

IMPLEMENTING THE CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH OF THE FACE TO FACE TUTORIAL PROGRAM IN THE ACADEMIC WRITING COURSE

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Abstract: *This study aims to elaborate on using a prospective approach to improve the effectiveness of students learning achievement in the Academic Writing tutorial : program. Thirty participants were involved in a series of face-to-face tutorial programs. The objective of this program –Academic Writing - is to help teachers who enroll in a distance learning program to be able to write adequate academic papers. Since the writing process is considered a mental constructive activity, the tutors must design and implement the constructivist learning perspectives in this course. To attain the course objective, the participants had to involve in several learning assignments that employed constructivist learning design. Six elements of the constructivist learning design - Situation, Groupings, Bridge, Questions, Exhibit, and Reflections - were applied in this research. The pre-test and post-test research designs were implemented in this study. Besides, the portfolio assessment was also used to assess the participants' learning outcomes in completing their assignments - writing their academic papers. The study results show that implementing the constructivist approach significantly increases the motivation and the ability of the students to write academic papers in the Academic Writing course of the Teacher Education Program of Universitas Terbuka.*

Keywords: *Face-To-Face Tutorial, Constructivism Approach, Academic Writing Course*

Introduction

Academic writing is one of the compulsory tutorial programs for the students of the Teacher Basic Education Program of Universitas Terbuka. The objective of this Academic Writing tutorial program is to facilitate the teachers who participate in distance learning programs to be able to write appropriate academic papers. Only a few academicians – teachers and lecturers – can write and publish proper academic papers. To cope with this problem, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Indonesian Republic encourages several teacher education institutions to hold courses and workshops on academic writing.

Most teachers perceive academic writing as a difficult and rigorous task to complete. It is difficult for most students to write an adequate academic paper that can be published and presented in national and international academic forums and journals. In general, the students have no adequate experiences and knowledge to express their ideas in writing



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a proper academic paper. Consequently, they have a low level of motivation to write academic papers.

Most academic writing courses and workshops are emphasized merely a theoretical side and cognitive base of learning results. The Academic Writing tutorial program is not designed to involve the students in real writing experiences. Regarding this situation, the students who participate in the Academic Writing course frequently lack the motivation and efficacy to involve in the writing assignments. To overcome these problems Universitas Terbuka, one of the institutions which held an academic writing course, has to discover an appropriate approach to be implemented effectively to assist the students to achieve the learning objective – the ability to write an academic paper properly.

Since the writing process is considered a constructive mental activity, the Education and Teaching Faculty, of Universitas Terbuka must design and implement the constructivist learning approach in conducting tutorial programs on academic writing. To participate in the Academic Writing tutorial program the students have to follow a very systematic and continuing process such as: (1) determining the topic; (2) collecting relevant references; (3) writing a systematic outline; (4) writing the draft; (5) reviewing and revising the draft; (6) finalizing their academic paper. The students who enroll in this tutorial program have to practice and construct meaningful knowledge for their academic paper outline.

Students construct their knowledge by elaborating on the references related to the selected topic of their academic paper. To teach the students ability to write a proper academic paper, the tutor has to design some meaningful learning experiences which consist of several tasks and assignments based on the constructivist learning approach.

This research is aimed to analyze the implementation of the constructivist learning approach to improve the effectiveness of the academic writing tutorial program of the Education and Teaching Faculty of Universitas Terbuka. The research was focused on implementing constructivism learning factors that contribute to the students learning in writing a good quality academic paper. In addition, this study emphasized determinant factors that provide contributions to improving the effectiveness of the student's learning process of academic writing. This study was emphasized to answer two following research problems 1) Which learning approach is suitable for facilitating students in mastering their academic writing skills? 2) Is the constructivist learning approach used in the face-to-face tutorial of the academic writing tutorial program providing significant contributions to assisting students to write good quality of their academic papers?

One of the important characteristics of the distance education system is the separation between teacher and learner (Heinich, 2005 & Moore, 2006). In this sense, learning content is delivered through various instructional media. Even though the use of media is dominant, some

distant education institutions still use face-to-face tutorial sessions to support the students' learning process.

UT uses a tutorial program to assist students to understand the course content. Several tutorial programs – face-to-face and online - are designed to support the student's learning process. The face-to-face tutorial is compulsory for the students who enroll both in teachers' education and non-education programs. One of the important courses offered in those programs is the Academic Writing course.

This course aims to provide academic writing skills for students who enroll in the teacher education program. The instructional goal of the course is stated as follows: “.... After completing the academic writing course, the students will be able to write a good quality academic paper based on their selected topic.”

In general, the majority of the students who enroll in teacher education programs have no experience in writing academic papers. Indeed, the academic writing course requires the students to read some reading materials regarding their selected topic. Designing the instructional program that suits the student's needs is necessary to help them to attain the predetermined instructional objectives.

