

“I AM AWARE, BUT WHO AM I TO COMMENT.”: CRITICAL STANCE IN INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC ESSAYS

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Article Info

Article History:
Received June 2022
Accepted August 2022
Published September 2022

Keywords:
Reporting verbs, Tenses of RV, Academic essay, Critical stance

Abstract

The study examined the reporting verbs (RV) and tenses of RV in the academic essay of English-majored undergraduate students in Indonesia. Employing a sequential explanatory mixed-method research design, the study first collected quantitative data in the form of frequency of RV using Hyland’s (2002) framework and tenses of RV using Thomas and Hawes’ (1997) framework. Qualitative data were then collected to explain the reasons behind the use of RV and the tenses of RV. The study found that discourse verbs are prevalent in the students’ essays, with 66,67% occurrence of total corpus, followed by research verbs, with 30,72% occurrence of the total corpus. Cognition verbs, however, were the least used, with 2,61% of the total corpus. The study also found that present tense (58,82%) and past tense (41,18%) were the most frequently used tenses in students’ RV. The interview revealed students’ reasons behind the frequent use of discourse and research verbs and the limited use of cognition verbs in their essays. Among which are their lack of engagement with literature and reticence to evaluate the author’s claims due to their inadequate cognitive competence and English proficiency. The study concludes that students’ use of discourse and research verbs reflects their relatively low criticality toward the cited materials.

INTRODUCTION

One characteristic distinguishing academic writing from other discourses is reporting verbs (RV). As a dialogical construction between writers and readers, academic writing requires convincing readers that the writer's claims are trustworthy by referencing cited works. In citation practices, the use of RV is essential in introducing cited works; therefore, RV instruction which is also part of academic vocabulary, requires EFL writing teachers' attention (Suhandoko & Ningrum, 2020). As an essential feature of knowledge construction in academic writing through citations, Hyland (1999) emphasizes the cautious selection of RV because they might demonstrate writers' attitudes towards the cited materials and further establish the credibility of their claims. In general, RV provides a space for writers to credit cited authors for their theoretical contributions in a particular discipline and makes the research and claims of other authors a construction of knowledge that may serve as a foundation for future work in the field (Charles, 2006a, 2006b). To distinguish between the citer from the cited, this paper, adopting Thompson and Yiyun's (1991) terminology, arbitrarily yet consistently refers to the citer as the writer and the cited as the author.

In higher education, writing papers is frequently included in course completion requirements, be it as a reflection paper for what has been discussed in the class or as a final-term paper. Therefore, understanding academic writing conventions for course completion, such as using citations and reporting structures, is required, making writing a more daunting task. It is even more challenging for EFL writers who must communicate ideas in appropriate English writing and follow the convention of English academic writing. Juliaty and Abetnego (2019) affirm that EFL students often struggle with their academic writing due to their lack of engagement with "L2 academic writing practices and understanding of the L2 academic writing culture" (p. 332).

As an important feature in academic writing to attribute the referred sources and improve the credibility of the writing, the choice of RV may define the validity of the cited materials. However, studies have consistently reported that novice EFL writers have struggled with reporting verbs in their academic writing. It is the case for EFL writers in Indonesia (Amrullah et al., 2017; Arsyad et al., 2021), Iran (Yeganeh & Boghayeri, 2015), Malaysia (Manan & Noor, 2014), Thailand (Jaroongkhongdach, 2015; Jogthong, 2001), Vietnam (Loan & Pramoolsook, 2015), Czech (Jarkovská & Kučírková, 2020), Spain (Luzón, 2018; Soler Monreal & Gil Salom, 2011), Ghana (Agbaglo, 2017), and China (Kwon et al., 2018; Wen & Pramoolsook, 2021). The studies have found a predilection for EFL writers to use RV in a limited manner, especially in research acts (such as find, show, analyze) and discourse factive

(such as explain, argue, affirm). In addition, the studies have also reported frequent occurrences, even excessive repetition of certain RV such as state, find, and argue (Manan & Noor, 2014; Yeganeh & Boghayeri, 2015). Even if they have used a variety of RV, the decision is made arbitrarily without further consideration to the rhetorical implications of selecting RV (Amrullah et al., 2017; Loan & Pramoolsook, 2015; Pecorari, 2008). Whereas, the use of RV as a rhetorical device in academic writing may convey the writer's critical stance toward the cited materials as a contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

Several factors contributed to the overuse and random selection of particular RV in EFL writers' academic writing. Some of these factors, albeit intuitively stated by some scholars, include a lack of understanding or exposure to the content of the cited previous studies (Arsyad et al., 2021; Jaroongkhongdach, 2015), as well as their reluctance to evaluate and comment on the claims of the authors (Agbaglo, 2017; Jaroongkhongdach, 2015; Soler Monreal & Gil Salom, 2011). Although EFL writers may have been exposed to training on using RV in academic writing, they nonetheless fail to make decisions about and experiment with new lexical varieties of RV owing to a lack of confidence (linguistic inferiority) (Bloch, 2010; Wen & Pramoolsook, 2021). This insecurity stems from their low English proficiency and, as a result, directs their judgment that they are not as eligible as English native speakers to effectively communicate their stance on materials presented in the language (Soler Monreal & Gil Salom, 2011; Uba, 2019).

