

EFL Students' Challenges & Solutions During and After the Pandemic: A Four-Year Study in an Academic Writing Class

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Abstract—Academic writing is a genre of writing which is considered challenging and difficult by many language learners. The underlying reason is that there are many requirements to make a good piece of writing. Many skills are required in this type of writing, including, for example, paraphrasing, synthesizing, and summarizing. Academic Writing students therefore often face various problems in this “nightmare” course. This study was thus conducted to delve into the problems that 60 Academic Writing students faced, and their alternative solutions during and after the pandemic. From the data collected, it was found that in general, the students faced similar problems like having difficulties in paraphrasing, finding ideas, collaborating with others, understanding the materials, having a lack of confidence, and concentrating on the lectures. In a particular situation, that is, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were two other significant problems faced by the students: an unstable Internet connection and hindrances to work collaboratively online. Three university lecturers were also interviewed to find their opinions about what Academic Writing lecturers could do to help students minimize their learning obstacles. This study is hopefully useful for teachers of Academic Writing to discover the common problems that their students may encounter. As for the students, it is hoped that through this study, they can anticipate emerging problems and solve them.

Index Terms—Academic Writing, EFL learners, writing obstacles, COVID-19 pandemic

I. INTRODUCTION

There are four skills that EFL learners should master. One of them is writing. It is one of the productive skills besides speaking. Among several genres of writing that tertiary students should master is academic writing. It often becomes a nightmare for EFL learners due to the high requirements of academic writing. There are some challenging skills in this writing style like paraphrasing, synthesizing, summarizing, as well as making in-text and end-of-text citations. Without concerted effort and struggles, students may not be able to pass this demanding course.

Based on the importance of the topic about students' difficulties in Academic Writing, this study was conducted. Other than that, this study also highlights the problems that students experienced during and after the pandemic. It is hoped that through this research, university students, especially those taking an Academic Writing class, will be enlightened as to how they should deal with the difficulties or problems that might arise during their learning process. Furthermore, lecturers teaching second language writing may also be aided by the findings from this study.

Therefore, this study is guided by three research questions:

1. What were Academic Writing students' difficulties during the pandemic?
2. What were Academic Writing students' difficulties after the pandemic?
3. What should Academic Writing lecturers do to help students overcome their learning problems?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Academic Writing

Academic Writing is a course that should be taken by students of the English Education Program at the tertiary level. According to the course syllabus, this course aims to equip students with knowledge and skills in writing an academic paper. Students gain knowledge and skills about writing, starting with what others are saying; quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing; responding to other people's views; and refuting arguments in writing texts. The objectives of the Academic Writing course are that students can identify keywords related to a particular topic. Then, they can position their argument in the midst of what others say. They also can understand how to integrate what others say, quote, paraphrase, and appropriately summarize sources. Moreover, students can be critical of their own writing and improve their skills in using several fundamental grammatical forms through a language focus (ELEP, 2023).

Academic writing has a distinctive style. It is very formal and has certain features. It is considered to be a complex process that is difficult for many second-language writers, spontaneity being an issue (Khadawardi, 2022). According to the EAP Foundation (2022), academic writing is a crucial skill in an academic context since writing is the principal technique of academic communication. Apart from that, academic writing is formal written work produced in an academic

environment (Valdes, 2019). Students, researchers, and professors often use it to convey ideas or present their arguments. Academic writing is directed from the writer to the readers like other writing. However, it is used for specific educational purposes. Before enrolling in the Academic Writing course, students must have passed the previous writing class, Writing for the Media. Hence, learning in this course is much more complex, considering the levels students should have passed to take this class. According to Irvin (2010), academic writing is a form of evaluation that asks the writers to demonstrate their knowledge and show their proficiency with certain disciplinary skills in thinking, interpreting, as well as presenting.

B. The Features of Academic Writing

There are four key features of academic style (The University of Melbourne, 2023). The first is objectivity, the next is formality, the third is precision, and the last one is hedging. They will be explained one by one below.

