

THE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' CHALLENGES TO THESIS WRITING AT UIN ALAUDDIN MAKASSAR

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ABSTRACT

Thesis writing as one of final year students' assignment is not a simple work. It involves hard work and effort to complete. This research addresses issue of the students' challenges to thesis writing among the eighth semester students of English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar. The research questions were asking about the challenges faced by the eighth semester students to thesis writing of English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar and the causal factors of the challenges faced by the eighth semester students to thesis writing of English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar. Descriptive qualitative design was used in this research. The subject of this research consisted of 30 students of English Education Department intake year 2016. The subjects were chosen purposively including several criteria. The data of this research was obtained from two kinds of instruments, namely interview with supporting data from questionnaire. The data analysis technique in this research used three steps, they are identification, classification, and explanation. The result of this research showed that the students mostly encountered challenges and delays in their thesis writing process. The challenges were: lack of availability of the references and resources related to the students' thesis topic, lack of students' skills in research methodology, as well as lack of students' knowledge related to the guidelines for writing scientific paper. Moreover, the challenges that the students encountered divided into two affecting factors, namely internal factor and external factor. The internal factors of the students' challenges are the students' academic skill related to research methodology and guidelines for writing scientific paper; and the students' self-confidence. Whereas, the external factors that influencing the students' challenges are, the availability of the research references, research supervisor, as well as respondents.

Keywords: Students' challenge, thesis writing, final year students

INTRODUCTION

In the tertiary level of education system, particularly at the undergraduate level, writing takes an important role due to many students' assignments related to written works, such as paper,

experimental report, research proposal, up to the thesis writing (*skripsi*) as the partial fulfillment to reach *Sarjana* degree (Zemach and Rumisek, 2005). Besides, according to Alwasilah as cited in Husnussalam (2016), the urgency of writing as evidence of intellectuality of academicians is apparent nowadays. Moreover, the importance of writing in higher level of education can also be seen at the every major where each of their students will learn at least research methodology in which they learn how to write an academic writing.

Based on the observation of the researcher, the students whose were at the eighth semester of English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar have started to prepare the research proposal as the first step in conducting research since the thesis supervisor's decree for each student published in November 2019. By this decree, the students were expected to prepare and arrange their research proposal immediately and then conducting a research proposal seminar. However, in fact, among the total of 96 students who are now at the eighth semester, there are still less than 60% of them who have conducted the research proposal seminar to this day.

Thesis is one of scientific paper which discussed about the result of a research related to issues or phenomena in a field of study using scientific principles. Thesis is one of important thing in higher education level and it is not a simple one as it involves hard work and effort (Alsied and Ibrahim, 2017). Considering this fact, it does not rule out the possibility that the students may face some challenges or difficulties during the process of writing thesis. Therefore, it seemed necessary to conduct research to identify the challenges of the students in writing thesis.

The previous study by Evangelista and Hernandez (2013) entitled "Struggle and Survive: Difficulties Encountered by Students Undertaking Research", revealed that among 103 fourth year students, they agreed that research is important for the undergraduate students. Besides, they also agreed that they encountered difficulties in writing the proposal, conducting the research, and writing the research paper. The difficulties that the students encountered are vary from each stage, such as the students are difficult in choosing a research topic, accessing and gathering the data, amount of time in completing the research, up to interpreting the data.

Moreover, a study by Qasem and Zayid (2019) entitled "The Challenges and Problems Faced by Students in the Early Stage of Writing Research Project in L2, University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia". The study revealed that 60 undergraduate students who have conducted their research projects in English as Second Language (ESL), faced several challenges such as difficulty in deciding topic of the research, lack of time, guidance, and interest in research,

lack of good knowledge of research methodology, and inability to find the latest and related references.

From the explanation above, the researcher concluded that writing thesis or *skripsi* is one of important thing for the students to do, as it is one of requirements to complete the study in university and to get the academic degree. However, many students were still facing various difficulties in the process of writing the research or *skripsi* itself. Thus, it seems necessary to find out the students' challenges to thesis writing. The findings of this study give information related to the students' common challenges to thesis writing, so that the both the teacher and students will focus on the strategy of how to solve the common challenges to thesis writing.

METHOD

This research used descriptive qualitative design as this research aimed to describe and explore the phenomenon of the students' challenges in writing thesis at the eighth semester of English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar. Qualitative research is a research which aims to describe a phenomenon where the data is analyzed qualitatively using words and the result of the research puts more emphasis on generalization (Anggito and Setiawan, 2018).

