

## AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING UNDERGRADUATE THESIS AT ENGLISH EDUCATION PROGRAM OF MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF BENGKULU

**Dwi Monica Lestari**

Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu

[dwimonicalestari@gmail.com](mailto:dwimonicalestari@gmail.com)

*Received: January 7, 2020,  
Accepted: March 5, 2020,*

*Revised: February 4, 2020  
Published: April 30, 2020*

### **Abstract:**

The objectives of this research are: 1) To find out the undergraduate students' Difficulties In Writing Thesis at The English Study Program of Muhammadiyah University Bengkulu (UMB) in Academic Year 2018-2019, and 2) To find out the most difficult variable they faced in writing theses. The design of this research is descriptive quantitative research. 74 students of the Seventh Semester Students of English Education Study Program of Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu in the Academic Year of 2018-2019 took part in this study. The instruments were questionnaires and interview. The data were collected by assigning the students to fill out the questionnaires and being interviewed afterward. The data were analyzed by checking the students' answer in the questionnaire, classifying the students' answers, calculating the students' scores of difficulties in writing a thesis, describing the data and concluding the results. The results showed the students' difficulties in writing a thesis; a) Orderly, the students' difficulties in writing a thesis are: related to difficulties of students' English proficiencies; related to difficulties of students' time management; related to difficulties of students' research methodology; related to difficulties of students' attitude; related to difficulties of students' research topic; and the least related to difficulties of a co-advisor relationship, students' plagiarism, students' personalities, the big number of supervised students and advisor workload; and difficulties of students motivation. b) The most difficulties in writing thesis are related to their English proficiency which are still low and limited. Both have become the first cause that they cannot develop their writing thesis well. The implication of this study ; 1) the students should minimize their difficulties and find the solution in the way of a) Improve their English, or at least have adequate English before writing a thesis. b) Should manage their time wisely in doing their thesis. c) Read more relevant sources that can support their research. d) Give more attention to avoid plagiarism. 2) Further researchers are suggested to do similar research and add more data with adding research instruments, such as interview guides.

**Keywords:** *students' difficulties, writing a thesis.*

## INTRODUCTION

Academic writing is the kind of writing that required to do in college or university (Turmudi, 2017). This kind of writing differs from other kinds of writing such as personal, literary, journalistic, or

in business writing (Turmudi, 2014). Academic writing remains one of the main ways you will be assessed in University, so it is an important skill to master.

Academic writing is a complex task, but it is made all the more challenging in University. Oshima and Hogue (1998) said that writing, particularly academic writing is not easy. A study and practice needed to develop this skill. It is important to note that writing is a process, not a product both for native speakers and new learners of English (p.3). It means that a piece of writing whether it is a composition for the English class or a lab report for chemistry class is never complete which is always possible to be revised repeatedly.

At the level of the university, especially university in Indonesia has a requirement as if students would like to finish their study they must make scientific research (Turmudi, 2020). It means that students should prepare themselves to face those challenges at all. The thesis is academic writing and it so differs from another kind of writing. Harmer (2002) said that students will more concerned about language focus, the most benefit greatly is writing subject. In the form of academic writing, there is a need for a detached and objective approach. An academic argument appeals logically and provides evidence in support of an intellectual position. It is important to present your arguments in a logical order and to arrive at conclusions (p.91).

If the researcher sees the difficulties in writing that students felt so we can find that there are grammar error and a psychological factor which is influenced to writing. Grammar problems might be impacting an error in writing, but the psychological factor is regarding the condition of learners' focus. Brown (2000) said that problems in language are caused by an error in understanding the language and affecting factors (p.219). In writing a thesis, students felt worried or do not have confidence in their ability. They are afraid of doing an error in English. In this case, they will not write more than one paragraph because there is no confidence in their minds.

In university-level students have to focus on grammar well and a good idea in creating a clear thesis. This obligation is getting anxiety for students. They think that if they did the mistake their lecturer would be angry with them. Consequently, many of them take a stance from their supervisor rather than do something that will make them learn something related to their thesis.

The writing style in your work makes it easier to read and comprehend or called Academic writing sense. There are rules and guidelines that the researcher can follow. These rules and guidelines will cover the way the researcher writes the language the researcher uses and the format

of his/her assignment. The purpose of academic writing is to make her/his work clear and understandable to whoever is reading and/or marking it.

Another important part of academic writing is to ensure that his/her work is fully and correctly referenced. Academic writing covers many different areas. For example, the researcher needs to pay attention to spelling, grammar, and punctuation. The researcher also needs to consider sentences and paragraph structures, as well as the layout of his/her work.