Objectivity means that academic writing presents and evaluates issues and the writer has an objective position. It means that all stances proposed by the writer are based on research and reasoning, and not merely on personal emotions, feelings, or opinions. Pronouns, which are personal, like *I*, *you*, and *we* are normally avoided. Instead of using personal pronouns, it is suggested the writer use the passive voice. Additionally, the writer can use the topic as the subject. Impersonal “it” can also be used. For example, *It is understandable that some students are very passive during the learning process.*

Formality means that academic writing is explicit. It provides the readers with all the information needed. This contradicts less-formal written or spoken English, which often relies on readers or listeners to supply extra information to make the message clear and well understood. To make academic writing formal, the writer should avoid contracted forms of words. Aside from that, colloquial language must not be used. Emoticons or smileys should likewise be avoided. In this way, the academic text will be formal.

The next feature is precision. It means that in academic writing, the writer has to avoid ambiguity as much as possible. Precision covers high-level details and specificity. Information should not be confusing. Academic essay writers ought to use verbs that express concepts precisely. For example, instead of saying, “*I got here at 5 p.m.*”, the writer can write, “*I arrived here at 5 p.m.*”. Some other words that need to be made more specific are *receive an email* instead of *get an email*, or *buy a shirt* instead of *get a shirt*.

The last feature is hedging. In academic writing, hedging is used to decrease the degree of strength of unproven statements. It functions to express caution and avoid unqualified statements. For example, a writer can use a quantifier like *some*, *many*, or *a lot of*. The writer can also use adverbial phrases like *sometimes*, *often*, or *usually*. The writer can also use modal verbs like *can*, *may*, or *could*. Hedging is used to avoid generalizations.

C. Problems Faced by Students

There are many problems faced by students while taking the Academic Writing course. Students make mistakes in their writing that are intended for an academic context. Rahmatunisa (2014) found that students faced problems in writing because of linguistic, cognitive, and psychological issues related to the text structure and paragraph organization. Additionally, Shang (2012) noticed that students experienced difficulties when writing essays because they were afraid of getting negative feedback, lacked confidence, and made mistakes in writing, such as in grammar and vocabulary. According to David (2019), students face hindrances when working on academic papers in terms of plagiarism, grammatical errors, lexical challenges, and a lack of planning (as cited in Khadijah, 2019, p. 34).

Various factors or problems influence students’ writing. Dewi et al. (2021) proposed two issues that affect students’ writing: internal and external problems. Furthermore, Moses and Mohamad (2019) stated that teaching writing is difficult because of students’ challenges in learning writing skills. Next, Moses and Mohamad (2019) discovered skill-related problems that students face, such as a lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, and insufficient reading materials.

Indonesia’s position being in the expanding circle based on Kachru’s theory may contribute to the complications faced by these students. In the 1980’s, Kachru proposed a model of World Englishes, allocating the presence of English in three circles. They are the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle. The Inner Circle represents countries where English is used as the first language like the UK and USA. The Outer Circle refers to countries that used to be British colonies like Malaysia and Singapore. The Expanding Circle includes countries where English is taught as a foreign language, like China, Korea, and Indonesia (Al-Mutairi, 2020; Kachru, 1985; Kurniawan et al., 2024; Listyani, 2022). Consequently, exposure to this international language is not as much as those countries in Kachru’s idea of Inner Circle or Outer Circle.

D. Internal and External Problems

Internal problems are those that come from within the student. Internal issues may include low motivation, limited vocabulary, a lack of knowledge of organizing ideas, low interest in the topic, amongst other matters. According to Subhan (2017), motivation is an effort that encourages students to do something in order to achieve their goals. Regarding internal matters, students sometimes still need more motivation to write in an Academic Writing class.

In addition, vocabulary is essential to help students express their ideas or construct sentences when writing. Hence, more knowledge of vocabulary is needed to improve students’ success in writing. On top of that, students in an Academic Writing class sometimes need to have more interest in their topics. Students who lack interest in the topics of their papers will find it difficult to develop ideas in writing.

External problems come from outside the students themselves, such as the classroom atmosphere, the role of the lecturer or classmates, learning facilities, and others (Dewi et al., 2021). Regarding this, learning facilities such as laptops, dictionaries, and smartphones are influential in helping students write. If their learning facilities are inadequate, it will be difficult for them to continue writing in their Academic Writing class.

In addition, the role of the lecturer in the class is significant, such as for delivering material and providing feedback. Additionally, Dewi et al. (2021) stated that the instructor's role in the learning process is crucial because the teacher can help students improve their talent in writing. Therefore, appropriate techniques need to be utilized by Academic Writing lecturers to deal with students' obstacles.

