizing any writing task.

4. Mechanic

In this part, the researcher finds mechanic not as factor of students writing difficulties in online learning during Covid 19. The data can be seen in the table below:

**Table 6 Mechanic**

No	Statement	Frequencies	
		Positive (+)	Negative (-)
1	When learning writing online, students feel confused about placing the correct punctuation when writing	39%	61%
2	When learning writing online, students become confused about placing a dot and a comma when writing	30%	70%
3	When learning writing online, students sometimes forget to put capital letters after the period when writing	35%	65%
4	When learning writing online students have difficulty checking the spelling of new words	52%	48%
5	When learning writing online, students feel that checking the spelling of words takes a long time	44%	56%
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>32%</b>	<b>68%</b>

As indicated in table 6, it shows that mechanic is not as factor of students writing difficulties in online learning during Covid 19. It implies that students understand about punctuation, spelling and how to use capital letter in their writing the students difficult to understand about grammar in writing. So, mechanic is not a problematic factor in writing.

5. Vocabulary Mastery

In this part, the researcher found vocabulary mastery as factor of students writing difficulties in online learning during Covid 19. The data can be seen in the table below:

Table 7 Vocabulary Mastery

No	Statement	Frequencies	
		Positive (+)	Negative (-)
1	When learning writing online, students often make some mistakes in choosing words	65%	35%
2	When learning writing online, students have difficulty expressing ideas due to lack of vocabulary	56%	44%
3	When learning writing online, students often repeat paragraphs of word writing because of limited vocabulary (vocabulary).	61%	39%
4	When learning writing online, students always use simple words in writing because of limited vocabulary (vocabulary).	61%	39%
5	When learning writing online, students feel that they always need a dictionary when writing in English	78%	22%
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>64%</b>	<b>36%</b>

As indicated in table 7, it shows that vocabulary mastery is one of factors of writing difficulties in online learning during Covid 19. It implies that the students are lack of vocabulary. It can happen because they rarely practice the writing skills just like in offline learning so that they do not add and expand their vocabularies. Therefore, the students are difficult to express their idea, to write the complete text or paragraph so that they always write repetitions words in their writing. Furthermore, to enhance vocabulary mastery, the students need to read widely, engage in word games or puzzles, and actively learn new words through vocabulary-building exercises. Regular exposure to diverse sources of written material and a conscious effort to expand the students lexicon will strengthen their vocabularies and enhance their writing skills. In addition, addressing these challenges requires employing effective teaching strategies, providing ample opportunities for exposure and practice, creating engaging and context-rich learning environments, and implementing various instructional techniques to cater to different learning styles. Encouraging regular reading, incorporating vocabulary games and activities, and fostering a curiosity for words can also help students overcome difficulties and develop stronger vocabulary skills.

## Discussion

In this part, the researcher will discuss about the result of this research. This research focuses to find out Student' Writing Difficulties in Online Learning During COVID-19 Pandemic At 4<sup>th</sup> Semester in Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu. Online learning is a modern approach to education that utilizes the internet to create a learning environment or system, eliminating the need for physical presence in a traditional classroom setting. However, not all students are familiar with this mode of learning, making it a new experience that requires adaptation. While some students eagerly embrace online learning activities,



others may display less enthusiasm for participation. Consequently, students may encounter challenges in their learning process, particularly in subjects like writing. Brown (2003) identified five specific difficulties that students face in writing, including organizing their thoughts, developing meaningful content, mastering grammar, understanding mechanics, and acquiring vocabulary proficiency.

Based on the findings, it shows that fourth-semester students face various writing difficulties in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These difficulties include organizing their thoughts, developing meaningful content, mastering grammar, and acquiring vocabulary proficiency. Among these factors, vocabulary mastery emerges as the most prominent challenge. According to Harmer (2001), students can feel frustrated when they lack the necessary words or grammar knowledge to express themselves in writing. Additionally, students may struggle when assigned topics that they find uninteresting, unfamiliar genres, or when they lack essential information. Writing prompts students to focus on using appropriate language, encouraging them to draw upon their existing knowledge or refer to dictionaries, grammar books, and other resources (Harmer: 2004). This indicates that writing entails more than just generating ideas; it involves the intricate task of selecting appropriate vocabulary and using proper sentence structures. Effective writing lies in how the writer presents and expresses these ideas.

This is in line with studies conducted by Alisha et.al (2019) revealed that the most significant problems are probably because of their lack of vocabulary mastery and language used. They assumed that they had limited knowledge in constructing sentence grammatically and also their lack of vocabulary mastery made them felt confused in choosing the word. Besides, they also had problem in spelling. They often left hesitant in writing English word and assumed their spelling is not good enough. But the result contrary with studies conducted Mohammad et.al (2020) They found that "incorrectness in using mechanics of writings" occupies the top of difficulties faced by Iraqi university EFL students in writing English, followed by lack of assessment rubrics and marking scheme tools". The third and fourth ranks were the items "lack of ideas", and 'Grammar Difficulties' respectively. Other items 'Lack of teacher's help', 'Lack of materials for Consulting', 'Unsuitable methods of teaching writing', 'Topic inappropriateness', and 'Time restriction' were almost similar in rankings. It means that in this research the the dominant of students writing difficulties is mechanic but in this research mechanic not as factor of students writing difficulties in online learning.

The findings indicate that students face challenges in organizing the generic structure of their texts during online learning. Furthermore, they struggle with developing main ideas and arranging supporting sentences to reinforce those ideas. According to Raimes (1983), another issue related to organization in student writing is the difficulty in distinguishing between a topic and supporting ideas, as well as generalizations and specific details. Poor organization or illogical sequencing may stem from ineffective teaching methods during the learning process. To address this problem, effective teaching strategies, fostering a habit of reading and writing, and encouraging participation in discussions and debates can be helpful. Grammatical errors, described as faulty, unconventional, or controversial language usage according to prescriptive grammar (Nordic, 2005) can hinder the gathering of ideas when creativity is limited. The essence of writing lies in capturing the reader's interest, and the main idea serves as the crucial focal

point in a paragraph or passage. This main idea can be explicitly stated or implied. However, apart from limited creativity on the topic, students face challenges in generating ideas, which leads to frustration in constructing their writing. These findings align with the research conducted by Simanihuruk and Silalahi (2021), who discovered that students encounter difficulties in writing recount texts during online learning amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The difficulties encompass sentence construction, organizing the text, paragraphing, and maintaining text cohesion.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **Conclusion**

Based on the previous chapter's discussion, it can be concluded that fourth-semester students encounter writing difficulties in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic due to four factors: organization, content of the text, grammar mastery, and vocabulary mastery. Among these factors, vocabulary mastery emerges as the primary challenge. Insufficient vocabulary knowledge hampers students' writing abilities, making the task difficult. To address these difficulties, it is important to emphasize consistency in supporting students to build confidence, improve writing fluency, and overcome these challenges.

### **Suggestion**

To assist students in overcoming their writing problems, it is recommended that they engage in regular writing practice to enhance their writing skills. Additionally, focusing on improving organization, content, grammar, and expanding vocabulary can be beneficial. By actively practicing these skills and expanding their knowledge, students can develop their writing abilities and overcome the difficulties they face.

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