

## Formal and Informal Language Features in the Academic Writing of Fourth-Semester EFL Students

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### ABSTRACT

Academic writing requires clarity, precision, and objectivity, which can be achieved through formal language. However, students often apply informal language in their actual practices. This descriptive qualitative research analyzed the dominant type of language features utilized by 23 fourth-semester students. It also analyzed the rhetorical purposes for which they utilized them. Additionally, this study explored students' awareness of using formal language features and avoiding informal ones in their academic writing. Data were collected from argumentative essay assignments and a questionnaire. The findings indicate the predominantly utilized formal language features in their essays. These included precise wording (with lexical density greater than 61%), passive voice, and hedging. The informal language features predominantly applied were colloquial expressions, followed by two-word verbs, idiomatic expressions, and contractions. This study contributes to the existing literature on academic writing. It also provides information to improve academic writing courses and guides students toward more formal academic writing.

**Keywords:** *Academic Writing, Formal Language Features, Informal Language Features*

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### INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is an essential skill for university students, particularly in situations when English is used as a foreign language (EFL). It is a form of nonfictional writing that presents objective information with reliable and credible data with a formal style (Sheehy et al., 2019). This is typically produced in circumstances where language is carefully planned and edited, detailed and specific, and produced in a concise format (Staples et al., 2016). The primary goals of academic writing are to report on a study the author has undertaken, respond to a question the author has been assigned or selected to address, present the author's perspective, and synthesize research conducted by others on a topic (Bailey, 2018).

Formal language is crucial in academic writing to ensure objectivity, coherence, clarity, and precision when presenting factual data. Formal tone and style help readers to understand the writing's topic accurately (Praminatih et al., 2019) by ensuring the writing is free from ambiguity, misunderstanding, and subjective opinion, all of which can cause the writing to lose objectivity (Mullany & Stockwell, 2015). Formality is characterized by the explicit and structured use of standard English, a form of English that has been formalized through dictionaries, grammar texts, and other educational materials (Mullany & Stockwell, 2015), and the absence of informal features such as personal, subjective references, direct interaction, and colloquial expressions (Liardet, 2019).

As formal writing is the fundamental skill in the academic field, it is a requirement for students to acquaint themselves with the academic writing convention at the initial stage of writing to plan effective writing strategies (Murray & Moore, 2006). Following the academic writing guidelines helps them identify which features they need to apply and which to avoid in order to develop their own writing style (Bailey, 2018). Formal language features based on Bailey (2018), including precise wording, hedging or cautions, and passive voice.

Bailey (2018) suggested that the informal language features, such as idiomatic or colloquial vocabulary, adverbs that show personal attitude or viewpoint, auxiliary verb contractions, complicated expressions of gender/sexist language, rhetorical question forms, misuse of listing expressions, and two-word verbs, should be avoided. Nevertheless, several features such as personal attitude adverbs and rhetorical question forms are often acceptable and even suggested in the argumentative essays as strategies to convey evaluation and stance, to engage with the reader, and to serve persuasive purposes (Strauss & Feiz, 2014; Ramage et al., 2018; Zarefsky, 2014). This suggests that the distinction between "formal" and "informal" in academic settings may be adaptable and reliant on the context

Several studies indicated that students combine formal and informal language in their academic writing. Constantinou et al. (2019) found that university students' writing had become more formal. Similarly, a study conducted by Akhtar and Riaz (2019) showed that students frequently combined formal and informal writing styles. In addition, the study by Pramatinah et al. (2019) that analyzed thesis abstracts authored by Indonesian EFL undergraduate students between 1992 and 2016 revealed that despite the fact that Indonesian EFL students' writing had become more formal over time, the informalization still persists. These findings indicate that although academic writing shifted towards more formal, informal features persist as an obvious challenge. Moreover, these previous studies utilized quantitative methods instead of qualitative methods.

However, the study that specifically examines the utilization of formal and informal language features in Indonesian EFL students' academic writing remains limited, particularly in the Tanjungpura University context. Furthermore, prior studies on students' academic writing at Tanjungpura University have revealed recurrent problems that compromise the clarity and objectivity of the students' academic writing, such as incorrect grammatical usage, difficulty in using word choice, lack of precision, and problems in organization (Santri et al., 2022; Rastri et al., 2023; Wahyuni et al., 2022; Oktafiandi et al., 2021).

The current study addresses this gap by applying a descriptive qualitative method. It investigated the predominantly used formal and informal language features in students' essay writing, the rhetorical purposes of these features' usage, and students' awareness of formal and informal language features, which were not investigated in previous studies.

## METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze the use of formal and informal language features in academic essays written by students at Tanjungpura University, Pontianak, in the English Language Education Study Program, Teacher Training and Education Faculty. There were two main data sources in this research, including documentation and questionnaires. Documentation was collected in the form of students' argumentative essays as a course assignment and analyzed by using a content analysis approach. The questionnaire was used to provide the understanding of students' self-reported practices and perceptions regarding the use of formal and informal language in writing. The research applied purposive sampling to focus on students who are particularly relevant to the research. The participants of this study were 23 students from a purposively selected fourth-semester essay writing class. These students had completed the paragraph writing course and were considered suitable for this study as they had a strong foundation in academic writing.

This research followed the interactive model developed by Miles et al. (2014) that consists of three concurrent components, including data condensation, data display, and drawing and validating conclusions. This framework is suitable for the qualitative nature of the study, as it facilitates an adaptable method for analyzing the formal and informal language features included in students' academic essays and questionnaire responses. Data condensation entails selecting, coding, calculation and organising of pertinent data into comprehensible categories. For the purpose of data displaying, the collected data presented in tables and chart. Ultimately, the researcher presented data interpretation and draw conclusion.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

**The Dominant Type of Language Features Used**

The results show that all the students' essays applied precise wording, and the majority of the students' essays had lexical density greater than 61%. Another point is that the dominantly utilized formal language features that followed precise wording were passive voice (with the frequency 67) and caution (with the frequency 48) in their essays. In addition, the dominantly applied informal language features were colloquial expressions, followed by idiomatic expressions and two-word or phrasal verbs. In contrast, contractions were used limitedly in their essays, and misuse of listing expressions was not found in their essays. The frequencies of idiomatic expressions, colloquial expressions, contractions, and two-word verbs are 6, 17, 3, and 14. The findings of this research are aligned with previous research by Constantinou et al. (2019), Praminatih et al. (2019), and Akhtar and Riaz (2019), which indicated that students of English as a foreign language often combine formal and informal features in their academic writing. The findings indicated that students predominantly used formal language features over informal ones. Furthermore, this research provides detailed findings on the predominantly used formal and informal language features by students.