EFL writers' access to RV is limited to certain categories, and they also struggle with appropriate tense choices within their RV of selection. Tenses in academic writing are related to time and also a form of authors' critical expression for materials they cite (Salager-Meyer, 1992). Bitchener (2010) identifies three tenses often used in academic citation practice: the present tense, the past tense, and the present perfect tense. The present tense communicates current knowledge, draws conclusions, or communicates previous relevant, trustworthy research findings. The past tense refers to ideas or previous research findings that are less relevant presently. The present perfect tense criticizes a recently agreed-upon situation or reports multiple sources simultaneously. Previous studies on the tenses of RV have also consistently shown that EFL writers have a preference for the present tense as opposed to the more dynamic tense use among native English speakers (Jarkovská & Kučírková, 2020; Jaroongkhongdach, 2015). The tendency of EFL writers to use tenses in their RV without considering the purpose of each tense indicates their incompetence to verify claims or highlight the relevance of previous research to their work.

Numerous research has explored the types of RV used by EFL writers, tenses in RV, and the differences between native English and EFL writers using RV. However, little scholarly attention has been paid to investigating the reasons for using certain RV by EFL writers. Willett (2013) emphasizes that relying solely on corpus data to identify the reasons behind the employment of RV may result in “a small degree of overlap between the author’s reasons for citing particular sources and their readers’ subsequent perceptions of those reasons” (p. 150). Therefore, although not all interviews can help reveal the authors’ motivations, it is still necessary to confirm corpus-based interpretations with individual subjectivity data in the field (Harwood, 2008). By investigating the reasons behind the use of RV in students’ texts, EFL teachers will be aware of to what extent their students can use RV in their academic texts. Furthermore, teachers can use their students’ reasons as reflection material for planning remedial actions to make students more competent in using RV.

With this in mind, the study aims to answer the following questions: 1) Which RV categories are most frequently used by Indonesian undergraduate EFL students in their academic essays? 2) Which tenses of RV are most frequently used by Indonesian undergraduate EFL students in their academic essays, 3) What are the reasons behind the use of RV and tenses of RV by Indonesian undergraduate EFL students in their academic essays?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are two key considerations when using reporting verbs in academic writing: the RV itself and the tense of RV. To some extent, this is a matter of writer preference; nonetheless, the choice of RV might reveal their stance on the assertions of authors used to support his claim. Thompson and Yiyun (1991) classified RV into denotation and evaluation verbs. The denotation RV is divided into the author’s and writer’s acts. The author’s act RV consists of textual, research, and mental. Meanwhile, RV that falls into the writers’ act includes comparison and theorization.

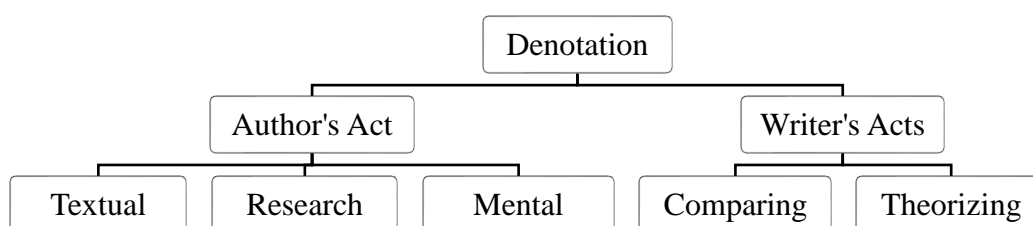


Figure 1: Thompson and Yiyun's (1991) framework of reporting verbs

Evaluation RV includes the author's stance, the writer's stance, and the writer's interpretation. The author's stance RV is "the reported attitude the author has toward the validity of the reported information or opinion" (Thompson & Yiyun, 1991, p. 372). It refers to how the writers use RV to reveal the claim made by authors, whether it is true (e.g., accept, emphasize, hypothesize), not true (e.g., attack, challenge, dismiss), or neutral (e.g., assess, examine, evaluate). The writer's stance verb portrays the writer's attitude toward the authors' claim either by explicitly accepting the claim (e.g., identify, prove, demonstrate), refusing (e.g., disregard, ignore, misuse), or merely restating the claim without making further evaluation (e.g., advance, believe, claim). The writer's interpretation verb is related to how the writers view the authors' claim by interpreting how the claim is relevant to the author's work (e.g., add, comment, continue, detail), assessing the author's purpose in presenting the claim (e.g., admit, assert, criticize), contextualizing the claim using her framework (e.g., establish, popularize, prove), or presenting the claim objectively (e.g., apply, employ, say, see).

