

The Solutions of Writing Undergraduate Thesis: A Narrative Inquiry Case Study

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ABSTRACT

EFL undergraduates have been making every effort to finish their theses throughout the process of thesis proposal, thesis proposal exam, writing thesis, oral thesis test, and thesis revision. This study invited four graduates of the English department who had finished their thesis within six months or less. They were interviewed in-depth via Zoom to reveal the tactics and solutions they had used to succeed in their undergraduate thesis. The authors used a narrative inquiry case study to justify their experiences, solutions, and strategies in writing their thesis. The participants understood the difficulty of conducting research and writing a thesis but overcame it through perseverance, determination, and self-discipline. They did various research preparation tasks during the thesis proposal, such as reading related sources to strengthen their references and learning how to create a thesis. They lacked the confidence to attend the thesis proposal exam, but they prepared it at their best. They could complete each section of the thesis with the help of their peers and advisor. Maintaining positive relationships with one's mentor, examiner, and peers could help them feel more confident in their writing and reduce the stress associated with writing a thesis. They calmed their tension, reread all thesis chapters, and practiced their presentation to ace their thesis examination. They were able to complete their thesis revision on schedule due to the guidance of their thesis mentor and an encouraging examiner. How further research solutions of the four participants were elucidated in this study.

I. Introduction

Undergraduate theses allow EFL students to do meaningful research on subjects pertinent to their respective topics. This project requires students to use a comprehensive range of research and writing skills, including the formulation of research questions, the design of a study, the collection of data, the conduct of secondary research, the analysis of data, and the presentation of research in the form of a thesis [1]. Thus, the undergraduate thesis is a high-impact educational practice that cultivates research and communication skills and tenacity, commitment, and self-consciousness, especially among EFL students [2]. In order to improve students' academic writing abilities, Nurkamto, Djatmika, and Prihandoko [3] determined that thesis supervisors contribute to students' metacognition, self-efficacy, and development mindset. Thus, EFL students must know the strategies for writing their thesis according to their criteria and situations to write an effective thesis.

Dakhi and Hutabarat [4] reported that psychological, social, and linguistic aspects determine thesis writing. Psychological aspects include identity students' awareness, motivation,

and conceptual competency; sociocultural elements including students' experiences; and language factors including students' linguistic awareness and application. They asserted that there is no uniformity in the lexical density or grammatical complexity of undergraduate thesis chapters. Second, although undergraduate theses are admissible lexically, they are not acceptable grammatically. Their thesis writing quality were perceived as polished fiction written by American students. Anderson [5] corroborated these findings because the students' well-being and social connectedness, including excellent bodily and mental health, student-student connection, and student-teacher engagement, significantly impacted the students' thesis writing success. However, neither Anderson [5] nor Dakhi and Hutabarat [4] divided the undergraduate thesis writing process into systematic stages. Consequently, their solutions appear too general for EFL students to construct their thesis.

According to Imafuku et al. [6], undergraduate thesis writing requires an inquiring mind, the ability to integrate information and knowledge, to interact and work with others, and to reflect on their learning. Thus, undergraduate students may demonstrate the significance of research autonomy, teamwork, and knowledge production processes. A further advantage of writing a thesis is that it improves self-efficacy in research and academic writing skills, which most undergraduate students had not previously indicated a high level of self-efficacy [7]. In addition, Allison and Miller [8] highlighted the similarity between the supporting aspects of an undergraduate thesis and the "solution" in this study. They studied the academic developers' research insights for worldwide undergraduate research program resources in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, which are as follows:

1. Integrating an undergraduate research practicum and research writing course throughout a program.
2. Connecting the teachers with the students who seek out faculty members whose expertise closely aligns with their academic interests.
3. Engaging students in the experience of conducting research and writing research reports in the classroom to foster critical thinking, information literacy, problem-solving, and written and oral communication skills.
4. Providing the funding to promote the demand for effective practice and the educational benefits associated with undergraduate thesis writing experiences.

The strategies advocated by Imafuku et al. [6], Antonou et al. [7], and Allison and Miller [8] were readily apparent. However, these solutions were generic for undergraduates, and they should cluster the tactics stated in each phase of thesis writing.