*Formal Language Features*

The students' essays showed the use of precise wording, passive voice, and caution. The results show that the majority of students' essays were dense since the lexical density of their essays was greater than 61%. This aligns with Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) theory that written language usually has lexical density; it depends significantly on content-rich lexical elements, which means that each clause has a lot of lexical items. In the table below, the researcher presents the lexical density of each essay.

Table 1 Lexical Density of Students' Essays

| No. | Essay Titles   | Lexical Density | Level      |
|-----|--|-----------------|------------|
| 1.  | Child Labour in Rural Communities  | 60.50%          | Less dense |
| 2.  | Traffic Congestion in Pontianak  | 57.20%          | Less dense |
| 3.  | Poor Public Transportation in West Kalimantan  | 66.32%          | Dense      |
| 4.  | Lack of Internet Access in Rural Areas of Indonesia  | 66.6%           | Dense      |
| 5.  | High Cost of Living in Urban Area  | 69.69%          | Dense      |
| 6.  | The Long-Term Consequences of Plastic Waste in West Kalimantan's Rivers                        | 64.36%          | Dense      |
| 7.  | Decline of Traditional Arts and Cultures in West Kalimantan                                    | 62.47%          | Dense      |
| 8.  | Poor Healthcare Facilities in Rural Areas  | 71.39%          | Very dense |
| 9.  | The Problem with Illegal Gold Mining in West Kalimantan  | 66.49%          | Dense      |
| 10. | Weak Tourism Promotion of Beautiful Destinations   | 59.18%          | Less dense |
| 11. | Preserving Mangroves, Keeping Hope   | 61.94%          | Dense      |
| 12. | Land Conflicts Between Companies and Indigenous People: A Call for Justice and Sustainability  | 62.7%           | Dense      |
| 13. | Flooding Problems in Pontianak   | 53.14%          | Less dense |
| 14. | Food Insecurity in Rural West Kalimantan: A Health, Education, and Community Stability Barrier | 66.7%           | Dense      |
| 15. | Taking Bullying Seriously in West Kalimantan   | 61.04%          | Dense      |
| 16. | Deforestation in West Kalimantan   | 64.04%          | Dense      |
| 17. | Drug Abuse Among Young People in West Kalimantan   | 65.96%          | Dense      |
| 18. | Fresh Graduate Deserve Job Opportunities   | 65.35%          | Dense      |
| 19. | Overpriced Education: A Barrier to Dreams in West Kalimantan                                   | 65.12%          | Dense      |
| 20. | The Danger of Peatland Fires in West Kalimantan  | 64.18%          | Dense      |
| 21. | The Urgent Need for Mental Health Education in Kalimantan Barat                                | 69.78%          | Dense      |
| 22. | Why West Kalimantan Must Improve Its Waste Management  | 67.56%          | Dense      |
| 23. | Youth Unemployment   | 68.22%          | Dense      |

Table 1 shows that only 3 essays were less dense, whereas 19 essays were dense, and 1 essay was very dense. This indicates that students' essays mostly had lexical density. Further, the researcher presents the frequency of each formal and informal language feature used in the students' essays in the table below.

Table 2 Frequencies of Hedging and Passive Voice in Students Essays

*Formal and Informal Language Features in Students' Academic Writing of Fourth-Semester EFL Students*

| No.          | Essay Titles   | Caution   | Passive Voice |
|--------------|--|-----------|---------------|
| 1.           | Child Labour in Rural Communities  | 2         | 4             |
| 2.           | Traffic Congestion in Pontianak  | 5         | 2             |
| 3.           | Poor Public Transportation in West Kalimantan  | 3         | 3             |
| 4.           | Lack of Internet Access in Rural Areas of Indonesia  | 4         | 1             |
| 5.           | High Cost of Living in Urban Area  | 0         | 2             |
| 6.           | The Long-Term Consequences of Plastic Waste in West Kalimantan's Rivers                        | 5         | 5             |
| 7.           | Decline of Traditional Arts and Cultures in West Kalimantan                                    | 0         | 2             |
| 8.           | Poor Healthcare Facilities in Rural Areas  | 4         | 0             |
| 9.           | The Problem with Illegal Gold Mining in West Kalimantan  | 2         | 2             |
| 10.          | Weak Tourism Promotion of Beautiful Destinations   | 2         | 4             |
| 11.          | Preserving Mangroves, Keeping Hope   | 3         | 2             |
| 12.          | Land Conflicts Between Companies and Indigenous People: A Call for Justice and Sustainability  | 1         | 5             |
| 13.          | Flooding Problems in Pontianak   | 1         | 4             |
| 14.          | Food Insecurity in Rural West Kalimantan: A Health, Education, and Community Stability Barrier | 4         | 4             |
| 15.          | Taking Bullying Seriously in West Kalimantan   | 2         | 3             |
| 16.          | Deforestation in West Kalimantan   | 3         | 3             |
| 17.          | Drug Abuse Among Young People in West Kalimantan   | 1         | 0             |
| 18.          | Fresh Graduate Deserve Job Opportunities   | 2         | 2             |
| 19.          | Overpriced Education: A Barrier to Dreams in West Kalimantan                                   | 0         | 2             |
| 20.          | The Danger of Peatland Fires in West Kalimantan  | 0         | 4             |
| 21.          | The Urgent Need for Mental Health Education in Kalimantan Barat                                | 1         | 4             |
| 22.          | Why West Kalimantan Must Improve Its Waste Management  | 2         | 4             |
| 23.          | Youth Unemployment   | 1         | 5             |
| <b>Total</b> |  | <b>48</b> | <b>67</b>     |

Another point is that nearly all of the essays utilized passive voice and caution in their essays. Table 2 shows that the passive voice was used most frequently in essays "The Long-Term Consequences of Plastic Waste in West Kalimantan's Rivers", "Land Conflicts Between Companies and Indigenous People", and "Youth Unemployment". Furthermore, caution is the least utilized formal feature, with a frequency ranging from 0 to 5 occasions per essay. The essays "Traffic Congestion in Pontianak" and "The Long-Term Consequences of Plastic Waste in West Kalimantan's Rivers" use the highest numbers of hedging. Several essays showed no use of hedging.

