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THE EFL LECTURERS' VOICES: STRATEGIES AND CONCERNS IN WRITING THE BA THESIS

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Abstract: The objective of this paper is to examine the perspectives of department chairmen and lecturers who teach Research Methods in English Language Teaching (ELT) with regards to strategies employed in thesis writing. We conducted in-depth interviews to collect data. Four English Education department chairs were interviewed and 24 lecturers teaching Research Methodology in ELT via FGDs. Using coding techniques, the data from interviews and FGDs were divided into two main themes: academic and non-academic variables to

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successful thesis writing. Academic variables include the selection of research problems, analysis of prior relevant themes, formulation of research questions, and comprehension of writing styles. In addition, participants acknowledged that non-academic variables play a vital role in the successful writing of a thesis. The participants highlighted time management and interpersonal relationships as non-academic issues.

Keywords: *interpersonal communication, research methodologies, time-management, thesis supervisor, thesis writing*

INTRODUCTION

Conducting a research project constitutes a significant prerequisite for college students to fulfill their graduation requirements. In order to fulfill this objective, it is anticipated that students in their final year of university will be required to undertake a research endeavor (Mbato & Cendra, 2019; Susilo, 2022). From an academic standpoint, the ability to engage in research and produce a comprehensive research report holds significant importance for a minimum of two distinct reasons. First, research plays a crucial role as it enables researchers to gain insights and find answers to specific inquiries, leading to the generation and production of new information (Kendal, 2015; Lapan, et al., 2012; Lodico, et al., 2006; Mirhoseini, 2020), since research is commonly understood as an academic or scholarly approach employed to gain answers (Anderson, 2002; Crompton, 2002; Mackey & Gass, 2005; Cohen, et al., 2020). According to Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (2016) and Vásquez-Colina, et al., (2021) universities have a responsibility to guarantee that their graduates possess the necessary skills and knowledge to engage in research activities.

Second, research activities contribute to the generation of new information and facilitate the maintenance and creation of knowledge.

One approach to accomplish this objective is by mandating that students engage in research activities. Furthermore, the stipulation to engage in research and compose a research report fosters the cultivation of students' abilities in analytical reasoning and written communication. According to Wu and Buripakdi (2022), the acquisition of these competences is crucial for individuals in preparation for their forthcoming professional endeavors.

Due to the important place of thesis writing in university curricula, educational institutions are urged to provide students with sufficient research abilities. Universities offer research methodology courses to assist students in writing their research papers. For example, prior to preparing a thesis, the Department of English Language Education at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh offers students three courses on research methodology, students are obliged to take the first subject, such as Research Methodology in Education, Introduction to Research Methods in ELT, and Practical Research in ELT. These courses are offered to help students improve their research skills and write their research projects.

Despite the availability of three research courses, the majority of my students continue to struggle with thesis writing. Students encounter difficulties when attempting to discern the fundamental characteristics of research and the challenges that are inherent to it. The most common challenges faced by our students are the identification of research problems, the exploration of the underlying causes of these problems, and the successful completion of the writing process (Li & Vandermensbrugghe, 2011; Murray, 2011; Paltridge, 1997; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Parsaiyan & Gholami, 2023).

The fundamental challenge encountered by students in the process of writing their research projects is the comprehension of the research topic. Another limitation faced by inexperienced researchers, particularly undergraduate students, is the identification and selection of suitable research problems that align with their interests. Certain individuals may exhibit confusion while attempting to determine the

sources or origins of research problems. Researchers have the option to explore a diverse range of sources in order to find research problems (Griffiee, 2012; Lipson, 2005; McKay, 2006; Tarozzi, 2013; Wilkey, 2013; Younas, et al., 2023). The prospective researchers have the opportunity to engage in discussions regarding relevant research matters with their colleagues or mentors (Berlach, 2010; Griffiee, 2012). Researchers may also refer to journal articles in order to uncover unresolved issues in the existing literature, which enables them to launch new research endeavors aimed at addressing the gaps left by prior studies (Cohen, et al., 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lune & Berg, 2017; Zulfikar, 2014, 2019).