Previous research has focused primarily on master's and doctorate students regarding the stress management of thesis writing development. Silinda [9] proposed a thesis writing development course to mitigate the anxiety associated with writing an undergraduate thesis. The impression of stress by students is subjective since stress perceptions can either encourage or discourage students from completing their thesis. Thus, relationships with mentors, thesis chairs, and committee members can reduce thesis writing stress and increase dissertation writing self-efficacy [10,11]. According to Kuh and O'Donnell [13], undergraduate research is a high-impact instructional strategy that gained popularity in higher education worldwide, especially in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. In each of these nations, undergraduate research is taught utilizing a variety of pedagogical methodologies with both striking similarities and substantial differences. Allison and Miller [8] provided the following summary of the academic developers' research findings in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia:

1. Integrating an undergraduate research practicum and research writing course throughout a program.
2. Connecting the teachers with the students who seek out faculty members whose expertise closely aligns with their academic interests.
3. Engaging students in the experience of conducting research and writing research reports in the classroom to foster critical thinking, information literacy, problem-solving, and written and oral communication skills.

4. Providing funding to promote the demand for effective practice and the educational benefits associated with undergraduate thesis writing experiences.

CURE (Course-based Undergraduate Research Experience) and writing thesis workshops have also been presented as "solutions" to the problem of writing undergraduate theses. These initiatives aim to produce undergraduate theses [14,15]. These initiatives proved efficient for acquiring knowledge and advancing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) studies. Kortz and Kraft [14] explained that a Geoscience Education Research Project devised a unique course-based research experience for introductory-level non-science students. Reynolds and Thompson [15] stated that writing a thesis after participating in a writing thesis workshop is one of the finest possibilities for undergraduates to learn how to write scientifically. However, improving writing abilities is not automatic, and academic writing courses and mentoring need to be gradually experienced to resolve considerable problems. Ravichandran et al. [16] asserted that writing a thesis was difficult for international graduate students, particularly in grammar and language, structure and flow of ideas, critical thinking, and plagiarism. In order to overcome this obstacle, they sought assistance from subject-matter instructors, friends, and peer mentors to improve their English-language writing skills. According to Kortz and Kraft [14], the CURE provides seven benefits for undergraduate students:

1. choosing a student's research topic;
2. valuing meticulous planning and detailed presentation of the research project;
3. establishing periodic deadlines and feedback;
4. sharing information beyond the supervisor and classroom;
5. evaluating the student's performance.
6. working together with others
7. gaining from one another

These solutions must be performed concurrently in the thesis writing assignment. However, earlier research [1, 2, 4, 5] did not organize their findings according to the thesis writing process. So far, STEM studies [6, 7, 8, 15] have dominated the undergraduate research and research report because research and undergraduate thesis writing have proven to be an effective way to learn and advance science research. In the EFL or ELT setting, the study of producing undergraduate theses based on students' voices is still in its infancy [4]. Nurkamto et al. [3] conducted the most recent study on undergraduate theses in Indonesia from the thesis advisor's perspective. In addition, studies of EFL students struggling with the problems of writing their thesis from the students' perspective are still emerging. Therefore, this study investigated the solutions and strategies employed by EFL students when writing their theses. Four undergraduates of the English language and Education Department of Adi Buana University Surabaya were invited to explore how they overcame obstacles in writing the thesis proposal, participating in the thesis proposal examination, composing chapters 1 to 5, and taking the thesis examination.

II. Method

This study invited four fresh graduates of the English Language and Education Department as participants of this study because they had experience and finished their thesis well. Then, the researchers explored and analyzed the voice of these four alumni acting as undergraduate EFL students to study their solutions and tactics for thesis writing development. The researchers conducted in-depth zoom interviews to comprehend the strategies of the undergraduates employed during the thesis proposal, proposal exam, thesis writing, oral thesis exam, and thesis revision processes. Then, the interview data of the four undergraduates, in terms of their experiences and solutions during thesis writing development, were comprehensively analyzed with narrative inquiry to appreciate how the four undergraduates of the English Language and Education Department of Adi Buana University Surabaya composed their theses, including their strategies, recommendations, and solutions.

Next, this study identified the solutions that enabled these participants to use a comprehensive set of research and writing skills, including the formulation of a research question,

the design of a study, the collection of data, the conduct of secondary research, the analysis of data, and the reporting of research in the form of thesis [1]. The researcher discovered that the undergraduate thesis is a high-impact instructional practice that fosters perseverance, commitment, and conscientiousness in EFL students in addition to research and communication abilities [2]. The researchers observed that the participants comprehended the answers and wrote their theses under their requirements and conditions, which included psychological, social, and linguistic variables [4].

The researchers perceived that the participants could demonstrate the significance of research autonomy, teamwork, motivation, and knowledge-creation processes. Thus, they had increased their self-efficacy in research and academic writing skills, whereas most undergraduates had not demonstrated a high level of self-efficacy prior to writing their theses [7]. What these four participants did while writing their theses demonstrates that they put into practice what they learned in their undergraduate research and writing courses, worked well with their mentors, encouraged critical thinking, had information literacy, had problem-solving strategies, and had written and oral communication skills [8].

