



Indonesian tertiary EFL students' problems in paraphrasing journal articles: a narrative inquiry

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the problems faced by EFL students and their coping strategies to deal with problems when paraphrasing journal articles. To achieve the study objectives, the researchers utilized a narrative inquiry design with two semi-structured interviews. The gathered data were then analyzed by using thematic analysis. Four EFL students participated in this study and shared their experiences regarding the problems they faced when paraphrasing journal articles. The findings presented that the four students perceived limited vocabulary, lack of awareness regarding the criteria for effective paraphrasing and the proper stages of paraphrasing, struggle to find the appropriate synonyms, and lack of grammar mastery. Furthermore, it was discovered that there were several strategies adopted by the students to overcome the problem of paraphrasing journal articles such as changing active to passive voice, eliminating unnecessary words, utilizing paraphrasing tools, and consulting with others. This research can be a form of self-reflection for the readers, especially students, to be more aware of the importance of mastering paraphrasing skills.

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Introduction

Writing is not an easy thing for students. It is because grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and content must all be mastered by students when writing (Rohmah, 2009). They often encounter several problems in writing, one of which is the problem of plagiarism. Plagiarism refers to using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit (Snow, 2006). Eliminating plagiarism among students is as difficult as eliminating negative habits in everyday life (Hasan et al., 2016). One way that can be done to avoid plagiarism is to use paraphrasing (Hasna et al., 2021).

According to Ismail et al. (2020), paraphrasing is rewriting other people's words or ideas while maintaining objective information from the original and maintaining the consistency of the length of the text. Paraphrasing is a valuable and needed skill in academic writing. However, these skills are not easily mastered by students (Hayuningrum & Yulia, 2012). When paraphrasing, for example, a journal article, one's vocabulary, strength, and understanding will be tested. Simply put, paraphrasing is a play on words and sentences. By paraphrasing, one must be able to interpret complex ideas in one's own, simpler language. Talking of paraphrasing, a phenomenon was found at a university in Pekalongan where some sixth-semester EFL students experienced problems when asked by a lecturer for the Academic Reading and Writing course to paraphrase a journal article as one of the assignments in the course. Some students even complained and almost gave up because they found it difficult to paraphrase an international journal article.

Several previous studies have examined the topic of paraphrasing. Pratiwi's (2019) research aims to investigate and analyze the use of paraphrasing techniques in journal articles for graduate students of the 57 English study programs at one of universities in West Sumatra. Similarly, Pertiwi (2019) examines student paraphrasing techniques, acceptability of paraphrasing, and barriers to paraphrasing among senior students of the English Language Program at IAIN Pare-Pare. Furthermore, in the Malaysian context, a study was conducted by Badiozaman (2014). This study investigated the challenges faced by Malaysian second language (L2) learners when paraphrasing an academic text. In addition, Maiyoritsa and Wahyuni (2021) examined the paraphrasing techniques used by students, the level of paraphrasing ability, and the problems encountered by students in the English Department's academic writing class.

However, the research encountered issues related to difficulties when paraphrasing journal articles among students that are still limited. Seeing the facts found by the researchers and those mentioned previously, it is necessary to conduct research to examine the problems faced by students when paraphrasing journal articles, considering the importance of paraphrasing in student life. In addition, the researchers are interested in raising research issues regarding paraphrasing because paraphrasing is challenging and can sharpen the brain. Hence, this study focuses on investigating the problems faced by Indonesian EFL students in paraphrasing journal articles and the strategies used to overcome these problems.

Method

This study adopted a narrative inquiry design. This study focuses on the experience of EFL students and contains the problems faced in paraphrasing journal articles and strategies adopted to overcome these problems. Furthermore, this study was conducted at a university in Pekalongan. The participants of this study are 4 EFL students, or more precisely, English Education students, consisting of 2 males and 2 females who are around 22-23 years old, selected through a purposive sampling technique. With purposive sampling, the researchers select participants based on several criteria. The criteria set by the researchers, such as participants being English education students, participants who have taken creative writing courses, academic reading and writing courses, and have difficulties paraphrasing a journal article as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic data of the participants

Name (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Description
Argan	Male	22	Students of English education who have taken creative writing courses, academic reading and writing courses, and have difficulties paraphrasing a journal article
Favian	Male	22	
Chiasa	Female	23	
Alura	Female	22	

Further, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews to collect data. In this case, a semi-structured interview was conducted twice at different times. This aims to cross-check the validity of the data or information from the participants. Furthermore, this interview was conducted in Indonesian to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the questions asked. The researchers analyzed the data using thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves searching across data sets to identify, analyze, and report on recurring patterns. Braun and Clarke (2006) used by the researchers to analyze the data. Furthermore, the stages in data analysis consist of familiarizing oneself with the data, creating initial codes, selecting themes, reviewing themes, defining and labeling themes, and constructing the report.

