

STUDENTS' PROBLEMS IN THE INTRODUCTION SECTION OF THESIS WRITING

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ABSTRACT


This study aims to investigate undergraduate students' problems in writing the Introduction section of their thesis. The study used the qualitative research method, employing interview to collect the necessary data. The study took ten students of English Education Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh, Aceh Province, as the sample. The technique used to analyze the data was descriptive analysis. The results of the study showed that most problems that students faced in writing thesis in the Introduction section consisted of lack of the supporting theories, lack of paraphrasing skills, lack of motivation, lack of grammatical knowledge, and lack of writing organization skills. One of the causes of their problems was low English competence. The students, however, tried to solve their problems by having routine consultation with thesis supervisors and reading many sources related with their thesis topics.

KEYWORDS: *Introduction Section, Thesis Writing.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the four fundamental language skills that should be gained in order to complete tasks and communicate ideas is writing. In academic writing, thesis statement starts the development of ideas as it conveys the content of the writing to the readers (Hadiani, 2017). Nevertheless, in writing academic essays, students frequently run into difficulties, particularly when organizing the ideas. In the case of Indonesian students, given that English is not their native language, they need to take proper writing, grammar, and other factors (i.e. psychological and sociocultural factors) into consideration (Dwihandini et al., 2013).

Writing an academic essay is difficult, and therefore, writing skills must be developed via extensive study and practice when it comes to academic purposes (Oshima & Hogue, 1999). When composing essays on academic research, many studies showed



that students struggled with sentence structure and organization, had limited vocabulary resources, and also made grammatical errors (Maznun et al., 2017).

In this study, the concern is on undergraduate thesis writing, particularly on the Introduction section. Undergraduate thesis generally consists of the following structure: Introduction, Theoretical Review, Research Methods, Results and Discussions, and Conclusion and Suggestions. In particular, the Introduction part describes the background of the study, research questions, significance of the study, research participants, as well as terminologies, which intends to draw the readers' attention to the study (Maznun et al., 2017). Chandrasekhar (2008) states that "an undergraduate thesis is, at present, graded on the quality of research, the significance of the contributions and the style of presentation" (p. 2).

A number of studies have revealed that undergraduate students still encountered difficulties when dealing with thesis writing. Maznun et al. (2017) summarized that the students' difficulties included having grammatical mistakes, insufficient lexical resources, and lack of academic writing skills. For the most part, having a good writing skill is necessary in order to develop proper scientific research paper, in this case the undergraduate thesis.

In light of the above discussions, the study attempted to investigate the undergraduate students' problems in writing thesis, especially in the introduction section, at English Education department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THESIS WRITING

According to Wallace et al. (2004), "writing is the final product of several separate acts that are hugely challenging to learn simultaneously. Among these separable acts are note-taking, identifying a central idea, outlining, drafting and editing" (p. 15). In addition, Brown (2004) states that there are several genres of writing, they are academic writing, job-related writing, and personal writing. Thesis writing, according to these genres, belongs to the academic type of writing.

In terms of thesis writing, Chandrasekhar (2008) remarks that even though writing a thesis may seem to be an onerous requirement for getting a degree, the discipline it fosters may have long-term advantages. He describes, "A thesis—whether undergraduate or postgraduate—is evidence of the candidate's capacity to carry out independent research under the guidance of a supervisor, and to analyze and

communicate the significant results of that work” (Chandrasekhar, 2008, p. 2). The following table summarizes types of theses compiled by Paltridge (2002).


Table 1. Thesis types based on Paltridge (2002)

Summary of thesis types	
<p>Traditional: simple Introduction Literature review Materials and methods Results Discussion Conclusions</p>	<p>Topic-based Introduction Topic 1 Topic 2 Topic 3 etc. Conclusions</p>
<p>Traditional: complex Introduction Background to the study and review of the literature (Background theory) (General methods) Study 1 Introduction Methods Results Discussion and conclusions Study 2 Introduction Methods Results Discussion and conclusions Study 3 etc. Introduction Methods Results Discussion and conclusions Discussion Conclusions</p>	<p>Compilation of research articles Introduction Background to the study Research article 1 Introduction Literature review Materials and methods Results Discussion Conclusions Research article 2 Introduction Literature review Materials and methods Results Discussion Conclusions Research article 3 etc. Introduction Literature review Materials and methods Results Discussion Conclusions Discussion Conclusions</p>

