EFL Obstacles in Writing Thesis Proposal

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze the students' obstacles when writing a thesis proposal. Subjects of this study were 20 learners in the English Language Education Study Program at Hamzanwadi University in the academic year 2020-2021. The data were collected by using a questionnaire with 27 items to obtain students' opinions about their problems in writing a thesis proposal. A descriptive quantitative design was used in this research. Having revealed the research analysis, it was found that the participants experienced four types of obstacles: 1) describing data analysis (40 %), 2) finding relevant references (60 %), 3) lack of vocabulary (50 %), and 4) writing theoretical and framework (45 %). To solve the learners' problems in accomplishing the thesis proposal, there are some suggestions. Students should learn more about grammar and practice how to arrange qualified thesis and read various books to get new vocabulary. The advisors should give a detailed and specific explanation to make sure the students understand the explanation.

Keywords: EFL students' obstacles; thesis proposal

INTRODUCTION

According to Wee & Banister (2016), a thesis refers to detailed research procedures conducted by university students to answer the research problems which is later proved in the research finding and discussion section. It is strengthened by Biggam (2018) who states that writing a thesis is a partial requirement for undergraduate learners who are about to obtain a degree of bachelor. A thesis cover the author's argument or several experts' theory which are later continued to research methodology, research finding, discussion, and conclusion of research you carry out (Hart, 2018). Organizing a thesis is the same as creating a scientific article, but it is quite complicated since it takes meaningful arguments, the latest references, and accurate theories. As a comparison, a thesis is thicker and longer than a scientific paper.

All Indonesian college learners are obliged to arrange a thesis as a partial fulfillment to achieve a degree (Mutofa, 2019). In the English Education Study Program at Hamzanwadi University, a thesis is an academic essay written by the learners and has to

be consulted under two supervisors. In writing a thesis, a lot of students got difficulties because it is a fact in Indonesia that English is not the students' mother tongue (Azizah & Budiman, 2018). That is why sometimes students are still confused when they start writing and developing ideas. Before accomplishing a complete thesis, students have to arrange a thesis proposal first. A proposal of thesis only covers chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3, and references and the author only focuses on learners' obstacles when writing a thesis proposal. Though a thesis proposal covers less part than the whole thesis, the activity of creating a proposal is still complicated for beginner undergraduate students who have lack expertise in a scientific paper, especially after being asked to write it in English as a foreign language (L2). In addition, students also often experience uneasy feelings such as depression and lack of self-confidence caused by uncertain insights of a proposal area or issues faced in the campus discourse context, like to make an appointment and have revisions with the supervisors and have a dialogue with other campus mates.

According to Azizatuzzahroh & Solikhah (2018), the success of writing a thesis is the main achievement of someone's learning process in the college. Before writing a thesis, the learners are guided in the form of a thesis manual to arrange a thesis in an understandable and acceptable structure and content as well. A thesis proposal should be noted in an accurate, logical order, an appropriate method, and obey the agreement of citation (Hart, 2018). In the case of technique, a thesis proposal has to be presented in proper accepted educational rules. Moreover, a thesis proposal has an analytical and readable composition and improvement which plays the role to ease the readers' comprehension of the description being argued and not obscuring it (Hayot, 2014). To be able to write an acceptable thesis, the analytical items are required in their generic structure. Analytical items to write a thesis proposal are (1) students should generate an idea and develop paragraph on what they are interested to note, (2) students should accept suggestions from related professionals who are experts in their discipline since the professionals have already carried out similar research or will be in a place to decide the students' viewpoint and in the end, and (3) students are required to begin their scientific writing significantly. Locke et al. (2013) state that "basic thesis proposal generic structure covers three main discussions: an introduction, review on related literature and research method".

Based on the descriptions above, a research the entitled "EFL Students' Obstacles

in Writing Thesis Proposal" was conducted. Its purposes are to investigate the causes of obstacles experienced by learners in the English Education Study Program at Hamzanwadi University when accomplishing their thesis proposal.