*Informal Language Features*

Colloquial expressions were the predominant informal features found, followed by idiomatic expressions and two-word or phrasal verbs, whereas contractions were used limitedly in their essays, and misuse of listing expressions was not found in their essays. The use of colloquial and idiomatic expressions in several essays suggests that the students may not have carefully considered word choice in their essays (Matias, 2023). Similarly, the use of phrasal or two-word verbs is thought of as a typical aspect of colloquial language and is typically not expected in academic writing (Alangari et al., 2020). Contractions also appeared in a few of the essays, despite their being uncommon in academic English, and it is preferable to write the full form of the verb (e.g., "it's" becomes "it is" and "that's" becomes "that is") (Bailey, 2018). Another point is that despite the misuse of listing expressions not being found in the students' essays. Furthermore, the frequency of each informal language feature in students' essays is as follows.

Table 3 Frequency of Each Informal Language Features in Students' Essays

| No. | Essay Titles                                  | Idiomatic Expression | Colloquial Expression | Contraction | Two-Word Verb | Misuse of Listing Expression |
|-----|---|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| 1.  | Child Labour in Rural Communities             | 0                    | 0                     | 0           | 0             | 0                            |
| 2.  | Traffic Congestion in Pontianak               | 0                    | 1                     | 0           | 0             | 0                            |
| 3.  | Poor Public Transportation in West Kalimantan | 0                    | 0                     | 0           | 0             | 0                            |

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| No. | Essay Titles   | Idiomatic Expression | Colloquial Expression | Contraction | Two-Word Verb | Misuse of Listing Expression |
|-----|--|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| 4.  | Lack of Internet Access in Rural Areas of Indonesia  | 0                    | 0                     | 0           | 2             | 0                            |
| 5.  | High Cost of Living in Urban Area  | 1                    | 0                     | 0           | 0             | 0                            |
| 6.  | The Long-Term Consequences of Plastic Waste in West Kalimantan's Rivers                        | 0                    | 0                     | 0           | 2             | 0                            |
| 7.  | Decline of Traditional Arts and Cultures in West Kalimantan                                    | 1                    | 0                     | 0           | 1             | 0                            |
| 8.  | Poor Healthcare Facilities in Rural Areas  | 0                    | 0                     | 0           | 0             | 0                            |
| 9.  | The Problem with Illegal Gold Mining in West Kalimantan  | 0                    | 1                     | 0           | 0             | 0                            |
| 10. | Weak Tourism Promotion of Beautiful Destinations   | 3                    | 0                     | 0           | 1             | 0                            |
| 11. | Preserving Mangroves, Keeping Hope   | 0                    | 0                     | 0           | 0             | 0                            |
| 12. | Land Conflicts Between Companies and Indigenous People: A Call for Justice and Sustainability  | 0                    | 2                     | 0           | 1             | 0                            |
| 13. | Flooding Problems in Pontianak   | 0                    | 2                     | 1           | 0             | 0                            |
| 14. | Food Insecurity in Rural West Kalimantan: A Health, Education, and Community Stability Barrier | 0                    | 0                     | 0           | 1             | 0                            |
| 15. | Taking Bullying Seriously in West Kalimantan   | 0                    | 3                     | 0           | 2             | 0                            |
| 16. | Deforestation in West Kalimantan   | 0                    | 0                     | 1           | 0             | 0                            |
| 17. | Drug Abuse Among Young People in West Kalimantan   | 0                    | 0                     | 1           | 0             | 0                            |
| 18. | Fresh Graduate Deserve Job Opportunities   | 1                    | 2                     | 0           | 1             | 0                            |
| 19. | Overpriced Education: A Barrier to Dreams in West Kalimantan                                   | 0                    | 0                     | 0           | 0             | 0                            |
| 20. | The Danger of Peatland Fires in West Kalimantan  | 0                    | 2                     | 0           | 1             | 0                            |
| 21. | The Urgent Need for Mental Health Education in Kalimantan Barat                                | 0                    | 4                     | 0           | 1             | 0                            |
| 22. | Why West Kalimantan Must Improve Its Waste Management  | 0                    | 0                     | 0           | 1             | 0                            |
| 23. | Youth Unemployment   | 0                    | 0                     | 0           | 0             | 0                            |
|     | <b>Total</b>   | <b>6</b>             | <b>17</b>             | <b>3</b>    | <b>14</b>     | <b>0</b>                     |

Table 3 shows the frequencies of idiomatic expressions, colloquial expressions, contractions, two-word verbs, and misuse of listing expressions are 6, 17, 3, 14, and 0. The order of formal language features mostly found in students' essays is colloquial expressions, followed by two-word verbs, idiomatic expressions, and contractions, while none of the vague listing expressions were utilized.

### **Rhetorical Purposes of Using Selected Formal and Informal Language Features**

#### *Formal Language Features*

Both formal and informal linguistic features are applied for specific rhetorical objectives. Formal language features, including specific and accurate vocabulary to elaborate upon the details, support claims with data, and underscore the seriousness of the issue. Additionally, students utilized hedging or caution to state tentative hypotheses, engage in discussions with ambiguity, propose solutions, and make predictions. They applied hedging regularly in their essays to present their arguments more carefully. This reflects Gherdan's (2019) argument that hedging is essential for stating how precise the claims are but also leaves room for a lack of precision that is not absolute, especially if it is difficult or completely impossible to achieve. Moreover, the passive voice was applied to avoid unnecessary repetition and emphasize acts or results rather than their originator, particularly when the originator is irrelevant, unknown, or has previously been stated, which are areas of this feature that are expected to be applied in academic style (Wallwork, 2023). The examples of each feature from the essay are below.

#### A. Precise wording:

The example of precise wording from the essays are as follows.

**"Plastic waste** in West Kalimantan's rivers is harming **the environment** and public health. In West Kalimantan, where rivers are the lifeblood of many communities, the impact of plastic waste has become increasingly alarming. **Plastic bags, bottles, and wrappers** are frequently seen floating in rivers such as the Kapuas and Landak. This pollution seriously harms **aquatic life**, threatens human health, and the wellbeing of future generations."

The paragraph above is an introductory paragraph from one of the students' essays. In a general statement, the noun "plastic waste" has a broad meaning used to introduce the general topic. The more specific noun "plastic bags, bottles, and wrappers" is used in the third sentence to elaborate on the details by providing examples of plastic waste. Similarly, the noun "the environment" in the general statement has a broad meaning, and the noun phrase "aquatic life" in the third sentence is a specific part of the environment used to introduce the subtopics that will be discussed in the body paragraph. Another example is below.