E. Skill-Related Problems

Writing is one of the critical skills in English. According to Mariana et al. (2018), writing has two benefits, namely, the ability to develop creativity and contribute to someone's intelligence. However, some students need help with their writing skills. Some examples are when they paraphrase, quote, summarize, and synthesize their academic papers. A study was conducted by Mustafa et al. (2022), who investigated hindrances encountered by undergraduate students in higher education institutions in Oman. They noticed that students generally experienced problems in writing skills, namely: paraphrasing, summarizing, referencing, spelling, vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure, and others.

According to Hayuningrum (2012), paraphrasing is a helpful skill that is needed for academic writing. However, students in an Academic Writing class cannot master this writing skill easily. Paraphrasing will be difficult if it is not properly taught to students. Paraphrasing needs to be mastered to reduce the risk of plagiarism in students' writing. In addition, students experience problems in quoting and summarizing. Quoting is repeating someone's words and still acknowledging their source. When quoting, students need to pay attention to signal phrases to introduce their quotations. If they take someone else's opinion, students need to properly give credit to the source. Another skill taught in Academic Writing is summarizing. A summary is a synthesis of the key ideas of a piece of writing. The key ideas should be restated in the writer's own words. In other words, they should be paraphrased. When we summarize, we should be careful not to copy the exact wording of the original source (MIT, 2023).

F. Problems Faced by Students During the Pandemic

It is known worldwide that the pandemic which lasted for more than two years (early 2020 – late 2022) affected many aspects of life. The educational sector was not an exception. The pandemic had disrupted this sector as well. According to the Alphabetical Order of Lebanon (2020), the effectiveness of online learning is dependent on three conditions. First, it is concerned with consistent Internet access for the students and the availability of computers. Second, it is connected with training to administer courses online. The last one is related to platforms that provide learning. This is important to make the learning journey of every student go well. Without those three things mentioned, online learning will be disrupted. The teaching and learning process will not go smoothly.

In a study by Salakhova et al. (2022) on 160 students from different universities in Moscow, it was found that all students faced technical difficulties during distance learning. The problems consisted of a bad Internet connection, a lack of access to online platforms because of the great number of users, insufficient equipment, and not enough individual space for online learning. Moreover, low technical readiness for distance education, a low quality of online resources, and cyber threats also became a problem. Most of the student participants mentioned that they preferred a hybrid form of instruction, combining distance learning with face-to-face classes. The difficulty of summarizing for students can be affected by limited vocabulary. Based on Na and Mai (2017), four main problems affect students in paraphrasing and summarizing: poor English proficiency, deficient vocabulary, insufficient reading abilities, and inadequate documentation skills. In 2020, Khadijah also conducted a study on academic writing. It was found that the students' problems with plagiarism reached 23%. The next issue that followed plagiarism was grammatical errors of up to 25%. Then, lexical difficulties were up to 25%. The last hindrance was a lack of planning at 27%. It indicated that most students have various problems in academic writing.

To summarize, previous studies have shown that students face many problems in academic writing. The success or failure of writing in an Academic Writing class is influenced by how students recognize their mistakes so that they can overcome them. Furthermore, the teacher's role is essential to help students overcome these issues. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the problems students face in an Academic Writing class and know how students can deal with them.

III. METHODS

A. Participants

There were 60 participants in this study. They were from cohorts in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021. Each batch took the Academic Writing class in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023, respectively. There were 10 male students, and the rest were female students. These students were English Language Education Program (ELEP) students of a private university in Central Java, Indonesia.

TABLE 1
THE PARTICIPANTS' DATA

Students' Numbers	Students' Class Years	Years of Taking the Course	Learning Mode
St. 1 – St. 17	2018	2020	Online
St. 18 – St. 32	2019	2021	Online
St. 33 – St. 46	2020	2022	Offline
St. 47 – St. 60	2021	2023	Offline

B. Research Setting

The research was conducted in a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. As noted above, there were 60 student respondents altogether. Data from this study was collected for about four years, from 2020 until 2023.

