

ANALYSIS OF STUDENT DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING THESIS IN ENGLISH EDUCATION PROGRAM AT IAIN PAREPARE

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ABSTRACT

Thesis writing is a central academic requirement for English education students, yet many students experience difficulties in converting ideas, research procedures, and academic language into a coherent thesis manuscript. This study aimed to describe the types of difficulties experienced by English Education Program students at IAIN Parepare in writing a thesis and to identify the factors that caused these difficulties. The study applied a descriptive quantitative design. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 25 seventh-semester students and analyzed using descriptive statistics, mean scores, and percentages. The findings show that academic difficulties were slightly more dominant than non-academic difficulties. Academic difficulties accounted for 51.68% of the total difficulty score and included academic writing style, grammatical rules, paraphrasing, and limited vocabulary. Non-academic difficulties accounted for 48.32% and included low motivation and limited feedback. The causal factors were also relatively balanced, with internal factors reaching 51.23% and external factors reaching 48.77%. The study concludes that thesis-writing support should integrate academic writing training, systematic feedback, vocabulary development, and stronger supervisory and institutional support.

Keywords: Academic Writing, English Education, Student Difficulties, Thesis Writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the core skills required in higher education because students are expected to express ideas, organize arguments, and communicate research findings through academic texts. In English education programs, writing is not only learned as a language skill but also used as a medium for completing scientific assignments, reports, articles, and undergraduate theses. Academic writing therefore demands more than the ability to arrange words into sentences because students must control grammar, vocabulary, coherence, source integration, and disciplinary conventions (Bailey, 2011; Oshima & Hogue, 2006; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Recent EFL studies also confirm that academic writing problems commonly appear in organization, coherence, mechanics, vocabulary, grammar, feedback, and self-efficacy (Asnas et al., 2022; Fadhly, 2022; Nenotek et al., 2022; Riadil, 2023).

The thesis is one of the most demanding forms of academic writing for undergraduate students. A thesis requires students to identify a research problem, formulate research questions, review previous studies, select a method, collect and analyze data, and present the results in a formal academic style. These requirements make thesis writing different from ordinary writing assignments because students must combine language competence, methodological understanding, research literacy, and independent academic discipline (Fauzan et al., 2022; Fitria, 2022; Lestari, 2020). Studies on undergraduate thesis writing show that students frequently face difficulties with topic selection, research methodology, English proficiency, time management, and supervision (Abrar et al., 2023; Irwandi & Arisanti, 2019; Tiwari, 2019; Yanto & Sulistiyo, 2019).

In the English Education Program at IAIN Parepare, students take several writing courses before entering the thesis-writing stage. These courses are expected to prepare students to write academic papers and research-based manuscripts. Preliminary observation in the original thesis indicated that many final-year students still experienced difficulties when they had to develop ideas, apply grammatical rules, choose appropriate vocabulary, and organize thesis content. Similar patterns have been found in EFL contexts, where students struggle to transform ideas into academically acceptable written arguments because of limited writing experience, lack of references, weak critical thinking, and insufficient preparation (Altınmakas & Bayyurt, 2019; Asnas et al., 2022; Suyadi et al., 2020).

Writing difficulties in thesis completion can arise from academic and non-academic dimensions. Academic difficulties relate to the student's ability to use academic style, construct grammatically accurate sentences, paraphrase information from sources, and use sufficient vocabulary. Non-academic difficulties can include low motivation, inadequate feedback, communication problems with supervisors, and limited emotional or institutional support. These two dimensions are connected because weak academic competence can reduce motivation, while limited support and feedback can slow the development of academic writing competence (Fitria, 2022; Hawari et al., 2022; Saeed et al., 2021).

Recent studies indicate that thesis-writing difficulty is not simply a language issue. It involves the interaction between writing skill, research literacy, confidence, supervision, institutional support, and access to academic resources (Abrar et al., 2023; Enita & Sumardi, 2023; Fauzan et al., 2022). Paraphrasing and citation also need attention because students who cannot restate source ideas accurately may experience problems with coherence, originality, and academic integrity (Irfayani & Rokhuma, 2023). For this reason, the present study focuses on two research questions: what kinds of difficulties are experienced by English Education

Program students in writing their thesis at IAIN Parepare, and what factors cause those difficulties?

RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Design

This study used a descriptive quantitative design. The design was selected because the study aimed to describe the distribution of students' thesis-writing difficulties and the factors that caused those difficulties based on numerical questionnaire data. Descriptive quantitative research allows the researcher to summarize current conditions, identify dominant categories, and present the tendency of responses in percentages (Creswell, 2014; Riduwan, 2009).

The study was conducted at IAIN Parepare. The participants were 25 seventh-semester students of the English Education Program. The participants consisted of 8 male students and 17 female students. The research focused on students' difficulties in writing a thesis and on the internal and external factors that influenced the thesis-writing process.

The primary data were obtained from the questionnaire distributed directly to the students. Secondary data were obtained from books and updated academic sources published mainly between 2018 and 2023. The questionnaire was chosen because it enabled the researcher to collect students' responses, opinions, and perceived difficulties in a structured form. The instrument used a Likert-type response format consisting of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire indicators covered academic difficulties, non-academic difficulties, internal factors, and external factors. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, especially frequency and percentage, to identify the dominant difficulty categories and causal factors (Creswell, 2014; Riduwan, 2009).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Respondent Profile

The respondents were 25 students of the English Education Program at IAIN Parepare. The respondent profile shows that female students formed the larger part of the sample, while male students formed a smaller proportion. This profile provides the basic context for interpreting the questionnaire results.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male students	8	32%

Female students	17	68%
Total	25	100%

Source: Research data, 2023.

2. Students' Difficulties in Writing Thesis

The questionnaire results show that the students experienced both academic and non-academic difficulties in writing their thesis. Academic difficulties were slightly more dominant, with a score of 51.68%. Non-academic difficulties reached 48.32%. This result indicates that thesis-writing difficulties among the students were not concentrated in only one dimension. The students struggled with academic writing competence, but they also faced motivational and feedback-related barriers.

Table 2. Categories of Students' Thesis-Writing Difficulties

No.	Difficulty Category	Result (%)
1	Academic difficulties	51.68
2	Nonacademic difficulties	48.32

Source: Research data, 2023.

Academic difficulties included the students' difficulty in using a formal academic style, applying grammatical rules, paraphrasing information from sources, and using sufficient vocabulary. Several questionnaire items showed that many students strongly agreed that they had difficulty writing formally and academically, expressing ideas effectively, and using correct grammar and punctuation. These findings are consistent with recent studies showing that EFL students often encounter serious problems in grammar, academic style, organization, vocabulary, mechanics, thesis statement development, and reference use (Fadhly, 2022; Nenotek et al., 2022; Riadil, 2023).

Non-academic difficulties included lack of motivation and lack of suitable feedback. Many students indicated that motivation affected their ability to meet deadlines and complete their thesis. Students also reported difficulty obtaining feedback and communicating easily with consultants. This pattern suggests that students need not only technical writing support but also responsive supervision and an academic environment that encourages consistent progress (Enita & Sumardi, 2023; Hawari et al., 2022; Saeed et al., 2021).

3. Factors Causing Thesis-Writing Difficulties

The second part of the questionnaire measured the factors that caused students' difficulties. The results show that internal factors reached 51.23%, while external factors reached 48.77%.

Internal and external factors were therefore almost balanced, although internal factors appeared slightly more dominant.

Table 3. Factors Causing Students' Thesis-Writing Difficulties

No.	Causal Factor	Result (%)
1	Internal factors	51.23
2	External factors	48.77

Source: Research data, 2023.

Internal factors referred to the students' perceived intellectual capacity, English capability, concentration, confidence, and writing ability. The results indicate that many students considered their own ability and concentration as barriers to thesis completion. A thesis requires sustained concentration and the ability to transform data into a logically organized academic text. Students who doubt their capability may experience slower progress because they tend to postpone writing, avoid revision, or depend excessively on examples from previous theses. Writing self-efficacy and self-regulated learning strategies are therefore important because they influence how students manage writing tasks, revise texts, and maintain motivation (Sun & Wang, 2020).

External factors referred to family support, university support, time allocation, consultation problems, and academic environment. These factors can influence students' ability to complete a thesis even when they have adequate academic potential. Limited support from family or institution may increase stress, reduce available time, and weaken students' access to constructive feedback. Studies on thesis writing and research proposal writing show that supervision, access to references, time management, and academic facilities are important external factors in thesis completion (Fauzan et al., 2022; Fitria, 2022; Lestari, 2020; Suyadi et al., 2020).

