

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter describes an explanation of several theories that support the study, which consists of a theoretical framework, a study of the relevant research, and a conceptual framework, as specifically detailed below.

#### **2.1 Academic Writing**

Academic writing is an essential component of higher education and a key skill for students in expressing their academic understanding. It differs from other forms of writing in that it emphasizes clarity, coherence, evidence-based argumentation, and adherence to disciplinary conventions. According to Hyland (2018), academic writing is not only about producing grammatically correct sentences but also about engaging critically with ideas and communicating knowledge within a particular academic community. This kind of writing requires students to demonstrate both linguistic competence and critical thinking skills in order to construct meaningful and persuasive arguments.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), academic writing presents additional challenges because students must manage both linguistic and cognitive demands simultaneously. As Al Fadda (2020) explains, EFL students often struggle to express complex academic ideas in a second language while following the conventions of academic discourse, such as citation, tone, and logical organization. Therefore, mastering academic writing involves more than language proficiency; it also requires the ability to plan, organize, and revise one's work through multiple stages. While Han and Hyland (2022) and Bai and Guo (2021) highlight the affective and motivational aspects that influence how students sustain effort and cope with difficulties, it is also essential to recognize that these emotional dimensions are inseparable from the cognitive process of writing. A balanced integration of these elements allows writers to approach academic writing more effectively and confidently. Recent research views academic writing as a process rather than a product

This process involves recursive stages through which writers plan, draft, revise, and reflect on their work (Kaufhold, 2025; Yunos et al., 2023). Each stage plays an important role in shaping the final quality of a text and reflects the writer's metacognitive awareness of how knowledge is developed and communicated. Understanding this process is essential for analyzing how students face and overcome difficulties in writing, particularly in tasks such as research proposal writing. These stages, planning, drafting, revising, and affective or self-management, represent the fundamental process of academic writing. Each stage plays a distinct yet interconnected role, which will be discussed in the following sections.

### **2.1.1 Planning Stage**

The planning stage, often referred to as the *pre-writing stage*, is the initial and one of the most critical phases in the academic writing process. During this stage, writers identify the topic, determine the purpose of their writing, and gather relevant ideas and sources to support their arguments. As Yunos et al. (2023) point out, effective planning enables writers to generate ideas and establish a clear direction before the actual drafting begins. This stage helps students clarify their objectives and structure their thoughts logically, which later contributes to coherence in writing.

According to Manchón and Matsuda (2022), the planning phase involves both conceptual and linguistic preparation. Writers must not only decide what they want to say but also anticipate how to express it in appropriate academic language. In the context of EFL learners, this stage can be particularly challenging because students are required to translate abstract ideas into a second language while ensuring the relevance and clarity of their topic. Therefore, good planning involves setting realistic goals, developing outlines, and reviewing related literature to build a strong foundation for the writing that follows.

Overall, the planning stage allows writers to transform vague ideas into structured plans. It serves as the foundation upon which the subsequent stages of writing, drafting, revising, and finalizing, are built. Without adequate planning, the

writing process may become disorganized, unfocused, and less effective in achieving its academic purpose.

### **2.1.2 Drafting Stage**

After completing the planning phase, writers move to the drafting stage, where they begin transforming their ideas and outlines into a coherent piece of writing. This stage focuses on developing the main arguments, elaborating on key ideas, and connecting them with supporting evidence. As Zhang (2021) explained, drafting is the process of transferring thoughts into written form while maintaining focus on meaning rather than accuracy. It allows writers to explore their ideas more freely and discover new perspectives as they write.

According to Manchón and Matsuda (2022), drafting is not a linear process but a recursive one, meaning that writers may go back and forth between generating ideas and composing sentences. This iterative nature helps writers refine their thinking as they construct meaning through text. For EFL learners, however, this process can be cognitively demanding because they must balance content development and language accuracy simultaneously (Fareed et al., 2021). Consequently, students are often encouraged to prioritize idea flow during drafting and address grammatical concerns in later stages such as revising and editing.