Although Thompson and Yiyun's (1991) RV classification seems comprehensive, it fails to address the problem of verbs that overlap different categories; for example, the verb *believe* is categorized as a mental verb in the denotation category and a non-factive verb in the evaluation category. In response to this, Hyland (2002) reclassifies RV more systematically. Hyland categorizes RV into research, cognition, and discourse verbs.

- 1) Research acts refer to the experimental procedures or activities in the research. The Research verb is further categorized into findings and procedures:
 - a) Research finding verbs are categorized into:
 - i) Factive, referring to the writers' acceptance of the authors' reports as a truth (e.g., demonstrate, show, confirm, prove).
 - ii) Counter-factive, referring to the writer's assertion of the author's reports as untrue (e.g., fail, misunderstand, ignore, overlook).
 - iii) Non-factive, referring to the writer's comment on the author's reports with no clear signals on whether to accept or reject the reports (e.g., find, identify, observe, obtain).
 - b) Procedure refers to the procedural activities the authors performed without giving the evaluation of the information (e.g., analyze, investigate, explore, carry out, study, conduct).
- 2) Cognition acts refer to the writer's use of RV interpreting the author's mental process (for example, think, agree). Hyland categorizes cognition verbs into positive, critical, tentative, and neutral.

- a) Positive cognition refers to the positive stance the writer shows (as the writer interprets) toward the author's claim (e.g., agree, concur, hold, know, think, understand).
 - b) Critical cognition refers to the writer's interpretation of the author's critical stance toward information (e.g., disagree, dispute, not think).
 - c) Tentative cognition refers to the writer's interpretation of the author's doubt on the validity of information (e.g., believe, doubt, speculate, suppose, suspect).
 - d) Neutral cognition refers to the writer's interpretation of the author's attitude toward information with no clear evaluation (e.g., picture, conceive, anticipate, notice).
- 3) Discourse acts refer to the writer's assessment of the cited material, whether by admitting some measure of personal responsibility for their interpretation, expressing some skepticism about the validity of the information, or providing some concerns regarding the information. Discourse verb is classified into doubt, assurance, and counter.
- a) Doubt refers to the writer's judgment that the cited materials include doubtful information either tentatively (e.g., postulate, hypothesize, indicate) or critically (e.g., exaggerate, not account, not make a point).
 - b) Assurance refers to the writer's judgment on the cited materials either neutrally/non-factive (e.g., state, describe, discuss, report, answer) or positively/factive (e.g., argue, affirm, explain, note, point out).
 - c) Counter refers to the author's refusals on the information (e.g., deny, critique, challenge, attack).

In addition to the selection of RV, the tense choice of RV may also imply the writer's attitude toward the cited materials. Thomas and Hawes (1997), in their analysis of tense choice for RV in research articles published in highly reputable journals, found three main tenses used: past tense, present tense, and present perfect tense. The past tense serves to explain the conclusions of previous research. The present tense serves to explain the interpretation of the conclusions from previous studies relevant to the writer's claim and show an evaluation of the cited materials. Meanwhile, the present perfect tense serves to criticize or highlight the relevance of previous research to the author's claims. Also, the present perfect tense is often used when reporting multiple sources simultaneously.

METHOD

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed method that first collected quantitative data in the form of the frequency of RV in each category following Hyland's (2002) framework and the frequency of tenses of RV following Thomas and Hawes' (1999) framework. It then collected qualitative data from students' reasons behind using certain RV to help explain and verify the quantitative data (Ivankova et al., 2016). Employing a mixed-method research design allowed the researcher to rely on numerical data to explain the phenomena of using RV and its tenses in academic writing and on qualitative data to bridge the gap between the researcher's interpretation and the real situation in the field.

The quantitative data were obtained from the frequency of RV and its tenses in the essays written by 81 English majored undergraduate second-year L2 students in an academic writing course at an Indonesian university. AntConc, a program that provides a "powerful concordancer, word and keyword frequency generators, tools for cluster and lexical bundle analysis, and a word distribution plot," was used to compile the RV and tense of RV corpus (Anthony, 2004). After the corpus of RV was collected, the researcher sorted the results because not all verbs produced by the software are reporting verbs, as shown below.

- a) Barreto and Ellemers (2003) and Morton and Sonnenberg (2010) **suggest** that a person will not avoid negative risks if he refuses to express a prominent self-reflection.
- b) Therefore, if a child becomes a criminal or perpetrator of a crime, the state must protect the teenager (Gilang, 2015). This **suggests** that juvenile justice is also the cause of not responding to punishment in the same way as adults.