Griffiee (2012) believes that different degrees of researchers will produce their research problems in different ways. Less experienced researchers (LERs) often rely on their lecturers for guidance in generating research ideas. During the duration of their academic courses, students have the opportunity to choose research questions that emerge from class discussions as subjects of investigation. In addition to seeking guidance from their peers, certain LERs engage in consulting relevant literature, including books and textbooks, as a means to address their research challenges. However, researchers with extensive experience, sometimes referred to as highly experienced researchers (HERs), employ several methods to produce research issues. A significant proportion of human resource professionals, for example, develop ideas through actively engaging in seminars, workshops, and conferences. In many instances, higher education researchers (HERs) engage in the examination of prior studies and discern the presence of notable deficiencies. In addition, novice researchers may encounter difficulties while attempting to problematize a research problem, which is sometimes referred to as a "problem statement." According to Terrel (2016), the lack of competence to formulate a research project stems from the inability to identify research problems.

In addition, the task of writing a thesis poses significant challenges, particularly for undergraduate students (El-Freihat, 2021; Lestari, 2020). To address this issue, the department of English Language Education at Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh has implemented a system wherein a designated professor is assigned to provide guidance and supervision to students throughout the process of formulating their thesis proposals. Subsequently, the department would designate two academics to fulfill the role of thesis supervisors. This assignment holds significant importance as it provides students with the opportunity to enhance their research design, effectively articulate their thesis, and successfully meet project deadlines. The collaborative efforts of the two thesis supervisors aim to facilitate the timely completion of students' theses. In addition to offering technical assistance, the supervisors also provide academic coaching. Given the significant influence that supervisors have on students' thesis writing outcomes, it is imperative and opportune to examine the viewpoints of supervisors about tactics that effectively facilitate thesis writing.

Considering the inherent difficulty associated with composing a thesis, it is of utmost importance for academics to do investigations that explore the perspectives of lecturers in relation to tactics and problems pertaining to thesis writing. In order to provide structure to our inquiry, we formulated the subsequent inquiries: What is the perspective of instructors at the Department of English Language Education regarding the most efficacious procedures for thesis writing? Are there any noteworthy considerations that should be taken into account when composing the thesis? What is the significance of these entities? The aforementioned inquiries were thoroughly examined through the utilization of qualitative research, which will be expounded upon in greater detail in the subsequent subsection.

METHOD

This is a qualitative case study, and it is seen as an appropriate strategy for exploring and studying perception-related topics by researchers (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2018; Leavy, 2014; Glesne, 2014; Zulfikar, 2014). This is due to the fact that qualitative research seeks a comprehensive knowledge of a phenomenon (Hsiung, 2018). For this reason, qualitative case study was employed in the present study, and we feel that it will allow us to gain an in-depth comprehension of our participants' perspectives.

Participants and Research Settings

The participants in our study were selected from a total of four universities, with two of them situated in Aceh and the remaining two located in Surabaya. These participants were recruited through gatekeepers, in which they provide names of the prospective participants. Having obtained their names, we contacted them and requested for their availability to participate in our research. Only after we secured their consent did we carried out in-depth interviews with four chairpersons of English education departments, along with focus group discussions with 24 lecturers who teach Introduction to Research in English Language Teaching (ELT). Furthermore, they possess prior experience in overseeing student theses. The purpose of these interviews and FGDs was to obtain the viewpoints of these individuals regarding the process of preparing research reports. It was posited that the provision of sufficient information to address our concerns would be facilitated by the involvement of department chairs and research course lecturers, hence underscoring the need of their recruitment.

Methods of data collection and analysis

The study employed a qualitative research approach, including in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to collect department chairs and lecturers' perspectives on effective strategies for writing a thesis. This methodology was chosen because to its ability to explore individuals' subjective experiences and

emotions. According to Cassell, Cunliffe, and Grandy (2018), interviews are widely recognized as a highly effective approach for gaining insights into the perspectives and viewpoints of individuals.

Nevertheless, the efficacy of interviews is contingent upon the interviewers' comprehension of interviewing strategies and techniques (Glesne, 2014; Hesse, et al., 2019). Furthermore, coding techniques are employed to examine the data that has been gathered for the purpose of this study. The present study utilized a three-stage codification process, following the recommendation proposed by Bryman (2016). Initially, open coding was employed to discover the necessary data for addressing our research inquiry. In the second phase, a refinement process was conducted on numerous codes by the application of axial coding. Subsequently, the data was formed through the utilization of selective coding techniques. Each participant is represented by the symbol "P". For example, participant 1 is marked as P1, and this naming convention applies to all other participants.