Fitzmaurice and Farrel (2010) said that three skills are particularly important as you write: Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Direct Quotation. Summarizing means writing an overview in your own words of the main ideas, issues, and general meanings of a text (p.15). It draws a general picture where you cite the original author. Any references help the writer become easier in determining a point and academic writers in having a responsibility to cite all sources used.

Furthermore, we also need to take our focus on a particular issue, idea, or section in a text and using your own words to put forward the meaning of the original text which called paraphrasing. In doing a paraphrase, instead of directly quoting the text, you must cite the original author. Try and be confident to write in your voice and to paraphrase in your own words. If you want to do the direct quotation, then the words need to be identified by quotation marks or block indentation and are entirely the words of the original author which you have chosen to use. Use the quotation for specific purposes:

1. To present a very well-stated passage of text whose meaning would be lessened if paraphrased?
2. To present an idea or argument to comment on. If you use an author's specific words, you must place the words within quotation marks, or in block indentation and you must credit the source.

Thesis writing is a writing activity of research. Turmudi (2019a, 2019b) and Hardling (2004) states that "to conduct research, therefore we need to have a thesis writing." Furthermore, Brookes and Grundy (1991) state that the hypothesis will be trying to prove by students when they write the thesis (p.106). However, the difficulties of writing a thesis might be due to many reasons, such as in point of the objective of the research, the data for the research, findings of the research, and/or the whole research based on the proved ratio( Turmudi,2019a,2019b).

To write a good thesis, the critical points in writing is needed. Blaxter (1998) identifies briefly the critical points needed in writing a thesis, includes the topic or ideas of what the learners want to generalize, they could gain it by consulting to the related subject experts because the master one has done even master it (p.145). The same ideas are also issued by Turmudi (2019a, 2019b).

Based on the explanation above the researcher conclude that writing a thesis is an activity related to science. The students usually have the thesis made as a requirement to finish their studies. To write the thesis the students must have good language to support the idea that they have. Writing a thesis also needs more knowledge to support the argument in their writing. It means that writing a thesis is not easy to do if there is no preparation from students.

Based on the research done by Yusuf (2013), What difficulties are faced by thesis advisors when supervising their students writing the thesis? He found their difficulties are from the top to the less in a sequence as follows;

1. Difficulties dealing with students' English proficiencies (Hyland as cited in Sajid, 2015), e.g. constrained with the requisite English language capability.
2. Difficulties dealing with students' time management (Mack, 2017) e.g. one of the effects of poor time management is a scramble to finish tasks at the last minute. Eventually, the students will miss a deadline.
3. Difficulties dealing with students' research methodology (Turmudi, 2020)
4. Difficulties dealing with students' motivation (Harmer, 1998, p.51) e.g. intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In addition, Brown (2000, p.164) e.g. motivation is the most frequently used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task.
5. Difficulties dealing with students' attitude,
6. Difficulties dealing with students' research topic Jamison (2017), e.g. a major problem that students run into when writing research papers is not reading enough about their topic.
7. Difficulties dealing with co-advisor relationships, students' plagiarism, students' personalities, the big number of supervised students, and advisor workload.

Next, according to Linthorst (2014) Writing a thesis is like a mad dash to the finish of a long marathon: it adds luster to your well-deserved degree. In theory, at least. Because the practice

will turn out that a thesis is often a stumbling block to students. Sometimes, students don't have the slightest clue as to what is expected from them, and it is becoming increasingly common for them to call in the (paid) help of a thesis agency.

The difficulties are:

1. Students do not learn how to do it
2. Criticism of quality = more demanding requirements
3. The requirements are vague and abstract.
4. Time and money.

(Gelderen et al, 2004)

Upon reviewing articles and books, the study is to find out the following results;

1. What are the Students' Difficulties in Writing Thesis at the English Education Study Program of Muhammadiyah University Bengkulu (UMB) in Academic Year 2018-2019,
2. What are the most difficult variables they faced in Writing the thesis?

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### ***Design***

The design of this research is descriptive quantitative research because, in this research, the researcher described the Undergraduate Students' Difficulties at Seventh Semester in Writing Thesis at the English Education Study Program of Muhammadiyah University Bengkulu Academic Year 2018-2019. According to Arikunto (1988) that descriptive research purpose is to collect a particular data of interest factually and accurately. Meanwhile, Ary (2010) also said that descriptive research purpose is to summarize the characteristics of different groups or to measure their attitudes and opinions toward some issues (p.28). Th design is considered to meet the requirement of the current study.