Students learning support

A face-to-face tutorial program was designed and implemented to facilitate the students to master academic writing skills. Instructional methods and strategies were selected to provide the students with learning experiences that are relevant to course objectives – *after completing the academic writing course the students will be able to write an academic paper based on their interest in certain subjects.*

This face-to-face tutorial program facilitates students to learn the theory and practice of academic writing. In this academic tutorial program, the constructivist learning approach was selected to provide students with the experience to interact intensively with learning resources. The tutorial program was designed to engage students both with tutors and learning activities. In this program, the students have to involve with individual projects and

Writing activity is a systematic process of expressing ideas through words and sentences. The writing process can be viewed as a constructive learning activity, therefore it is necessary to implement constructivist learning theory in this academic writing course. A broad definition of academic writing is any writing done to fulfill a requirement of a college or university.

Academic writing is also used for publications that are read by teachers and researchers or presented at conferences. A very broad definition of academic writing could include any writing assignment given in an academic setting. Academic writing in general has several characteristics as follows: 1) *Planning* - There is a certain amount of planning before you start writing the paper; so, it will be analytical and organized, 2) *Outline* - A proper outline is a must for academic writing. An

outline will not only help you formulate your thoughts but will sometimes make you aware of certain relationships between topics. It will help you determine the pertinent information to be included in your paper, 3) *Tone* - A formal tone is used. You do not use slang words, jargon, abbreviations, or many clichés, 4) *Language* - The language in your paper needs to be clear and words need to be chosen for their precision. A thesaurus is a good tool to help you pick just the right words to explain the issues, 5) *Point-of-view* - The point of view in the third person, as the focus of academic writing, is to educate on the facts, not support an opinion, 6) *Approach* - Deductive reasoning is a big part of academic writing as your readers have to follow the path that brought you to your conclusion.

To be able to write an academic paper properly, the students have to construct knowledge related to their selected writing topic. In other words, to construct proper knowledge they have to interact intensively with various available learning resources. In this sense, the students must search and elaborate on related literature to develop the selected topic of their academic paper.

Khasanah & Mistinurasih. (2023) noted that valid and reliable observation is required to improve students capacity in writing academic papers. In addition, a valid rubric of authentic assessment is also required to assess students' achievement in writing academic articles. Authentic assessment requires students to display attitudes and use knowledge and skills obtained from learning to carry out tasks in real situations (Ferita, 2017).

Constructivism is viewed as one of the approaches in the cognitive and humanism learning theory which describes human learning as active efforts to construct meaning in the world around us. Constructivist proposes that learning is an active and self-directed process.

Constructivist learning theory notes that to develop meaningful concepts an individual student must actively interact with various learning resources (Woolfolk, 2006). In addition, Harashim (2017) stated that constructivism refers both to a learning theory (*how people learn*) and to an epistemology of learning (*what is the nature of knowledge*). In constructing knowledge the students have to participate in the learning process which involved interaction between the teacher and students.

Several constructivist principles can be implemented in designing an effective instructional program such as: 1) Learning is an active process in which the learner uses sensory input and constructs meaning out of it, 2) People learn to learn as they learn: learning consists both of constructing meaning and constructing systems of meaning, 3) The crucial action of constructing meaning is mental: it happens in the mind, 4) Learning involves language: the language we use influences learning, 5) Learning is a social activity, 6) Learning is contextual, 7) One needs the knowledge to learn, 8) It is not possible to assimilate new knowledge without having some structure developed from previous knowledge to build

on, 9) It takes time to learn, learning is not instantaneous, 10) Motivation is a key component in learning. (<http://www.thirteen.org>).

Fosnot (1996) summarizes some perspectives on constructivist teaching practice. Four epistemological assumptions underline constructivist learning theory such as 1) Knowledge is physically constructed by learners who are involved in active learning; 2) Knowledge is symbolically constructed by learners who are making their representations of action; 3) Knowledge is socially constructed by learners who convey their meaning-making to others; 4) Knowledge is theoretically constructed by learners who try to explain things they don't completely understand.

Active interaction in the learning process is necessary for the students to construct their knowledge. Hashim (2013) also noted that the constructivist view of learning has generated several teaching approaches based on the four key principles of value: 1) active learning; 2) learning by doing; 3) scaffolding learning; collaborative learning. The teacher or tutor has to encourage students to be more active in the learning process. Active learning requires the students to explore and share their knowledge with teachers and peers. Problem-solving, experiments, seminars, and discussions are the instructional methods that can be used to facilitate the students in constructing their knowledge.

Learning by doing is another approach of the constructivist learning theory that can be implemented to provide meaningful learning experiences for students. Learning occurs when students construct meaning through their learning experiences. Learning by doing provides students with hands-on learning experiences. Scaffolding can be viewed as a kind of learning support for the students to learn new knowledge. This approach will enable the students to learn a subject systematically. In practice, scaffolding should be reduced gradually to enhance students' learning progress.

