

## **Energizing students' academic writing through research group activity**

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**Abstract** - The outcome of having a manuscript published in reputable international journals leads students to various challenges. The supervisor has an essential role in succeeding students to achieve this goal. This study aims to determine the position of the supervisor in guiding students to have a publication in reputable international journals by a research group activity. This study focuses on retrieving data from three non-native speakers (NNS) supervisors who guide graduate students majoring in chemistry who have manuscripts published in reputable international journals. Data were obtained by interview method. This research uses the qualitative approach with descriptive analysis. Based on the data collected, the mentor has a crucial role in succeeding the students to have reputable international manuscript publications. Interventions conducted by supervisor varied from the selection of a title to the choice of journal publisher.

Keywords: research article, academic writing, energizing students

## 1. Introduction

Academics around the world are in a race to increase the number of publications. This phenomenon is felt by a native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) academics around the world (Luo and Hyland, 2016). Indonesia that is EFL country also experienced this phenomenon. About the number of publications, academics in Indonesia are finding difficulties in publishing their manuscripts in the accredited national journal (Arsyad, 2016). They will have more complicated distress when publishing a manuscript in internationally reputable journals (Arsyad, 2017). English skills are seen as an essential requirement in manuscript writing to support academic careers globally (Hyland, 2013, Luo and Hyland, 2016).

Academics put manuscript publications as an essential activity in their life. By having publications, academics will gain an appreciation for their career and reputation (Jiang et al., 2016). Also, the manuscripts written by academics will also be communicating media to the academic discourse community (Plakhotnik and Rocco, 2013). Manuscripts made by academics to interact with the academic community have a particular characteristic. The manuscript needs to convince the reader of the coherency of ideas and arguments (Lin, 2017).

Academics must have adequate academic writing skills to publish their manuscripts in reputable international journals. Improving the ability of academic writing is not an easy task because it relates to several aspects that must be mastered. Writing proficiency is inseparable from grammar mastery (Munoz-Luna, 2015), cognitive ability (Bacha, 2002), and ability to understand the structure of writing, especially following the manuscripts writing a composition (Rakedzon and Baram-Tsabari, 2016). Moreover, the structure of the scientific paper (IMRAD) is widely used in both the science and social science disciplines (Bertin et al., 2015; Wu, 2011).

Academics have to struggle harder to improve the skill of academic writing. In writing, specifically manuscript writing, it is considered as ordinary activities for those who already have enough experience, but it is not an easy task for those who have limited experience in writing manuscripts (Ho, 2017). In general, about writing skills, NS has a challenge in writing, it will be more perceived by NNS (Morton et al., 2015). Finally, to improve writing skills, academics should also extend the scope of research as well as their writing skills (Ho, 2017).

Writing manuscripts for international publications can be regarded as a challenging task. Despite academics need quite complex abilities to be able to draft a research article, this state does not degrade their desire to write a paper for publication. There is still a high interest in publishing manuscripts viewed from the different number of publications with various disciplines and geographic locations (Lillis et al., 2010). Writing a research article for publication is vital for academics as it relates to their need to communicate with the scientific community (Kwan, 2013; Lillis and Curry, 2010; Rakedzon and Tsabari, 2016).

Problems encountered when writing manuscripts to be published in international journals are varied. English language skills become problems for NNS academics (Curry and Lillis, 2004; Jiang et al., 2016), the obligation of having manuscript publication put them in pressure (Jiang et al., 2016), and they also had prejudice from the reviewer (Jiang et al., 2016). In the Indonesia context, the government represented by the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education emphasises the quality improvement of all universities in Indonesia. The obligation to have a publication will

have the effect of putting pressure on the lecturers as well as supervisors who have to do research and write manuscripts for publication. Furthermore, they also have a role in guiding students in writing a research article to be published as an obligation for a graduation requirement.

Problems present in the manuscript writing is also inseparable from the character of academics in Indonesia itself. Academics in Indonesia have an entirely different style from neighbouring countries, especially in Southeast Asia itself. The condition that is quite crucial related to the literacy index. Reading habits, especially in English, are deficient because the majority of the students only read with the motive of completing tasks that lead to low index literacy (Iftanti, 2012). Although the students in Indonesia mostly learn English from elementary school, they are not motivated to enjoy English reading (Iftanti, 2012).

