

## MULTICULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF STUDENTS IN THE WRITING OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE PAPERS IN THE ERA OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Sujiono<sup>1</sup>, Andayani<sup>2</sup>, Budhi Setiawan<sup>3</sup>, Nugraheni Eko Wardhani<sup>4</sup>  
{[sujionoradenwijaya@student.uns.ac.id](mailto:sujionoradenwijaya@student.uns.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [bu\\_anda09@yahoo.co.id](mailto:bu_anda09@yahoo.co.id)<sup>2</sup>, [buset.74@gmail.com](mailto:buset.74@gmail.com)<sup>3</sup>,  
[nugraheniekowardani\\_99@yahoo.co.id](mailto:nugraheniekowardani_99@yahoo.co.id)<sup>4</sup>}

Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia<sup>1234</sup>.

**Abstract.** The research aims to analyze students' difficulties writing papers based on multicultural understanding when learning the Indonesian language during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research was qualitative research with a case study approach. Respondents in the study were students and lecturers of the Indonesian language course at a Buddhist college in Central Java. The research finding is that during the Covid-19 pandemic, Indonesian language learning was carried out online. Students, when participating in online learning, were not optimal in writing papers based on multicultural understanding. Student's difficulties in writing papers were; (1) ideas presented; (2) writing organization; (3) writing discourse; (4) grammar; (5) word choice; and (6) the use of spelling.

**Keywords:** writing papers, learning Indonesian language, the covid-19 pandemic, students in Indonesia.

### INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the ability to communicating using language is needed, especially for university students. The ability to communicate in oral and written forms is one of the abilities that students must have in facing the challenges of the 21st century (Motallebzadeh et al., 2018). One of the communication skills that students need is writing scientific papers, one of which is in the form of documents. Students' communication skills in writing, especially writing scientific papers, can be learned through the application of learning models that develop students' critical and creative thinking skills (Kasi et al., 2018; Motallebzadeh et al., 2018; Sumarmi et al., 2020).

The skill of writing papers in college is one of the most critical academic cultures. Writing articles is an inseparable part of the three pillars (Tri Dharma) of higher education. Paper writing skills are primarily taught in Indonesian language learning. Indonesian language learning in higher education is focused on academic writing skills by using the Indonesian language properly and correctly. This statement is reinforced by the Decree of the Directorate General of Higher Education Ministry of National Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia Number 84/E/KPT/2020. It explains that the Indonesian language course is education that makes students can express their thoughts orally and in writing with excellent and correct Indonesian language rules, making the Indonesian language a source of insights and a means for unifying the nation. One of the substances of learning the Indonesian language is; self-actualization in scientific articles. Scientific works in the form of papers to develop knowledge that contributes to building the nation. In addition, Scientific works in the form of papers are written with full scientific responsibility by using written language well and right.

Learning of writing papers in the Indonesian language course is currently experiencing a shift due to the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the world. The polemic of the COVID-19 pandemic is growing like mushrooms in Indonesia and

around the globe. All walks of life are affected by the spread of the Covid-19. As a result, people are forced to avoid activities and all forms of crowds, gatherings and avoid meetings that involve many people until the lockdown stage (Murad et al., 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has also had an impact on the world of education. The closure of educational institutions is reported to reduce the spread of infectious diseases in the community and break the transmission chain (Gewin, 2020; Lau et al., 2020). With increasing worries about the current COVID-19 pandemic, more and more universities worldwide have postponed or cancelled all scheduled events and changed teaching methods from face-to-face to online teaching (Gewin, 2020; Lau et al., 2020).

The Covid pandemic has caused an increase in stress levels for students. School closures indirectly have a psychological impact on students. In China, a study describing psychological conditions and factors that influence anxiety in college students showed that their fear was related to the COVID-19 epidemic. It could be explained by the effects of the pandemic on their study and concern for future work (Cao et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Students become isolated from their friends in the learning process and struggle to adapt to the new normal in online learning (Tan, 2021). Students who take part in learning that involves a high level of interaction and practical experiences such as internships, exercises, laboratories, feel a substantial disadvantage in the course of study (Sahu, 2020).