**"Unreliable transportation** makes it hard for people to reach schools and workplaces. Many students in both urban and rural areas have to walk long distances or wait a long time for transportation. In cities like Pontianak, buses and public vans often do not follow a fixed schedule, making it difficult to plan travel. **A 2022 survey by Pontianak Regional Planning Agency (Bappeda) Pontianak** revealed that 45% of people are not satisfied with public transport services. **According to a 2023 report by Kompas, children in areas with poor transport access are more likely to have lower attendance.**"

The nouns "a 2022 survey by Pontianak Regional Planning Agency (Bappeda) Pontianak" and "a 2023 report by Kompas" are used by the students to give evidence that supports the argument stated previously in the first and second sentences.

Furthermore, precise adjectives were applied by the students to emphasize the seriousness of a problem. The examples from the essays are below.

*"Pontianak City, one of the largest cities in West Kalimantan that has experienced some of the most rapid growth, faces **an increasingly severe traffic congestion crisis.**"*

*"Therefore, I argue that the issue of road congestion is a **critical urban problem** that needs to be fixed immediately because of all the adverse effects it has on the people of Pontianak."*

The adjectives "increasingly" and "critical" in the two sentences above indicate the seriousness of a problem stated by the writer. This also might create a sense of urgency about the problem.

#### Hedging

The examples of hedging from the essay are provided in the table below.

Table 4. The Examples of Hedging from Students' Essays

| The Rhetorical Purposes                        | Hedging | Examples from Essays                                   | Essay Topics    |
|--|---------|--|-----------------|
| Stating the hypothesis that needs to be tested | Can     | "food insecurity <b>can</b> be significantly reduced." | Food Insecurity |

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| The Rhetorical Purposes                  | Hedging     | Examples from Essays   | Essay Topics       |
|--|-------------|--|--------------------|
|  | Could       | "I believe this is something that <b>could</b> be avoided if..."   | Flooding           |
| Discussing the result of study or report | Around      | "According to an ILO report (2010), <b>around</b> 8.5 million children in Indonesia work..."                                 | Child Labour       |
|  | more likely | "80% <b>more likely</b> to miss school due to hunger-related illnesses (Smith & Haddad, 2021)."                              | Child Labour       |
|  | are closely | "account for more than 700,000 deaths globally each year and <b>are closely</b> linked to poor environmental conditions."    | Waste Management   |
|  | Can         | "These concentrations <b>can</b> be interpreted from a good air quality description..."                                      | Traffic Congestion |
| Providing suggestions and solutions      | Could       | "...the duplication of Kapuas Bridge 1 <b>could</b> be modified by making U Turn area to diminish the impact of congestion." | Waste Management   |
|  | Can         | "but it <b>can</b> be addressed through targeted, sustainable solutions."  | Traffic Congestion |
| Making predictions                       | Could       | "... 50% of which <b>could</b> become homeless by 2032 if the trend is not reversed."  | Deforestation      |

**Passive Voice**

The examples of the use of passive voice in each rhetorical purpose are as follows.

Table 1. The Examples of Passive Voice Used in the Students' Essays

| The Rhetorical Purposes   | The Examples for Essays   |
|---|---|
| Focusing on the action or result, instead of the originator   | "Firstly, working children are often <b>forced</b> to leave school."                      |
| Avoiding unnecessary or distracting details when the originator of the action is not needed, unknown, or irrelevant to identify | "As <b>seen</b> in areas along the Kapuas River, where accumulated garbage..."            |
| Avoiding repetition when the originator has been mentioned earlier.   | "Thirdly, various legal and social measures have been <b>taken</b> to reduce child labor" |

**Informal Language Features**

There are also particular informal language features in the students' essays, each of which has a distinct rhetorical purpose. Idiomatic expressions were used to emphasize values, hopes, or constraints while creating an optimistic tone. Additionally, students used contractions to present their arguments, emphasize the seriousness or urgency of the issues, or draw conclusions. Ultimately, two-word verbs or verb phrases like "drop out," "miss out," and "keep up" are commonly employed to emphasize causes, consequences, and suggested courses of action. The examples of the informal language features from the essay are as follows.

**Idiomatic and Colloquial Expression**

The examples of idiomatic expressions found in the students' essays and the rhetorical purposes for which they were used are below.

Table 2. The Examples of Idiomatic Expressions Used in the Students' Essays

| Idiomatic Expressions   | The Rhetorical Purposes                     |
|---|---|
| "...the Samabue Traditional School in Landak Regency has emerged as a <b>beacon of hope</b> ."                    | Creating an optimistic tone                 |
| "The British Chamber of Commerce in Indonesia says the region's glory days <b>are just around the corner</b> ..." | Creating an optimistic and encouraging tone |
| "...West Kalimantan is a <b>complete package</b> for a potential tourism hotspot."                                | Highlighting the value                      |
| "I think that with <b>no frills</b> government support..."  | Highlighting the quality                    |
| "...enter the job market with high hopes of putting their <b>hard-earned</b> skills to use."                      | Creating emotional tone                     |
| "...these costs leave <b>very little room for savings or emergencies</b> ."                                       | Highlighting the limitation                 |

Furthermore, the examples of colloquial expressions used in the students' essays and the rhetorical purposes for which they were used are as below.

Table 3. The Examples of Colloquial Expressions Used in the Students' Essays

| Colloquial Expressions  | The Rhetorical Purposes                              |
|---|--|
| "These numbers clearly <b>tell us</b> that if we do nothing, the situation will only get worse."                                    | Presenting the argument as evidence-based and urgent |
| "Bullying is a <b>huge problem</b> that happens in almost every school."  | Emphasizing the seriousness and urgency of the issue |
| "...bullying is <b>no small issue</b> it is an endemic threat..."   | Emphasizing the seriousness and urgency of the issue |
| "Therefore, it is essential to start making these changes now rather than waiting for the crisis <b>get worse</b> ."                | Emphasizing the consequence                          |
| "This land could have supported crops <b>like</b> rice, coffee, or palm oil, which, compared to..."                                 | Providing examples                                   |
| "...bullying to continue but recent efforts – <b>like</b> LBH Mengajar and the updated regulations of the Ministry of Education..." | Providing examples                                   |

The use of "like" for introducing examples is considered a colloquial expression (Bailey, 2018); instead of using this word, the student can use "such as" and "for instance" in academic writing.

### Contractions

The examples of contractions that students utilized in their essays are as follows.