FINDINGS

In the fieldwork, we found several similar themes in the participants' narrations in good ways of writing thesis. Referring to the analysis of the research findings, we coded two big strategies: academic and non-academic related strategies.

Academic-related strategies

All participants involved in this study hold the belief that the initial stage of thesis writing involves the identification of research problems. The first step in undertaking research and developing the thesis is to commence the process. Furthermore, the ability to conduct a comprehensive literature study is regarded as the second most crucial criterion for achieving a great thesis. The participants additionally observe that the writing style constitutes a significant component of thesis composition. Prior to composing their thesis, students are required to possess a comprehensive understanding of writing style.

Identifying research problems

All participants interviewed for this study concur that identifying the research problem is the first and most important step. The ability to define, specify, and then explain a research problem is crucial since it directs students in their study and report writing. One of the participants, for instance, proposed:

"First, you need to know your problem, and then after you decide 'this is my problem' and then you need to write research question from that problem. When you have formulated your research questions you need to put them on the wall, ya just write them big, so you can also pay attention on them. From those research question, you can decide what type of literature you need (P3)"

This paragraph implies that the 'research problem' is the starting point for research; no one can advance with the design of their proposal without a specific research problem. Since good research is restricted and in-depth, a good research problem is particular (Creswell, 2014; Partington, 2001; Younas, et al., 2023). In accordance with this assertion, P1 provided guidance on how to develop research problems and which types of research problems will increase students' likelihood of completing their theses within the allotted time frame. P1 expressed:

"There are some tips and tricks to identify research problem and start writing the thesis. The trick is what I call SMART. S stands for specific. The problem of your thesis must be specific, you cannot write about big problems as you do not have time to finish it, and then M, which measurable, the letter A stands for attainable. This is important because a good thesis is the one that completed. R is realistic, and the last one is T, which is time bound. If you have this word in your head, this will allow you to do research and write your thesis on time (P1)"

An excellent research problem is something within the reach of the researchers themselves, as demonstrated by P1. They must ensure that their study problem is specific and achievable so that it can be measured and completed within the allotted time frame.

In the same tone, P2 also stated that it is important for students to narrow their research scope down. During the interview, P2 suggested that:

"The best tip to write the thesis is understanding of what you are going to write, find a problem, find an interesting thing. Okay then having stated a research problem, you have to narrow it down so that specific research problem can be identified (P2)"

Other individuals, P9 and P10, concur that the identification of a research problem is essential for initiating research. For instance, P9 advises that "...you must identify the difficulties and then narrow them down by generating study questions." Similarly, P10 indicates that "before selecting a title, you must first identify an issue or problem." According to Lipson (2005) and Hunt, et al. (2022), writing a thesis is a difficult task; it requires a number of significant tasks, such as recognizing problems and picking themes that match to those concerns.

In discovering research problems, however, some researchers may need to participate in seminars, conferences, and other academic programs in order to get insight into prospective research inquiries, whilst other researchers may have come up with solid research ideas by examining the literature (Griffee, 2012; Weatherall, 2019). Numerous researchers, including Teitelbaum (1998), Anderson and Poole (2001), Paltridge and Starfield (2007), Murray (2011), and Creswell (2014), Zarestky (2023) stress that identifying research questions requires careful consideration. In reality, these experts stated that, once the research problems have been identified, students and researchers must still consider whether their research topic has a solid explanation, is sufficiently intriguing to warrant exploration, and has the resources to be completed.

Selecting relevant literature

Other important issue to enable researchers conduct their research effectively is by reviewing relevant literature (Randolph, 2009; Kuchinke, 2023). All participants in this study agree that previous studies or relevant literature are important to help researchers conduct research and write research findings. During the interview, P4 stated that:

"In our experience, there are several types to consider in writing thesis, the first one is we need to find for all thesis and then we have to read previous studies that are relevant to your topic and then we analyze these studies to state gaps between our thesis and those previous ones (P4)"

At the same notes, other participants, P2, P5, and P8 also agree that reviewing relevant previous studies are one of the first steps to start doing research. P2 for example, suggested that:

"...then try to find literature, you need to find the literature, ya...the resource. We call it resources to back up your knowledge, to back up the theory that you are going to use in conducting your research...you can get information from scholars-google;...Pustaka Nasional; ... SAGE and some other kinds of journal (P2)"