In (a), the verb *suggest* follows the author's names and publication year; therefore, this verb is categorized as RV, while in (b), the verb *suggest* is followed by the writer's interpretation of the cited materials yet not followed by author's name and publication year; therefore, it is not categorized as RV. To validate the data, the researcher asked an independent coder to validate the RV found in the students' essays. The researcher gave the coder the essay and asked the coder to collect the RV. The coder was given a week to complete the process of identifying the RV. After that, the RV collected by the researcher and the coder was compared, then the correlation was measured. The results showed a very good match of 91 percent, meaning that the data the researcher and the coder found is consistent (Kanoksilapatham, 2005). After the RV was collected and validated, the next stage of data collection was to investigate the frequency of tenses used, including past, present, and present perfect tense.

The qualitative data was collected from the focused-group discussion (FGD) conducted with the students. Eighty-one students were enrolled in the four-class academic writing course. The researcher purposively selected the students to join the FGD. Each class was represented by three students (one high achiever, one middle achiever, and one low achiever) to get a more thorough picture of the reasons behind RV use. Each participant was asked the same question, “Why did you choose this RV and tense?” The responses were then discussed with the rest of the FGD members because it is possible to question one participant, and others may provide perspectives regarding the reasons for using RV and tense. The results of the FGD were then analyzed following Miles et al.'s (2019) qualitative analysis framework to reveal the common pattern of students’ reasons for using certain RV and the tense of RV in their academic writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reporting verbs in L2 students’ academic essays

Employing Hyland’s (2002) RV framework: research, cognitive, and discourse verbs, the study found 306 RV, which can be summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. The frequency of RV in students’ essays

Research acts 94 (30,72%)	Findings 91 (29,74%)	Factive 25 (8,17%)	demonstrate 3 (0,98%) show 18 (5,88%) confirm 4 (1,31%)
		Counter-factive (0%)	-
		Non-factive 66 (21,57%)	find 55 (17,97%) identify 4 (1,31%) observe 6 (1,96%) obtain 1 (0,33%)
	Procedures 3 (0,98%)		investigate 3 (0,98%)
Cognition acts 8 (2,61%)		Positive 3 (0,98%)	think 2 (0,65%) understand 1 (0,33%)
		Critical 0 (0%)	
		Tentative 5 (1,63%)	believe 5 (1,63%)
		Neutral 0 (0%)	
Discourse acts 204 (66,67%)	Doubt 13 (4,25%)	Tentative 13 (4,21%)	hypothesize 1 (0,33%) indicate 4 (1,31%) suggest 8 (2,61%)
		Critical 0 (0%)	-
		Assurance 190 (62,09%)	Factive 95 (31,05%)
		Non-factive 95 (31,05%)	state 45 (14,71%) describe 7 (2,29%) discuss 5 (1,63%) report 32 (10,46%) define 6 (1,96%)

Counters 1 (0,33%)

Table 1 shows the predilection of the students' use of discourse and research verbs in their reporting structures. A large number of research findings verbs were found in students' essay, and *find/found* that functions to report the research results is prevalent (55 occurrences/ 17,97% of total corpus). Other research findings verbs found in students' essays are *show* (5,88%), *confirm* (1,31%), and *demonstrate* (0,98%) that belong to factive verbs showing that they "acknowledge their acceptance of the authors' results or conclusions" (Hyland, 2002, p. 119). Furthermore, non-factive verbs that give no signals of whether students accept or reject the information in the cited materials were also found, including *identify* (1,31%), *observe* (1,96%), and *obtain* (0,33%). There were just three (0,98%) occurrences of the procedural verb *investigate* that demonstrates steps taken during the research process. Although counter-factive RV seems an effective way to question the results of previous research as a form of niche establishment, it seems that students rarely exercised these verbs in their essays. Hyland (2002) concludes that EFL writers are more inclined to use a more subtle way of building on previous literature. The following extracts show how research verbs carry no evaluative potential toward the cited materials in students' essays.

- (1) Al-Alawi et al. (2017) demonstrated that compared to the older age group ...
- (2) Atmawati (2020) shows a language shift in the coastal area of Yogyakarta ...
- (3) Littleton and Ollendick (2003) confirm that people with body image dissatisfaction tend to be uncomfortable with their body shape.
- (4) Another data is also obtained from Galal (2021), which illustrates that ...
- (5) Reiter et al. (2013) find that divorce in husband-and-wife relationships does not show an increase.
- (6) Tsuda (2008) identifies the loss of mother tongue as caused by people underestimating the power of English.
- (7) Yilmaz, Anrikulu, and Ikmen (2017) observed sleep quality of nursing students and showed that ...
- (8) A paper published in European Journal of Sport Science (2018) investigated how excited each athlete is in singing their national anthem.

The excerpts in (1), (2), (3), and (4) show how students' use of research-finding factive verbs when reporting the author's claims to show their acceptance toward the cited materials. These verbs were prevalent in the corpus. The heavy reliance on factive verbs suggests that students are hesitant to communicate their critical thought on the author's claims, which

Jaroongkhongdach (2015) interprets as a sign of poor critical engagement with the literature. Another option for commenting on previous work is to use research-finding non-factive verbs that do not convey a clear attitude toward the credibility of the cited materials, as shown in (5), (6), and (7). The use of such verbs mainly focuses on reviewing previous research frequently to establish a niche. The excessive use of research-finding non-factive verbs implies that students merely relayed what previous researchers had conducted without attempting to synthesize, compare, and criticize the interpretation of the author's findings; hence, these verbs are classified as low-level reporting verbs (Manan & Noor, 2014). The last research finding verb found in the student's essay is the procedural verb *investigate*, which was found in only three.

Similar to research verbs, discourse verbs were also prevalent in students' essays, even about 66,67% of the total corpus. Discourse verbs allow writers to be fully responsible for evaluating the cited materials, question the validity of the cited materials, and acknowledge the author's credibility in providing the information (Hyland, 2002). The study found 204 discourse verbs with 13 occurrences (4,21%) of discourse doubt verbs, 190 occurrences (61,49%) of discourse assurance verbs, and one occurrence (0,33%) of discourse counter verbs. Although discourse doubt verbs were found in students' essays, no critical verb was exercised in their reporting practices. Overwhelmingly, discourse assurance factive verbs were found to occur 95 times (31,05%). It is also the case for discourse assurance non-factive verbs that were found to occur 95 times (31,05%). The following excerpts show how students rely heavily on positive and neutral verbs when reporting the cited materials.

- (9) Herbst and Strawński (2016) hypothesize that there are various factors that influence
- (10) Survey conducted by Ng, Fleming and Robinson (2014) indicated that in 2013, 36,9 % of men adults
- (11) Stokes (2015) suggests colleges and universities find ways
- (12) Smith (2019) argues people who have a social butterfly attitude
- (13) National Center of Biotechnology Information (n.d.) affirms that the disadvantage of early marriage is
- (14) Hendriksen (2018) explains being yourself means
- (15) Smith (2013) notes that at the end of 2012
- (16) Nguyen, Soenens, and Werner (2019) point out that enjoying and appreciating time
- (17) Franklin, (2019) claimed that groups around people with mental illness
- (18) This is also stated by Roberts (2016) in his research that in Christianity,

- (19) A study by Medic, Wille, and Hemels (2017) describes some of the impacts
- (20) Furthermore, Deming and Dynarski (2008) discuss that in the United States
- (21) Murphy (2022) reported that Liverpool fans love to boo the national anthem.
- (22) Laryea et al. (2019, p. 2) simply defined Adverse Events Following Immunization as
- (23) Kalita (2020) denies that Indian medical students' Grade Point Average (GPAs)

Excerpts (9), (10), and (11) show students' use of discourse doubt tentative verbs to show that alternative sources are possible in addition to the materials presented by the author. Although the RV allows students to provide readers room for more perspectives on the cited materials, students did not exercise much on the verbs in their essays. Liardét and Black (2019) argue that experts "more commonly rely on dialogically expansive choices that present the reported evidence as but one of a number of perspectives offered to the reader for consideration," using tentative verbs, such as *suggest*. It also seems to be the rationale for the prevalence of tentative verbs in students' writing, given that this is how they perceive the best practice of reporting verbs by native and/or professional English writers.

Excerpts (12), (13), (14), (15), (16), and (17) show how discourse assurance factive verbs were used in students' reporting practices. Of the 95 verbs, *argue* and *explain* are prevalent in students' essays. It is in line with Kwon et al. (2018) and Lee et al. (2018), who found that *argue* verbs are more common in EFL novice writers' essays. Undergraduate students in the social humanities also have a predilection, as Liardét and Black (2019) concluded, to employ *argue* verbs in their academic writing, which Soler Monreal and Gil Salom (2011) refer to this as speculation over the reliability of the cited materials. A large amount of discourse assurance factive verbs suggests that students are more likely to present cited materials in a more positive or conclusive manner that such practice was also found in several studies (see Hyland, 2002; Jarkovská & Kučírková, 2020; Loan & Pramoolsook, 2015; Wen & Pramoolsook, 2021). The employment of assurance verbs, particularly factives, implies that the EFL novice writers are not passively accepting the assertions of the authors but are instead able to articulate their thoughts on the cited materials in an objective and impartial manner. However, its overuse would produce bland and prosaic works when instead, strong, effective academic writing would have emphasized the writers' ideas rather than the authors'.

Similar to the findings of high preference for discourse assurance factive verbs, abundant distribution was also seen in students exercising discourse assurance non-factive, accounting for a third of the total corpus, as seen in excerpts (18), (19), (20), (21), (22), and (23). A high preference for discourse assurance non-factive verbs suggests that students tend to report the

cited materials without a clear stance. Similar research by Ramoroka (2014) also demonstrated the prevalent use of non-factive assurance verbs by EFL writers in their academic writing. According to Jarkovská and Kučirková (2020), this occurs because EFL novice writers have problems with going beyond a simple connection between the cited materials and their original source. EFL novice writers typically attribute to the cited materials rather than expressing their stance by paying attention to the relationship between syntactic features and rhetorical functions when reporting authors' claims. Wen and Pramoolsook (2021) conclude that undergraduate students' preference for non-factive verbs allows them to comment neutrally on the cited materials and avoid biases in making interpretations, thus highlighting the author's agency instead of theirs.