C. Research Design

This research was qualitative in nature. This type of research tries to explore and provide insights from the participants regarding real-world problems. It does not collect statistical or numerical data like quantitative research does. Neither does it proffer a treatment. On the other hand, qualitative research generates hypotheses, investigates, and understands qualitative data (Tenny et al., 2022).

D. Data Collection Methods & Procedures

Data was collected through reflections that the student respondents had to write at the end of the semester. The reflection guiding questions are attached in the Appendix. First, the students were verbally asked for their consent to become research respondents. After they agreed, they were asked to write their reflections on the writing difficulties and solutions enacted in the Academic Writing class. Thus, only reflections were used for the data collection. The answers were then qualitatively analyzed.

IV. RESULTS

The findings of this research are shown in Table 2 (the problems) and Table 3 (the solutions). The problems in Table 2 were arranged based on the number of the problems faced by the students. The obstacles faced most by the students were listed at the top, and the least mentioned ones were placed at the bottom.

TABLE 2
ACADEMIC WRITING STUDENTS' PROBLEMS

Problems	Experienced by Students	Total	LM
1. Developing, organizing, & relating opinions/ideas	20, 24, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 51, 52, 55, 56, 57, 59	19	1 & 2
2. Understanding the materials & the quantity of materials	6, 8, 9, 10, 17, 21, 23, 25, 28, 30, 38, 41, 42	15	1 & 2
3. Paraphrasing	2, 18, 21, 22, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 47, 55, 58	14	1 & 2
4. Working with other classmates	6, 8, 9, 12, 15, 33, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 43, 46	13	1 & 2
5. Internet connection & technical problems (voice, etc.)	2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 15, 17, 39	9	1 & 2
6. Problems related to psychology: A lack of self-confidence, anxiety, & personal problems	34, 38, 47, 48, 49, 50, 53	7	2
7. No problems	1, 4, 7, 13, 14, 16	6	1
8. Making a good thesis statement	3, 19, 26, 27, 32	5	1
9. Vocabulary	38, 53, 58	3	2
10. Difficulty concentrating	45	1	2
11. Making an interesting introductory paragraph	27	1	1
12. Searching for and gathering sources & evidence	60	1	2
13. Making citations	54	1	2
14. Dealing with coherence	54	1	2
15. Writing with good grammar	58	1	2

Note: LM: Learning Mode
1: Online; 2: Offline

The solutions can be seen in Table 3. The solutions in Table 3 were arranged based on the number of options noted by the students. The solutions selected by the students most frequently were listed at the top, while those mentioned the least were placed at the bottom of the chart.

TABLE 3
ACADEMIC WRITING STUDENTS' SOLUTIONS

Solutions	Students' Numbers	Total	LM
1 Asking for classmates' help and advice	17, 18, 24, 47, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 59	11	1 & 2
2 No specific strategy	1, 2, 7, 13, 14, 16, 36, 37, 43, 49, 57	11	1 & 2
3 Practicing by themselves	22, 23, 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 38, 39	9	1 & 2
4 Trying to find a good Internet connection	3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 15	8	1
5 Reading more journal articles	33, 40, 52, 53, 55, 58	6	2
6 Consulting with the lecturer	42, 51, 52, 54, 59	5	2
7 Finding and doing some exercises from the Internet	26, 27, 28, 45, 46	5	1 & 2
8 Getting support and motivation from other peers	34, 35, 38	3	2
9 Searching for materials from Google	10, 25, 54	3	1 & 2
10 Dividing tasks among group members	4, 8	2	1
11 Using online applications	39, 59	2	1 & 2
12 Watching YouTube videos on the materials given	18, 20	2	1
13 Comforting themselves	47	1	2
14 Doing relaxing activities	48	1	2
15 Learning from grammar books	28	1	1
16 Making a study group	19	1	1
17 Making video calls with the group members	9	1	1
18 Motivating themselves	53	1	2
19 Preparing themselves for the class	3	1	1
20 Reviewing the materials	6	1	1
21 Trying to be confident	50	1	2
22 Trying to be relaxed	56	1	2
23 Trying to accept others' opinions	44	1	2
24 Trying to find new ideas	47	1	2
25 Trying to find relevant and reliable sources	60	1	2
26 Trying to manage their time better	35	1	2
27 Trying to minimize grammatical errors	58	1	2
28 Voting for the best idea among group members	6	1	1

Note: LM: Learning Mode

1: Online; 2: Offline

V. DISCUSSION

A. Students' Problems

In this section, Academic Writing students' problems and the solutions are discussed. There were fifteen problems reported by the students, and 28 solutions were utilized to overcome the problems. The findings are detailed in Table 2 and Table 3. Regarding the problems that the student respondents encountered, it was found that they faced 15 problems. The problems can be seen in Table 2, followed by an elaboration of each problem.