Findings and discussion

Problems faced by Indonesian tertiary EFL students when paraphrasing journal articles

There are some results from the researchers' semi-structured interviews with the participants on March 7 and 18, 2023. This interview was conducted twice, at different times, by offline interview. The findings from interviews with students show the problem faced by Indonesian EFL students in paraphrasing journal articles, as follows:

Until now, I have had a limited vocabulary; thus, I find it difficult to read and understand journal articles because there are many unfamiliar words (Argan, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

Yeah, I realize that my vocabulary is limited because I infrequently read journal articles in an English context. This often leads me to make mistakes when interpreting the text (Favian, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

I have limited vocabulary in English. However, this is due to the lack of engagement with literacy in the academic writing context. My limited vocabulary makes me constrained when trying to understand the content of journal articles, and sometimes it causes me to be confused when reorganizing them using my own words (Chiasa, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

I feel that my vocabulary is limited because several factors contribute to it. When paraphrasing a journal article, there are many words or sentences that I do not understand the meaning of, and the context of the journal article is unable to be conveyed clearly (Alura, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

An EFL student, Argan, revealed that he admitted to having problems paraphrasing a journal article. The problem that he faced was a limited vocabulary. Khairunnisa et al. (2014) note that limited vocabulary was detected as one of the difficulties in paraphrasing. Argan

told the researchers that he had a limited vocabulary, which contributed to his difficulty in reading and understanding journal articles. Similarly, Favian expressed that the problem he faced was a limited vocabulary. This can be seen from the clause, "*I realize that my vocabulary is limited.*" Furthermore, he often misinterprets a text due to vocabulary constraints. This can be verified through sentence, "*This often leads me to make mistakes when interpreting the text.*" According to Frodesen (as cited in Khairunnisa et al., 2014), the limited vocabulary causes the results of the paraphrases to contain different meanings due to errors in interpreting the text. In line with Favian's data, Chiasa said that the problem she faced was limited vocabulary. This can be seen from the clause, "*I have limited vocabulary in English.*" She also added that the limited vocabulary contributed to the obstacles she faced when understanding the context and led to confusion when paraphrasing using her own words. This can be proven through the sentence, "*Limited vocabulary makes me constrained when trying to understand the content of journal articles, and sometimes it causes me to be confused when reorganizing them using my own words.*" Restricted vocabulary is a serious concern because students will tend to preserve the writer's words (Hayuningrum & Yulia, 2012). Furthermore, Alura, as another EFL student, confirmed that her vocabulary was quite limited, which posed a problem when paraphrasing journal articles.

Although I have learned about the topic of paraphrasing, in reality, there is still a lack of understanding, and there are even some matters that I have missed. As a result, when asked to mention the criteria and stages of paraphrasing, I certainly couldn't mention them in detail (Argan, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

Honestly, I already knew the criteria for effective paraphrasing and the steps, but only in general. I don't know the specifics yet, so when I implement it directly, sometimes I still make errors. Therefore, the paraphrased results can be said to be less accurate (Favian, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

So far, I have a good understanding of the criteria for effective paraphrasing or the stages of paraphrasing. However, I still find it tricky to apply them when paraphrasing journal articles. Simply put, I understand the theory, but it's hard to practice (Chiasa, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

I feel that I need more insight into paraphrasing. From my point of view, the criteria for effective paraphrasing are keeping the meaning of a sentence intact and using distinctive vocabulary. Furthermore, I also failed to remember the steps of proper paraphrasing (Alura, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

Lack of understanding about the criteria for effective paraphrasing and the appropriate stages in paraphrasing was found to be difficult for students in paraphrasing, apart from vocabulary limitations (Khairunnisa et al., 2014). According to the narratives of Argan and Alura, they perceived a lack of understanding and even neglected the criteria of effective paraphrasing and the proper stages of paraphrasing, so they could not provide a clear mention of the topic. The same situation was also experienced by Favian; he informed the researchers that his lack of detailed understanding of the criteria for effective paraphrasing and its stages led him to still "*Sometimes, I still make errors. Therefore, the paraphrased results can be said to be less accurate.*" As stated by Khairunnisa et al. (2014), some students, when paraphrasing apply the wrong procedure due to a lack of understanding of paraphrasing, both criteria and stages. As opposed to other students, Chiasa shared that she had a good understanding of the criteria for effective paraphrasing or its stages. However, the problem was that she could hardly implement her understanding when it came to the practice of paraphrasing journal articles.

I thought for some minutes to determine which vocabulary to modify with synonyms. Then, when I had made a decision, for example, this one, I struggled to memorize or find the right synonym for the word. Perhaps this occurred due to a lack of awareness of the context of the word (Argan, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

I struggle to select the appropriate synonym for a word in the journal article that I want to paraphrase using similar words. Many times, I feel uncertain as to whether the synonyms I've selected can represent the original word (Favian, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

I was unable to find the equivalent word because of my poor vocabulary. First, I need to search for the word in the dictionary or Google Translate, which is time-consuming. One time I tried to find synonyms without the help of Google Translate, but the results of the paraphrase were inaccurate and peculiar (Chiasa, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

I often feel insecure when I decide to find synonyms for the original word. This is partially due to my limited vocabulary and the journal article's academic diction. Sometimes, when I have found a synonym, it looks odd when combined with other words (Alura, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

Wati (2017) revealed that some students made errors when changing their vocabulary of the original text with the same meaning (synonym). Based on the interview results, Argan and Favian admitted that they had difficulty finding the proper synonyms. In addition, Argan confirmed that the cause of the difficulty was a lack of attention to the context of the word. In line with this statement, Wati (2017) stated that when choosing synonyms, students must consider several factors, such as context and the correlation between one word and another. Furthermore, Chiasa and Alura also encountered the same problem as Argan and Favian. Shape (as cited in Khairunnisa et al., 2014) reveals that limited vocabulary causes paraphrased texts to contain too many original words because they face difficulties in finding the appropriate synonym to represent the word. According to Chiasa and Alura's stories, sometimes they produce bizarre paraphrases due to the wrong choice of synonyms. This is in line with Wati's idea (2017) that the incorrect vocabulary choice makes the paraphrased text appear less natural.

When I attempted to rephrase the sentence structure to contrast with the source, I was satisfied that the paraphrased sentence was accurate and the content still had the same meaning. Nevertheless, when I re-read it, I discovered that it seemed odd and that the meaning was the opposite of the original. I think the factor is due to my lack of understanding regarding sentence structure or grammar, such as tenses (Argan, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

To this day, I still have limited awareness of grammar, and sometimes I misinterpret some of the tenses. As a result, when paraphrasing sentences from journal articles, there are still some difficulties. The sentences I compose look bizarre and unnatural (Chiasa, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

I encountered problems when modifying the sentence structure of a journal article. This situation is due to missing out on insights related to grammar, such as tenses. I also felt overwhelmed and lacking in confidence when modifying the sentence structure. I was fearful that the sentence I modified would seem ridiculous (Alura, Offline interview, March 7, 2023, Researcher's translation).

Apart from limited vocabulary, a lack of awareness of the criteria for effective paraphrasing and the proper steps in paraphrasing, finding appropriate synonyms, and a lack of grammar mastery were detected as problems faced by Argan, Chiasa, and Alura when paraphrasing journal articles. In the same view, Rezkilaturahmi et al. (2021) reveal that most students frequently encounter problems in their grammar acquisition when paraphrasing text. Wati (2017) states that when attempting to change the grammar or structure of a text, almost all of them makes mistakes. This is most likely because they

forgot about tenses and how to use them. They did create paraphrases that did not flow well and contrasted with the original sentences. Hence, sentences such as "*I discovered that it seemed odd and the meaning was the opposite of the original*" and "*The sentences I compose look bizarre and unnatural*" are clear evidence of their poor grammar skills. Furthermore, Alura admitted that she felt overwhelmed and lacked confidence due to her limited grammar understanding.

Strategies of Indonesian tertiary EFL students in overcoming problems in paraphrasing journal articles

The findings from interviews with students show that the strategies adopted by Indonesian EFL students to overcome the problems when paraphrasing journal articles, as follows:

I believe that changing from active to passive voice is effective since I only need to rephrase the words. This can reduce the difficulties, such as my limited vocabulary. For instance, 'I read this book,' then I changed it into a passive voice to 'This book is read by me'. As I see it, frequently in passive voice there is an additional word 'by' as opposed to active voice (Favian, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

I often change active to passive voice because it seems that students are allowed to change this type of sentence. I think adopting a strategy could help me minimize problems such as vocabulary constraints and avoid plagiarism. When applying this strategy, I don't have to try to come up with a lot of new vocabulary that I do not understand (Alura, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

According to Davies et al. (2011), the paraphrasing strategy involves changing from an active to a passive voice. The participants' responses showed a similar perspective on dealing with the problems of paraphrasing journal articles by changing active voice to passive voice, according to what they encountered themselves. The data confirms that changing this type of sentence can help in reduce the problems they face, such as limited vocabulary, and can prevent the issue of plagiarism from being detected. Favian expresses this feeling through the clause, "*This can reduce the difficulties, such as my limited vocabulary.*" Meanwhile, other evidence can be seen in the clause delivered by Alura: "*Help me minimize problems such as vocabulary constraints and avoid plagiarism.*" Based on Favian's empirical data, he reveals one of the characteristics of passive voice that he acknowledges. This can be captured in the phrase "... *in passive voice, there is an additional word by ...*". As Batovski (2007) explains, in a passive voice, the subject of the sentence receives the action expressed in the verb. The elements of the passive voice are '*to be, past tense, by the...*'. Besides the characteristics of passive voice, Favian also lists one example of an active voice being transformed into a passive voice. This can be seen in the clause, "*I read this book*", then I changed it into a passive voice to say, "*This book is read by me.*" The example sentences listed by Favian are similar to Davies et al.'s (2011) ideas. He provides the following example of changing an active voice to a passive voice, such as 'She delivered the report' to 'The report was delivered by her'.

I omit unnecessary words in a sentence. It works well for coping with the difficulties of finding the right synonyms. Sometimes, words are repetitive in a sentence. This word should be removed because it has no significance in the sentence. In my perspective, the most natural sentences are free of unnecessary and ambiguous words (Alura, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

Another strategy in paraphrasing is to eliminate unnecessary words or phrases that simply do not contribute to the meaning (Fitzpatrick, 2005). One of the students adopted

this strategy to deal with the problem when paraphrasing journal articles. Alura claims that eliminating unimportant words can help minimize problems when determining the proper synonyms. Furthermore, she narrated to the researchers that the motivation behind removing unnecessary words was to present a sentence that is natural and understandable. As explained by Hussain (2014), a sentence is well-constructed and seems natural when it is not messed up with unnecessary words. In addition, wordiness creates longer sentences or paragraphs, and it is difficult for readers to understand them (Winter, 2009). Alura adds that there are words that need to be eliminated, such as redundant words. This can be seen in the clause, "*This word should be removed because it has no significance in the sentence.*"

I utilize *QuillBot* when I struggle to decide on the appropriate synonym. I gained access to the website through Google. I believe that *QuillBot* has been helpful for the lack of vocabulary or grammar in paraphrasing journal articles. The sentences produced by *QuillBot* are different but still preserve the original meaning (Argan, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

I use Google's unpaid paraphrasing tool. The paraphrasing tool is *QuillBot*. I feel that *QuillBot* is quite effective in helping me determine the right synonyms or re-express the sentences I paraphrase. I don't have to work hard to try, and it's quite saving me time and money by paraphrasing journal articles (Favian, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

When I'm struggling to choose the appropriate synonyms and construct a sentence structure, sometimes I open a paraphrasing tool on the web, which is known as *QuillBot*. I like the fact that *QuillBot* facilitates my ability to paraphrase easily and quickly without expending more effort... (Chiasa, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

Usually, I employ the assistance of *QuillBot*. The way to paraphrase through *QuillBot* can be described as straightforward. I select the sentence to be paraphrased, then I insert the sentence into *QuillBot*. According to me, *Quillbot* is quite effective in solving the difficulty of finding the proper synonyms and can support me, who lacks grammar, in reorganizing the sentences (Alura, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

According to the empirical data, four students adopted an online paraphrasing tool known as *QuillBot.com* to come to terms with the problems they faced. Dale (2020) explains that *QuillBot.com* is one of the most popular free paraphrase tools available on the internet. As stated in the interviews, they admitted that *QuillBot.com* could help them in mitigating problems while paraphrasing a journal article, such as limited vocabulary, obtaining the appropriate synonyms, and a lack of grammar mastery. As Kinga and Gupta (2021) have explained, some students have expressed that paraphrasing tools such as *QuillBot.com* can support them in overcoming difficulties when paraphrasing. In addition, Alura mentioned that the procedure for implementing *QuillBot* is effortless.

