

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of seven sub-sections, namely the research context, which explains the subject of the study. The research questions and objectives in this chapter are formulated based on the research context. The hypotheses serve as the assumptions underpinning these questions and objectives. The significance of the research highlights potential benefits for future studies. The scope and limitations of the research act as a framework to ensure the discussion remains focused. Finally, the definition of key terms is used to clarify the research variables, which are measured within specific parameters.

A. Research Background

Academic writing is a major challenge for EFL learners. Academic writing requires a good command of academic vocabulary, as well as adherence to specific criteria regarding layout and style (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022). It also differs from general writing, including the accuracy of arguments, the quantity of evidence, and writing ethics (Asmara & Kastuhandani, 2024; Nasywa, 2024). In addition, a writer is required to have adequate knowledge of the subject matter, use appropriate language, and have a clear purpose (Ilham, 2022). However, these relatively complex requirements are not easy for English language students. In support of this, there is evidence from Pasaribu et al. (2024) that most EFL students tend to experience difficulties with writing in terms of language proficiency. It can therefore be concluded that academic writing presents greater challenges than general writing and requires extra skills.

Difficulties that are often faced by English language learners in writing academically include knowledge of word formation. A series of studies concluded that writing difficulties can stem from problems with organising ideas (Aldabbus & Almansouri, 2022), thesis statement development (Nenotek et al., 2022), grammar and structure, as well as limited vocabulary (Mustafa et al., 2022; Tomé et al., 2022), writing mechanics (El Sulukiyyah et al. & Abdullah, S., 2026), reviewing and study literature (Ersyad, M. D. & Cahyono, Y., 2025), understanding collocations and word pairs that aim to give a natural impression to the reader (Sanosi, 2025; Le et al., 2022), and linking word (Marcella, A. D, 2023). In addition, evidence from a strong sample and diverse methodologies also supports this (Sarwar et al., 2022; Fadda, 2012; Shahid Farooq et al., 2012). This includes 372 and 245 students in Pakistan (Sarwar et al., 2022; Shahid Farooq et al., 2012). Then, 50 postgraduate students in Saudi Arabia (Fadda, 2012). 100 foreign language students were the sample for the study of Isma et al. (2023), has been found that a common mistake often made by students is word formation in academic writing word formation. In line with this, the findings of the observations carried out by Adi (2022) also argue the importance of morphology. Therefore, this literature review highlights that foreign language students still face difficulties with academic writing.

One factor that influences students' academic writing skills is morphological awareness. Morphological awareness is defined as students' active ability or full awareness and understanding of how prefixes, suffixes and the combination of morpheme structures convey meaning. This ability helps students to construct high-quality sentences. It also enables students to express

their ideas effectively in writing (Samaraweera, 2025). In addition, breaking down complex words in comprehension and constructing simple words in expression has a positive impact on writing quality (Giyatmi et al., 2024). The most important thing is the use of morphological awareness to reveal meaning and understanding the syntactic relationship of a word through morphemic analysis (Zaretsky & Russak, 2024). Thus, morphological awareness enables English language students to manipulate lexical, grammatical and syntactic features to produce accurate, coherent and cohesive academic writing. Overall, morphological awareness supports writers in seeing the various relationships between the form, structure, and meaning of words.

A key indicator of the quality of an academic text is lexical richness. Lexical richness comprises three dimensions: lexical diversity, lexical density, and lexical sophistication. Lexical richness demonstrates a writer's ability through the sophistication and diversity of their vocabulary, as well as the density of the information provided. This enables the writer to convey precise and nuanced meanings whilst preventing information overload and confusion for readers. Lexical richness also enhances a text's appeal, thereby encouraging reader engagement. Furthermore, writers who possess proficiency in all these areas are able to develop ideas more accurately, create more engaging texts, and avoid monotonous language. Schnur and Rubio (2021) demonstrated that lexical complexity, particularly lexical diversity and sophistication, increases as writing proficiency develops. This suggests that testing lexical richness provides valuable insights into learners' academic writing competence.

Research on morphological awareness and academic writing skills has been conducted in a variety of contexts. Asaad (2024) found that morphological awareness contributes to academic writing ability through both direct and indirect mastery of vocabulary. Other studies, such as Aslan (2024), indicate that morphological awareness has a significant impact on improving writing fluency as well as grammatical accuracy and sentence structure in the writing of EFL learners. In the Indonesian context, Wahyuni (2025) conducted the study in the context of a junior high school in one of Indonesia's cities. The study revealed that pupils with high morphological awareness tend to have strong writing skills. In line with these findings, the research by Schnur and Rubio (2021) investigated writing ability with a focus on lexical richness. found that lexical complexity, particularly lexical diversity and lexical sophistication, increases as writing proficiency improves.

Based on the review of previous research, it is evident that although numerous studies have examined the relationship between morphological awareness and academic writing ability, the majority of these studies still treat writing ability as a general construct or measure it using holistic rubrics that do not specifically highlight particular linguistic dimensions. The studies by Asaad (2024) and Aslan (2024), for example, whilst making important contributions regarding the mediating role of vocabulary and its influence on writing fluency, have not specifically analysed how morphological awareness contributes to lexical richness as a critical indicator of the quality of academic writing. Meanwhile, the study by Schnur & Rubio (2021) has demonstrated that lexical richness is a sensitive indicator of the development of writing proficiency, yet

it does not link it to metalinguistic abilities such as morphological awareness. On the other hand, Wahyuni's (2025) research, conducted in an Indonesian context, is still limited to secondary education and narrative writing genres, and therefore cannot yet be generalised to the context of EFL students with the demands of more complex academic genres.