Table 8. The Examples of Contractions Used in the Students' Essays

| The Titles of the Essay                          | Excerpts  | The Rhetorical Purposes  |
|--|---|--|
| Flooding Problems in Pontianak                   | 1. "... <b>it's</b> putting the entire city at risk."<br>2. "... <b>it's</b> a way to protect the local economy." | 1. Emphasizing the seriousness of the issue<br>2. Presenting an argument |
| Deforestation in West Kalimantan                 | " <b>That's</b> why it is important to implement policies that not only prevent illegal forest clearing"          | Presenting a well-reasoned conclusion based on existing data.            |
| Drug Abuse Among Young People in West Kalimantan | "Now is the time to take real action- before <b>it's</b> too late."   | Emphasizing the urgency of the issue                                     |

### Two Word or Phrasal Verbs

Below are several examples of two-word verbs found in their essays.

"...children are more likely to **drop out** of schools as a result of the pandemic..."

Rhetorical purpose: highlighting the consequence

"...Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) can **miss out** on the opportunity to be widespread due to poor internet access."

Rhetorical purpose: highlighting lost opportunity

"Students in rural areas with poor connectivity have difficulty **keeping up with** their peers in..."

Rhetorical purpose: highlighting struggle or inability

"Moreover, plastic waste does not **break down** easily."

Rhetorical purpose: describing persistence of the problem

"In addition, rivers **clogged with** plastic waste become breeding grounds for disease-carrying mosquitoes and bacteria"

Rhetorical purpose: describing a problematic condition

"...that would make it harder for them to **keep up** with the pace of schooling or perform in class."

Rhetorical purpose: emphasizing challenge

"...often **stripped of** their spiritual elements and presented as mere entertainment."

Rhetorical purpose: highlighting degradation

"...she was reluctant to return to school and frequently could not sleep well, which resulted in her **lagging behind** in school."

Rhetorical purpose: showing cause-effect relationship

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"However, these places need focused and comprehensive efforts to market them to **turn them into** sought after destinations."

Rhetorical purpose: emphasizing potential

"The potential for economic gain or employment from companies has **set up** internal divisions..."

Rhetorical purpose: indicating causation

"...this means many children are at risk of **dropping out or falling behind.**"

Rhetorical purpose: highlighting the negative effect

"Research shows that in areas where the government has stronger rules and better control, the number of fires can **go down** by 30%."

Rhetorical purpose: emphasizing the positive outcome

"Looking ahead, empowering startups and local industries could **open up** more opportunities for fresh graduates."

Rhetorical purpose: emphasizing a positive potential

"...over 20% of Indonesia's total waste **ends up** in water bodies, significantly contributing to environmental damage."

Rhetorical purpose: stating an undesirable consequence

### Students' Awareness of Formal and Informal Language Features Usage

The researcher presents the findings on students' awareness of using formal and informal language features below.

#### Formal Language Features

The findings from the questionnaire indicated that the majority of students were aware of using formal language features in their essays. However, the findings showed that the students' attention to formal language features varied at several levels. A large number of students (18 out of 23, or 78.3%) either always or frequently pay attention of using formal language features, whereas 21.7% of students only sometimes pay attention to this, indicating a generally positive degree of awareness.

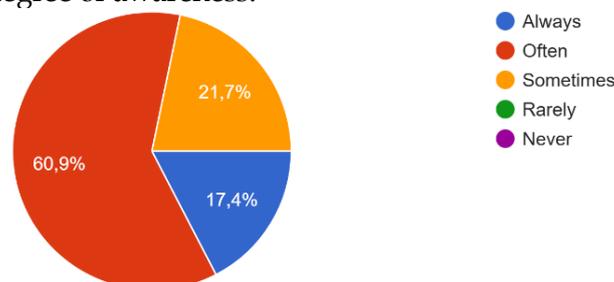


Figure 1. Questionnaire Responses to the Question: How often do you pay attention to use formal language features in your essay?

Figure 1 shows the responses of students regarding how often they pay attention to using formal and informal language features in their essays. As seen in the table above, 17.4% of students chose "always", 60.9% of students chose "often", 21.7% of students chose "sometimes", 0% of students chose "rarely", and 0% chose "never". This indicates that the number of students who pay attention to use formal language features is higher than the number of students who do not pay attention to use formal language features in their essays. Furthermore, when asked which formal language feature they found most difficult to use, the majority of the students chose precise nouns and adjectives, followed by passive voice and caution or hedging. Students' awareness of using each formal language feature in their essays is described as follows.

#### Precise Wording

The findings from the questionnaire indicated that students predominantly answered that they sometimes use specific and accurate vocabulary. The below is the chart of questionnaire results.

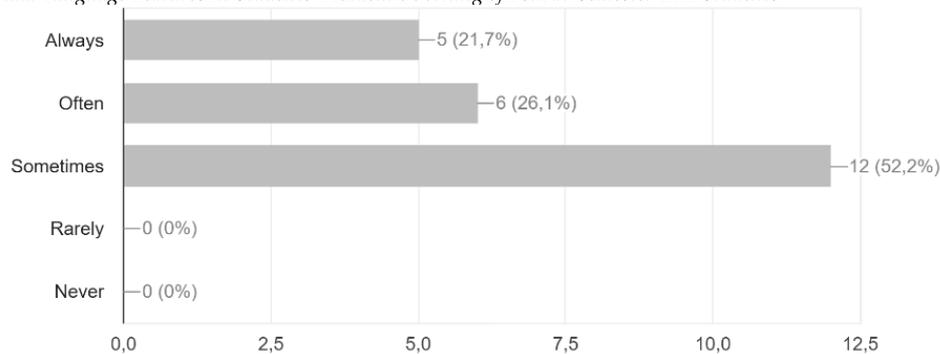
*Formal and Informal Language Features in Students' Academic Writing of Fourth-Semester EFL Students*

Figure 2. Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use specific and accurate vocabulary?

Figure 2 shows the responses for the question asking about the frequency of the students using specific and accurate vocabulary in their essays. The majority of students, with a percentage of 52.2%, chose "sometimes"; 26.1% of students chose "often"; 21.7% of students chose "always"; and 0% of the participants chose "rarely" or "never." Therefore, the number of students who were aware of using specific and accurate vocabulary (47.8%, or 11 students) is fewer than the students who were only sometimes using it (52.2%, or 12 students).

*Hedging/ Caution*

The findings from the questionnaire showed that the majority of students aware of using caution in their academic essays. They mostly answered that they often utilize caution in their essays, whereas the rest of the students answered 'always' and 'sometimes', and none of the students answered 'rarely' and 'never'.