The least RV found in students' essays were cognition verbs which were associated with the author's mental process. Of the least represented verbs, positive and tentative verbs amount to five and three occurrences, respectively. Cognition-positive verbs allow writers to demonstrate their acceptance of the cited materials and acknowledge their authenticity, sharing the author's positive attitude with the verbs such as *agree*, *know*, *think*, or *understand* (Hyland, 2002). In contrast, cognition tentative verbs indicate the writers' reservations regarding the reliability of the reported information with the verbs such as *believe*, *doubt*, or *speculate*. The followings are examples of cognition verbs found in the students' essays.

(24) Hendriksen (2018) thinks that feeling lonely in a person causes feelings of insecurity and hopelessness.

(25) Corley (cited in Indra, 2007) understands the importance of replacing negative-minded friends or acquaintances with positive-minded people.

(26) Hoppe (2010) believes that capitalism has a stronger economy than socialism

The cognition positive verbs in (24) and (25) show students' interpretation of the author's positive attitude toward the cited materials. Employing the verb *think* implies that the student perceived the author as confident with the information presented. Similarly, the verb *understand* indicates the writer's acceptance of the author's qualification in presenting the information. They are followed by a tentative verb (1.63%) represented by *believe* with five occurrences. The use of tentative verbs shows that the writer notices other perspectives that can substitute or complement the information the authors presented. However, neither neutral nor critical cognition verbs were discovered, suggesting that students failed to infer the author's mental state when presenting the materials, whereas most experts perceive cognition verbs or verbs that evaluate the author's mental process (e.g., Hyland, 2002; Swales, 1990; Thompson

& Yiyun, 1991) as indicators of writing that is not only academic but also of high quality. Criticism and assessment are essential in the academic writing setting because they provide a productive discussion between authors, specialists, and readers that promotes the development of science. As long as no examination and criticism of a scientific hypothesis take place, a theory will hold faithful. Lack of criticism and evaluation stunts scientific progress, making it more important to openly discuss knowledge to promote rational thinking.

The choice of RV becomes an essential issue beyond the subject of the writing itself. Not only can it be used “to give credit to other researchers and to use their work in the cumulative construction of knowledge” (Charles, 2006a, p. 326), but it also allows writers to situate their work in a scientific community and, therefore, “contribute to the recognition from other members from the discipline itself” (Manan & Noor, 2014, p. 141). Despite its importance, students often fail to use appropriate RV effectively in their academic writing, as shown in the overuse of certain RV. The study found that students rely on research and discourse verbs, and certain verbs are used repeatedly, suggesting that they cannot decide what RV to use. In other words, criticality is beyond their competence. The situation seems to affirm what has been found by previous researchers (e.g., Manan & Noor, 2014; Pecorari, 2008) that EFL students unnecessarily use the same reporting verbs, which may have consequences on the reliability of the cited materials.

Tenses of RV in EFL Students’ Academic Essay

In addition to the investigation of RV used in EFL students’ reporting practices, the study also examined how tenses of RV were used to express the writer’s attitude and criticality in academic work (Swales, 1990). In the study, the major choices for tense in the reporting structures were present tense (58,82%) and past tense (41,18%), but no present perfect in the corpus, as seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Tense of RV in Indonesian EFL students’ academic essay

Tense	Occurrence	%
Present tense	180	58,82%
Past tense	126	41,18%
Present perfect	0	0%
Total	306	100%

Table 3 shows students’ familiarity with present tense and past tense in the reporting structures. Students’ predilection for using present tense and past tense in their reporting structure seems to correspond with their choice of RV. Academic writing convention demands that writers employ past verbs when citing the results of previous research (research acts) and

present verbs when referring to the author's views (discourse acts). The examples of RV in the present tense and past tense are given below.

(27) National Geographic Society (2022) states that almost every witchcraft is about violence and crime, and sometimes people get sick as a result of it.

(28) Ningsih et al. (2022) stated that education contributes to the production of human resources who have knowledge, abilities, and expertise.

In excerpts (27) and (28), the discourse assurance non-factive verb *state* was found to be written in present and past tense. Even though both data sets are reported in the same year with the same verb, the reporting structure employs different tenses. In excerpt (27), students use the present tense to reference a statement from the National Geographic Society, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating the public about the significance of preserving all the treasures given by our planet. The employment of the present tense in the structure of the verb *state* seems to show the student's neutrality of the cited claims. Because the statement is a view that represents an organization, the truth can be questioned; hence the present tense seems more appropriate. The present tense is often associated with lexical items in the THINK verb, so it has implications for the generalization meaning of the cited material (Thompson & Yiyun, 1991).