A. Research Design

The design of this study is a narrative inquiry case study to justify the four English Language and Education Department graduates in terms of their life experiences, solutions, strategies, and difficulties in writing their undergraduate thesis. Narrative inquiry, which includes stories, narratives, and human experience, has risen in popularity among educational scholars and has proven to be a practical learning approach for EFL undergraduates [17, 18]. This narrative reflection on the participants is necessary, from formulating the research puzzle, to the presence in the field, to drafting research documents [19]. Writing a thesis proposal, submitting the proposal for evaluation, composing the thesis, attending the oral thesis examination, and rewriting the thesis functioned as indicators of solving the undergraduate thesis writing difficulty for EFL students. The research data were obtained on October 2022. On the data, both descriptive and qualitative analyses were performed.

B. Population and Sampling

Five best English Language and Education Department graduates were recruited to participate in this study using a convenient sampling method, but only four were willing to engage in this study. The following table describes their profile.

Table 1. Table of Participants' Data

| Participant | Sex | Year of entering the English Department | Year of graduation | Age | GPA | Thesis Mark | Length of writing thesis proposal | Length of writing thesis |
|-------------|--------|---|--------------------|-----|------|-------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 | female | 2018 | 2022 | 22 | 3,86 | A | 2 months | 2 months |
| 2 | female | 2018 | 2022 | 23 | 3,83 | A | 1 month | 2 months |
| 3 | female | 2018 | 2022 | 23 | 3,77 | A | 2 months | 4 months |
| 4 | female | 2018 | 2022 | 27 | 3,78 | A | 3 months | 2 months |

All four participants are women enrolled in the Department of English Language and Education in 2018 and graduated in 2022. Their age ranges from 22 to 27, and their GPA is approximately 3.8. Their entire thesis grade is an A or an exceptional. They spend between one and three months writing their thesis proposal and two to four months writing their thesis. Therefore, they complete their thesis in only one semester.

C. Research Instrument

This study's instruments consisted of an in-depth Zoom interview regarding the participants' struggles to complete their theses. The in-depth interview reveals how the participants

composed their theses, beginning with writing the thesis proposal, attending the proposal examination, writing the thesis, taking the examination, and revising it.

D. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The authors extracted data from in-depth interviews with four participants conducted via Zoom. They are the most distinguished graduates of the English Language and Education Department of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya. Through the online interview, students described their efforts and difficulties writing their undergraduate theses. The authors narratively reported the analyzed data from their interview [19].

III. Results and Discussion

This study offers the results of an online interview regarding undergraduate theses, which are divided into planning and writing the thesis proposal, attending the thesis proposal exam, writing the thesis from chapter 1 to 5, and amending the thesis according to the examiner's suggestions. Participant 1 discussed her thesis proposal planning and writing experience. Next, Participant 2 demonstrated her experience attending her thesis proposal examination and writing her thesis from chapter 1 to chapter 5. Participant 3 proposed tactics for attending the thesis defense, and then Participant 4 discovered the solution of amending her thesis based on her examiners' feedback. Below, participant 1 describes her preparation and writing struggles for her thesis proposal.

A. Planning and Writing Thesis Proposal

Participant 1 has the best GPA in the Department of English Language and Education. She may complete her thesis in four months and receives an A for her thesis grade. Despite her exceptional grades, she acknowledged that writing a thesis is challenging. She labored through each stage, beginning with proposal writing, proposal examinations, thesis writing, thesis examinations, and thesis revision. This participant successfully completed the thesis due to her discipline, perseverance, and motivation, as well as her desire to improve her academic writing skills. She urged herself to continue reading and composing meaningful literature. She paused when she became fatigued. Participant 1 never worked on her thesis when she lacked inspiration or was physically or mentally weary. She perceived thesis writing as an academic test at the end of her courses to determine how much she had learned. Participant 1 was unruffled while working on the thesis, yet she employed a methodical and organized approach to conducting research and composing the thesis. To develop original ideas, she perceived to be in control but not slothful. The following excerpt describes her strategies, efforts, and mentorship aid during her thesis proposal.

Participant 1

I read articles, journals, previous studies related to the title of my proposal. I analyzed my research topic. If I had difficulty in writing my proposal, I ask my supervisor and read the articles to add to my references. My supervisor asked me to make research that was trending, but I didn't understand the research that was trending at that time. Then my supervisor gave a choice of trending ELT research topics. I was challenged to choose 'readability' because I didn't understand. I learned about 'readability' in depth so that I could write about readability. Then I met with my supervisor and he explained about 'readability' and how to do research on 'readability'.