### ***Participants***

The subject of this research is 74 of the Seventh Semester Students of English Education Study Program of Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu in the Academic Year of 2018/2019 who had taken a writing class. They were taken as they were available to be respondents voluntarily.

### ***Instruments***

The instruments that used to collect the data in this study were questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire model was taken from Yusuf (2013). The interview guide was used to get the data that support the students' answers in the questionnaire. During the interview, the students were recorded using a video camera. The data types were language data gained mainly from interview scripts. Both instruments are to gain the valid data so that the results are reliable for further study.

### ***Data Collecting Technique***

To gain data, the researcher distributed a questionnaire to all selected participants. While the researcher witnessed how they answered the questionnaire. When everything was done, the participants submitted the answer to their questionnaires at hand. Further, the researcher investigated the result of the questionnaires and made a decision in which participants were listed to get an interview.

During the interview session, the answer was recorded to transcribe and analyze later when the data analysis process carried out. Both questionnaires and interview records were the main data to analyze in the stage of data analysis as the data collecting was done. After all these procedures, the data analysis was applied.

### ***Data Analysis Technique***

The result of the questionnaire was consolidated and so did the interview record. To the later data, it was transcribed to find a clear idea of the interviewed participants. When all data of transcriptions were mapped, the researcher analyzed by listing and categorizing the contents of

interview scripts. The data were then summed up in a data tabulation qualitatively. The whole process of data analysis follows the lead of Miles and Huberman (2014) called criteria content analysis (CCA).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Result*

The current study tries to find out the following aspects; 1) to find out the undergraduate students' Difficulties in Writing Thesis at The English Study Program of Muhammadiyah University Bengkulu (UMB) in Academic Year 2018-2019; and 2) to find out the most difficult variable they faced in writing theses. Accordingly, the results are presented in the following data.

The results of this research was found that the students' difficulties in writing thesis were related to 1) Difficulties dealing with students' English proficiencies; 2) Difficulties dealing with students' time management; 3) Difficulties dealing with co-advisor relationship, students' plagiarism, students' personalities, the big number of supervised students and advisor workload; 4) Difficulties dealing with students' research methodology; 5) Difficulties dealing with students' research topic; 6) Difficulties dealing with students' motivation; and 7) Difficulties dealing with students' attitude.

### *Discussion*

From the data above, the students feel difficulty in writing a thesis, especially in the variables of their English proficiencies and time management. In the variable of their English proficiency, they found difficulties because their English is still low and limited so that they cannot write a thesis well. It also caused them not to understand what the theory presents, while they must read many sources to support their thesis writing. This phenomenon could be happening because English is different from Bahasa Indonesia, they may find difficulties in the form of understanding the language, arrange good writing. According to Hyland (in Sajid 2015), the majority in academic writing students are constrained with the requisite English language capability e.g. deficiencies in use of tenses, ambiguous or loose sentence construction, unparalleled sentence construction, flaws in the surface and deep structure sentences, poor diction (vocabulary) and expression (style of

language), lack of transforming or rephrasing texts for synthesizing information as a member of a discourse community to reproduce a research work, errors in the use of pronouns, articles, punctuations, etc (p.175).

In the variable of time management, the students like to postpone their writing thesis. This phenomenon could be happening because when they find that their writing is criticized by the supervisor, they feel stuck and difficult to develop their ideas to revise the thesis correctly. As the researcher experience, the researcher also finds difficult to revise the correction of the thesis when the supervisor said it is still wrong. The researcher also sees that other students feel the same. According to Mack (2017), one of the effects of poor time management is a scramble to finish tasks at the last minute. Eventually, the students will miss a deadline. Based on this explanation, it can cause the students to miss their deadlines to finish their thesis writing.

Another difficulty is the students also find difficulties to paraphrase the sentences in the theory, so they only copy-paste the theory without giving their sentences. That is why there are many of the students' thesis sometimes said as plagiarism writing. However, plagiarism is forbidden in academic areas. According to Dung (2010), there are some causes that paraphrasing is difficult, namely: a) Mistakes in Changing Words, b) Mistakes in Changing Word Order, c) Mistakes in Changing Grammar or Structure, and d) Mistakes in Changing Order of Ideas (p.23).