The Problem of Thesis Proposal Writing

Helping students to be able to write is not easy and it needs some effort. This is because writing is a difficult subject, especially for foreign students. Irwandi (2019) states that internal and external causes play a significant role in thesis proposal writing. The internal cause deals with students' cognitive ability and the external cause refer to the setting of the place where the learners study. Out of this notion, writing skill covers how well we understand a language, mechanical knowledge, analysis of content stylistic skills, and evaluative skill (Septiani, 2014).

A lot of students conduct research projects without barriers. Yet, when they are demanded to arrange a thesis proposal, only a few succeed (Turabian, 2013). Students cannot deny the reality of certain barriers in developing a thesis. Arranging a thesis proposal in English or other foreign languages is troublesome especially for learners of higher education in Indonesia because they are demanded to understand not only the arguments and generic structure of the thesis proposal but also the language; moreover, English is well-known as a foreign language in Indonesia. According to Davies & Hughes (2014:14) "learners who are conducting a thesis proposal are often annoyed with the number of tasks they have to accomplish during the certain time due to low motivation or because they know how difficult the work is". Besides, there are several problems that students face in writing a thesis like (1) elaborate the ideas, (2) lack of grammar knowledge and vocabulary, and (3) the student's low motivation to write (Hourani, 2008). Thesis writing is always carried out with various efforts. The learners' problem of interest or focus lost to produce an acceptable thesis proposal is classified as one of the personality factor areas (Ng & Ng, 2015). Whereas, if students have to lack insights into the rules in the thesis manual released by faculty or university, it belongs to one of the sociocultural factors (Biggam, 2018).

To arrange their thoughts of proposals, students should recognize writing aspects that cover several elements. One of the writing aspects refers to the accuracy of grammar. Grammar does not only play the main role in creating the sentence structure as well as

English typical order but is also significant to convey ideas to readers. Therefore, if the authors ignore the regulations to arrange certain words, phrases, or sentences, they will fail to communicate the message to the readers. As in addition, ignorance of grammatical rules affected learners' writing skills is classified as one of the linguistic factors which may delay their thesis proposal process (Alfaki, 2015).

To set off thesis proposal writing, learners should be able to pass certain procedures, like consulting the thesis title to the supervisor and collecting related references from books, thesis, and journals. This is also one of the causes why learners who lack consciousness to make an appointment to their lectures are late in finishing the thesis. Because there are various barriers they encounter, some learners are rarely on time to accomplish the thesis proposal, but they just spend time doing something else. Several obstacles will be encountered by students which need to be solved, yet they are going to be assisted by the supervisors to accomplish. In addition, writing a thesis proposal for a lot of university learners has various causes of the problem which must be solved. Ideas, generic structure, insufficient vocabulary stock, and revising or paraphrasing are some issues of obstacles in writing a thesis that learners usually experience (Ruslan et al., 2020).

(Biggam, 2018) states that "the basic proposal structure contains three sections: introduction, review of related literature and research method" and all of the sections are connected. Some of these sections may be divided into a different subtitles, and the main item can be more than half of the thesis. Each of these sections plays a different role. Frontpage of the research proposal contains at least a cover, approval sheet, and table of content. The introduction explains what the background of the research is: the problem of study followed by the research purposes and scopes and significance of the study. In certain fields, it includes an overview of research findings. An introduction is predominantly intended for a more common viewer than the proportion of the thesis and may use the explanatory pattern to assist the viewers to recognize what the author would like to convey.

Azizatuzzahroh & Solikhah (2018) state that the introduction should contain 7 parts, namely (1) the background of the study consists of a logical illustration about the gap between expectation and the facts dealing with the thesis title, (2) identification of problem is the aspect dealing with the matters discussed in the background of the study, (3) the scope of the study is the limitation of the problems that are identified, (4) statements of

the problem is the formulation of problems formed in an interrogative sentence and the answer of the interrogative sentence will be revealed in the research finding, (5) the objective of the study is made to be appropriate to statement of the problem, (6) the benefit of the research states the theoretical and practical benefit of the research, and finally, (7) key term mentions the explanation about the term related to the research.

The theoretical review section offers discussion to a theoretical explanation based on particular theories stated by experts (Fink, 2019). The literary review commonly has 2 sections: (1) there is a review on the theory which explains the theories related to the research focus or variable. It consists of definition, assumption, grounded theories for the research, etc.; and (2) previous related studies which explain the previous researchers describing the readers some studies from the other authors who have a similar variable with the on-going research.