This study therefore aims to address these gaps by specifically investigating the correlation between morphological awareness and lexical richness in academic writing ability, with a particular focus on university-level EFL students. By narrowing the focus to lexical richness, this research seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of how morphological awareness contributes to specific dimensions of writing quality, rather than treating writing ability as a monolithic construct. Although there has been extensive empirical research on morphological awareness and academic writing ability, studies examining the relationship between morphological awareness and academic writing with a specific focus on lexical richness in the context of university students still require further investigation.

B. Research Question

Based on the above research context, the researcher formulated the following research question:

1. Do the students with higher morphological awareness have lexical diversity?
2. Do the students with higher morphological awareness have higher lexical density?

3. Do the students with higher morphological awareness have higher lexical sophistication?

C. Research Objective

Based on the formulation of the research questions, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To investigate whether students with higher morphological have higher lexical diversity?
2. To investigate whether students with higher morphological have higher lexical density?
3. To investigate whether students with higher morphological have higher lexical sophistication?

D. Hypothesis

Based on the theoretical framework and previous empirical studies, the researcher proposes the following hypotheses:

1. Ha (Alternative Hypothesis): There is student higher morphological awareness have higher lexical diversity
2. H0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no student higher morphological awareness have higher lexical diversity
3. Ha (Alternative Hypothesis): There is student higher morphological awareness have higher lexical density
4. H0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no student higher morphological awareness have higher lexical density
5. Ha (Alternative Hypothesis): There is student higher morphological awareness have higher lexical sophistication

6. H0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no student higher morphological awareness have higher lexical sophistication

E. Research Significance

The findings of this research are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of English language education, particularly in understanding the relationship between morphological awareness and lexical richness in academic writing among EFL learners. Firstly, theoretical significance: This study aims to enrich the existing body of knowledge regarding the role of morphological awareness in lexical richness, specifically by narrowing the focus on lexical richness as a critical indicator of writing quality. The results are expected to offer empirical evidence that supports or challenges current theories on metalinguistic awareness and its contribution to writing development in EFL contexts. Secondly, practical significance for EFL students, EFL lecturers and educators. For EFL students: The findings may encourage students to develop their morphological awareness as a strategy to improve their academic writing, particularly in enriching their lexical repertoire and enhancing writing precision. For EFL Lecturers and Educators: This research can provide insights for designing instructional materials and activities that explicitly integrate morphological instruction into writing courses to foster students' lexical richness.

F. Scope And Limitation

This research focuses on investigating the correlation between morphological awareness and lexical richness in EFL academic writing. The study will involve fourth-semester and sixth-semester EFL university students

at the Department of English Language Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Syekh Wasil Kediri, during the academic year 2026.

The limitations of this study involve variable focus, participants, instrument, and design. Variable Focus: The study limits its investigation to morphological awareness (independent variable) and lexical richness (dependent variable). Other potential linguistic or cognitive factors influencing academic writing are not examined. Participants: The research is confined to one institutional context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations or educational settings. Instruments: The measurement of academic writing ability is restricted to the analysis of lexical richness dimensions (diversity, sophistication, and density), without addressing other aspects such as grammatical accuracy, coherence, or argumentation structure. Design: As a correlational study, this research identifies relationships between variables but does not establish causal effects.

G. Definition Of Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding and to ensure clarity of concepts, the following key terms are defined as they are used in this study. Firstly, morphological awareness refers to the metalinguistic ability to identify, understand meaning, manipulate and produce morphemes. It includes the capacity to decompose complex words into their constituent morphemes, understand the meaning contributed by each morpheme, and produce or manipulate morphologically complex forms. This is assessed by three tests. Tests include the morphological identification test (MIT), judgment and

analogy test, and the morphology structure awareness test (MSAT) (Carlisle, 2000; Kuo & Anderson, 2006).

Secondly, lexical richness refers to the quality and variety of vocabulary used in a written text. It encompasses three main dimensions: lexical diversity (the range of different words used), lexical sophistication (the proportion of advanced or low-frequency words), and lexical density (the proportion of content words in the text) (Read, 2000). These three dimensions were calculated objectively using the Lexical Complexity Analyser-Academic Writing (LCA-AW) software developed by Nasserri and Lu (2019), based on the argumentative essays written by the participants. Lexical richness was operationalised through three dimensions: the corrected type-token ratio (CTTR) for diversity, the proportion of academic/low-frequency words for sophistication, and the proportion of content words for density.

Thirdly, academic writing refers to the written work of students who have completed the courses in morphosyntax and academic writing for research review, to be submitted in the form of draft writing assignments. EFL refers to the teaching of English in a context where the language is not the everyday language of the majority of Indonesia's population. Consequently, academic writing in EFL consists of formal texts produced in accordance with academic standards by students learning English as a foreign language.