In academic writing, the drafting stage is where critical thinking and creativity intersect. Writers learn to articulate arguments logically, use appropriate academic tone, and ensure that each paragraph contributes to the overall purpose of the text. A well-developed draft provides a foundation for effective revision, enabling writers to evaluate and refine their work in subsequent stages.

### **2.1.3 Revising Stage**

The revising stage is one of the most crucial phases in the academic writing process, as it focuses on improving the content, organization, and clarity of the text. Unlike editing, which deals mainly with grammatical accuracy or surface errors, revising involves rethinking ideas, restructuring arguments, and refining the overall logic of the writing. As Zhang (2021) emphasized, revision allows writers to review

their drafts critically, identify weaknesses, and make substantial improvements that enhance the coherence and persuasiveness of their work.

According to Faigley (2018), effective revision requires writers to view their text from the reader's perspective. This means assessing whether the arguments are well supported, whether transitions between paragraphs are logical, and whether the ideas align with the purpose of the writing. For EFL learners, revising can be particularly demanding because it involves both higher-order thinking and linguistic awareness.

Revising is often described as a recursive and reflective process rather than a one-time correction. Writers may need to return to the planning or drafting stages to adjust ideas or add evidence based on feedback and self-evaluation. As noted by Yunos et al. (2023), this recursive movement fosters the development of metacognitive strategies, helping students become more autonomous and strategic writers. Thus, the revising stage is not merely a phase of correction but an integral part of developing academic maturity and critical awareness in writing.

#### **2.1.4 Finalizing Stage**

The finalizing stage represents the culmination of the academic writing process, where writers focus on refining their work for clarity, coherence, and accuracy. According to Flower and Hayes' (1981) process model, writing is recursive rather than linear; however, the final stage marks a conscious effort to polish the text and ensure it meets academic standards. This stage involves careful editing, proofreading, and formatting, as well as checking references and adherence to institutional guidelines.

As noted by Al Fadda (2020), the finalizing stage is not only about correcting surface-level errors but also about ensuring that the argument remains logically consistent and persuasive throughout. Students are expected to review transitions, paragraph cohesion, and the overall tone of their writing. For EFL learners, this stage can be particularly challenging because it requires attention to both linguistic accuracy and rhetorical appropriateness.

Effective finalizing involves multiple readings of the text from different perspectives, first as a writer, then as a reader, and finally as an evaluator. This reflective practice allows students to identify gaps, redundancies, or inconsistencies that may have been overlooked during drafting and revising. Ultimately, finalizing represents the writer's commitment to academic integrity and professionalism, demonstrating readiness to share their work with a broader scholarly audience.

### **2.1.5 Affective/Self-Management Stage**

In addition to the cognitive and linguistic aspects of writing, academic writing also involves affective and self-management components. The affective or self-management stage refers to how writers regulate their emotions, motivation, and attitudes throughout the writing process. As Han and Hyland (2022) noted, writing is not merely a cognitive act but also an emotional one, where feelings of anxiety, confidence, or motivation can significantly influence performance. Students who can manage their emotions effectively tend to sustain engagement, persist through difficulties, and produce higher-quality writing outcomes.

According to Bai and Guo (2021), effective strategies such as maintaining motivation, managing frustration, and fostering a positive mindset are crucial in academic writing success, especially for EFL learners. These learners often experience language-related anxiety and self-doubt, which may hinder their ability to express ideas confidently. Therefore according to Zimmerman (2020), self-regulation, including setting goals, monitoring progress, and seeking feedback, becomes an essential part of this stage.

In this sense, the affective or self-management stage underpins all other stages of writing. It allows writers to remain focused and resilient while dealing with the iterative nature of the writing process. Effective self-management helps writers balance their cognitive workload, maintain discipline, and stay motivated from the planning to the revising stage. Thus, understanding the affective dimension of writing provides valuable insight into how students navigate challenges and sustain motivation in complex academic tasks such as writing research proposals.