Indonesia is one of the most impactful countries during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially education. The government has implemented a policy to close educational facilities to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The social restriction policy certainly impacts the learning process in Indonesia, especially for the face-to-face learning model (Dina et al., 2020). Online learning has not become part of most educational institutions in Indonesia. So far, it has relied heavily on face-to-face learning. As a result, academic institutions in Indonesia are greatly affected by the shift from face-to-face learning to online (Putri et al., 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, learning is required in Indonesia to be done online. Many obstacles are found during online learning, namely the lack of interaction between lecturers and students. The internet network is one of the challenges in online education. It is because Indonesia's geography is vast. Face-to-face learning cannot be replaced by online education due to online system constraints, internet access, and teachers' digital mastery (Parji et al., 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic that occurred in Indonesia also impacts the implementation of Indonesian language learning in the material for writing papers. Learning of Writing papers in the Indonesian language course conducted online during the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in students not being optimal in writing papers. Students in writing papers are required to be able to use language by paying attention to scientific grammar, effective sentences, and coherence in each paragraph. However, in reality, Buddhist college students are still not optimal in writing scientific papers in the form of documents. Hidayat, Khotimah, and Saputra (2019: 32) revealed that academic writing as part of efforts to reach the top of the current national literacy program is still far from expectations. Academic writing in college should not be difficult if the capital that must be mastered has long been studied and used. Based on the quote above, it can be explained that scientific writing skills in the form of papers are not optimal. Students as the front line in writing scientific papers still have difficulties when learning is done online.

Based on the problems above, and considering the importance of the ability to write papers for students. Thus, this research is significant to do. The study aims to analyze the difficulties of Buddhist college students in Central Java in writing papers based on multicultural understanding. The research problem raised is that students were not optimal in writing papers. According to the author's knowledge, this is the first study to analyze the difficulties of Buddhist college students in writing papers when learning the Indonesian language during the Covid-19 pandemic. The contribution of the research obtained findings of the students' problems in writing papers so that improvement efforts can be made to improve students' abilities in writing papers based on multicultural understanding.

Language learning in college plays a crucial role in life. Brown & Yule (1983:2) explain the function of language, namely to express content described as transactional. Language can convey messages or information effectively, which speakers or writers carry out. The language functions involved in the expression of social relationships and attitudes are described as interactional. Language is a medium of communication between people around the world. People with good

mastery of language can communicate effectively to share various meanings, ideas, emotions, feelings and solve multiple problems in life. To increase the intensity and quality of relations, communication, interaction, business transactions, trade and diplomacy with the nations of the world, the Indonesian language is considered as one of the most important languages that must be mastered by most people around the globe (Suparsa, Mantra, & Widiastuti, 2017: 52).

Universities are institutions that play a role in educating the lives of the nation's children and advancing science and technology. At the university level in Indonesia, the Indonesian language course is a compulsory subject. It is because of the importance of language in academic life. Andayani and Gilang (2015: 198) reveal that the existence of language as a behavioural subsystem is essential to be able to develop patterns of the learning process to condition interest in learning Indonesian language habits in authentic experience.

Language learning in college has particular competencies. One of them is that students can apply the process of writing academic papers, articles, reports, proposals, official letters, and speech scripts using a variety of standard languages. Students can also apply scientific presentation steps effectively and attractively informal situations. In addition, students are skilled in presenting scientific presentations using the media Andayani, (2015: 57). It confirms that language learning in college focuses on academic paper writing skills.

The skills to write papers is a significant need for college students. Learning activities in universities always require students to write articles. McCrimmon (1976: 2) explains that writing is an activity of exploring thoughts and feelings on a particular subject, choosing things to write about, determining how to write them so that readers can understand them quickly and clearly. Writing is an activity to explore thoughts and feelings on a particular subject. The writing process involves thoughts, feelings, and writing strategies so that the writing results can be easily understood. Writing skills are revealing ideas and paying attention to the legibility of ideas that have been reported.

Brown (2000: 335) states that writing focuses on how students generate ideas and organize ideas coherently by using discourse markers and rules to place them cohesively into the text, so it becomes more apparent than before. It means how students can edit the appropriate grammar, so they produce writing. The use of language in writing scientific papers follows strict requirements. Scientific papers are written precisely, so they are easy to read. Writing scientific papers must know the rules. Writing scientific papers uses short sentences, direct expressions (Charles, 2007: 638).

Papers are academic writings produced by paying attention to the target audience, objectives, systematics, writing style, and the use of various scientific languages. Swales & Feak (2012: 3) states that writing a paper must notice the target audience. The statement is reinforced by Elbow (1988: 26), who explains that it is necessary to pay attention to the target audience and the purpose of writing when starting to write a paper. Writing a paper must be accompanied by a clear sense. Writing a paper aims to demonstrate expertise and ability to master a particular theme that focuses on writing. The established systematics need to be guided, so it produces a good paper. The style of writing papers is related to the use of a variety of scientific language. Language errors in writing papers need to be avoided. The accuracy of typing in is something that must be considered.