Besides the lack of reading habits, students also have other problems related to learning English. Students have limited access to English materials such as listening, speaking, writing, and reading (Sawir, 2005). Students are positioned as a passive learner that focuses on grammar and has limited exposure to use English (Sawir, 2005). This condition leads to problems for higher students when they have to become academics who need sufficient English skills to support their careers in the academic world.

This study aims to analyze the assistance of supervisors as external overcoming strategies received by students in writing papers or manuscripts to be published in international journals. Previous studies had discussed the overcoming plans from NS (Flowerdew, 1999; Cho, 2004), writing together with NS (Cho, 2004), using literacy broker services (Lillis and Curry, 2006), writing workshop (Kapp, 2011), and writing retreat (Benvuti, 2017). However, none of them put the NNS supervisor as the focus of the study. By surveying supervisors who assist the students in writing manuscripts, it is expected to provide information from different angles about the other overcoming strategies. Finally, this research is supposed to be a practical step for other supervisors and universities who want to increase the number of manuscript publications through strategic policies.

Supervisors have a crucial role in intervening students in writing manuscripts based on the institutions strategic policies to improve their reputation by increasing the number of publications. In the Asian context, several universities in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are striving to improve their institution ranking globally (Lo and Weng, 2005). Not only limited to the three countries, the desire to compete in developing the classification of institutions globally which is used as a benchmark of the university's reputation also affects other Asian universities (Tie 2012). With global competition, universities increase research funds to enhance the quality of manuscripts that operated as a benchmark index of citation (Jiang et al., 2015; Tie, 2012). Moreover, the university ranking will also rise if the manuscript is published in reputable international journals and has sufficient citation frequency (Tie, 2012). Universities provide full support for supervisors to have manuscripts publications and to guide students to have publications to increase their international ranking.

Interventions conducted by supervisors in writing manuscripts for international publications have specific goals. The intervention to the writing process is expected to help the university to improve reputation based on global rankings. Some of the interventions conducted by universities include holding manuscript writing programs in the form of workshops, publication awards, and graduation requirement (Tie, 2012;

Lillis et al., 2010; Luo & Hyland, 2016). Moreover, the university also provides intensive writing courses (Bacha, 2002; Rakedzon and Tsabari, 2016).

In this research, the strategies done by the supervisor to assist the student is the mentoring activity. Mentoring is an essential key to improving the productivity of manuscript publications in international journals (Stevens et al., 2010). Supervisors perform several steps in mentoring in the form of guidance, consultation, and support to students who are novice writers (Kram cited in Stevens et al., 2010). Especially in mentoring, the supervisor not only performed as a mentor, but also as an advisor, supporter, tutor, master, sponsor, and role model (Stevens et al., 2010).

## **2. Method**

Purposive sampling technique is applied to choose the subject of this study. The study focuses on three supervisors from three graduate students majoring in chemistry that have published manuscripts in reputable international journals. They were named into the pseudonymous name as Esa, Dwi, and Tri. The three supervisors have doctoral degrees in chemistry and work as lecturers in the chemistry department at the faculty of mathematics and sciences. They actively teach and guide students at one of the famous state universities in Surakarta, Indonesia. Supervisors also had numerous manuscripts published in reputable international journals with Q1-Q3 ranges in Scimago database. They also become reviewers of national journals and invited reviewers in several international journals.

The three supervisors were interviewed using a guided interview technique. The guided interview instrument is based on the preliminary study that had been conducted on the students under their supervision. The initial study aims to determine what factors become obstacles for students in the process of writing the manuscripts. The guided interview instrument focuses on supervisor interventions related to their activities in guiding students in the manuscript writing process.

There are seven questions included in the guided interview. The interview was conducted with Esa on March 16, 2018, Dwi on March 23, 2018, and Tri on April 3, 2018. Data obtained from guided interviews were then analyzed qualitatively. The data are presented orderly based on the sequence of questions contained in the guided interview. The questions in a guided interview are as follows:

- a. Why do you initiate a research group to improve students' academic writing competence?
- b. What kind of process is undertaken in a research group activity?
- c. What kind of problems dealt with by students that you need to intervene?
- d. How do you overcome those problems?
- e. What academic writing skills should students possess to write a research article to be submitted in a reputable international journal?