In the same tone, P6 also mentioned that previous relevant studies are helpful in the process of identifying and shaping the research problem. P6, for instance mentioned that:

"Ya of course, you have to read the books which are related to your topic like find out some theories related to the research. Reviewing literature is also important to allow students shape research questions. However, avoid copy paste from other people's thesis because these theses may have some mistakes as well (P6)"

P2 also noted steps a student can do in problem identification, in his own word P2 suggests that problem identification is a prerequisite to conducting research effectively. He states that:

"Okay, I think you need to do is to find problem, to find an interesting thing that you want to research, and then try to find the resources, literature that will back you about the information that you are going to research on (P2)"

These quotes suggest that reviews of literature, the relevant studies are important to help researchers shape the research questions and also help them find the research gap. As reviewing literature is important, researchers are expected to understand where they may get access to literature. P12 suggests that:

"Well, you can go to library, searching for books or journals, or anything you can have and take to your research. Well, you can find many different research titles and check them if they are relevant to your study (P12)"

There are numerous locations where researchers can locate literature. The best place to find quality resources is the library, where students have access to books, journals, and other academic materials (Synder, 2019). Anderson and Poole (2001); Henttonen, et al. (2023) and Creswell (2014) emphasized the importance of a literature review. Students and researchers are required to undertake regular and continuous literature evaluations; this should be done throughout the thesis writing process. Students and researchers will benefit from literature reviews in numerous ways. As suggested by Creswell (2014) and Griffiee (2012), literature review benefits researchers in a number of ways: it provides background information about the topic; it educates readers about your specific research topics; it demonstrates to readers that you have read extensively on your field of interest; it identifies researchers' sources; and, lastly, it generates ideas for future research (Griffiee, 2012, p. 23). Although qualitative research does not necessitate a literature review at the outset of thesis writing, literature reviews can enrich students' or researchers' grasp of their study's topic. The literature review is therefore a crucial component of thesis writing. Additionally, Creswell (2014) stated, "it is essential to conduct a thorough literature review on your issue prior to writing your proposal" (p. 22). This shows that literature evaluations are essential

throughout the thesis writing process. Not only is a literature review crucial during problem identification and methodological design, but also during data analysis. For this reason, having abilities in literature evaluation is an asset for thesis writing success. In addition, according to the participants of this research, the other important skills needed for successful thesis writing is writing competent. The following section thus will discuss about this important issue.

Knowledge on academic writing

While problem identification and literature review are two important steps to write thesis successfully, skills in academic writing are also very important. Researchers will not be able to report their findings well unless they have sufficient skills in academic writing. P16 for instance states that:

"In writing thesis, you should be skillful in paraphrasing...you may use direct quote where you copy from the original version and paste it to your work...paraphrasing you need to read, you have to understand and you have to take the clue or the core of the statement...the paraphrase make the idea brief...(P16)"

This remark argues that one of the most essential talents for all students writing theses is the ability to paraphrase. Authors and researchers who can effectively paraphrase enjoy significant benefits. This is because fresh information can be developed and explored using these methods. Additionally, this talent stops the author from plagiarizing (Teitelbaum, 1998; Anderson & Poole, 2001; Lipson, 2005; Du, & Liu, 2021; Singh, et al., 2023).

Additionally, to be able to produce a decent thesis, researchers or students must study as many theses as possible. This is necessary for them to comprehend the writing style. For example, P6 stated:

"...and then the second one tries to get familiar with the style, writing style of the thesis...see and follow the rules of the writers. I am sure that will make it easy, easier for you to write later on...read and read again the writing style (P19)"

In the process of developing a thesis, writing proficiency is unquestionably essential. The writing skills will assist students and researchers in creating their thesis. Students or researchers must obtain appropriate knowledge on academic writing, which includes paraphrasing, summarizing, citing, and other abilities associated with academic writing, in order to be successful in writing their thesis (Anderson & Poole, 2001; Lee, & Lin, 2022). For some students, writing is one of the most difficult talents to acquire, and consequently, it is the greatest impediment to completing their studies on time. For this reason, academics offer suggestions and ways for enhancing writing skills. Anderson and Poole (1998) and Lipson (2005) offer many essential procedures for writing a thesis. It is imperative that students compose the initial document, which they may later need to evaluate and revise (Schillings, et al., 2023).