Writing papers is done with strict rules of language use. Writing articles cohesively, so it produces documents that provide transparent information. Students in writing papers go through the editing process of grammar, so it has optimal writing. Write an essay that uses effective sentences. Regular use of language is needed, so the form is easy to read.

Papers are written by meeting the criteria of scientific writing. Scientific writing has the following criteria; (1) has a structure or writing format that includes an introduction, discussion and closing, (2) has a clear reference source as a reinforcement of ideas, (3) follows the rules of grammar and standard punctuation; (4) containing themes that have novelty (Bowker, 2007: 2-4).

Writing a paper cannot be separated from citing relevant expert opinions. Quotations are needed to strengthen the arguments that have been constructed in the article. (Peat et al. (2002: 101-102) explains that citations in papers are an appreciation of the opinions and works of others. Quotations are carried out using original sources. Quoting ideas or works of others must include clearly referenced sources. The literature cited is the most valid, the most important, and the most recent. The writing of the bibliography based on the citations considers the guidelines that have been set.

The achievement of the paper quality can be measured through an evaluation. The process of evaluating papers requires guidelines, so their quality can be measured. Also, the assessment of

paper writing skills requires assessment guidelines. Guidelines for assessing writing papers that become references, namely the content of the ideas presented, organization of the writing content, discourse, grammar, word choice, use of spelling (Brown (2000: 357-358).

Nowadays, learning based on multicultural understanding becomes a necessity in higher education, especially in Indonesia, the largest multicultural country in the world. The diversity of cultures, languages, ethnicities, and religions that exist in college students is a strong reason for the importance of language learning based on multicultural understanding. Multicultural understanding-based learning is rooted in understanding cultural differences, thus enabling students to gain greater intercultural competence to create mutual account among different students (Spiteri, 2017: 2-5). Based on the excerpt above, it can be explained that the diversity that exists in students is the root of multicultural understanding-based learning. Education that is based on multicultural understanding allows students to gain a strong sense of diversity. Mutual understanding between students with cultural, linguistic, religious, racial, ethnic, social status backgrounds can be realized.

Race (2011: 5) explains that this multicultural perspective underscores the recognition of gender, ethnicity and race, besides the desire for cultural diversity and internal cultural plurality. Learning based on multicultural understanding is a process of cultivating values and a way of life of mutual respect, sincerity, and tolerance for diversity. Learning should cover matters related to tolerance, sociocultural differences, religion, the dangers of discrimination, conflict resolution and mediation, human rights, democracy and plurality, universal humanity, and subjects that condition the love for peace and respect for differences Harun, et al., (2020: 367). Learning based on multicultural understanding is learning that always respects cultural diversity by respecting and appreciating each other. Multicultural-based education also provides balanced recognition of gender, ethnicity, race, culture, language, and religion.

The purpose of language learning based on multicultural understanding is to provide equal opportunities and guide students from various cultures, religions, ethnicities, languages, and social statuses. Providing students with understanding and knowledge about diversity helps teachers avoid making ideas about students' abilities based on students' racial or cultural character (Mallick & Verma, 1982: 157). Furthermore, Spiteri (2017: 5) states that the purpose of learning based on multicultural understanding is to realize greater social equality in society. DomNwachukwu (2010: 83) says that multicultural education is seen as an effort to create awareness and tolerance between cultures and related worldviews. Referring to some of the opinions above, language learning based on multicultural understanding is needed. The main objectives of multicultural understanding-based learning are; (1) provide understanding related to diversity; (2) avoid giving assessments of abilities based on social background; (3) realize equality in learning; and (4) foster tolerance among students.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This type of research was qualitative. The approach used was a case study. Stake (1995) states that a case study is a study conducted specifically to understand the specificity and complexity of a single case. Yin (2003) explains that case studies can increase knowledge related to individual, organizational, social and political phenomena. In addition, case study research can enable researchers to retain significant events. The research site was at the Buddhist college in Central Java. Research implementation was from July 2020 to February 2021.

### Respondents

The research respondents were 30 students, the lecturers of the Indonesian language course, students' papers, and the implementation of the learning process. Data collection techniques were observation, interviews, and analysis of students' papers documents. The words were conducted to obtain information on the implementation of Indonesian language learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviews were conducted in-depth. Stake (2010: 95) describes the three primary purposes of interviewing in qualitative research, namely (1) Obtaining information or unique interpretations held by the interviewee; (2) Collecting numerical aggregation of information from many informants; and (3) Finding out about "something" that the researcher himself cannot observe.