A problem experienced by most students was developing and organizing opinions or ideas. Relating ideas from one classmate to another also became a problem for 19 students (31.67%). Both students learning through online and offline modes faced this problem. The next one was related to materials. Understanding the materials and the large quantity of materials was experienced by 15 students (25%). Problems related to materials were also felt by students in both learning modes. The results were in line with a study by Saprina et al. (2020) on tertiary EFL students in academic essay writing. The study revealed that the students still had some difficulties in constructing thesis statements, organizing paragraphs, making their writing coherent, and combining ideas in correct sentences.

According to Haryanti and Sudartini (2016), one of the aspects to enhance students' writing skills is the material. The use of appropriate materials will help students in learning how to write well. In the teaching-and-learning process, teachers need to develop the right materials for their students. As a result, these learners are assisted through improving their writing skills.

The third problem was paraphrasing. This skill was considered difficult by 14 students (23.33%). Student 2, for example, admitted that she had difficulty paraphrasing sentences from a source. At the end, she just replaced some words with synonyms. This can be seen from Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1:

I am still confused in paraphrasing. I still can't paraphrase a sentence that well. So when I paraphrase a sentence, I just end up changing the words with the synonyms. (Student 2's statement in the reflection)

In 2018, Rahmayani conducted a study on students' difficulties in paraphrasing. This study explored students' difficulties in paraphrasing English texts and how they solved the difficulties. Data was collected using a paraphrasing test, questionnaires, and interviews. There were 30 participants in that study. Rahmayani's (2018) study revealed that the majority of the students faced hindrances in paraphrasing English texts. The main challenges were culture-bound and

other obstacles dealt with language like changing their ideas, replacing certain words with others, adjusting the word order, and improving the sentence structures. Other problems were a lack of vocabulary and insufficient knowledge about paraphrasing. The solutions that the respondents applied were doing more exercises, finding more sources on paraphrasing and learning from them, asking people who were good at paraphrasing, sharing their problems with friends, and not looking back at the original text. Rahmayani (2018) concluded that learners of English had difficulties in paraphrasing English texts, yet they knew how to solve those difficulties.

Working with classmates in a group and accepting their opinions was the fourth problem experienced by the students. Thirteen (13) students or 21.67% of the respondents faced this kind of problem. Student 6 stated this in the questionnaire, as seen from Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2:

I also encountered a problem during collaboration work. Sometimes it was hard to decide which opinion we should use to answer a certain part of the task. There were conflicts when choosing the answers. The discussion could last for a long time because we had to decide on a certain answer. (Student 6's statement in the reflection)

Working with peers virtually is indeed not easy. Engaging in efficient coordination and cooperation can be very difficult. Maintaining a good relationship with friends and family members during the pandemic also became a coping strategy utilized by the respondents of a study conducted by Defina and Rizkillah (2021). They did this through the Internet.

Technical problems like a poor Internet connection or sound issues, which were problematic (on/off) during an online video conference like Zoom or Google Meet, became a challenge for nine students (15%) during the pandemic. Next, problems related to psychology like a lack of self-confidence, anxiety, and personal matters were experienced by seven students. Surprisingly, these 7 students (11.67%) took the course offline. It means that during the pandemic, none of the students admitted that they experienced psychological problems. Stated below are Student 34's and Student 49's statements about their self-confidence and personal problems.

Excerpt 3:

During brainstorming, sometimes I lacked confidence in conveying new ideas to my partners. I always wondered if I could give reasonable explanations in the context of our discussion. (Student 34's statement in the reflection)

Excerpt 4:

I had personal problems. Besides that, I was feeling overwhelmed taking 2 writing courses in the same semester. (Student 49's statement in the reflection)

As previously mentioned, research by Salakhova et al. (2022) involved 160 students from various universities in Moscow. They used in-depth interviews to find the respondents' opinions on distance education. Among the results of the study, it was found that low technical readiness for distance education or online learning became a problem. Additionally, the low quality of online resources also disrupted online learning.

Related to anxiety or nervousness in the class, Damayanti and Listyani (2020) conducted a study on speaking anxiety among English Language Education Program (ELEP) students. It was found that the anxiety was derived from three main factors. They were communication apprehension, test anxiety, and the fear of a negative evaluation. Furthermore, from the interview and questionnaire results, it was also revealed that insufficient vocabulary, a lack of confidence in their own ability, not enough preparation, fear of making mistakes, and worrying about being embarrassed by their friends also contributed to students' anxiety in speaking (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020).

Interestingly, six students (10%) stated that they did not have any problems at all. Next, five students shared that they had troubles making a good thesis statement, followed by three students who had hindrances with vocabulary. The next six problems were, in no specific order, difficulty concentrating (experienced by Student 45), making an interesting introductory paragraph (experienced by Student 27), searching for and gathering sources and evidence (experienced by Student 60), making citations (experienced by Student 54), dealing with coherence (also experienced by Student 54), and writing with good grammar (experienced by Student 58). All these students took the class after the pandemic was over, except for Student 27. She took the course online. The issues were difficulty in concentrating, making an interesting introductory paragraph, searching for and gathering sources and evidence, making citations, applying coherence, and using correct grammar.

B. Solutions to Overcome the Problems

Regarding the solutions that the students tried, 28 solutions were utilized. The most frequent solution was asking for peers' help and advice. Eleven students (18.33%) did this. "I asked some of my classmates to give me feedback," was stated by Student 53. In the second place, there were also eleven students who had no specific strategy or solution to handle their problems. Next, nine students (15%) did some practice on the materials provided. All these students were both from the era during and after the pandemic.

In fourth place was trying to find a good Internet connection. Eight students (13.33%) did this. It was found that the eight students took the class during the pandemic. Reading more journal articles was done by six students or 10% of the total respondents. All the six students took the class after the pandemic. Reading more journal articles was followed by consulting with the lecturer. It was also done by five students (8.33%) after the pandemic. Student 33 mentioned, “*I read a lot of scientific journals or articles related to the topic that I wrote*”. Finding and doing some exercises from the Internet was also done by five students. Three student respondents took the class during the pandemic (Students 26, 27, and 28), and two others took the class after the pandemic (Students 45 & 46).

In the eighth and ninth positions, three student respondents admitted that they tried to get support and motivation from their peer students, and they searched for materials from Google. The three students who tried to get support and motivation took the class after the pandemic, while the other three students who searched from Google were enrolled in the class during as well as after the pandemic. Student 35 clearly stated this in her questionnaire.

Excerpt 5:

We could help each other when we encountered difficulties and asked each other if there were any doubts. We also reminded and corrected one another if there were any mistakes. In addition, we learned to manage our time. (Student 35’s statement in the reflection)

Related to support and motivation from classmates, people can find social support from social relationships with other individuals, groups, or a larger community (Canty-Mitchell & Zimet, 2000; in Defina & Rizkillah, 2018). Defina and Rizkillah (2018) further stated that social support is a fundamental part of coping with stress. Support from family and friends is of utmost priority. Teenagers tend to seek aid from their friends, teachers, counselors, or other family members. It depends on the problems and the kind of assistance that they need. They might need information, advice, strategies, comfort, opinions, or other kinds of help (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2016; in Defina & Rizkillah, 2018).

Meanwhile, in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth places, the respondents tried to minimize their problems by dividing tasks among group members, using online applications, and watching YouTube videos on the materials given. Each of these solutions was adopted by two students. Dividing the tasks among the group members was done by Student 4 and Student 8 during the pandemic. Watching YouTube videos was also conducted by Student 18 and Student 20 during the pandemic. Using online writing applications was carried out after the pandemic by Student 39 and Student 59.

There were 16 other solutions, that is, solutions 13-28. Each of the solutions was utilized by one student. Solution number 13 is comforting oneself. It was done by Student 47, who took the class after the pandemic. The next one is similar to number 13, that is, doing relaxing activities. Student 48 did this. It was also after the pandemic. Learning from grammar books and making a study group were done by Student 28 and Student 19, respectively. They both took the class during the pandemic. Solution number 17 was making video calls with the group members. It was done by Student 19. She took the class during the pandemic. Motivating oneself was the solution done by Student 53. Student 53 stated, “*I constantly encouraged myself to write.*” Making good preparations and reviewing the materials were done by Student 3 and Student 6, correspondingly. Excerpt 6 shows Student 48’s way to solve a problem; that is, by being relaxed.

Excerpt 6

I would take breaks and do something unrelated to writing, like listening to music, to help clear my mind. I learned to permit myself to produce imperfect work, knowing I could always revise and improve it later. (Student 48’s statement in the reflection)

From numbers 21-23, the student respondents tried to do things which were good for their minds and mental health. Those measures were attempting to be confident, trying to be relaxed, and making an effort to accept others’ opinions. They were done by Students 50, 56, and 44. Student 47 and Student 60 did different things from their peers. They strove to find new ideas and looked for relevant and reliable sources. Solution number 26 was trying to manage time. It was done by Student 35. The last two solutions were attempting to minimize grammatical errors and voting for the best idea among group members. Student 58 and Student 6 did these.

Excerpt 7:

To overcome my anxiety, I realized that I was still learning and it was totally fine if I got bad feedback. I also asked my friends for their opinions about my essay. (Student 47’s statement in the reflection)

All this was in line with Defina and Rizkillah’s (2018) research. They conducted research on how international students in Indonesia coped with problems and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also examined how these students found social support. It was revealed that the students did both indoor and outdoor activities, inside and outside their homes. They did some activities like playing sports or doing offline shopping to get some food. The indoor activities that they did were, among others, watching TV, watching YouTube videos, cooking, playing online games, dancing, singing, reading, writing, doing their theses, and doing some meditation as well as relaxation.

C. Lecturers' Insights: What Should Academic Writing Lecturers Do?

Opinions from three Academic Writing lecturers also became the data for this study. Lecturer A (44, M) was a master's degree holder, a senior lecturer teaching in the English Language Education Program (ELEP) at a private university in Central Java. The second lecturer, Lecturer B (41, F), was a part-timer teaching EAP at an international accountancy program in a private university in Central Java. She held a master's degree as well. The last lecturer, Lecturer C (35, M), taught at a private university in Jordan.

TABLE 4
TEACHER RESPONDENTS' DATA

	Lecturer A	Lecturer B	Lecturer C
Gender	M	F	M
Educational Background	Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics	Master's Degree in Instructional Technology	Doctorate Degree in Educational Technology
Teaching Experience	Twenty-one years	Eight years	Twenty years

From the three lecturers' opinions interviewed in July 2023, different answers were derived. Lecturer A opined that Academic Writing lecturers should give more feedback to their students. Students need clear and understandable feedback to improve their writing. This opinion is in line with Gupita and Listyani's (2022) research on teacher feedback, a summary of which follows.

There were 34 student participants in Gupita and Listyani's study. Thirty-three students (97.06%) agreed with the idea that teachers' written corrective feedback could enhance their writing accuracy. Other than that, it helped them revise their essays. They also believed that feedback motivated them to revise their essays.

Ten of the students (29.41%) admitted that they were sometimes confused with the feedback since it lacked clarity. The teachers only gave clues on the wrong parts without any explanations. These students did not understand the ideas contained in the feedback. This, consequently, hindered students from producing better essays.

In line with Lecturer A, Lecturer B emphasized the importance of face-to-face or direct consultation. This was also done to increase students' understanding. Her opinion is stated in Excerpt 8.

Excerpt 8:

Academic Writing lecturers should provide sufficient consultation time face-to-face, be it offline or online through Zoom, Google Meet, or Google Docs. (Lecturer B's opinion, Interview, July 19, 2023)

Murray et al. (2008) stated that offering consultation could be one way of providing 'structured interventions' (as cited from McGrail, Rickard, & Jones, 2006). It could also function to support the participants to bridge on- or off-campus writing environments. In the long-run, writing consultation could be a way to establish regular, mutual peer support in writing. It means that academic environments would be promoted positively.