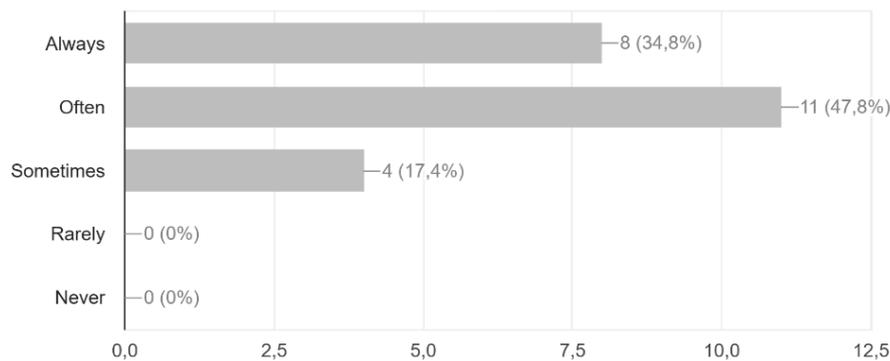


Figure 3. Questionnaire Responses to the Question: How often do you use caution words in your essay?

Figure 3 shows the response to the question asking about the frequency of their use of caution words in their essays, most of the participants (47.8%) chose "often", 34.8% of the participants chose "always", 17.4% of the participants chose "sometimes", and 0% of the participants chose "rarely" or "never".

*Passive Voice*

The results from questionnaires indicated that the students predominantly answered that they sometimes apply passive voice in their academic essays; the rest mostly answered "often," followed by the answer "rarely," and a few of the students answered "always" and "never".

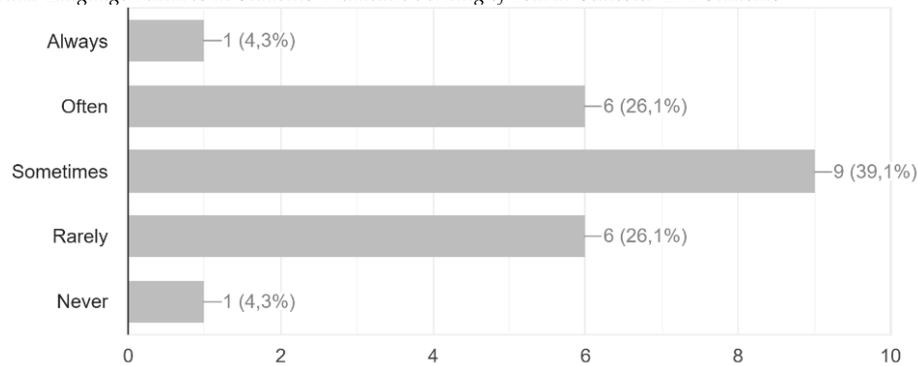
*Formal and Informal Language Features in Students' Academic Writing of Fourth-Semester EFL Students*

Figure 4. Questionnaire Responses to the Question: How often do you use passive voice instead of active voice in your essay?

Figure 4 shows the responses to the question asking about the frequency of using passive voice, 39.1% of the participants chose "sometimes", 26.1% of the participants chose "often", 26.1% chose "rarely", 4.3% chose "always", and 4.3% chose "never".

*Informal Language Features*

The questionnaire results showed that nearly all of the students answered that they intentionally avoid using informal language features. The chart below shows the responses from the questionnaire.

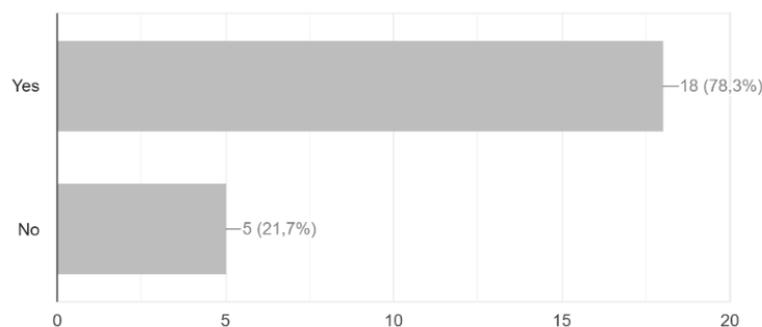


Figure 5. Questionnaire Responses to the Question: Do you intentionally avoid using informal language features in your essay?

Figure 5 shows the responses to the question "Do you intentionally avoid informal language features in your essay?", 78.3% of students chose "yes" and 21.7% chose "no". From this result, it can be concluded that the majority of students intentionally avoid using informal language features in their essays.

The results of the questionnaire also indicate that the most difficult informal language for students to avoid is contractions. Furthermore, following the contraction, students find it most difficult to avoid colloquial expressions, idiomatic expressions, and two-word verbs with an equal number. The other students selected none of them and no student selected misuse of listing verbs. The chart below shows the responses to the questionnaire.

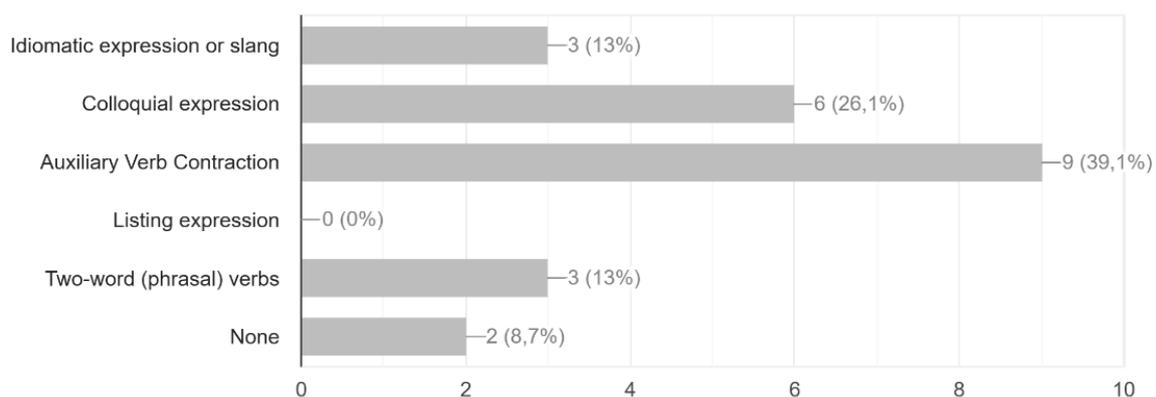


Figure 6. Questionnaire Responses for the Question: Which informal language features do you find most difficult to avoid in writing in your essay?