According to Bogdan & Biklen (1992: 96), interviews are used to collect descriptive data in the form of words, so the data needed to answer the problem is obtained. Students' paper documents were analyzed by analyzing, reviewing, and studying the documents in the form of papers that students had written in learning Indonesian.

**Data analysis**

The data analysis technique used was the interactive model of analysis developed by Miles and Huberman. The components of interactive model data analysis include; data reduction, data presentation, and concluding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The research data found were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and writing conclusions.

**RESULT AND ANALYSIS**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the implementation of learning to write papers in Indonesian language courses at the Buddhist college was carried out online. The performance of online learning was less than optimal. Several problems were found in the field when learning to write papers online, namely; 1) the internet network was an obstacle in implementing online learning. Most students often went in and out of class due to an unstable internet network. Most of the students did not activate their cameras, so it was impossible to monitor students' activities in writing papers; 2) only a few students dominated the question and answer process; 3) during the group discussion, a few students only dominated it. As a result, the group presentation was less than optimal; 4) students were less than optimal in doing exercises. 5) students were less actively involved in learning; only a few students were active during reflection.

Based on the assignment of papers written by students of the Buddhist college in Central Java, the following findings can be obtained:

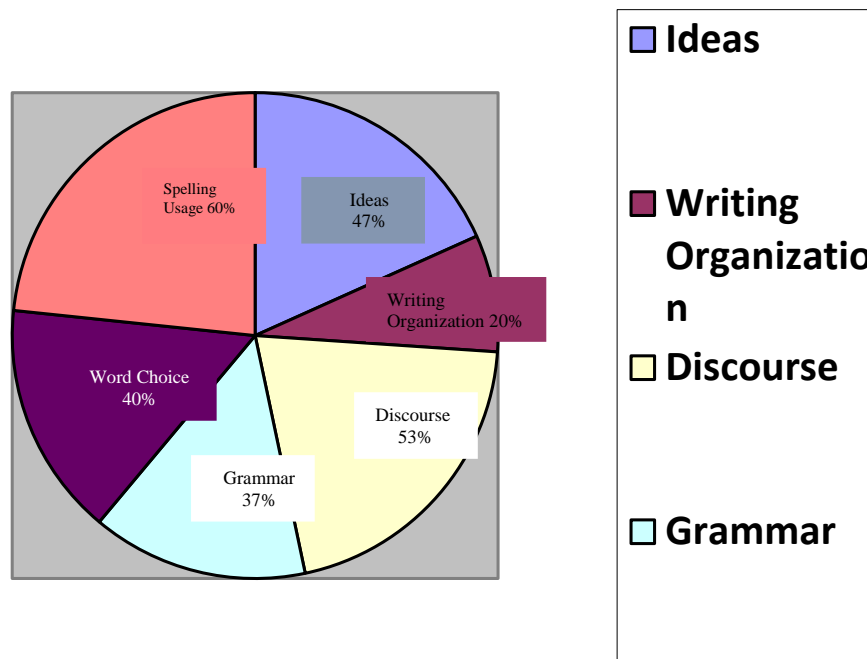


Figure 1 Mistakes that are often made by students in writing papers

**1. The ideas presented**

It was found that 14 or 47% of students made mistakes in the ideas presented in the paper. The opinions presented were based on personal experience. It was found that the students lacked focus in giving ideas in the article. The idea was less focused on multicultural studies.



## **2. Writing organization**

It was found that 6 or 20% of students in writing papers made mistakes related to writing organization. The introduction of documents completed by students was less practical because they were too long and unfocused. The conclusion section was generally not in line with the discussion and seemed to repeat the argument.

## **3. Writing discourse**

It was found that 16 or 53% of students made errors related to written discourse in writing papers. Students paid less attention to the use of effective sentences, paragraph cohesion, and cohesion. The sentences used were long and tended to be written in oral variety. The students did not pay attention to the unity of paragraphs. It was found that one section sometimes only has two sentences, and there was a paragraph consisting of 10 sentences. It made it difficult for readers of the papers. The cohesion between one section and another had not been realized.

## **4. Grammar**

Grammatical errors in writing papers amounted to 11 students or 37%. Those Errors were especially in terms of sentence patterns.

## **5. Word choice**

As many as 12 or 40% of students make mistakes related to word choice in writing papers. Students are less fixed in the use of familiar words. The average student in writing an essay uses non-standard words.

## **6. Spelling usage**

It was found that 18 students, or 60% made spelling errors in writing papers. They were; foreign terms that were not italicized; the origins of the quotations came from the blog; the sources of citations were not listed in the bibliography, and there was error typing.