The subjects of this research consisted of 30 students from three different classes, whose were at the eighth semester of English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar in academic year 2019/2020. In determining the subject of this research, the researcher put several criteria to the students. Firstly, the student must be from English Education Department intake year 2016. Secondly, the student must have conducted thesis supervision process more than two times. Thirdly, the student must have written the thesis minimum from the first chapter and maximum the fifth chapter about conclusions and suggestions.

The research instruments used in this research were questionnaire and interview. The data was obtained using both of these instruments by online form using Google Form and WhatsApp chat, since there was a publication of the government's circular letter regarding "Social Distancing" where everyone should stay at home and not to go anywhere due to the spread of Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19). Besides, the rector's at UIN Alauddin Makassar circular letter also emphasized the online use on each academic activity, including the process of conducting research for the final year students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Students' Challenges to Thesis Writing

Table 1. The Students' Challenges to Thesis Writing

No.	Challenges	Total Number of Challenge Appear	Percentages (%)
1.	Lack of References Related to Students' Research Topic	25	18%
2.	Students Had Challenge to Formulate Research Instruments, Data Processing Techniques, Up to Data Analysis	23	16.5%
3.	Lack of Students' Understanding Related to Guidelines for Writing Scientific Paper	22	16%
4.	Students Had Challenge Related to Thesis Supervision Process	20	14.4%
5.	Students Had Challenge to Collect the Data from Respondents	19	13.6%
6.	Students Had Challenge to Arrange Research Background	16	11.5%
7.	Students Had Challenge to Interpret and Describe Research Result	12	8.6%
8.	Students Had Challenge to Determine the Correct English Grammar	1	0.7%
9.	Students Had Challenge Related to Self-Confidence	1	0.7%
TOTAL		139	100%

Lack of References Related to Students' Research Topic

From the questionnaire and interview section with the respondent, it is known that the students had challenges related to the availability of the related theories/study. This problem happened as the topic is still not common or still new. This line to the statement from the student 3, as she said: "It is difficult for me to find references related to my study since my topic is not common and there is still a few researches related to my study". Moreover, the student 1 also said: "I also got problems related to the availability of the references, where there are not many references related to my study".

In line with this, a study by Andani and Oktaviani (2018) revealed that the dominant cause of students' problem in writing thesis is the problem in finding reference. Similarly, Al-Qaseri (2016) also found that most of the needed references and resources did not exist in the libraries and students had difficulties in finding them.

Students Had Challenge to Formulate Research Instruments, Data Processing Techniques, Up to Data Analysis

In the third chapter of a thesis, the researcher had to explain what kind of research methodology used in the research. The discussion in the chapter three of a thesis also

included the explanation of research instruments, data processing techniques, up to data analysis used by the researcher to get the result of the research.

According to the research result, it is known that the students mostly had challenge related to this issue. This happened as the students are still lack of knowledge in research methodology. As the student 5 said: “I have problem in research methodology as I still found some problems related to research methodology such as determining appropriate research design, determining population and sample, and many more”.

In line with this, Qasem and Zayid (2019) found that during the process of writing research project, the students faced challenge related to research methodology, i.e. the students did not have adequate knowledge in selecting research tools, data collection, and data analysis.

Lack of Students' Understanding Related to Guidelines for Writing Scientific Paper

As the preliminary stage in preparing a thesis or academic writing, it is necessary for the students to understand the guidelines for writing scientific paper first as this will help the students know what steps they have to do in writing the academic paper. Based on the research result, it is found that the students encounter challenge related to this issue and the students mostly did not know what they are going to do first and how to do it. This made the delay of the students' progress in their thesis writing process.

In line with this, a study by Evangelista and Hernandez (2013) also revealed that in terms of preparing the thesis proposal, one of the students' challenges is the lack of the students understanding of the steps to be used in conducting the research. Moreover, Keong and Mussa (2015) revealed that the students faced several academic writing difficulties. It is also found that 75% of the respondents had no knowledge of composing and organizing academic research. Thus, it is important for the students to have a good understanding of the guidelines for writing scientific paper before starting organize a thesis.

Students Had Challenge Related to Thesis Supervision Process

The students also had challenge related to the thesis supervision process. The students agree that their thesis supervisors are difficult to meet and give slow feedback to the students. Whereas, as well as learning, thesis writing also requires guidance, considering that students are not experts in research. Guidance from the supervisor such as advice will help the students to write the thesis well (Andani and Oktaviani, 2018).