4. Discussion

The findings show that academic difficulties were the largest category of difficulty, although the difference from non-academic difficulties was relatively small. This result suggests that the students' main challenge was the ability to produce an acceptable academic text. Students had to write in a formal style, organize ideas, use appropriate vocabulary, apply grammatical rules, paraphrase sources, and maintain clarity throughout the thesis. These demands are central to English academic writing and are often difficult for students who have not yet internalized the conventions of research-based writing (Bailey, 2011; Oshima & Hogue, 2006; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007).

The difficulty in applying grammatical rules is important because grammar directly affects clarity and credibility in academic writing. When students struggle with sentence structure, tense, punctuation, and agreement, the thesis becomes harder to read and evaluate. Limited vocabulary also reduces the students' ability to express complex ideas, compare findings, and discuss theoretical concepts. In this context, vocabulary is not merely a lexical issue but a means of constructing academic meaning. Students with limited vocabulary may repeat the same expressions and fail to present nuanced arguments. Similar linguistic problems have been reported in recent EFL thesis and academic writing studies (Abrar et al., 2023; Hawari et al., 2022; Lestari, 2020).

Paraphrasing also appeared as a relevant academic difficulty. Thesis writing requires students to use sources ethically and accurately. Students who are not confident in paraphrasing may either copy source texts too closely or avoid using sources effectively. This issue can influence the originality, coherence, and academic integrity of the thesis. For that reason, academic writing support should include explicit practice in paraphrasing, citation, summarizing, and integrating sources into arguments. Irfayani and Rokhuma (2023) reported that EFL students' paraphrasing problems were related to limited vocabulary, lack of awareness of effective paraphrasing criteria, difficulty finding synonyms, and weak grammar mastery.

The non-academic findings show that motivation and feedback are also critical. Thesis writing is a long process. Students need persistence, time management, and emotional resilience to revise their work repeatedly. Lack of motivation can reduce writing frequency and delay completion. At the same time, limited feedback can make students uncertain about what should be revised. The interaction between motivation and feedback is important because clear feedback can strengthen confidence and help students see concrete progress. Recent studies emphasize that dialogic and supervisory feedback can prevent misunderstanding, support reflective thinking, and improve students' thesis progress (Enita & Sumardi, 2023; Saeed et al., 2021).

The internal factors found in this study are related to the student's perceived ability and concentration. Students who perceive their English competence as low may experience anxiety when writing a thesis in English. This perception can reduce confidence and make them dependent on examples from other works. The finding is consistent with studies showing that EFL thesis writers experience psychological, linguistic, media-resource, supervision, and time-management issues (Abrar et al., 2023; Fitria, 2022). The similarity indicates that thesis-writing difficulty often combines research literacy and writing ability.

External factors also deserve attention. The thesis-writing process requires institutional support, accessible supervision, and a learning environment that encourages academic independence. Family support can help students maintain time and emotional stability, while university support can provide guidance, access to sources, and structured feedback. When these supports are limited, students may experience difficulty even when they understand the research topic. The findings imply that thesis-writing intervention should not only target students but also the supervision system and academic support mechanism (Fauzan et al., 2022; Hawari et al., 2022; Tiwari, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that English Education Program students at IAIN Parepare experienced both academic and non-academic difficulties in writing their thesis. Academic difficulties were slightly more dominant, with a score of 51.68%, and included academic writing style, grammatical rules, paraphrasing, and limited vocabulary. Non-academic difficulties reached 48.32% and included low motivation and limited feedback. The factors causing thesis-writing difficulties were also relatively balanced. Internal factors reached 51.23%, while external factors reached 48.77%.

The results imply that thesis-writing support should be designed as an integrated academic assistance program. Students need structured training in academic writing, grammar, paraphrasing, vocabulary development, research methodology, and data presentation. Supervisors and institutions also need to provide clear, timely, and constructive feedback so that students can identify weaknesses and revise their thesis effectively. The limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size because the research involved only 25 students from one program. Future studies can involve larger samples, compare different study programs, and use mixed methods to explore students' experiences in greater depth.

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