In the context of this present study, the part of the thesis under study is the Introduction section. The justification of the thesis is laid out in the Introduction, including the background of writing the study, the statement of problem, clear objectives, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations of the research and operational definition of the key terms (Tiwari, 2019). In general, writing a thesis in English may be demanding and complex, especially for those learning English as a second or foreign language (Maznun et al., 2017). Writing a thesis is, for the majority of students, a novel experience that is more challenging linguistically and structurally compared to any other writing they have ever done (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 1997).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative research approach. The study applied interview to collect data from the respondents. A number of ten students from English Education



Department at Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh were selected on voluntary basis, based on their consent and availability to participate in this study. The students were doing their thesis at the time of the study period. The interview guide consisted of questions on the writing problems and the solutions of the problems. The students were interviewed separately at their convenience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the interviews, some students found it challenging to write a thesis for the Introduction part, particularly given the factor of their English proficiency. They had problems with their English since their levels of proficiency were still poor and limited, making it difficult for them to produce a quality thesis. Furthermore, because the students had to study a lot of materials to support their thesis writing, it made it difficult for them to comprehend what the theory proposed. This situation occurred because English and Indonesian differ, making it harder for them to comprehend the language and write well. The majority of English learners lack the necessary English language proficiency, as evidenced by their poor use of tenses, unclear sentences, incorrect sentences, poor word choice and language style, and a lack of ability to transform or rephrase texts for information synthesis needed to write a scientific paper (Sajid & Siddiqui, 2015).

Another issue is that the students had trouble paraphrasing the theory's phrases; as a result, they merely copied and pasted it without adding their own sentences. Because of this, many student theses have been occasionally accused of being copied. Dung (2010) found that there were several reasons why paraphrasing was challenging, including errors in word choice, errors in word order, errors in grammar or structure, and errors in thought order.

The information from the interview also showed that the students struggled for a variety of reasons, including time management, choosing a study topic, and motivation. Some students wanted to delay writing their theses when it came to time management. This occurrence might be taking place as a result of the students' inability to develop their thoughts and appropriately modify the thesis when they learned that their work has been condemned by the supervisors. When the supervisors described that their theses had to be corrected, the students encountered difficulty in doing so. Most students also stated that they did not have a strong will to finish writing their theses. When writing a thesis, this kind of motivation should come first since, if someone had a great willingness, another issue may be resolved. If students do not have this type of intrinsic drive, they will not begin writing their theses. Harmer (1991) defines motivation as a type of internal force that propels a

person to act in order to accomplish a goal. A person's decision to do something, how long he/she decides to do it for, and how much work he/she puts into it are all factors in motivation (Dornyei, 2001). In a nutshell, it might be said that motivation was essential for doing anything, including writing a thesis.

Further, some students had difficulty in writing the introduction part because their topics were challenging. Sometimes this occurred because the students did not read the relevant materials thoroughly enough, which may have made it simpler for them to identify a study subject. Some students had a tendency to offer their topics without first reading relevant articles, leading to confusion when their topics were finally approved. According to Jamison (2017), one of the biggest issues that students have while writing research papers is that they do not read enough on the subject. As a topic has a wide range of perspectives, there will be variations from one to the next.


The final point concerned with how students resolved their issues. The majority of students who were in the thesis-writing phase resolved their issues by routinely consulting with their supervisors and reading several past theses that were relevant to their topic interests. There is no substantial alternative to reading the prior thesis, despite the fact that this strategy still leaves these students perplexed while trying to solve their difficulties. This issue may have happened as a result of the students' lack of understanding of proper thesis writing techniques and English language comprehension.

CONCLUSIONS

The students' difficulties with writing the thesis in the Introduction section are related to their difficulties with matching supporting theories, thinking about the purpose of the introduction section, their English proficiency, their understanding of paraphrasing, their motivation, and their difficulties with paraphrasing. The students solved their problems in writing thesis in the Introduction section by doing a routine consultation and reading various sources related to their theses.

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