Another approach of the constructivist learning theory that can be used in implementing the constructivist learning theory is collaborative learning. These activities enable the student to interact actively with other students to complete his / her learning assignments.

Brooks and Brooks (<http://www.thirteen.org>) offer five key principles of the constructivist learning theory such as: 1) Pose problems of emerging relevance to students; 2) Structure learning around primary concepts; 3) Seek and value students' points of view (4) Adapt instruction to address student suppositions; 4) Assess student learning in the context of teaching.

In addition, Gagnon and Colay (2001, p. xi) propose a model of constructivist-instructional design which consists of six elements - *Situation, Groupings, Bridge, Questions, Exhibit, and Reflections*. A description of the six elements of the Gagnon and Colay constructivism instructional design can be shown in the following table.

Table 1. Elements of Constructivism Instructional Design

NO	CONSTRUCTIVISM DESIGN ELEMENTS	ACTIVITIES
1	Situation	Develop goals, tasks, and curriculum standards.
2	Groupings	Group students and materials, and cooperative learning.
3	Bridge	Recall prior knowledge using students' cognitive maps, skills, values, motivation, and expectations.
4	Questions	Use higher-level thinking skills and problem-based learning.
5	Exhibit	Arrange student portfolios and work samples.
6	Reflections	Engage students in tasks, help them think for themselves, and support them in making meaning of their learning.

METHODS

The method is action research, thirty-two students were involved in this study. They are teachers who enroll in the Teacher Education Program of Universitas Terbuka. Most of them are almost finished with their upgrading study program at Universitas Terbuka. They have to write academic papers to complete their study program. In general, they have no experience in writing academic papers. They have a high motivation to learn academic writing skills. They are required to take a tutorial program of the academic writing course before completing their study program. In this program, they have to follow a face-to-face academic writing tutorial program. The program consists of eight sessions of face-to-face instructional activities.

Each session of the face-to-face tutorial was designed to implement constructivist learning theory. Constructivism based on the instructional design model, proposed by Gagnon and Collay (2001), was applied to deliver the instructional content of the academic writing tutorial program. The six elements of the model - *Situation, Groupings, Bridge, Questions, Exhibit, and Reflections* – were used in every session of the face-to-face tutorial program.

In addition, every session of the face-to-face tutorial program was designed to provide students with real writing exercises and hands-on academic writing learning experiences. In another word, learning activities in this program consist of systematic procedures for writing an academic paper such as 1) Getting the ideas for writing; 2) Selecting a topic; 3) Searching relevant literature regarding their selected topic; 4) Write the paper outline; 5) Review and revise the outline; 6) Write the paper draft; 7) Review and revise the draft; 8) Compose the illustrations; 9) Finalize the academic paper.

A pre-test and post-test session were implemented to acquire information on the student's learning progress. In addition, systematic observation of students' motivation and their learning progress was also analyzed in this study. At the beginning of the course, the students were

assigned to describe a topic that will be developed to be their academic paper. The students have to complete systematic and continuous writing assignments, and portfolios, during eight sessions of the constructivism face-to-face tutorial.

A portfolio assessment was used to assess the quality of the student's work in completing the assigned academic writing exercises. In this sense, the portfolio assessment was implemented to observe and assess the student's learning progress in writing their final academic paper projects. A rubric consisting of several indicators of good quality of academic paper was developed in this study. The rubric will be used as an instrument to assess the student's writing assignments. The following rubric indicates the components and indicators of the good quality of the academic paper.

Table 2. Indicators of the Good Quality of Academic Paper

NO	INDICATORS	DESCRIPTIONS
1	<i>Topic selection</i>	The selected topic of the academic should be interesting for the readers.
2	<i>Structure of the academic paper</i>	The academic should be well structured and systematic.
3	<i>The quality of the introduction</i>	The introduction section should explain the essence of the ideas inside the paper.
4	<i>The quality of the content description</i>	The content of the paper should be clearly described and elaborated. The writer has to provide examples when describing the concepts.
5	<i>The use of supporting data</i>	The writer has to integrate the relevant data in his/her academic paper.
6	<i>The quality of the summary</i>	The summary should be concise and comprehensive
7	<i>The use of grammar and structure</i>	The writer has to use correct grammar and structure
8	<i>The use of references</i>	References should be relevant to the content of the paper
9	<i>The quality of abstract</i>	Abstract writing is concise and understandable
10	<i>The quality of illustrations (graphics and table)</i>	The use of illustrations – graphs, tables, and charts supports the concepts explained in the paper.