In excerpt (28) student cited a single work that, although it may appear optional, the role of education in improving human life is actually experimental because the evidentiality of it is abundant (Lebedinski & Vandenberghe, 2014). Although Swales and Feak (2012) remark that it seems mandatory to refer to what a researcher conducted in the past tense, writers have greater freedom to use the present tense when referring to what the researcher wrote or thought (discourse and cognitive verbs). It is possible that it can also be used in THINK verb structures, especially to report less generalized claims (Shaw, 1992).

Although students were found to employ both the present and past tense in their reporting structure, some of these tenses were used arbitrarily without considering the rhetorical consequences.

(29) Knuttgen (2007) **argues**, "There are great differences between exercise programs performed for strength gain vs. aerobic fitness gain."

(30) Knuttgen (2007) **argued** that the point of conducting this type of exercise, which is cardio, is that performing it in adequately high intensity is more prompt, however an adjustment is possible for a particular individual with particular condition.

The verb *argue* belongs to discourse assurance factive verb that shows the writer's acknowledgment of the validity of the cited materials. In excerpt (30), the student used past tense, even though the verb ARGUE is more appropriately to be presented in the present tense to demonstrate the writer's stance on the cited materials. Even though the researcher failed to delve into students' reason for using the past tense, it is clear from excerpt (30) that the student has cited a statement that is not a result of the research findings but rather an opinion made by the cited author (as evidenced by the use of a booster *adequately high*, implying a proposition), hence the use of past tense is somewhat arbitrary and inappropriate. Even if the learner perceives the referred information as research findings, the employment of past tense research verbs seems more acceptable. Likewise, if the student wants to demonstrate 'distance' between his work and the referred content, then it would be more appropriate to use the verb *not account* to show the tentative truth of the cited material.

Though seemingly trivial, the tenses choice of RV might significantly affect the credibility of the claim. Students' choice of the present and past tense, common in attributions in academic writing, is a strong indicator that they are familiar with citation practices in academic writing. However, EFL students frequently use them inconsistently, as seen in excerpts (27), (28), (29), and (30). The inaccurate selection of tenses of RV confirms Jaroongkhongdach's (2015) conclusion that "selecting what tense to use can be a problem for many non-native English researchers, especially for the novice" (p. 150). Indonesian and English differ in many ways; however, the concepts of present tense and past tense are apparent and, therefore, should not raise a problem for Indonesian EFL writers as it does among Thai writers who are not equipped with the concept of the time difference in their native language (Jogthong, 2001). Except for the present perfect, which is unknown in Indonesian grammar, the present tense and past tense should not raise a problem (Rochman, 2003). The present perfect tense in RV can be employed to highlight the current state of affairs or convey a temporary conclusion from multiple works of literature (Swales & Feak, 2012). Arsyad et al. (2021) argue that the limited use of the present perfect in EFL students' writing is due to their predilection for referring to a single study and research findings. It is in stark contrast to the citation practices by native English speakers or experts who prefer to cite generally accepted knowledge in the present tense and cite information from multiple sources collectively to indicate an area of inquiry with the present perfect.

The choice of tenses of RV structure has a substantial rhetorical influence on the referred information as it conveys the writer's attitude on the credibility and generalizability of the cited materials. With this in mind, Salager-Meyer (1992) reminds the importance of using the correct

tenses of RV because different tenses provide different functions. Despite widespread agreement on the structure of the tense in reporting verbs, Hyland (2017) reported a substantial shift in the reporting structures in soft-hard and pure-applied disciplines. Even in pure and hard science research articles that emphasize the significance of experimentalism, writers tend to employ the present tense when reporting previous literature. It is made to highlight what other authors said rather than what they did, making the referred information instead of the authors support the writer's claim. It produces an image of 'ownership of the present work' in that authors emphasize their work more and that of other authors less.

EFL Students' Reasons for Using Certain RV and Tense of RV

In addition to corpus-based analysis to investigate the RV and its tenses used in students' academic essays, this study also seeks to explore further the reasons for students using certain RV and its tenses by conducting focus group discussions (FGD) with students. The FGD revealed four critical points to discuss.

"I have used citation, haven't I? Isn't that academic enough?"

Students perceived that using RV in citation procedures complied with academic writing practice, and they were capable of using appropriate sources to support their arguments, as shown in the students' responses below.

We've been told that using quotations indicates being responsible for what we refer to in our text and not just taking from random sources. I can direct the readers to where exactly the cited materials are. And I have already used citations to support my claim with reporting verbs such as *state* written in the present tense, haven't I? Isn't that academic enough?