The research method contains illustrations about the method (Flick, 2015). It is applied by the researcher to make a series of plans for the research. The research methodology may discuss six components; they are (1) research design explaining the layout of research design which is going to be applied during the research, (2) the setting of research tells the place and time to conduct the research, (3) the subject of the research shows the subject limitation that is going to be observed, (4) the data collecting technique discusses the researcher's design to compile the data, (5) the data analyzing technique contains the procedures to analyze data, and (6) trustworthiness discusses the validity and reliability of the data that is going to be analyzed.

Bibliography refers to a list of citation sources of information on a subject (Brundage, 2017). The bibliography is always written in a list containing the author's name, year, title, location, publisher, and sites at the end of a thesis, book, or article.

METHOD

Research design enables the authors to design and then apply the research in such a way that assists them to gain a satisfying outcome; hence, providing the opportunity to have insights that may be related to reality. This study employed descriptive quantitative as the method since the data found from the research instrument was presented orderly and distinctly. Descriptive methodology refers to a method that describes and reveals the latest occurrence, surroundings, and circumstances currently.

According to Kumar (2018) "descriptive research is studies which are designed to

acquire details dealing with the recent condition". This study concentrated on the students' problems in arranging a thesis proposal in English Education Study Program at Hamzanwadi University in the academic year 2020-2021.

Participants

The learners taken as participants of the research were 20, and they were still studying in the English Education Study Program in eighth semester at Hamzanwadi University. The data were collected by using an instrument namely questionnaire. In the process of collecting the data, the participants were directly asked some questions about their problems in writing a thesis proposal.

Data Collection

Instrument of Collecting Data

The questionnaire is a written question that is used to get information from respondents about them or something that they know (Krosnick, 2018). There were 27 questions about the obstacles encountered by learners to write their thesis proposal. The students were asked to answer a questionnaire that contains items about problems when arranging a thesis proposal. The purpose was to know the most outstanding obstacles encountered by learners to write a thesis proposal.

The Technique of Collecting Data

For data collection, a questionnaire was made containing a table with five categories and the participants answered five types of questions. The questionnaire format was a close-ended one designed by the Likert scale. The participants were asked to show their level of agreement with certain statements by a list of ordinal scales. The participants answered the questionnaire based on the statements given. The questionnaire consists of five options and each option had a scale value ranging from A to E. The scale shows a positive reply of strongly agree has a score A, the scale tells a positive reply of agreeing has a score B, the scale shows reply of neutral has a score C, the scale shows disagreeing has a score D, and the scale shows strongly disagree has a score E. Furthermore, the researchers used tabulation to process data and to gain better data for systematic process and seek percentage. The data were obtained from the questionnaire. After the participants had filled out the statements on the questionnaire, the answer from each respondent for

each item on the questionnaire was counted. The score of each student's answer to the questionnaire was analyzed to determine the most dominant cause of every students' problems in writing a thesis. The data were analyzed by counting the percentage of each factor by multiplying the mean score of each factor to 100. Then, the result was divided by the total mean score. The factor that had the highest percentage was considered as the most dominant problem faced by the students in writing their thesis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was done by collecting all participant's answers based on the questionnaire. Then, the questionnaire data were examined quantitatively to analyze the highest percentage determined as the most common problems affected the participants to write a thesis proposal. The data were gained from the questionnaire. Having filled out the statements on the questionnaire, the participant's response to each item on the questionnaire was later counted. The score of every participant's response to the questionnaire was analyzed to determine the most dominant cause of students' problems in writing a thesis proposal. The data were examined by calculating the percentage of students choosing a certain criterion (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree) which was computed by dividing the number of participants choosing a criterion by the total number of all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The study was carried out in the English Education Study Program at Hamzanwadi University. Information related to the students' obstacles during accomplishing the thesis proposal was obtained from the instrument. Before finding the result, the author displayed the data description. In this study, the author gained data from the questionnaire submitted by the English Education Study Program learners who were in process of thesis proposal. The researchers provided some questions dealing with the problems of study to have real descriptions about the students' obstacles in the thesis proposal.