Related to the difficulties dealing with students' research methodology, the students feel difficult because they confused to decide what research design that most appropriate to their research. It can be assumed that they cannot differentiate the types of research design in many types of researches. And they also find difficulties to determine what instrument they should use in their research, whether they use questionnaires, interview guides, classroom observation lists, or other instruments. They also do not know how to analyze their data properly. Sometimes they do not know where to start and what to write after they got the data.

Related to the difficulties dealing with students' motivation, most of the students feel that they had no strong desire to finish it. This type of motivation should be put in the first position to write a thesis because if someone had a strong desire, another factor can be solved. It is intrinsic motivation, if the students do not have this well, they will stick to start their thesis writing. in the term of external motivation, the students do not feel it too difficult, because in the finding it was shown as the lowest score they achieved, it means that people around us did not become the

difficulties for them. According to Harmer (1998) motivation is some kind of internal drive that pushes someone to do think to achieve something (p.51). Also, Brown (2000) states that there are two types of motivation, they were intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (p.164). In the learning process, motivation was an important aspect where it decides students to get success in second language learning. The student that those who do not have a lot of motivation will get difficulty in learning English. Motivation is the reason that wants to do something. Brown (2000) stated that motivation is the most frequently used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task. It clearly means that those who are motivated will have the opportunity to be a successful one (p.160). In short, it could be defined that motivation was very necessary for doing anything.

Related to difficulties dealing with students' attitudes, they find difficulties because they feel lazy to read relevant sources to support their writing thesis. They also feel that they cannot finish it at the right time. And the last, they are ignorant toward writing the thesis. The statements above showed that their attitude toward writing a thesis is still not good.

The last, related to difficulties dealing with students' research topics, they feel difficult because their topic is hard to finish. Sometimes it happens because the students did not read the related article enough that can make them easier to find a topic of research that they can do. The phenomenon that the researcher sees that the students propose their article without reading first so that when their topic is accepted, they got confused to do that.

According to Jamison (2017), a major problem that students run into when writing research papers is not reading enough about their topic. In fact, an issue has many different views. It will be different between one to each other. If a researcher listens or reads about each aspect, he will be aware of the big picture. Actually, it will help the researcher in writing a qualified paper.

The results above are supported by the data from the interview because they had difficulties for many reasons. They are: 1) the factor of language vocabulary. Here, the students had limited vocabulary in English, so it makes them difficult to write a good thesis, 2) difficult to understand the theories. The theories that they found had a high level of language, so they could not understand the content of the theories, 3) difficult to determine the idea when first writing. It is difficult because ideas need to be developed, while they have limited language to develop it, 4) difficult to write the first chapter (background, etc.). It is difficult because, in the background, we need to know the

phenomena through preliminary research, 5) difficult to review the theories. It is difficult because the students need to review the theories with their languages and need to develop the theories too, 6) difficult to determine the appropriate methodology. It is difficult because the need to read more about the appropriate methodology, such as made the appropriate instrument and meet the subject of the research, 7) difficult to analyze the data. It is difficult because it needs a long time to analyze the data, and need more understanding, and must be careful in interpreting it, 8) and give the appropriate suggestions. It is difficult because sometimes the suggestion is not appropriate to the result that had been found.

The previous research results showed that the first was different from the present research where the result of her thesis shown that there was 20 % of students did error in linguistic function. The differences with this thesis were to find out the affecting factor that including psychological, linguistics, and sociocultural while the similarity of this thesis is to find out the students' error in English writing. And the second one showed that there are different characteristics of students who came from various areas. They have a problem showing their ability because they are ashamed of other friends. The difference of this thesis is the scope of research where the researcher will find out psychological, linguistics, and sociocultural while the similarity of this thesis is to find out the students' error in English writing.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### ***Conclusion***

Looking back and digesting the result of this study, it has been showed that the students' difficulties in writing a thesis in the following conclusion:

1. Orderly, the students' difficulties in writing a thesis are: related to difficulties of students' English proficiencies; related to difficulties of students' time management; related to difficulties of students' research methodology; related to difficulties of students' attitude; related to difficulties of students' research topic; and the least related to difficulties of a co-advisor relationship, students' plagiarism, students' personalities, the big number of supervised students and advisor workload; and difficulties of students motivation. The students also had some other difficulties, namely: 1) the factor of language vocabulary, 2)

difficult to understand the theories, 3) difficult to determine the idea when first writing, 4) difficult to write the first chapter (background, etc.), 5) difficult to review the theories, 6) difficult to determine the appropriate methodology, 7) difficult to analyze the data, 8) and give the appropriate suggestions.