## **3. Results and Discussion**

The data obtained reveal that the supervisors have an important role in the success of students to have manuscripts published in reputable international journals. From the interview sessions, the findings showed that supervisors had a role in selecting the topic of writing manuscripts until selecting the journal publisher where the manuscripts would be submitted. There is a policy underlies the supervisor to guide students in

writing manuscripts. University was issuing written policies regarding graduate students that must publish their manuscripts as a graduation requirement. The chemistry department applies this rule through supervisors to guide students to have manuscripts published in reputable international journals. The explanation of supervisors are as follows:

Especially for graduate and postgraduate program, according to the Rector's Policy number 582, the students must publish their manuscript as a graduation requirement. The supervisor has the responsibility of guiding the students to have the publication. For graduate students in the chemistry department, the supervisors are particularly obligated to assist students in writing manuscripts to be published in reputable international journals (Esa).

Lecturers in the chemistry department implemented the rector's policy by having publications in international journals in the level of the Scopus index. The Head of department encourages multiply the publication to show the performance of the chemistry department (Tri).

Moreover, the supervisor has a research project every year. They need students to assist in their research and write manuscripts based on the subtopics of the research project. Supervisors provide general topics and students choose which subtopics they want to select and then write the subtopics. The explanation of supervisors are as follows.

I have a research project. I offered the students to choose the subtopic within the research project. Then the students choose subtopic. I ordered them to read the manuscript thoroughly based on their related subtopic focus (Dwi).

Lecturers have research projects yearly. Lecturers are impossible to research by themselves especially in the laboratory. They must recruit the students as their assistants. Then the students assist the lecturers in doing a lecturer research project (Esa).

Also, supervisors have intrinsic factors that encourage them to guide students to have a manuscript published in reputable international journal publisher. There is a productive atmosphere between lecturers and students in the chemistry department. Lecturers have the desire to have research and publish the results of their research manuscript to reputable international journals. Students also have a desire to assist lecturers in doing the research and write manuscripts to be published in reputable international journals.

Students are willing to learn and willing to be guided in researching and writing. This academic atmosphere eventually encouraged supervisors and chemistry students to be productive in doing research and writing the result into a manuscript to be published in a reputable international journal. Supervisors also have a desire for students to have achievement during their studies. The achievement is expected to give them a real portfolio when they apply for the job. Thus, they will acquire more easily as their CV has excellent achievement record. The description from Esa is as follows:

The first motivation, writing manuscripts is a requirement for graduation. Research atmosphere in the chemistry department is created to be productive. Those who have manuscript publication will have pride. All the lecturer wishes what has been resulted from research can be published in reputable international journals. By these circumstances, that lecturers must support the students to write. Lecturers have motivation as well as the students. Moreover, lecturers are motivated to have a research outcome (Esa).

The process undertaken during research group activity was various. Supervisors monitor students' progress related to the research in the laboratory and write manuscripts to meet the research timeline. In the first phase, supervisors continue to monitor the results of research conducted in the laboratory based on logbook submitted by students. Supervisors require students to write about their activities in the lab each day as well as problems that arise during the research process in the lab. Problems that arise will be solved together with the supervisor. Supervisors also provide research fund as research in the laboratory costs highly. The research funds are provided for a student under the lecturer's research project.

When the research process in the laboratory is complete, the students start writing the draft. The supervisor scrutinizes the students' draft and provides discussion seasons for the revision process before the manuscript will be sent to the reputable international journal publisher. Supervisors assist students in improving the draft quality by correcting students' draft. They also provide similarity checker and proofreading facilities for the draft written by the students. The similarity checker and proofreading expenses become supervisor responsibility. The last process of selecting a journal publisher laid on the supervisor. The supervisors choose the journal scope and credibility. The explanation is as follows:

Weekly I ask students for their resume or research progress. I may provide them with manuscript references related to their subtopic. I ask each student to have a logbook. Thus, I can monitor their progress (Dwi).