The researchers made the instrument of questionnaires which consisted of twenty-seven items. This questionnaire was then distributed to English Education Study Program learners at Hamzanwadi University. From the research, it was found that there were some

problems that the students encounter when writing a thesis proposal. In writing background there were 12 students chose strongly agree by the percentage amount 30%, 13 students chose to agree with the percentage is 32,5%, 10 students chose neutral with the percentage was 25%, 5 students chose to disagree with the percentage is 7,5 % and no student chose strongly agree.

In finding references, 24 students chose strongly agree with the percentage was 60%, 9 students chose to agree with the percentage was 22, 5 %, 15 students chose neutral with the percentage was 45%, 9 students chose to disagree and no student chose strongly agree. In item number three, students who had a problem in grammatical were 10 students chose strongly agree with the percentage was 50%, 6 students chose to agree with the percentage was 30%, 7 students chose neutral with the percentage was 20%, and no student chose to disagree and strongly agree.

In item number 4 stating "some terms in research are confusing", 4 students chose strongly agree with percentage 20%, 6 students chose to agree with the percentage was 30%, 5 students chose neutral with the percentage was 25%, 4 students chose to disagree with the percentage was 20%, and 1 student chose strongly agree with the percentage was 5%. In writing focus of study, 4 students chose strongly agree with percentage 20%, 11 students chose to agree with the percentage was 27,5%, 16 students chose neutral with the percentage was 40%, 25 students chose to disagree with percentage 57,5%, and 4 students chose strongly agree with percentage 20%.

In writing the purpose of study, 7 students chose strongly agree with percentage amount 17,5%, 9 students chose to agree with percentage 22,5%, 12 students chose neutral with percentage 30%, 11 students chose to disagree with percentage 27,5%, and no student chose strongly disagree with percentage 5%. In writing significances, there were no student chose strongly agree, 6 students chose to agree with a percentage of 30%, 5 students chose neutral with a percentage of 25%, 5 students chose to disagree with a percentage of 25%, and 1 student chose strongly disagree with percentage 5%.

The next item is students have problems in writing paragraph were 3 students chose strongly agree with the percentage is 15%, 2 students chose to agree with the percentage was 10%, 7 students chose neutral with the percentage was 35%, 8 students chose to disagree with the percentage is 40%, and no student chose strongly disagree. The next item was students have a problem in vocabulary were 10 students chose strongly agree

with the percentage was 50%, 2 students chose to agree with the percentage was 10%, 6 students chose neutral with the percentage was 30%, 2 students chose to disagree with the percentage was 10%, and no student chose strongly agree.

Item number 13 stating "I have a problem in organizing the content of my thesis proposal", there were 2 students who chose strongly agree with the percentage was 10%, 7 students chose to agree with the percentage was 35%, 8 students chose neutral with the percentage was 40%, 3 students chose to disagree with the percentage was 15%, and no student chose strongly agree. In writing relevant of study, there were 5 students chose strongly agree with the percentage is 25%, 6 students chose to agree with the percentage was 30%, 6 students chose neutral with the percentage was 30%, 3 students chose to disagree with the percentage was 15%, and no student chose strongly agree.

In the writing theoretical framework, 9 students chose strongly agree with the percentage of 45%, 4 students chose to agree with the percentage 20%, 6 students chose neutral with the percentage 30%, one student chose to disagree with the percentage 5%, and no student chose strongly disagree. In writing research question, 2 students answered strongly agree with the percentage 10%, 4 students answered agree with the percentage is 20%, 7 students answered neutrally with the percentage 35%, 5 students answered disagree with the percentage is 25%, and 2 students answered strongly disagree with the percentage is 10%.

In the writing research design, 4 students answered strongly agree with the percentage 20%, 5 students answered agree with a percentage of 25%, 4 students answered neutrally with a percentage of 20%, 7 students answered disagree with a percentage of 35%, and no student's response of strongly disagree. In the writing setting of the study, no student answered strongly agree, 4 students answered agree with the percentage 20%, 6 students answered neutrally with the percentage 30%, 8 students answered disagree with the percentage 40%, and 2 students answered strongly disagree with the percentage 10%.

