

## ABSTRACT

Needs on academic writing competence as the main focus in higher education encourage the university institutions around the world to provide academic writing courses to support their students dealing with their tasks pertaining to this competence. However, a pilot study conducted previously in one of the universities in Palopo, a city in South Sulawesi, revealed that even though the institution has provided academic writing courses, supported by some workshops related to academic writing and some supporting facilities at campus, the students still face difficulties in completing their assignments related to academic writing, particularly in writing their theses. The present study focuses on investigating the specific needs of the students in the same institution in terms of competences required in academic writing. It is also carried out to examine whether or not the syllabus exists and accommodates the students' needs. Questionnaire and interview were used to collect data from sixty students of sixth semester and two lecturers of the academic courses. The results reveal that the students need to learn all aspects of linguistic competence (language features, lexical phrases, academic language and vocabulary, and proper language) and some aspects in discourse competence (how to write introduction, search for appropriate literature, design research method, write coherent paragraphs, refer to sources, summarize and display data, and link sentences smoothly). Regarding the syllabus, it is found that the academic writing courses provided in the institution, where this study takes place, do not have syllabus. This condition is different from other institutions which provide syllabi for all courses. However, at the commencement of the course, the students and the lecturers have negotiated their learning goals, topics discussed, learning activities, and assessment criteria for the course. Therefore, even though the syllabus does not exist, but the elements of the syllabus are there. The negotiation between the students and the lecturers contributes to the students' attitude toward the courses. The students are contented with the course and they feel that their needs in academic writing have been accommodated. However, some suggestions for the next academic writing courses are stated by the students. Considering the results of this study, a syllabus is then proposed which is expected to accommodate the specific needs of students in that particular institution.

**Keywords:** *academic writing, students' needs, syllabus.*