In addition to academic aspects, the study identifies other non-academic factors that contribute to students' performance in thesis writing. The participants argue that the relationship with the supervisor and time management are two interconnected aspects that are equally as significant as academic factors.

Non-Academic-related factors

Interpersonal communication with supervisor

In addition to academic aspects, students' relationships with their supervisors are crucial for producing a successful thesis. In certain circumstances, students are unable to complete their theses on time due to ineffective supervisor communication. All participants acknowledge this issue, with P15, for instance, stating:

“As a novice researcher you need the advice from your supervisor because they have more experience than you. You need to first make an appointment before consultation, you also need to come on time, make sure that you are well prepared. The most important thing is you create healthy communication with your supervisor; you need to talk politely with them (P15)”

This shows that making good arrangements with supervisors and interacting with them cordially can assist students in maximizing their time. Students and their supervisors may not reach the same level of agreement on certain subjects during the supervision process. When this occurs, students writing theses may need to effectively resolve concerns. Several participants indicate that:

"First you need to share and talk a lot with your supervisor. If you and your supervisor have a different perception, you need to talk you need to change your idea, everything you can talk (P10)"

"You just need to talk and talk, and just talk with your supervisors that you want to complete your thesis writing in one semester (P11)"

"...but this is the advisor, you have to tell what happen to you...I believe they would understand, you as students just need to say...I am quite sure that to make a good relationship, you just have to tell them in advance that you really want to finish it on time...make your schedule, like you have to make schedule with your advisor (P7)"

This suggests that apart from academic factors, the non-academic ones also influence students' effort to write a successful thesis.

In thesis writing, building good relationship with the supervisor is important. In fact, it is one of the most important pre-requisites in successful thesis writing. P7, for example states that:

"Okay so make sure to talk a lot with your supervisor. Because when you share when you discuss together you will change your mind and also I think so for this lecturer also she will change her/his main and that is why you have to meet this lecturer regularly (P7)"

Meeting supervisor on the regular basis will increase the likelihood that someone finishes their study on time.

Time management

The capacity to complete a thesis depends not only on students' research and teaching capabilities, but also on their time management abilities. In the senior year of the undergraduate program, students are obliged to write a thesis. Students have limited time to complete their theses if they do not work hard enough to generate quality theses, as the majority of senior students have only six months to undertake research. For example, P10 states:

"The first thing you have to do is design the schedule. Design a schedule because it will be more structure when doing your thesis. You want to finish your thesis in six months or maybe three months to write what you want to do. If you want to finish fast, you must be more diligent than you do as usual (P10)"

P14 also mentions that:

"...supervisor does his/her job at the beginning in designing Chapter One. Actually, the supervisor helps a lot in designing that...supervisor supervises you, well maybe you think that case is important (P14)"

Lipson (2005), Murray (2011), and Paltridge and Starfield (2007) agree that time management is a crucial aspect of thesis writing success. Students are obliged to effectively manage their time for the sole purpose of completing their theses on deadline. The vast majority of participants in this study feel that time management skills will reduce the amount of time students spend writing their theses. Students may choose whether or not to complete their thesis on time. For instance, P7 suggests:

"...in one semester we can finished it. If we have four semesters, it means we have to finish it in two years. In time management point of view, it can be finished on time. That is a good way of writing research I believe (P7)"

Several accounts in this section demonstrate that crafting a thesis is difficult. Numerous elements contribute to both the success

and failure of thesis writing. Therefore, it is essential that students are aware of this condition so that they may plan ahead and arrange their time efficiently in order to complete their theses in a timely manner.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the viewpoints of chairpersons of English Language Departments and senior lecturers regarding successful strategies for writing a thesis. The findings obtained from comprehensive interviews and focus group discussions reveal a consensus among participants regarding the recommended strategies that students should consider when completing their thesis within a specified timeframe. The participants in this study suggest that both academic and non-academic factors play an equally major role in the timely completion of a thesis. The academic components encompass problem identification, literature reviews, and writing proficiency, while the non-academic factors encompass supervisors' relationships and time management. Although both of them are equally significant, we also noticed that to certain extent, difficulties involving non-academic give bigger challenges in completing thesis on time. Hence, this article posits that students endeavoring to timely complete their thesis should take into account both academic and non-academic factors, as both hold equal significance in ensuring timeliness within the designated timeframe.

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