This line to the challenge that encountered by student 3, as she stated: “I have problems in my thesis supervision process, my supervisors are not easy to meet and they give me slow feedback even though I always contact them. That is why I got delay on my thesis writing

process”. Moreover, the student 1 also said: “I have problems in my thesis supervision process, where my supervisors were not easy to get in touch”.

In accordance with this, a study by Asmawan (2016) also showed the same result. He revealed that one of the external factors that influence the students in writing thesis is the thesis supervision process, in which the students were difficult meeting up the supervisors and had a communication problem with them.

Students Had Challenge to Collect the Data from Respondents

In conducting research for a thesis, the researcher had to consider the existence of respondents as the research cannot be completed without them. Respondents are the ones who give their perception and answers related to issues discussed in the study. At this point, the researcher should establish a friendly relationship with the respondents for the success of the study.

According to the result of this research, the students mostly had challenges in collecting the data from respondents. This happened as the students are not familiar with the respondents and also the spread of Coronavirus Disease (COVID) 19 made all the research activities must be conducted at home as the people cannot gather in one place. This is also stated by student 5, as she said: “I have problem in collecting the data. Hmm, you know, sometimes the respondents are not cooperative. So, it takes much time for me to collect all the data”.

In line with this result, Bocar (2013) also found that the major challenge that the students encountered in the thesis writing is that the students are less-cooperated with respondents.

Students Had Challenge to Arrange Research Background

As the first chapter in the organization of a thesis, background serves the reason underlying the researcher choose the topic itself. Besides, a background also serves facts and data related to the problem that will be solved through the research. From the research result, it is known that the students faced challenge of arranging research background. The students mostly lack of ideas so that they did not know what they would write in their thesis proposal.

A study by Yabu et al. (2013) also revealed the same thing. The study found that the second major difficulty of the students in writing thesis is that the students had problem in arranging research background. Rismen (2015) asserted that the most of the students had low skills of communicating and stating their ideas into written form, thus they encountered difficulty in arranging the research background.

Students Had Challenge to Interpret and Describe Research Result

In the chapter fourth of a thesis i.e. Findings and Discussion, the researcher showed and described the research result based on the data obtained. Based on the result of this research, it is known that the students encountered challenges to interpret and describe the research result. Regarding this issue, a study by Villanueva (2017) also found that the students' challenges related to writing the fourth chapter of a thesis is they did not know interpreting the data clearly and concisely. Besides, Evangelista and Hernandez (2013) revealed the major difficulty of the students in writing research paper is interpreting and explaining the research data.

Students Had Challenge to Determine the Correct English Grammar

According to Byrne in Alfaki (2015), writing is a complex process as it requires the mastery of grammatical devices, conceptual thinking and judgemental elements. In related to this research, it is found in the interview section that one student had challenge to determine the correct English grammar. As the student 2 said: "I have problem in determining the correct grammar for my writing, I am not good at English grammar, that's it".

In line with this, Al-Mukdad (2019) also revealed the same case in terms of students' academic writing problems, i.e. students encountered difficulty in grammatical features of the language.

Students Had Challenge Related to Self-Confidence

The word confidence derived from Latin, "confidential" means "to trust" and "to have faith" (Mardiansyah, 2018). Self-confidence is one of important role in the achievement of foreign language learning. Furthermore, Mardiansyah (2018) revealed that there was a significant correlation between self-confidence and students' essay writing achievement. In related to self-confidence, the student 4 in interview section said that she was lack of confidence when writing her thesis. As she stated: "I have problem with self-confidence, I am not confidence with what I have written in my thesis".

Moreover, Sara (2015) as cited in Mardiansyah (2018) stated that the students who have high self-confidence in learning English particularly in writing, usually have higher writing achievement compared to the students who have low self-confidence. Thus, it can be concluded that the students with low self-confidence will probably have low writing achievement, as happened with the student 4. Otherwise, the students with a better or high self-confidence will probably have a better writing achievement.