In writing participant of the study, there was one student answered strongly agree with the percentage 5%, 4 students answered agree with the percentage 20%, 7 students answered neutrally with the percentage 35%, 6 students answered disagree with percentage 30%, and 2 students answered strongly agree with the percentage 10%. In writing data collection, there were 4 students answered strongly agree with the percentage 20%, 6 students answered agree with the percentage 30%, 7 students answered neutrally

with the percentage 35%, 3 students answered disagree with the percentage 15%, and no student answered strongly agree.

In writing data analysis, 8 students answered strongly agree with the percentage 40%, 4 students answered agree with the percentage 20%, 6 students answered neutrally with the percentage 30%, 2 students answered disagree with the percentage 10%, and no student answered strongly disagree. In writing trustworthiness, 6 students answered strongly agree with the percentage 30%, 4 students answered agree with the percentage 20%, 5 students answered neutrally with the percentage 25%, 5 students answered disagree with the percentage 25%, and no student answered strongly disagree.

DISCUSSION

The lecturers team of the English Education Study Program at Hamzanwadi University has arranged a thesis manual to assist the eight-semester students to write a thesis. The thesis manual contains typing rules, style rules, quotations, references page guidance, the layout of each research design, and an example of the proposal. Yet in reality, there are a lot of students who get problems during the thesis proposal writing process. The discussion of research only focuses on the types of obstacles encountered by the participants as stated previously in the research purpose. It reveals in research finding that there are 6 dominant obstacles encountered by undergraduate students at Hamzanwadi University; they are relevant references (60%), vocabulary (50%), grammar (50%), theoretical framework (45%), and data analysis (40%). Those obstacles have to be monitored and then solved soon to avoid further trouble in the writing thesis process.

The first commonest obstacle faced by the students was finding relevant references. References always deal with the authors' confession to other experts' theories in their work. The significance of reference has been acknowledged by experts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; De Vries et al., 2016). Those experts confirm that in a scientific paper, students are demanded to "gain, combine, unite, and examine details from different references, for example, printed sources, course books, or scientific investigation". Apart from confessing theories to the writers whose ideas are quoted, citation means to describe book reviewers or readers whether an author is familiar with the certain subject matter and ease them to investigate the original references and to put the suitable references that support their argument (Krippendorff, 2018). The learners' hindrances in getting relevant

references are also supported by the research conducted by Irwandi (2019) whose goal was to analyze the obstacles encountered by the eighth-semester college learners in the English Education Program FKIP-UMM in the academic year 2015–2016 during thesis process, especially from internal and external aspects. In the research result, the writers reveal that as many as 33% of learners encountered problems to obtain proper citation sources. Problem in finding relevant reference was caused by lack of representative library either offline or online which provide enough books, articles and published thesis which can assist the students to seek for relevant references.

The second obstacle comes to vocabulary. Vocabulary affects significantly in language education (Tran, 2020). Vocabulary is also a prominent basic element to start learning reading, speaking, writing, and listening (Nation & Meara, 2013). With the adequate stock of vocabulary, we are not able to spread information and state opinion in form of spoken and written well. Hamidova (2020) claims that without grammar, hardly information can be spread; yet without vocabulary, we will convey nothing meaning that even people are fluent in grammar. In addition, it will be ineffective if they do not understand a lot of vocabulary stock. Based on a study conducted by Fareed et al. (2016) and Fillmore & Snow (2018), one of the main troubles in studying languages is too many unfamiliar terms which cause problems to students who misapprehend the paper they interpret. In accordance to studying English vocabulary, it is unlike Indonesian vocabulary from the form point of view, covering pronunciation and spelling, meaning, and the word diction (Cahyono & Widiati, 2015). Furthermore, the technique of word pronunciation is extremely dissimilar from the spelling. Hence, learners especially beginners who begin studying English often encounter problems in vocabulary mastery (Webb & Nation, 2017).