Field note data can strengthen the difficulties experienced by students in writing papers. First, field notes were from interviews conducted with BTA informants who explained that they had problems writing essays. The problems faced in writing papers were making effective sentences, using standard grammar and references (CLHW. 03). Second, the field notes were the results of interviews with the informant Mr SDT as an Indonesian language lecturer at the Buddhist college in Central Java. Informants explained that students had not been optimal in writing papers, especially in doing citations and bibliography, which is not as expected. There were still students in writing papers who used theoretical sources from blogs and Wikipedia. Students in writing papers were still not right in choosing effective diction and sentences (CLHW.05).

Third, field notes from an interview with Mrs NC as an Indonesian language lecturer at the Buddhist college in Central Java explained that students were still not optimal in constructing a theoretical framework. Students' laziness made students less optimal in finding supporting theories, especially theories sourced from the sutta (the Buddha's discourses). Students still used many reference sources that were from blogs (CLHW.09). Fourth, the field notes from interviews with Mr KY, an Indonesian language lecturer at the Buddhist college in Central Java, always stated that students were still not optimal in writing papers. Difficulties experienced by students in writing papers included choosing diction, effective sentences, paragraph politeness, theoretical reference sources that were still not credible, and inability to distinguish citations from books or journals (CLHW. 15).

Fifth, the field notes from interviews with students at the Buddhist college in Central Java on Wednesday, January 27, 2021, obtained facts about the problems faced by students in improving proposals as a form of Indonesian MKU assignments, namely experiencing confusion regarding effective sentences, correcting titles, problem formulations, and theoretical framework (CLHW. 10). Sixth, the field notes from interviews with students at the Buddhist college in Central Java on Wednesday, February 3, 2021, stated that students had difficulties when writing papers, namely; looking for references, citing, making titles, effective sentences, choosing the proper diction, and using references from journal articles without regard to the quality of the journal (CLHW. 14).

Field notes from interviews, reinforced by field notes from document analysis in the form of student writings. Students' papers were not optimal. Students in choosing diction were incorrect, reference limitations, reference sources tended to use blogs. Students' reports were inferior in using theoretical sources derived from the suttas or the Buddha's discourses (CLHAD. 02).

Based on field notes from interviews with Indonesian language lecturers, students at the Buddhist college in Central Java, observations and students' papers, it can be explained that learning of writing papers in the Indonesian language course during the Covid-19 pandemic was carried out online. The education that was conducted online found several problems. The students' ability in writing papers at the Buddhist college in Central Java was not optimal. Students had difficulties in writing papers.

### Discussion

The Covid-19 pandemic that has occurred in the world and Indonesia has had consequences in all walks of life. It has been almost two years since the Covid-19 pandemic is still out of control. The Indonesian government has made policies and regulations to control the spread of Covid-19. Social restrictions, reducing activities outside the home have been carried out. The world of education is greatly affected by the implementation of social limits. Learning at all levels of education is done online, with limited facilities. Writing papers online tends to use lecturing, chat, and assignment methods. It also causes the students to be less than optimal in writing papers. So far, learning using lecturing, discussion, and assignment methods has resulted in the potential of students not being able to develop optimally (Aghajani & Adloo, 2018; Aliman et al., 2019; Ardani, Utaya, & Budijanto, 2016; Kasi, Sumarmi, & Astina, 2018; Sumardi et al., 2020).

Indonesian language learning is focused on language skills, namely writing scientific papers. The obligation that students must complete is to produce a scientific work, one of which is in the form of an article. Students are educated to become good academic writers. We all want to write better, and if writing is better for both researchers and scientific progress, then that is undoubtedly a good thing (França & Monserrat, 2019). For students to have the skills to write papers, it takes time and an attitude of responsibility. Writing takes time to do the work. To have focused and effective writing time, we may need to increase our accountability concerning writing. In addition, every writer needs a writing system – a set of processes that help them complete their writing work reliably (Janke, Mospan, & Cain, 2019).

### CONCLUSION

Based on the research results above, it can be concluded that students of the Buddhist college in Indonesia had difficulty writing papers based on multicultural understanding when learning the Indonesian language during the Covid-19 pandemic. Several problems were found when learning was conducted online during the Covid-19 pandemic, including; (1) unsupported internet network; (2) students were less active in question and answered session; (3) a few students dominated class discussion; (4) students were less optimal in doing the task of writing papers; (5) students' involvement was less active during learning. Online learning also caused students to have difficulty in writing papers. Some of the mistakes that were often made by students in writing papers based on multicultural understanding during the Covid-19 pandemic included; (1) ideas presented; (2) writing organization; (3) written discourse; (4) grammar; (5) word choice; and (6) the use of spelling.

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