## **2.2 Research Proposal**

A research proposal is one of the forms of academic writing that requires students to demonstrate their ability to plan, organize, and communicate their ideas in a scholarly manner. It serves as a formal document that outlines the purpose, significance, and methods of a proposed study. According to Vasanthakumari (2021), a research proposal is a written document that outlines the researcher's intended study and guides the subsequent stages of the research. Similarly, Kivunja (2016) described a research proposal as a document that informs others about what the researcher intends to investigate, why it is important, how the research will be conducted, and what ethical issues may need to be considered. Acheampong (2021) emphasized that the main goal of a research proposal is to convince readers of the project's value and the researcher's capability to complete it successfully.

From an academic perspective, writing a research proposal reflects students' mastery of academic writing skills, as it involves synthesizing theoretical knowledge, demonstrating research literacy, and presenting information systematically. Denscombe (2012) explained that a research proposal functions as a blueprint for the overall research process. It outlines the main components of a study and illustrates how they fit together coherently. Therefore, writing a research proposal can be viewed as both a test of a student's academic competence and an opportunity to apply critical thinking and methodological understanding in a real research context.

### **2.2.1 The Importance and Structure of Research Proposal**

Writing a research proposal is an essential step in the academic research process because it demonstrates a writer's ability to identify a problem, formulate objectives, and design an appropriate research method. It provides a foundation for conducting a systematic and ethical study while allowing researchers to clarify the purpose and significance of their work. As highlighted by Al-Riyami (2020), a well-prepared research proposal helps the researcher organize thoughts, communicate intentions clearly, and anticipate potential challenges that may arise during the study. In

academic settings, this process also reflects the writer's readiness to engage in independent research and contribute meaningfully to their field of study.

Beyond its academic importance, a research proposal serves several practical purposes. It acts as a persuasive document that convinces supervisors or funding bodies of the feasibility and value of a project. Acheampong (2021) explained that a strong proposal not only presents a research idea but also justifies why it deserves support and how it will advance existing knowledge. Thus, the ability to write a clear and coherent proposal is crucial for developing critical thinking, methodological awareness, and academic confidence among students.

In terms of structure, a research proposal generally includes several core components: an introduction that presents the background and rationale of the study, a literature review that situates the research within existing scholarship, and a methodology section that outlines the design, participants, instruments, and data analysis procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Some proposals may also include sections on ethical considerations, limitations, and timelines, depending on institutional requirements. While formats may vary, the underlying principle remains the same, to present a logical, well-structured plan that demonstrates both academic competence and research integrity.

Understanding both the importance and structure of a research proposal is therefore essential for students, as it enables them to approach proposal writing not as a bureaucratic requirement but as an intellectual exercise that reflects their critical awareness, creativity, and research potential.

### **2.2.2 Challenges in Writing Research Proposal**

Writing a research proposal is a complex task that demands a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and organizational skills. Many students, particularly those in EFL contexts, experience difficulties in articulating research ideas, structuring their proposals, and meeting academic conventions. According to Al Fadda (2020), the most common challenges in academic writing among EFL students include limited vocabulary, weak organization, and lack of clarity in expressing complex ideas. These

difficulties are often intensified when students are required to present their ideas in a formal academic genre such as a research proposal.

Conceptually, students often struggle to identify a clear research gap and formulate precise research questions. As highlighted by Kivunja (2016), writing a proposal requires not only understanding the content area but also the ability to design a coherent plan that aligns with research objectives and methods. Many students lack confidence in evaluating previous studies or synthesizing theories, which leads to vague rationales and underdeveloped frameworks. Additionally, Dlamini (2023) pointed out that students may find it challenging to establish logical connections between the background, research problem, and methodology, making their proposals appear fragmented.

From a linguistic perspective, challenges arise due to the need to maintain academic tone, grammatical accuracy, and appropriate use of citation and referencing. Bai and Guo (2021) observed that linguistic insecurity and limited mastery of academic vocabulary often cause students to rely heavily on templates or mimic existing research instead of developing their own authentic voice. This results in writing that sounds repetitive or overly dependent on models, reducing originality and confidence.