Participant 1 completed legitimate research on her topic [1] noted that she engaged in extensive research activities to plan her research, including reading similar sources to bolster her references and learning how to compose a thesis. This participant recognized that performing research and writing a thesis was not simple for her, but this young woman completed both successfully with tenacity, dedication, and self-discipline [2]. In addition, she had a thesis advisor who was willing to assist her whenever she encountered difficulties. Her supervisor was able to cultivate her metacognition to deal with her new research topic, increase her self-efficacy to deal with all the challenges of conducting research and writing a thesis, and cultivate her mindset to

increase her academic competences as an EFL student [3]. Her supervisor boosted her self-confidence in research and academic writing [7].

B. Thesis Proposal Examination

Participant 2 received an A and a 3.83 GPA for her thesis despite being the quickest to complete her thesis. Since she had to present her thesis proposal before her examiner and supervisor, she lacked the confidence to attend her thesis proposal exam. However, she felt grateful for the assistance and encouragement during the drafting of her thesis proposal, which is stated in the following excerpt:

Participant 2

I am not good in public speaking, particularly speaking in front of the thesis proposal examiner. To overcome the nervousness and fear, I asked my friends who had already attended the proposal exam. So I can imagine what the situation of the proposal exam. I also reread from chapter 1 to chapter 3. Specifically chapter 3, I have tried to collect research data so that I have answers when I am asked about the results of my research.

Participant 2 realized that attending the thesis proposal test was dreadful because she was an inferior individual. She lacked the confidence to present her thesis proposal because she recognized that her speaking skills were below those of her examiner and supervisor. In addition, it was the first time that Participant 2 composed a lengthy academic work in her foreign language, English. Consequently, she anticipated that she would be unable to satisfy the determining factor of thesis writing - psychology, social, and linguistics [4]. However, her social connectivity competence enables her to speak effectively with her peers, supervisor, and examiners, allowing her to defend her research proposal successfully. She also attempted to collect her study data by anticipating her examiner's questions. Imafuku et al. [6] acknowledged that she could construct her knowledge as a metacognition and self-consciousness response to her thesis proposal assessors [2].

C. Thesis Writing

The most crucial stage for undergraduate students writing is gathering and analyzing the study data. Participant 2 describes this phase. She had written chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the thesis proposal. To adjust chapters 1, 2, and 3, she had to reread the thesis proposal feedback during her thesis proposal exam and review the result of her research. After data analysis, she composed chapter 4's result and discussion. She provided a summary of her research in chapter 5. In addition, she admitted that she could write each chapter successfully due to the assistance of her peer and mentor, as evidenced by the following passage.

Participant 2

I repeatedly read the corrections and feedback of chapter 1 during the thesis exam. For chapter 2, I collected as many references as possible. For chapter 3 and 4, I analyzed and explained the result of my research data. To work on chapter 5, I reread the formulation of the problem in chapter 1 and the results of the research discussion of chapter 4. To overcome my difficulties in my thesis writing, I worked together with my friends. I discussed which sentence to use with them. I asked my friends to help me to read my draft. They were very helpful and encouraged me. When my mentor said that my writing was good and I could continue writing the next chapter, I felt happy and satisfied. My mentor also provided the references I needed.

To adjust chapters 1, 2, and 3, Participant 2 was expected to have an inquisitive mind, synthesize the relevant literature, and communicate effectively with her supervisor and peer [6]. Due to her research autonomy in the form of constant self-regulation, collaboration with her peers and mentor, and knowledge production process by analyzing and synthesizing the associated literature, participant 2 was able to complete chapters 4 and 5 of her thesis [7]. The undergraduate research resources similarly suggested her mentor's and peer's practical help in drafting her thesis in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. She is also determined to think critically, be information literate, resolve all pop-up troubles, and possess oral and writing communication

abilities [8]. Thus, her excellent relationship with her mentor, thesis proposal examiner, and peers can lessen the stress of undergraduate thesis [10] and increase her undergraduate writing self-efficacy [11]. Finally, she managed her stress [9]. Consequently, Kuh and O'Donnell [13] asserted that undergraduate research is a high-impact instructional strategy that is gaining popularity in higher education worldwide, especially in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

D. Thesis Oral Exam

An oral thesis examination was administered to consider the scope and limitations of the undergraduate thesis, Participant 3, with the lowest grade point average, is participant 3 took part in the oral thesis examination. She completed her thesis within six months. She confessed that her thesis writing and examination process was fraught with anxiety, concern, and pressure.