Figure 6 shows the responses for the question of which informal language features they find difficult to avoid in writing their essays, 13% of the participants answered "idiomatic expression or slang", 26.1% answered "colloquial expressions", 39.1% answered "auxiliary verb contraction", 0% of the participants answered "listing expressions", 13% of the participants answered "two-word/phrasal verbs", and 8.7% of the participants answered "none". Furthermore, informal language features appeared in the students' essays are described as follows.

#### *Idiomatic and Colloquial Expressions*

The results of questionnaires showed that the students mostly answered that they rarely use idiomatic expressions, while the significant number of students answered sometimes. Additionally, a few of students answered never, often, and always. The chart below shows the responses to the question of frequency they use idiomatic expressions or slang and colloquial expressions.

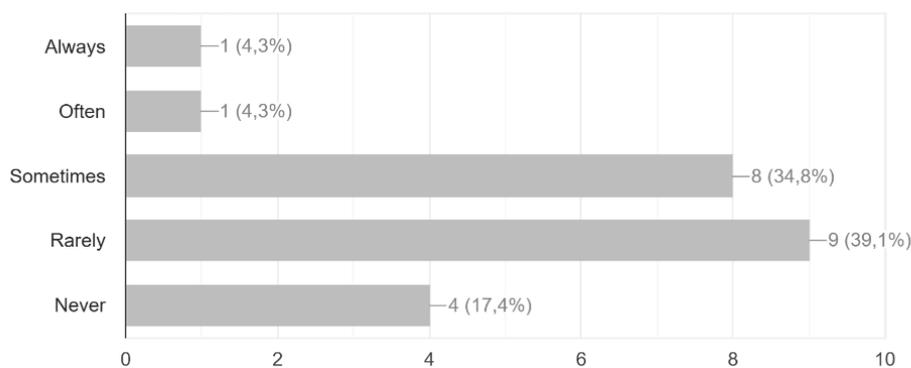


Figure 7. Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use idiomatic expressions or slang in your essay?

Figure 7 shows that 39.1% of the participants chose "rarely", 34.8% of the participants chose "sometimes", 17.4% of the participants chose "never", and 4.3% of the participants chose "always". This indicates that the number of students who were aware of avoiding using idiomatic expressions or slang is higher than the number of students who were not aware of this.

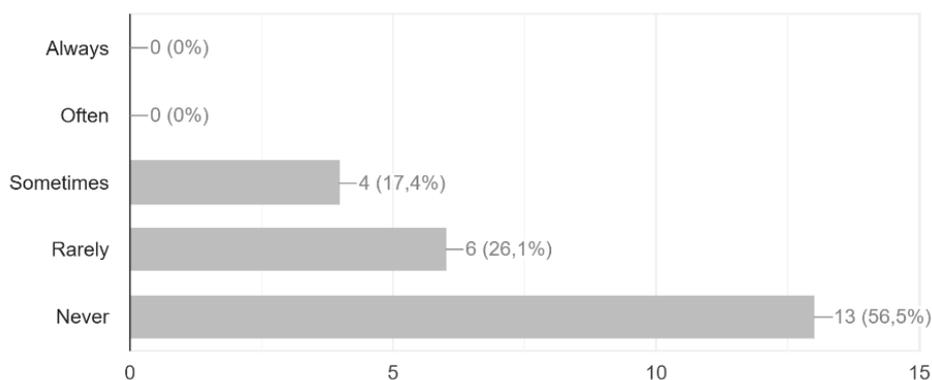


Figure 8. Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use colloquial expressions or slang in your essay?

Figure 8 shows that the majority of the participants (56.5%) chose "never", while 26.1% of the participants chose "rarely", 17.4% of the participants chose "sometimes", and 0% of the participants chose "often" and "always". This indicates that the majority of students were aware of avoiding the use of colloquial expressions in their essays.

#### *Contractions*

In contrast with the results of essay analysis, the results of questionnaires showed that students mostly answered that they sometimes use contractions in their essays, followed by the answers "often," "rarely," and "never" with insignificant numbers.

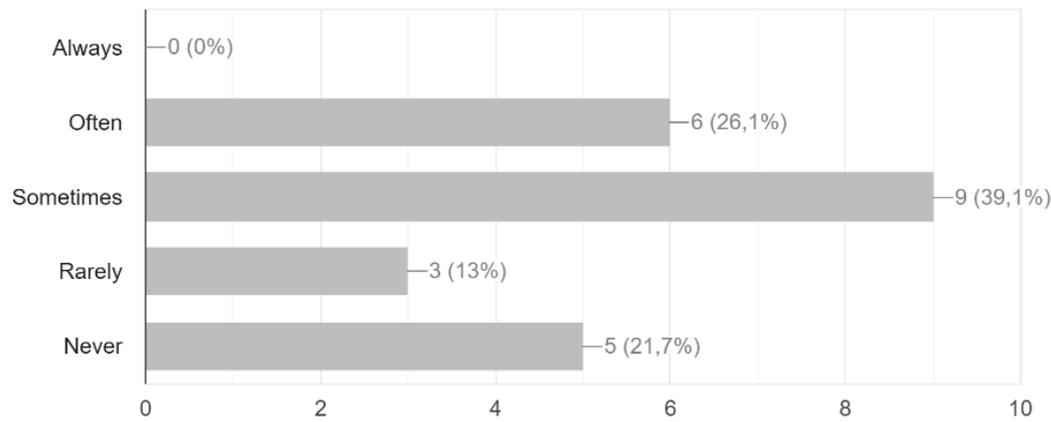


Figure 9. Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use contractions in your essay?

Figure 9 shows the responses to the question asks about the frequency of using contractions in their essays: 39.1% of the participants chose "often", 30.4% of the participants chose "sometimes", 26.1% of the participants chose "rarely", 4.3% of the participants chose "never", and 0% of the participants chose "always".

#### *Two-Word Verbs/Phrasal Verbs*

Furthermore, the results of questionnaires indicated that students mostly answered that they sometimes use two-word or phrasal verbs, followed by the answers "often," "always," and "never" with an equal number.