On the affective level, writing a proposal can trigger anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt. Han and Hyland (2022) noted that emotional factors significantly influence students' writing performance and persistence. When faced with repeated revisions or unclear guidance, students may lose motivation or perceive writing as a stressful obligation rather than a process of learning. Moreover, insufficient feedback and limited supervisory support can worsen these feelings, leaving students uncertain about the quality of their work.

Overall, challenges in writing a research proposal are multifaceted, encompassing conceptual, linguistic, and affective dimensions. These difficulties highlight the importance of viewing proposal writing not merely as a technical

requirement but as a complex academic practice that requires continuous guidance, reflection, and emotional resilience.

### **2.2.3 Solutions in Writing Research Proposal**

Addressing the challenges in writing a research proposal requires a combination of personal strategies and institutional support. Since proposal writing is both a cognitive and affective process, effective solutions should target the development of students' writing competence, confidence, and self-regulation. As Bai and Guo (2021) emphasized, motivation and self-management play an essential role in sustaining writing performance, especially when students face linguistic or conceptual difficulties. Therefore, training students to develop metacognitive awareness — such as setting goals, monitoring progress, and reflecting on feedback can significantly enhance their writing outcomes.

From a pedagogical perspective, writing support programs and academic writing courses can help students improve their proposal writing skills. Research by Dlamini (2023) found that explicit instruction in research design, academic writing conventions, and citation practices helps reduce confusion and improve proposal coherence. Likewise, collaborative writing activities, workshops, and peer feedback sessions enable students to gain multiple perspectives, revise more effectively, and develop a sense of academic community (Han & Hyland, 2022). These practices also foster motivation by creating a supportive learning environment where students can share experiences and learn from one another.

Supervisory guidance is another key factor in overcoming proposal writing challenges. Effective supervision involves more than correcting language errors; it includes mentoring students in conceptualizing ideas, structuring their arguments, and understanding the logic of research inquiry. According to Kivunja (2016), supervisors who provide formative feedback and constructive dialogue help students transform writing difficulties into opportunities for learning. Furthermore, building a positive supervisor–student relationship can reduce anxiety and foster confidence, particularly for EFL learners who may feel insecure about their academic writing ability.

Ultimately, successful proposal writing depends on how well students integrate linguistic competence, conceptual understanding, and emotional resilience. Providing continuous opportunities for feedback, reflection, and revision not only strengthens writing proficiency but also develops independent, motivated, and confident researchers. Rather than viewing proposal writing as a one-time requirement, students and educators should see it as an evolving process that cultivates critical thinking and lifelong academic skills.

### **2.3 Study of Relevant Research**

In the previous study, the researcher revealed numerous difficulties in writing a research proposal. Suryatiningsih (2019) There are several problems in writing research proposals such as capitalization and punctuation, inexplicability or fuzziness, poor organization or illogical sequence, spelling and grammatical order. The study argues that most of their writing problems arise from pedagogical reasons. The subjects of this study are twenty students and the instruments are students writing the research proposal, interview for the students and lecturer.

Peng (2018) indicated that students face challenges when it comes to writing research, starting with selecting a topic and developing a research proposal, and continuing with the subsequent steps. more complex, such as document review. It explores the generic difficulties in thesis/dissertation writing perceived by the graduate supervisors of their research students in their advanced academic literacy process. Manchishi (2015) found some students' mistakes in writing the proposal such as, broad and unclear topics, failure to state the problem, failure to identify the gap in the literature, using the wrong methodology, misunderstanding research terminology, wrong referencing style and plagiarism. Retya (2010) researched the problems faced by the students in writing a Thesis and revealed several students' problems in writing a thesis, especially nonlinguistic aspects. This present study has some differences and similarities with the previous studies. While the differences between the relevant research are that this present study focuses on the challenges and solutions based on the students' perspective.