Participant 3

To have smooth thesis exam, I read my thesis over and over again, prepare my presentation, and wonder to my friends and seniors what the exam is like and how the examiner gives questions. I prepared my heart and mentality to be calmer and ready for the test.

Participant 3's techniques for passing her thesis exam included rereading all thesis chapters, creating PPT slide presentation, and questioning colleagues whom her examiner had tested. She sought to maintain her peaceful mind and healthy physics by motivating herself to remain in peace for her thesis defense. Anderson [5] corroborated these findings because the students' well-being and social connectedness, including excellent bodily and mental health, student-student connection, and student-teacher engagement, significantly impact the students' thesis writing success.

E. Thesis Revision

Participant 4 revised her thesis based on the advice of her examiner and mentor following the thesis defense. She finished her dissertation in five months and is the eldest of the four participants. Participant 4 was able to communicate with everyone, including her thesis reviewer, due to her maturity. Thus, she did not have any problem consulting her reviewer's feedback. In addition, Participant 4 was compelled to complete the revision of his thesis soon due to his poor financial circumstances. The following are the specifics of her confession of how she revised the thesis.

Participant 4

I want to finish the revision fast because I don't have much money. I don't want to extend until the next semester. I consulted a lot with my thesis examiner about her feedbacks such as my grammar, word choice, and organization. She was very cooperative and positive towards my research topic. Since her explanation was so clear, I could revise as she wishes. So after she saw my revision, she immediately agreed and signed my thesis approval.

Like international graduate students, participant 4 was required to revise her language, word choice, and writing arrangement [16]. Her accommodating examiner helped her to alter her thesis according to the examiner's preferences. In this regard, Nurkamto et al. [3] stated that participant 4's academic writing and professional skills were enhanced by both her supervisor and examiner.

IV. Conclusion

Since writing an undergraduate thesis has a high impact on the academic, personal, and professional life of EFL undergraduate students, they have been making their best efforts to complete their thesis during their thesis proposal writing, thesis proposal exam, writing thesis, oral thesis exam, and thesis revision. Using a narrative inquiry case study, this study justifies the experiences, solutions, and strategies in writing their thesis. Most undergraduates recognize that performing research and writing a thesis, mainly written in English, is not simple. This study reveals that EFL students must have tenacity, dedication, self-discipline, and academic writing skills to complete an undergraduate thesis.

During the thesis proposal, undergraduates engage in extensive research planning activities such as reading related sources to bolster their references and learn how to compose a thesis. They may lack the confidence to attend the thesis proposal exam since it can be their first time presenting their EFL research in English. However, their peers, family members, and thesis supervisor were available to assist them in drafting their thesis proposal. Thus undergraduate EFL students can write each chapter of the thesis successfully due to the assistance of their peers and mentor. A good relationship with mentors, examiners, and peers can lessen thesis stress and increase undergraduate writing self-efficacy. To attend the oral thesis examination, they should reread all thesis chapters, prepare a presentation, and question colleagues who have been tested, besides keeping their minds peaceful. The support from the thesis mentor and supportive examiner enabled these EFL students to revise and accomplish their thesis on time. As a result, the student's well-being and social connectedness, which includes excellent bodily and mental health, student-student connection, and student-teacher engagement, significantly impact the EFL students' thesis writing success.

The above statement and situation truly provided that the students are considered smart learners with good character and mindset in academic and professional life. Since this study is qualitative with four participants from the same institution, the result cannot be generalized. They might be fortunate students that have supportive peers and helpful mentors. Thus, their strong external motivation has encouraged them to accomplish their thesis on time. However, this study has been contributed to the body of knowledge for writing undergraduate theses for EFL or ESL students. The EFL students will be aware of learning English academic writing, particularly the thesis writing genre, before writing their thesis. They should select helpful supervisors and supportive peers to motivate them to keep drafting their thesis. They must think critically, be information literate, resolve all pop-up troubles, and possess oral and written communication abilities. Thus, they can lessen the undergraduate thesis's stress and increase her writing competence. For lectures or thesis supervisors, they should not only nurture their students' academic writing, being supportive thesis advisors, and keep the students' well-being during undergraduate thesis development.

Since this qualitative study has certain flaws and is vulnerable to subjective interpretation, the authors propose inviting more EFL students from various locations. Quantitative research design is advisable to see the determinant factors that succeed undergraduate EFL or ESL students when writing their thesis. Therefore, the undergraduate thesis models for EFL, ESL, and Social and Humanistic Sciences students can be developed. Since writing a thesis necessitates multiple fields, the interdisciplinary study will be beneficial. Last but not least, if undergraduate thesis research is conducted anyplace, young and talented researchers can be produced.

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