RESULTS

The use of the constructivism approach in the tutorial program of academic writing facilitates the students to achieve the determined instructional objectives. The elements of constructivist instructional design provide a positive contribution to enhancing students' knowledge and skills in writing academic papers. The constructivism approach implemented in this academic writing tutorial program enhanced students' motivation to master academic writing skills and complete their study program. the systematic and systemic constructivism learning activities involved students in given tasks and assignments of academic writing.

Assessment both on cognitive and performance aspects of academic writing indicated enhancement in students' scores significantly on academic writing. A pre and post-test session in the academic writing program indicates significant student gains in learning achievement. In addition, the performance assessment implemented to measure students' real ability in writing academic papers indicates a significant improvement in scores.

Implementing the constructivism approach in the tutorial program on academic writing facilitates the students to attain the instructional objectives. The elements of constructivist instructional design that include provide a positive contribution to enhancing students' knowledge and skills in writing academic papers. Assessment both on cognitive and performance aspects of academic writing increases significantly. A pre and post-test session in the academic writing program indicates significant student gains in learning achievement. In addition, the performance assessment implemented to measure students' real ability in writing academic papers indicates significant improvement.

Table 3. Gaining pre-and post-test students' achievement scores in academic writin

TEST	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST
SCORES	54	85

DISCUSSION

Implementing a constructivist learning approach to the face-to-face tutorial program of Universitas Terbuka significantly impacts students' learning achievement. Constructivism learning strategies - *Situation, Groupings, Bridge, Questions, Exhibit, and Reflections* – are applied to students' learning process increasing the students' learning involvement in completing writing tasks and assignments.

The constructivist approach used in this face-to-face tutorial program provides the students with hands-on experience in writing an academic paper. The tutor motivates the students to achieve overall course objectives. *The situation*, one element of the constructivism model, was used to explain the learning objectives and learning strategies that can facilitate students' learning process. Student *groupings* were applied to enhance students' chances to discuss their writing projects. The element of the *Bridge* is used to facilitate the students to make connections between their prior knowledge and the tutorial objectives. The tutor implemented the element of the question by assigning the students with higher-level thinking skills and problem-based learning. They have to select a topic of academic writing which is appropriate to their interest and prior knowledge. In addition, they have to elaborate on the selected topic by writing a comprehensive paper outline.

The tutor has to assist the students who have difficulties in writing their paper projects. The implementation of the exhibit as the element of the constructivism design was done by providing a chance for the students to present their writing projects to the tutor and colleagues. This learning

event has helped the students to get appropriate feedback from the tutor and their colleagues. The element of *reflecting* provided a chance for students to engage students in writing tasks, help them think for themselves, and support them in making meaning after completing their writing assignments.

Several principles of the constructivist learning approach which consist of *active learning*, *learning by doing*, *scaffolding learning*, and *collaborative learning* were also implemented in this research. The tutor asked the students to actively gain new knowledge and understanding in writing academic papers from available learning resources. *Active learning* will enhance the possibility of the students achieving a predetermined learning goal – to be able to write an adequate academic paper.

Hands-on exercises in this academic writing tutorial help the students implement the writing principles in their assignments. In this sense, the students practice the concept of *learning by doing*. By doing their learning exercise the students engage actively in the learning process.

Collaborative learning, whereby students interact and build on each other's ideas, is constructivist. Interaction, in this case, is the essential procedure practiced by the students in the academic writing process. The interaction which happened among the students generates the process of changing ideas that support the students to build knowledge and understanding.

Scaffolding learning, a technique that is viewed as one of the constructivist approaches, was used in this program. It provides students with guidance on systematic learning. In this sense, the students have to study some essentials skills which include the following systematic learning activities: (1) Get the ideas for writing; (2) Select a topic; (3) Search relevant literature regarding their selected topic; (4) Write the paper outline; (5) Review and revise the outline; (6) Write the paper draft; (7) Review and revise the draft; (8) Compose the illustrations; (9) Finalize the academic paper.

Feedback provision, another technique of the constructivism learning approach, was applied to this tutorial program. Students received immediate feedback after completing their writing assignments. Providing immediate feedback regarding the students' writing projects helped them to improve their skills in revising their assignments.

The learning process in the constructivist classroom, however, is structured to provide students with greater control of their learning as their as they develop new skills and understandings. They must have room to initiate as well as respond, they explore their strength as well as the limitation of their new understanding. The teacher must be ready to step back as well as forward, providing students with support for new skills they are still developing (Graham, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

Implementing the constructivism approach in the tutorial program on academic writing facilitates the students to attain the instructional objectives. The elements of constructivist instructional design that include provide a positive contribution to enhancing students' knowledge and skills in writing academic papers. Assessment both on cognitive and performance aspects of academic writing increases significantly. A pre and post-test session in the academic writing program indicates significant student gains in learning achievement. In addition, the performance assessment implemented to measure students' real ability in writing academic papers indicates significant improvement.

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