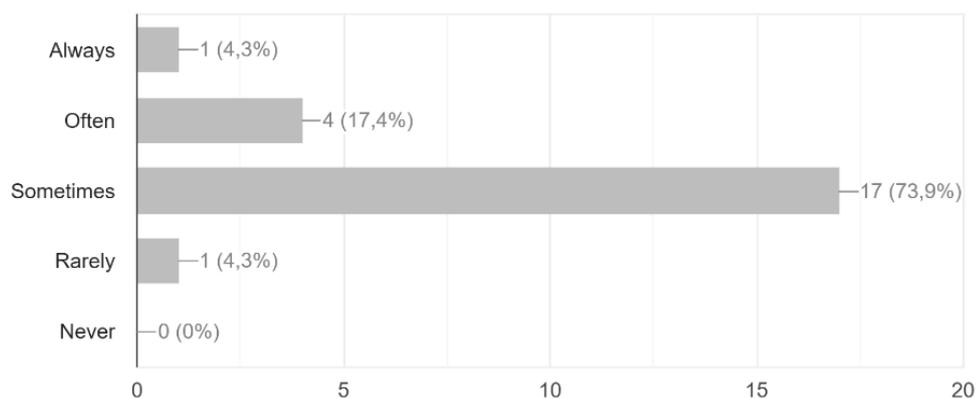


Figure 10. Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use two-word or phrasal verbs in your essay?

Figure 10 shows the responses to the question asking about the frequency of using two-word or phrasal verbs in their essays. They were as follows: 73.9% chose "sometimes", 17.4% of the participants chose "often", 4.3% of the participants chose "always", 4.3% of the students chose "rarely", whereas none of the students, or 0% of the students, chose "never".

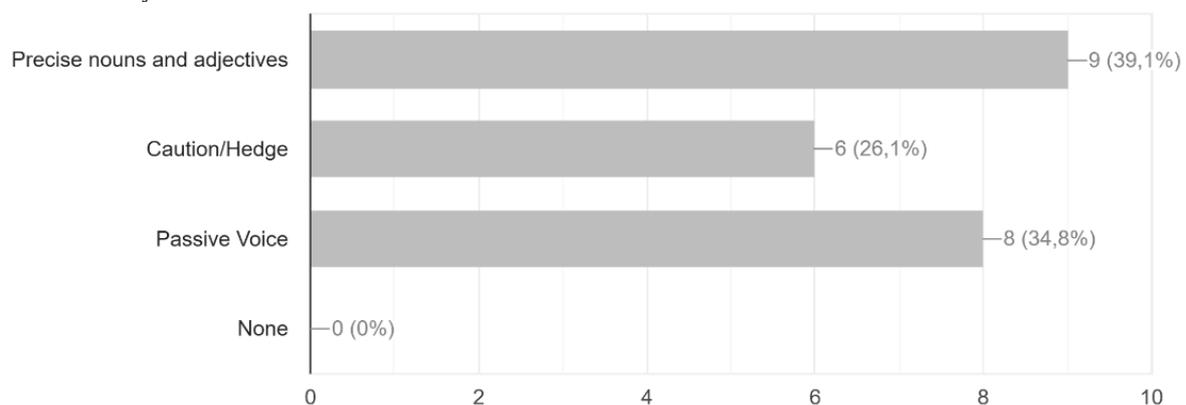


Figure 11. Questionnaire Responses for the Question: Which formal language features do you find most difficult to use in your essay?

Figure 11 shows the responses for the question of which formal language features they find most difficult to use in their essays; 39.1% of the participants chose "precise nouns and adjectives", 26.1% of the participants chose "caution/hedging", 34.8% of the others chose "passive voice", and 0% of the participants chose "none". This result indicates that most students find precise nouns and adjectives the most difficult formal language features to use in their essays, followed by passive voice and caution/hedging.

#### Misuse of Listing Expressions

Despite the misuse of listing expressions not being found in the students' essays, the results from the questionnaires showed that there are a few students who answered that they often utilized vague listing expressions. However, the majority of the students (53.8%, or 14 students) indicated an awareness of avoiding vague listing expressions.

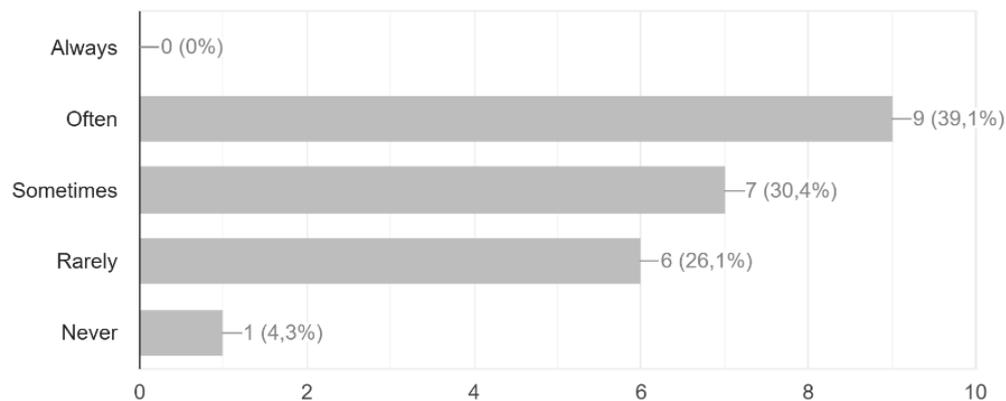


Figure 12. Questionnaire Responses for the Question: How often do you use listing with vague expressions?

Figure 12 above shows the responses to the questionnaire about the frequency of using vague listing expressions: 39.1% of the participants chose "often", 30.4% of the participants chose "sometimes", 26.1% of the participants chose "rarely", 4.3% of the participants chose "never", and 0% of the participants chose "always".

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings indicated that even though students predominantly utilized formal language features in their academic essays, informal language features still appeared in several essays. Formal language features such as specific and accurate vocabulary, high lexical density (exceeding 61%), passive voice, and hedging were dominant in their essays, while informal language features included contractions, verb phrases, and colloquial and idiomatic expressions. This suggests that students have not entirely followed formal academic writing guidelines, even though each feature was applied for specific rhetorical objectives. The results of the questionnaire indicated that students were mostly aware of the importance of formal language features and utilized them purposefully. Several students transferred informal language habits from spoken English, such as using auxiliary verb contractions and vague listing expressions. In contrast, most of them recognized the importance of avoiding the use of idiomatic and colloquial expressions and two-word or phrasal verbs. These findings reveal the gap between students' awareness and their actual writing practices and provide insights for curriculum developers and lecturers regarding the linguistic challenges that students often face in their academic writing. However, this study is limited by its restricted number of participants and one-time essay submissions. These prevent the identification of patterns or changes in students' utilization of formal and informal language features in their essays over time. Further research could employ a long-term approach to gain a deeper understanding of how students' academic writing practices develop.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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