Grammar placed the third position as the cause of students' obstacles in writing the thesis. Staples & Reppen (2016) state "an element of a language, grammar is a rule of lexicogrammatical arrangement which is written to make meaning becomes appropriate". Grammar always brings about annoyance and sometimes a nightmare for learners. Hence, it is well known that in English foreign language learning classrooms, particularly Indonesian learners feel that grammar is a complicated subject (Tresnawati & Musthafa, 2016). Theoretical framework turned out to be the fourth place in the common obstacles in thesis writing. Heppner et al. (2015) state that theoretical framework is a significant

part of thesis writing and an aspect that is rarely understood well in thesis proposal writing. (Osanloo & Grant, 2016) describe the effort to recognize and put together the theoretical framework for the thesis proposal as "the most complicated, yet still accessible section". To explain the theoretical framework section, an author presents the experts' arguments which can guide his/her proposal, proving that the ideas are rooted in accepted theories (Foley & Timonen, 2015). It is a fact that learners often convey their uncertainty, insufficient comprehension, and dissatisfaction on the demand of writing a theoretical framework and recognition of how to develop it as a part of the thesis.

The fifth obstacle encountered by the students is to analyze data. In the research field, data analysis is one of the urgent parts (Ott & Longnecker, 2015). The goal of data analysis is to recognize, modify, keep up judgment and draw a conclusion of the research (Gurl, 2017). Data analysis refers to the technique to present details and statistics to answer the statement of problems. It is important to find the solution to the question of research. Another vital aspect of the research is the data explanation, which is taken from the analysis of the data and draws deduction and conclusions (Mishra et al., 2019). Sometimes, the author finds it difficult to assume the raw data, because the data must be examined and concluded the analysis result.

Students' problem in composing research findings is because of student's lack of proficiency in vocabulary and grammar, and insufficient proper references in the form of printed books, the thesis found in the library or unable to find online sources from the internet due to lack insight on how to find suitable websites. The implications are the lecturers should guide their students to read articles and books written in English and to choose various materials and reference sources. Then, the students are suggested to ask for help from the lecturer or campus mates, applying some strategies in generating ideas, such as mind mapping, skimming and scanning, writing a draft, etc., and learning how to use the application to cite and search for the latest references like Mendeley. Last but not the least, the limitation of this study is that the theses analyzed are those applied descriptive qualitative methods, so the obstacles might be different from the obstacles faced by students who take experimental, descriptive quantitative, or literary works.

CONCLUSION

Having presented data in research findings and discussion, some conclusions were

drawn that the main obstacles that the students faced were finding the latest and accurate relevant references, followed by vocabulary, grammar, theoretical framework, and finally data analysis. Relevant references mean related academic sources in the form of printed or electronic which can cite to support the argument of the thesis proposal. The causes of students' problems are barriers to finding references and resources which are appropriate to their thesis, the limitation of books in the library that are not complete and available, the expensive price of books in the bookstore, and the sources from the internet are not complete as well.

Furthermore, students were confused in determining the problems from the thesis, and students were difficult to develop the ideas and arrange the sentence because of the lack of vocabulary and grammatical error, and sometimes wrong tenses. In writing data analysis, the students are difficult to determine the formula to calculate the result of the data, the causes are students' less understanding of this topic because the lectures explain the material unclearly. The last is writing a theoretical framework for some students is difficult because they have to explain the concepts of research, purpose, and discusses appropriate theories based on literature review.

The recommendations which are offered by the author to cope with the students' obstacles to completing the thesis proposal cover some points like broadening insight by reading reputable journals which usually consist of a lot of scientific articles with a similar discussion topic. Seeking related sources increase their vocabulary dealing with the topic they choose for the thesis proposal, applying particular efforts to arrange smooth transitional ideas between one paragraph to the next like mind mapping and proofreading among friends before proposal advising to the advisor. The learners should pay attention carefully to all writing and research courses offered by the English Education Study Program. The variety of writing courses are composed for general communication, writing for academic communication, and writing thesis proposals that are intended to teach the learners how to arrange a research proposal, write a citation as well as references. In addition, research methodology is also significant because it explains to the learners how to choose a proper research design that is suitable to their research. Finally, the learners and the lecturer should create a strong collaboration so that the students are not averse to asking for suggestions and involve in discussion to improve the quality of the research proposal.

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