In the same view, according to Kinga and Gupta (2021), *QuillBot* is very straightforward to utilize. This tool can modify the text simply after one writes or pastes the text and then hits the rephrase icon. Furthermore, Favian and Chiasa provide the same response regarding the perceived benefits of utilizing <https://quillbot.com/>, in addition to minimizing the problems they mentioned earlier. They said that <https://quillbot.com/> offers several benefits, such as convenient practice, affordability, and saving time or money. In the same view, Mia (2021) states that by utilizing <https://quillbot.com/>, students acquire the ability to learn how to paraphrase in a good and effective way, which can be helpful for them to complete assignments more quickly and accurately, and they must develop their vocabulary.

Frequently, I ask some of my friends about the criteria for effective paraphrasing and the proper stages of paraphrasing. Fortunately, I have gained new knowledge about these matters and can minimize the problems I face (Argan, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

Occasionally, I pose some questions to my friends who are knowledgeable about paraphrasing. The aim is for me to be aware of the criteria for good paraphrasing and the steps in paraphrasing in more detail (Favian, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

Since I have a restricted vocabulary and struggle when reconstructing paraphrased sentences, sometimes I consult my friends regarding this topic. Moreover, I request that my friends evaluate the results of my paraphrase to determine whether they are suitable to fit with the original sentence (Chiasa, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

To gain fresh and comprehensive insights regarding the criteria for effective paraphrasing and the stages of paraphrasing, I usually approach one or two of my friends who are more familiar with the material than me with a few questions (Alura, Offline interview, March 18, 2023, Researcher's translation).

Consulting with others was also identified as one of the strategies they adopted to solve the problems they faced when paraphrasing journal articles. Rahmayani (2018) explains that asking someone who possesses good paraphrasing skills or sharing with friends are strategies that students apply when facing problems when paraphrasing. Furthermore, one of the strategies to solve problems when paraphrasing is to engage with friends to gain clarification (Putri, 2021). Based on the participants' narratives, two perspectives can be described. Argan, Favian, and Alura admitted that they consulted friends whom they considered to be familiar with the topic of paraphrasing, especially regarding the criteria for effective paraphrasing and the appropriate stages in paraphrasing, to gain deep insight into the topic. In contrast to the others, Chiasa told the researchers that she consulted her friend, but for different matters. She consulted her friend related to the sentence that she paraphrased due to her limited vocabulary. Nevertheless, they both consult with others in terms of paraphrasing. Furthermore, according to Putri (2021), raising questions is an important part of students' learning process because it can help them gain new knowledge.

Conclusion

Based on the data obtained from semi-structured interviews, it was discovered that when paraphrasing journal articles, the students struggled with limited vocabulary, a lack of awareness toward effective paraphrasing criteria and appropriate steps in paraphrasing, finding appropriate synonyms, and a lack of grammar mastery. The existence of problems that emerge encourages them to create errors when paraphrasing journal articles. Hence, it is necessary to have strategies that must be adopted by students to overcome these various problems. Furthermore, the findings from interviews with students show that there are four strategies to solve their problems or how to deal with their problems in paraphrasing journal articles, which consist of changing active voice to passive voice, eliminating wordiness, employing paraphrasing tools, and consulting with other people.

Based on the findings, the researchers hopes that this study can be useful as a form of self-reflection for students and lecturers to be more aware of the importance of paraphrasing skills in students' lives. In addition, this study encourages students to acquire more information about paraphrasing, either from books, experts, or the internet, so that they can master paraphrasing skills. Furthermore, in this part, the researchers emphasizes

that this research is partial. As the study only focuses on the experiences of four participants with a background in English education, the researchers hope that future researchers can develop more details of the research topic regarding problems when paraphrasing. The researchers hope that the topic can be explored again with different contexts, diverse backgrounds of students' experiences, and different research designs and data collection techniques.

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