Lecturer C suggested several actions that Academic Writing lecturers could take. First, he suggested that they could encourage students to read more. Aside from that, he also mentioned that these lecturers should encourage reading offline sources from the university library. The third opinion is that teachers ought to encourage the use of Internet services from the university. Peer review in an Academic Writing course is also recommended. The last recommendation is the use of multimodal compositions.

Peer reviewers are needed to help writers sharpen their arguments. They also help writers improve their texts. By reviewing others' texts, peer reviewers also train their own analytical abilities. Seeing different ways of structuring a paper and presenting facts as well as arguments will give a peer reviewer a better understanding of writing (AWELU, 2021).

VI. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted in order to find answers to the following research questions: (1) What were Academic Writing students' difficulties during the pandemic? (2) What are Academic Writing students' difficulties after the pandemic? and (3) What could Academic Writing lecturers do to help students overcome their problems? The results from questionnaires from 60 Academic Writing students and interviews with 3 lecturers revealed that students experienced various problems, both during and after the pandemic. There were some differences in terms of technical problems like the Internet connection.

Referring to Table 2, problems 1 until 5 were experienced by students during offline and online learning. Problems number 7, 8, and 11 were experienced by students during online learning only, while problems number 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15 were felt by students in the offline learning mode. As to the solutions, from Table 3, it can be seen that the solutions enacted by students from both learning modes were solutions number 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, and 11. Solutions number 4, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, and 28 were done by online students. The rest were implemented by students in the offline learning mode.

Future researchers are thus recommended to conduct a study with more respondents and link the problems and solutions to students' GPAs. This study hopefully will be useful both for students and teachers of Academic Writing. For teachers,

hopefully they can understand their students' problems better, and thus can improve their teaching quality as well as techniques. For the students, it is hoped that they can learn how to solve problems regarding both online and offline learning.

This study, however, has its limitations. First, the number of respondents could be more than 60, involving more students from more class years. Apart from that, the findings could have been linked to the students' GPAs in a quantitative study. Thus, both researchers and readers can see the correlations between the students' problems, solutions, and GPAs.

APPENDIX

A. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What problems do you face in your Academic Writing course?
2. What solutions do you use to overcome your problems?

B. PARTICIPANTS' DATA IN DETAIL

F/M	Student	Class Year	Year of Taking AW	Mode of Learning
F	St.1	2018	2020	Online
F	St.2	2018	2020	Online
F	St.3	2018	2020	Online
F	St.4	2018	2020	Online
F	St.5	2018	2020	Online
F	St.6	2018	2020	Online
F	St.7	2018	2020	Online
F	St.8	2018	2020	Online
F	St.9	2018	2020	Online
F	St.10	2018	2020	Online
F	St.11	2018	2020	Online
M	St.12	2018	2020	Online
F	St.13	2018	2020	Online
F	St.14	2018	2020	Online
F	St.15	2018	2020	Online
F	St.16	2018	2020	Online
M	St.17	2018	2020	Online
F	St.18	2019	2021	Online
F	St.19	2019	2021	Online
F	St.20	2018	2021	Online
F	St.21	2019	2021	Online
M	St.22	2019	2021	Online
F	St.23	2019	2021	Online
M	St.24	2018	2021	Online
F	St.25	2019	2021	Online
M	St.26	2019	2021	Online
F	St.27	2019	2021	Online
F	St.28	2019	2021	Online
F	St.29	2019	2021	Online
F	St.30	2019	2021	Online
F	St.31	2019	2021	Online
F	St.32	2019	2021	Online
F	St.33	2019	2022	Offline
F	St.34	2020	2022	Offline
F	St.35	2020	2022	Offline
F	St.36	2019	2022	Offline
F	St.37	2020	2022	Offline
F	St.38	2020	2022	Offline
F	St.39	2020	2022	Offline
M	St.40	2020	2022	Offline
F	St.41	2019	2022	Offline
F	St.42	2019	2022	Offline
M	St.43	2018	2022	Offline
M	St.44	2020	2022	Offline
F	St.45	2020	2022	Offline
M	St.46	2020	2022	Offline
F	St.47	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.48	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.49	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.50	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.51	2021	2023	Offline

F	St.52	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.53	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.54	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.55	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.56	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.57	2021	2023	Offline
M	St.58	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.59	2021	2023	Offline
F	St.60	2021	2023	Offline

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