

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Writing is one of the most essential skills in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), especially in higher education where students are required to produce various academic texts such as essays, reports, and research papers. Writing allows students to express ideas, construct arguments, and communicate knowledge systematically. In academic contexts, writing is not only a linguistic activity but also a cognitive process that requires critical thinking, logical organization, and analytical ability (Ken Hyland, 2022). Therefore, writing plays an important role in students' academic success.

For students in English Education programs, academic writing becomes increasingly important because it is closely related to their future academic and professional responsibilities. Students are expected to master writing as a means of presenting ideas clearly and academically. However, many students still face difficulties in developing their writing skills, particularly in organizing ideas, using appropriate grammar, and maintaining coherence in their writing (Toba et al., 2019). This finding is in line with Yuliant (2018) who found that students often face difficulties in writing due to lack of vocabulary, grammar mastery, motivation, and confidence. The study also emphasized that learning strategies play an important role in improving students' writing performance.

Academic writing requires more than classroom instruction alone. Students need continuous practice, independent effort, and active involvement in their learning process. In this context, learner autonomy becomes an important factor in supporting writing development. One approach that emphasizes learner autonomy

is Self-Directed Learning (SDL). Self-Directed Learning refers to a process in which learners take responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning activities (Malcolm Knowles, 1975).

Self-Directed Learning enables students to identify their learning needs, set goals, manage time, seek resources, and evaluate their progress independently. This concept is closely related to learner autonomy. A study conducted by Ratrina et al., (2022) showed that autonomous learning helps students access learning materials independently, manage flexible learning time, and improve their responsibility in the learning process.

In writing activities, SDL helps students become more responsible for improving their writing by practicing regularly, revising drafts, and reflecting on their weaknesses. According to Barry Zimmerman (2002), learners who are actively involved in self-regulation tend to have better academic performance because they are more motivated and strategic in their learning.

Several previous studies have shown that Self-Directed Learning contributes positively to students' writing development. Research conducted by Aghayani and Janfeshan (2020) found that students with higher SDL readiness showed better writing performance and stronger learning responsibility. Similarly, Hafizah Adnan and Sayadi (2021) revealed that learners who actively managed their learning process demonstrated greater improvement in English writing skills. These findings indicate that SDL has a significant role in enhancing students' writing ability.

Although many studies have discussed the relationship between SDL and language learning, most of them focus on quantitative measurements and general

learning outcomes. There are still limited studies that explore how students apply SDL strategies in academic writing practices, particularly in the Indonesian EFL context. Furthermore, little attention has been given to how students with strong SDL characteristics manage challenges and implement strategies in improving their writing skills.

To identify students who actively demonstrate Self-Directed Learning, this study employed a preliminary questionnaire as an initial screening process. The preliminary results indicated that all fifth-semester students showed Self-Directed Learning characteristics. After that, a more specific SDL questionnaire was distributed to measure their SDL levels in detail. Students who obtained the highest SDL scores were selected for in-depth interviews to explore their learning strategies and challenges in academic writing.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore the role of Self-Directed Learning in enhancing academic writing skills among fifth-semester students of the English Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo. This research is expected to provide valuable insights into how students apply SDL strategies, overcome writing challenges, and improve their academic writing development.

B. Statement of Problem

Based on the background of the study above, the statement of the problems are as follows:

1. How do fifth-semester students of the English Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo demonstrate Self-Directed Learning in developing their academic writing skills?

2. What strategies do students use and what challenges do they face in applying Self-Directed Learning to improve their academic writing skills?
3. How is Self-Directed Learning (SDL) reflected in students' academic writing development?

C. Purpose of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems, the purposes of the study are as follows:

- 1) To explore how fifth-semester students of the English Education Department at Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo apply Self-Directed Learning (SDL) in developing their academic writing skills
- 2) To describe the challenges students encounter in academic writing and how they utilize SDL strategies to address those challenges
- 3) To explore how students with the highest Self-Directed Learning levels apply their strategies in enhancing their academic writing development.

D. Contribution of the Study

This study is expected to give contributions both in theory and practice. Theoretically, this study can add more understanding about how SDL is implemented by students in developing academic writing skill. It also provides a clearer picture of how students manage their own learning, use different strategies, and deal with challenges during the writing process. Besides that, this study can strengthen the existing theories of Self-Directed Learning by Malcolm Knowles and self-regulated learning by Barry Zimmerman.

Practically, this study is expected to be useful for students, lecturers, and future researchers. For students, this study can help them understand the importance

of learning independently and finding suitable strategies to improve their writing. For lecturers, the findings can be used as an insight to understand students' learning habits and to support them in developing better writing skills. For future researchers, this study can be a reference for conducting similar research related to Self-Directed Learning and academic writing in different contexts.

E. Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on analyzing the implementation of Self-Directed Learning (SDL) among fifth-semester students of the English Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo in developing their academic writing skills. The study is limited to examining students' Self-Directed Learning practices, the strategies they apply, and the challenges they face during the academic writing process. The data were collected through Likert-scale questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The interview participants were selected based on the highest scores from the Self-Directed Learning questionnaire to gain deeper understanding of their learning experiences.

F. Definition of Key terms

This section provides the definitions of the key terms used in this study. The definitions are presented to clarify the meaning of the main concepts discussed in the research and to avoid misunderstanding in interpreting the terms. The key terms in this study are writing skills and Self-Directed Learning (SDL).

Writing Skills	: The term "writing skills" describes students ability to express themselves effectively in writing using proper syntax, vocabulary, clarity, cohesiveness, and organization
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(Hyland, 2022).

Self-Directed Learning : Self-directed learning (SDL) is a process where students, with or without support, identify resources, diagnose their own learning requirements, create learning goals, select and use effective learning strategies, and assess learning (Xu et al., 2024)