Since quotation is a common rhetorical technique in academic writing, and RV is one of the reporting tools, the response by the student above is not entirely off base. However, the proper use of RV could demonstrate the writer's critical attitude towards the cited materials, making the writer's view valuable as an intellectual contribution to the development of knowledge "to situate their [idea] in a larger narrative, and this is most obviously demonstrated through appropriate citation" (Hyland, 2004, p. 20). Discourse verbs are common in social sciences and humanities disciplines (Hyland, 2002). Discourse verbs allow writers to make interpretations, speculations, and complexities of ideas into knowledge worthy of reckoning. The reliability of the information in social sciences and humanities, which are included in soft disciplines, is more fluid and discursive depending on the context and specificity. It is perhaps the reason why students in the study that are majored in English employ discourse verbs because they are more likely to be exposed to them in reporting practices in the literature they

read, facilitating the verbal exploration of problems and using qualitative arguments that rely on the accuracy of interpretation rather than systematic and rigid measurement procedures (Hyland, 1999), as shown in the following students' response.

To me, the use of reporting verbs is important in citation practices, but it is the writer who holds control over the use. It is okay to be neutral, right? We have our reasons for it. After all, I frequently found *state*, *found*, and *according to* in N*bel journal's articles. So, I just follow common practice.

Citation practices in the social sciences and humanities often rely on discourse verbs; however, its overuse poses a concern for the validity of the claims being made in the works themselves. Students were found to use discourse assurance verbs, which suggests that they either agree with or assume the validity of the cited materials. It implies that students do not incorporate authors' ideas into their own work; instead, they only draw connections between their work and that of authors. It will be the following reason students overuse discourse and research verbs in their writing.

“I input keywords into Google. When I found [linguistic] match, I took it.”

EFL writers often struggle with locating relevant references to support their claims, making it more challenging to write clearly, critically, and convincingly. Davis (2013) argues that “understanding how and why to cite takes time and represents a challenge for novice student writers” (p. 126). One student's response to why students often employ discourse verbs like *state* illustrates this point.

I find it challenging and overwhelming to include appropriate materials to support my argument, especially if I am required to use journal articles, which in terms of language alone is difficult to understand. Thus, I often input keywords into Google. When I found [linguistic] match, I took it. I sometimes copied the information into Qui**bot (paraphrasing application) to avoid plagiarism. Since I cannot be sure about the reliability of the referred information, I often rely on direct quotations and *state* verbs.

Students reasoned that they failed to properly articulate their ideas in their writing because they lacked access to and comprehension of materials pertinent to their writing. Jaroongkhongdach (2015) contends that EFL novice writers' lack of comprehension and engagement with the relevant literature limits their ability to explore alternative ideas further to develop their arguments.

“I am aware. But who am I to comment.”

Students' overuse of discourse and research verbs, but limited in cognitive verbs, may be attributable to a lack of confidence in evaluating authors' claims. Lack of access to and engagement with relevant literature makes EFL novice writers fail to adequately express their

ideas and instead convey authors' claims without evaluation. The interview with students illustrates this point.

I am well aware that cognition verbs not only evaluate the claims but also show our attitude toward the authors. For example, if I write "Harmony believes that..." it means that the information is something that Harmony believes. Well, what he believes is not necessarily true, right? To believe or not to believe is not the matter. The significant amount of evidence does matter. So, if the author is dubious, his opinion is also questionable. Well! If I don't know much about the topic I am writing about, I surely don't know much about the experts in that field. So, I'm not confident enough to criticize the author and his opinion as well. I am aware. But who am I to comment?

I used *found*, *state*, and *report* to report the findings of previous research relevant to my argument. The researches have been empirically examined; therefore, they may credence my argument. If I use an opinion or information that contradicts my argument, I am afraid it will confuse me and weaken my argument.

Students' responses above confirm what has been revealed in Loan and Pramoolsook's (2015) study that EFL novice writers are reluctant to evaluate or even contradict the cited materials. This hesitance seems rooted in the fact that they are either cognitively or linguistically disadvantaged when conveying ideas from English sources into their own (Jafarigohar & Mohammadkhani, 2015). It has led to students being hesitant to evaluate the cited materials considering that they are not at the appropriate level to engage in the scientific community.

CONCLUSION

As a critical feature of academic discourse that enables writers to credit other authors, the choice of RV and its tenses significantly impacts the validity of cited materials. Capitalizing only on factive or neutral stance RV implies students lack criticality toward the cited materials to achieve communicative purposes. Furthermore, the prevalence of present and past and the absence of present perfect tense in RV indicates students' lack of engagement toward the cited materials. The present perfect, often used to reference multiple sources simultaneously, demonstrates writers' familiarity and engagement with the relevant literature.

Academic writers must understand that citing relevant literature to support their claims is inadequate. They must be capable of situating themselves within academic discussions by establishing agency through appropriate RV and tense. Although ineffective use of RV is frequently observed in the writing of non-native English speakers due to their linguistic disadvantages, providing examples of the appropriate use of RV in academic texts will help

students communicate their ideas more effectively and demonstrate their competence as English academic writers, even if they are not native English speakers.

Acknowledgment

This research was possible with the financial support provided by UIN Sunan Ampel through the Institute of Research and Community Services (LPPM) (Decree of Rector of UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya Number 247 of 2022).

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