The problems raised during the research group are varied. The hardest condition when doing mentoring is that the students do not understand what the supervisor implied. The students hardly interpret my direction because they are novice writers as they have limited experience in writing manuscripts. Another condition that makes it difficult when the mentoring process is that students have slow progress in research thereby hampering the research and publication process. Another difficult condition that arises is that students are less disciplined in doing research and writing. Students who often procrastinate the work is quite difficult for mentors to conduct guidance because they usually do not dare to meet mentors. The research project has a rigorous timetable because it is related to the manuscript-publishing deadline so that if a student takes a subtopic of a lecturer research project and does not do it on schedule, it will be a problem for the supervisor. The explanation of supervisor 3 is as follows:

The difficult condition is that the students do not understand what I implied. However, by two to three times the mentoring process, they will understand. Also, students are willing to accept criticism, suggestions, and revisions (Tri).

Besides, supervisors handle problems that arise in the mentoring process by holding a discussion session with the students when they have submitted the manuscript drafts. Counsellors need to hold a discussion session because if there is no meeting, then the student may be confused to follow the process of revision of the supervisor. Furthermore, supervisors also form a research group that accommodates students under the guidance of supervisors to conduct research and manuscript writing according to the planned schedule in the lecturers' research project. In the research group, students will report their progress in front of their mentor and other students. Students will also communicate their issues in research and manuscript writing. This research group aims to boost students to work productively according to the current schedule of the lecturers' research project.

Guided students must possess several requirements to write a research article. Students are required to have a willingness to want to write, learn, and never give up in doing research and writing manuscripts. The supervisor does not need the achievement of specific high remark that must be owned by students. If the student is willing to learn and receive feedback from the supervisor, the supervisor is ready to guide the student. Supervisor also does not require students must have a high English proficiency because the supervisor assumes the ability of English, especially also academic writing will increase along with the student has a manuscript published in Scopus. Supervisors also ask students to be confident, disciplined in arranging a time and willing to read reference sources related to their research topic. The willingness to read is considered to be important because if the student has sufficient information by reading the manuscript, they will have a broad and deep understanding coverage to be written in their manuscript. The explanation of supervisors are as follows:

The important thing is that students have confidence. Scopus is just a means to practice. If the student is already used to writing, it will be beneficial for them (Tri).

Students must be willing to write. They should understand the concept of writing, for example, making introductions, identifying problems, formulating problems. If students are quite tricky to understand this concept, the manuscript will be imperfect (Esa).

About question number seven, the most crucial thing for supervisors during the process of guiding students to write manuscripts are various. Increased student ability after research and manuscript writing is a pride for supervisors. Supervisors also have pride when students can publish their manuscripts in reputable international journals indexed by Scopus. Supervisors feel useful if they can guide students to have the achievement. Another exciting thing is that counsellors like students who want to learn and receive input from mentors.

The data obtained shows the key to the success of students in having a manuscript published in reputable international journals lies in the ability of mentors in guiding students to research and write manuscripts. The mentoring activities undertaken by supervisors are considered as practical strategies of international publication (Stevens et al., 2010). In the mentoring process, there is the acquisition of knowledge (The Rackham School of Graduate Studies, 2006) because it contains numerous procedures that include support, guidance, and consultation from academics who have sufficient

experience to academics with limited experience (Kram cited in Stevens et al., 2010).

Concerning previous research on assistance for academics in having international publications, the presence of NS to help novice writers to improve the quality of manuscripts regarded as significant (Cho, 2004; Lillis and Curry, 2006; Jiang, 2016) because the background of NS can be a co-author as well as the audience (Connor, 1999). Having assistance from NS is not the only strategy to improve the quality of the manuscript. As having NS assistance will lead to a sensitive issue about power positions and co-authoring issues (Cho, 2004), having qualified NNS guidance can be an alternative strategy. From this study proves that having an NNS supervisor with excellent qualifications and work ethics can also encourage students to have manuscripts published in reputable international journals.

#### 4. Conclusion

Supervisors have a role in supporting students to have the manuscript publication of reputable international journals. The supervisor must have excellent ability in writing manuscripts so they will guide the students properly. With a lecturer research project, the supervisor has a role in determining the title of the research until the publisher of the journal for the manuscript created. There is a symbiotic mutualism between the supervisor and the student because the supervisor got the assistance in conducting the research project while the student has the opportunity to learn writing manuscripts under the supervisor's guidance.

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