The Causal Factors of the Students' Challenges to Thesis Writing

Table 2. The Causal Factors of the Students' Challenges to Thesis Writing

No.	Type of Factors	Kinds of Challenges	The Causal Factor	Percentages (%)
1.	Internal Factor	Challenge of research methodology	Academic skills	70%
		Challenge of determining the correct English grammar		
		Lack of self-confidence	Affective condition	0.45%
2.	External Factor	Lack of references related to research topic	The availability of the related research references	11.36%
		Limited time and cooperation from research supervisor	Research supervisor	9.1%
		Lack of cooperation from respondents	Respondents	8.64%
TOTAL				100%

The Internal Factor

Based on the data obtained, the causal factor dominating the students' challenges from internal factor is the students' academic skills. This can be seen on the research result where the students' challenges are mostly related to academic skills, as follows:

- 1) Lack of students' skill in formulating research instruments, data processing techniques up to data analysis
- 2) Lack of students' knowledge related to the guidelines for writing scientific paper
- 3) Lack of students' skill in arranging research background
- 4) Lack of students' skill in interpreting and describing the research results
- 5) Lack of students' skill in determining the correct English grammar

According to Dewi (2018), the students' skills in writing thesis become a major factor which affects the students' duration in completing the thesis. Students who often practice to write academic writing such as article and experimental report will be easier to write a thesis, rather than the students who rarely practice to write academic writing. This revealed that academic skills related to research methodology and guidelines for writing scientific paper plays an important role in students' thesis completion task, as it could affect the students' duration in writing thesis.

In line with this, the student 5 said: "I have problem in research methodology as I still found some problems related to research methodology such as determining appropriate research design, determining population and sample, and many more". Besides, this academic writing skills also takes time to master, as it needs more practice from the students itself.

Moreover, the other factor influencing the student's challenge to thesis writing is the affective condition, i.e. the student's self-confidence. This was stated by student 4, as she said: "I have problem with my self confidence, I am not confidence with what I have written in my thesis".

Sara (2015) as cited in Mardiansyah (2018) stated that the students who have high self-confidence in learning English particularly in writing, usually have higher writing achievement compared to the students who have low self-confidence.

The External Factor

Based on the research result, the external factor of the students' challenges to draft/thesis writing came from various aspects such as the availability of the research references, research supervisor, as well as respondents. This can be seen on the research result related to the external factors of the students' challenges to draft/thesis writing as follows:

- 1) The lack of references and resources related to the students' draft/thesis topic
- 2) Limited time of thesis supervision process and limited cooperation from students' thesis supervisor
- 3) Problems in collecting the data from respondents

Firstly, the students had challenge related to the lack of the references and resources related to the students' thesis topic. As the student 3 stated: "It is difficult for me to find references related to my study since my topic is not common and there is still a few researches related to my study". According to Hartato (2016), resource and references play an important role in the students' thesis writing process as it can be guide for the students in completing the thesis. This means that the students are not able to complete their thesis without the appropriate references, as it can guide the students in writing thesis. Besides, the more references the students get, the more information will be obtained.

Secondly, the students had challenge related to the limited time in thesis supervision process and limited cooperation from the thesis supervisor. This was also stated by student 1, as she said: "I have problems in my thesis supervision process, where my supervisors were not easy to get in touch". According to Andani and Oktaviani (2018), thesis supervision process plays an important role during the process of completing thesis, considering that the students are not experts in this area. Guide from the supervisors such as suggestions and comments will be helpful for the students in writing a better thesis.

Thirdly, the students also had problems related to respondents, where they were not cooperative to the researcher and gave slow feedback. Thus, it took more time for the researcher in the process of collecting the data. As the student 5 said: "I have problem in

collecting the data. The respondents are not cooperative. So, it takes much time for me to collect all the data". There were 19 out of 30 students agree that they had problem in collecting the data from respondents. In line with this, a study by Evangelista and Hernandez (2013) revealed that the highest problem mostly faced by the students in undertaking research is gathering the data from respondents.

This problem happened due to the spread of Coronavirus-19 Disease, which makes all of the educational facilities such as school and universities are mostly closed and almost all the educational activities are held at home. This made almost all of the students have to conduct the research using online form and avoid any meeting with the respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

The eighth semester students of English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar had challenges and delay to their thesis writing process. The challenges that the students encountered were, lack of availability of the references and resources related to the students' thesis topic, lack of students' skills in research methodology, as well as lack of students' knowledge related to the guidelines for writing scientific paper. The causal factors of the students' challenges to thesis writing are divided into two affecting factors, i.e. the internal factor and the external factor. The internal factors influencing the students' challenges are the students' academic skill and the students' affective condition. While the external factors that influencing the students' challenges are, the availability of the research references, research supervisor, as well as respondents.

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