2. The most difficulties that the students found in their writing thesis are related to their English proficiency are still low and limited. So, that becomes the first cause that they cannot develop their writing thesis well.

### ***Suggestion***

Considering the findings that had been described in the previous chapter, the researcher would like to suggest the following parties. Firstly, it is addressed to the students. They should minimize their difficulties and find the solution in the way of:

- Improve their English, or at least have adequate English before writing a thesis.
- Should manage their time wisely in doing their thesis.
- Read more relevant sources that can support their research.
- Give more attention to avoid plagiarism.

Finally, it is addressed to future researchers. They are suggested to do similar research and add more data with adding research instruments, such as interview guides appropriately.

### **BIOPROFILE**

Dwi Monica Lestari has her bachelor's degree in English Education from English Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. Her research interest is in writing in any modality. Her corresponding email: [dwimonicalestari@gmail.com](mailto:dwimonicalestari@gmail.com)

## REFERENCES

- Arikunto, S. (1998). *Prosedur Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktek*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.
- Ary, Donal et al. (2010). *Introduction to Research in Education (8th Edition)*. United States of Amerika: Wadsworth.
- Blaxter, Loraine, Christina Hughes and Malcolm Tight. (1998). *The Academic Career Handbook*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Brookes and Grundy (1991). *Writing for Study Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, H. D. (1998). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (4th Edition)*. San Fransisco: Pearson Longman.
- Dung, Tra TM. (2010). *An Investigation in Paraphrasing Experienced by Vietnamese Students of English in Academic Writing*. Da Nang: Da Nang University.
- Fitzmaurice, Marian, and O'Farrell. (2010). *Developing Your Academic Writing Skills: a Handbook*. London: Trinity Collage Dublin Graham.
- Hardling, Chris. (2004). *Planning and Organizing a Master's Thesis*. United Kingdom: Studymates limited.
- Harmer, Jeremy. (1998). *How to Teach English: An Introduction to The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Essex: Person Education.
- Harmer, Jeremy. (2002). *The Practice English Language Teaching*. New York: Edinburg Gate.
- Jamison, Elizabeth. (2017). *What Problems Take Place When Choosing Research Topics & Research Questions*. Hearst Seattle Media, LLC.
- Mack, Stan. (2017). *The Effect of Having Poor Time Management Skills*. From live strong.com
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, M. a, Saldana, J., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed.). <https://doi.org/January 11, 2016>
- Oshima, Hogue. (1998). *Writing Academic English (3rd Edition)*. Longman.
- Sajid, M., & Siddiqui, J. A. (2015). Lack of academic writing skills in English language at higher education level in Pakistan: causes, effects and remedies. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 2(4), 174-186.
- Turmudi, D. (2014). An Analysis of the Students' Trend in Writing Course. In *THE THIRD UAD*

*TEFL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS " ELT Materials Development in Asia and Beyond: Directions, Issues, and Challenges "* (pp. 181–195). Yogyakarta: English Education Department, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan.

- Turmudi, D. (2017). Rethinking Academic Essay Writing: Selected Genres in Comparison. *Premise: Journal of English Education*, 6(2), 119-137.
- Turmudi, D. (2020). English Scholarly Publishing Activities in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 : What , Why , and How ? *ELTEJ*, 3(1), 52–62. Retrieved from <http://journal2.uad.ac.id/index.php/eltej/article/view/1890>
- Turmudi, D.(2019a). *Diary Gambits: Understanding Writing for Research Publication*. Metro: CV. Laduni Alifatama. Retrieved from ISBN: 978-602-582-583-5  
<https://isbn.perpusnas.go.id/Account/SearchBuku?searchCat=Pengarang&searchTxt=Dedi+Turmudi>
- Turmudi, D.(2019b).*Diary Gambits: Understanding Writing Dissertation Proposal Development*. Bandung: CV. Alfabeta. Retrieved from ISBN: 978-602-289-542-8.  
<http://www.cvalfabeta.com/>
- Van Gelderen, A., Schoonen, R., De Glopper, K., Hulstijn, J., Simis, A., Snellings, P., & Stevenson, M. (2004). Linguistic Knowledge, Processing Speed, and Metacognitive Knowledge in First-and Second-Language Reading Comprehension: A Componential Analysis. *Journal of educational psychology*, 96(1), 19.
- Yusuf, M. (2013). *Students Problems In Writing Research Proposal: A Case Study of The Fifth Semester Students of English Education Department, State Institute For Islamic Studies Sunan Ampel Surabaya* (Doctoral dissertation, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya).