

## NAVIGATING THESIS WRITING: CHALLENGES FACED BY EFL STUDENTS IN AN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

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**Abstract:** The preparation of writing theses is the last phase in carrying out the duties as a student in a university level, the theses itself is a scientific essay that should be written by a student as part of his/her academic final requirements. So, the aim of this study is to know the factors faced by EFL students in writing their theses. This is qualitative research with a case study approach; qualitative research is research that intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the respondents. The subjects of this study were English Education Students at Muhammadiyah University of North Maluku. The results of this research found that the factors faced by EFL students in writing thesis were internal factors and external factors. Internal factors include students' ability in mastering about grammar, their laziness and boredom during the process of writing. While, the external factors are coming from their environment which includes family, friends and supervisor as well as economic factors.

**Keywords:** challenge; EFL learner; writing; scientific essay (theses)

### INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered the most challenging skill to learn due to grammar and vocabulary difficulties. Students often struggle with constructing grammatically correct sentences and lack mastery over vocabulary choices. Common challenges faced by students in writing include difficulties in research writing, such as selecting appropriate topics, formulating research problems, choosing suitable methodologies, and processing data effectively. These challenges highlight the need for enhanced teaching methods, increased practice opportunities, and tailored support to improve students' writing skills effectively. Budjalemba and Listyani (2020) Writing is one of the most important and challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) student. Writing in English might be more difficult than other skills like listening,

speaking and reading; Writing is one of the essential skills to be mastered by every human due to its critical functions (Fauzan et al., 2020).

Haerazi et al (2018) that Writing is one of the most difficult language skills for prospective teachers to acquire. They need to activate their cognitive, linguistics, and cultural knowledge together in composing good paragraphs with proper cohesion and coherence devices. Then, Haerazi et al (2020) writing activity is a form of manifestation of the most recent language skills that should be mastered by English preservice teachers after listening, speaking, and reading skills. Haerazi and Kazemian (2021) in the teaching of writing skills, lecturers' role is very essential to lead prospective teachers to practice writing. Lecturers should be able to find an appropriate instructional model for their learners in order to learn in the class. Learning to write can be

conducted well if quality teaching is promising for prospective teachers.

Sinaga (2017) emphasized that writing compels individuals to meticulously consider their thoughts before expressing them, thereby facilitating a clearer and more deliberate articulation of ideas. Haerazi (2020) posits that writing skills are fundamentally an endeavor to express the thoughts and feelings harbored within an individual, thereby underscoring the role of language in the articulation of personal experiences and emotions. Alisha (2019) teaching writing in foreign language has been an interesting topic for researchers

Sirait (2022 in Dunga, 2018) writing encompasses more than just its linguistic components; it is a critical skill in all languages and is deeply intertwined with students' classroom activities. It plays a pivotal role in language learning by motivating students, as Husna & Multazim (2019) note, to focus on employing accurate language. Writing is not only essential for conveying thoughts, emotions, and messages but is also a key communicative skill. Parmawati (2021), writing is a productive talent that serves the purpose of communication, enabling the delivery of messages through letters and symbols. Hence, recognizing writing as a comprehensive skill that extends beyond basic linguistic proficiency to include cognitive and communicative capabilities is crucial for effectively teaching and improving writing skills among EFL learners. Wahid et al (2024) Writing is a skill to express ideas and thoughts to make a message explicit. To arrange an idea in written text the students' need soft skill in completing a text; grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary are the most important aspect in the writing skill that should be mastered by the students organizing the ideas. For students to develop their writing competence, they are expected to produce a well-structured piece of writing (Ceylan, 2019).

This is line with an opinion from Durga and Rao (2018) writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of variables simultaneously. Strong writing skills may enhance students' chances for success. Writing is an essential factor of language. Good writing skills are needed for all the students in order to accomplish their educational and employable requirements. Sulaiman and Muhajir (2019) The approaches needed by the teachers to strengthen and help students to improve their scientific writing referred to reviewing writing such as the level of words, sentences, paragraphs, and grammar, making

outlines, applying three steps in the writing process such as planning, writing and revision, and understanding the formal and informal styles as well as oral and written forms so as to be able to avoid words and phrases that were not needed.

Budjalemba and Listyani (2020) found that there were two factors that caused students' difficulties in writing academically. The two factors were internal and external. Internal factors consisted of self-motivation, self-confidence, lack of knowledge and feeling of under pressure. External factors consisted of the teacher's teaching style, classroom atmosphere, materials, and writing aspects. This research hopefully can help teachers and instructors in developing appropriate teaching techniques in Academic Writing and minimize students' difficulties in Academic Writing. Gezmiş (2020) It is found in this study that drafting and revising are problematic stages for undergraduate students. Thus, it is thought that it will be better for teachers to warn students to prepare enough before the production stage. Also, having separate lectures on the organization of paragraphs before the application of the approach will be useful for students. Fauzan (2022) the causes of these problems were the interference of students' native language and the lack of knowledge about the rules of the development of paragraph and writing elements.

Fauzan (2022) A thesis on college students combines their knowledge and skill in understanding, analyzing, and explaining problems related to their field. Therefore, writing a thesis became the main requirement for every undergraduate student to graduate in Indonesia. Yet, before arranging the thesis, the students must submit a proposal paper to clarify their thesis topic, namely the thesis proposal. Many undergraduate students today are still struggling to write their thesis proposals. This condition was proved by some other researchers such as Arifuddin (2021; Indrian & Ardi, 2019; Lestari et al., 2018). There are many problems in writing an undergraduate thesis (Ashipala & Livingi, 2021; Cao & Zhang, 2022; Fitria, 2022). In the Indonesian context, some researchers have tried to solve the writing problems faced by the students (Ado & Alsheyab, 2019; Farizka et al., 2020; Linuwih, 2021; Meysarah, 2018; Santosa et al., 2019; Silvani, 2020).

Thus, from the description above, the role of teacher in teaching writing course is very important and very complicated. It needed work hard and also various methods in order to make the skill is understandable easily as Haerazi (2021) stated that

in the teaching of writing skills, lecturers' role is very essential to lead prospective teachers to practice writing. Lecturers should be able to find an appropriate instructional model for their learners in order to learn in the class. Learning to write can be conducted well if quality teaching is promising for prospective teachers.

One of the most difficult assignment for all university students during their lectures is writing a thesis. And as we already known that a thesis is a type of research paper based on students' original research. It is usually submitted as the final step of a master's program or a capstone to a bachelor's degree.

Every student is required to have independence and responsibility to complete predetermined academic tasks in order to achieve graduation competencies set by each tertiary institution. In undergoing the lecture process there are many tasks carried out as a student including academic assignments such as coursework, practicum, street vendors, and theses. However, in the process students often experience various obstacles, both those that come from the students themselves or those that come from their environment.

Jabali (2018; Toba et al., 2019), writing is crucially essential for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, particularly for the students at the tertiary level. In an academic setting, enhancing writing skills for the students is the primary objective in education (Al Khazraji, 2019). Okpe & Onjewu (2017) pointed that acquiring essay writing skills may be the one of great beneficial things to do as it can improve day-to-day communication, obtain good grades, and be a better professional. Consequently, the essay writing course becomes a notable subject for students at the tertiary level. Seprianus (2022) academic wiring is one of the essential skills in academic writing, and it is vital to support students' self-development through opinion writing, grant essay writing and others.

Related to the research conduct by Bulqiyah (2021) those aspects of academic writing should be given serious attention by both EFL students and teachers to overcome the problems. The findings of this study have implications for EFL writing course designer as basic data of material improvement and for researchers particularly in the realms of language and education. The process of preparing the theses is carried out individually; this is intended so that students can be independent in finding solutions to problems regarding the research carried out in the theses. It is hoped that if it is carried out individually each student will be

able to bring out their respective abilities for the knowledge they have gained while attending the lecture process which in the end is expected to be able to assist in the process of preparing a thesis. It should also be able to make a real contribution to finding the truth, meaning trying to get something as a real contribution to test the truth of science. However, in reality, in general, students' study trips become sluggish or hampered when compiling their thesis. As (Mu'tadin, 2002: 37) said that there are various things that become obstacles in writing thesis, including: boredom in working on thesis, the long process of collecting data, the difficulty in pouring thoughts into written form, the difficulty in dividing time between doing thesis and other activities such as work and lack of ability in English to read book literature. Bulqiyah (2021) therefore, a critical study of tertiary students' essay writing difficulties must be undertaken. The contribution of the study will be a basis for designing or applying the appropriate teaching strategy in Essay Writing Course for tertiary students.

Shahsavar (2020) the results indicate that most students, even *proficient ones* were not able to synthesize, critique, or explain the literature in their writing. They mainly focused on summarizing other researchers' findings and interpretations. Other problems dealt with lack of sufficient knowledge and time to complete their literature review, and the deliberate dereliction of some supervisors and professors who do not fulfill their obligations to provide the students with sufficient information about writing it. Solving these problems can not only change students' negative feelings and experiences in writing their literature review section but also enhance students' motivation to write any pieces of writing effectively. Aldabbus (2022) the data analysis revealed that both graduate and undergraduate students have some problems in academic writing such as choosing the appropriate academic words, difficulty in developing a thesis statement, organizing ideas, and writing coherent paragraphs.

Aldabbus (2022) Academic writing is a formal style of writing used by university students, instructors, and researchers. Moreover, the language used in academic writing should be clear and precise to ensure that the reader can easily understand the meaning and avoid any bias or ambiguity (Pratiwi, 2016; Fadhel, 2019). Academic writing is a common method of assessing students at the university level, where students are expected to do different written assignments and conduct

research, meanwhile, it is not an easy task for many students to acquire (Al-Marwani, 2020).

The above obstacles or challenges also felt by the English Department students of Muhammadiyah University of North Maluku. Most of the them felt difficult in writing a thesis, starting from choose an interesting topic, how to compose problem statement, confusing in beginning the background and arranging the idea into a good paragraph and low of motivation to finish this job. In order to know more about the challenging faced by those students, so the researchers interested to conducted a research in order to answered the following problem “What factors faced by EFL students in writing thesis”?

## METHOD

In this research was delineated as a quantitative study, employing a quasi-experimental design to systematically investigate the impact of certain educational interventions on student writing theses. Where random assignment to groups is not feasible, provides a robust framework for comparing outcomes across in different groups. The total subject of this study is 20 students of English Department Students. The researchers choose the students from academic years 2018 and 2019 because they were in last semester who are conducting a research too, so it would be get a relevant data. This research took place at Muhammadiyah University of North Maluku. The aim is to give the contribution for this institution about the problem faced by the English department students.

The researchers applied questionnaire and interview as an instrument. The purpose of questionnaires is to collect reliable data, provide valuable insights, and inform decision-making processes. While, interviews is useful to follow-up with individual respondents after questionnaires in order to get further investigate of their responses. The next step is reporting findings, and then analyzing data. Technique of analyzing data employed SPSS-21 because SPSS-21 is a comprehensive system that can take the data from almost any type of file and used them to generate tabulated reports, charts, descriptive statistics until complex statistical analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers present the results of data analysis. As explain before that there are two kinds of instruments, they are questionnaires and interview in order to obtain accurate and valid information. For questionnaires, the respondents’

task is only to put a tick mark on the answer choice they choose, and then the data is processed in tabular form and then analyzed. The following is an analysis obtained for each indicator item statement answered by the respondents:

**Table 1. Communication with supervisors**

Statements	Responses				
	S D	D	N	A	SA
1. I find difficulty to communicate with the supervisors	25.0%	50.0%	20.0%	5.0%	-
2. Motivation and support from supervisors are very influential in the process of writing thesis	-	-	10.0%	20.0%	70.0%

For the statement number 1, Most of the students have a Disagree Category (50.0 %), while 25.0 % are Strongly Disagree. It means that many students did not find any difficulties to communicate with their supervisors. The communication is running well. Whenever the students’ wants to consults their thesis, the supervisors tried to give the time and chance to do the consultation. The students strongly believe that by communication with supervisors, it can be able to improve good relationship between them. And, it is a good step because with good communication, they will finish the writing thesis on time as they hope.

Only a little bit (5.0 %) who got the difficulty in communicating with their advisors because it was not easy to arrange the schedule with supervisors. Whereas, 20.0 % choose Neutral Category. They said that the supervisors sometimes give slow responds.

For statement number 2: almost all the respondents agree. Only 10.0 % in a Neutral position. According to them, motivation and support not only come into writing thesis but also in every situation.

20.0 % perceives that motivation and support from advisors are good steps in developing writing thesis. Meanwhile, 70.0 % participants gives the respond Strongly Agree which means that motivation and support from supervisors are very influential in the process of writing thesis. Besides, motivation and support are also needed to overcome the problems faced by the students in writing thesis. They think that advisors should

possess some strategies in giving motivation and support to students in order to improve their writing ability.

Table 2. *Economic factors*

Statements	Responses				
	S D	D	N	A	SA
3.Economic factors are also very influential in the process of completing the thesis	5.0%	-	5.0%	40.0%	50.0%
4.I find difficulty to complete my thesis because I don't have a printer	10.0%	-	30.0%	35.0%	25.0%

In dealing with the statement number 3: the students receive that economic factor can influence the big impact for them especially for the process in completing their thesis. From its result, it can be seen clearly that 50.0 % are in Strongly Agree and 40.0 % are in the position of Agree. So, it can be concluded that economic factor is in the prior categorize in writing thesis. However, most students think that economic factor is not crucial one to finish the writing but surely it becomes the important part in helping them to complete their thesis.

As explain above that one of the important parts to overcome the problem in the writing thesis is the economic factor, and one example is students do not have printer as crucial tool in printing the script. They said that printer become their problem in finishing their thesis. This has been proved by the data presented in the table before that 35.0 % choose Agree and 25.0 % are Strongly Agree category. They stated that printer become the most important part in the finishing thesis because it can help them in finishing they thesis easily and quickly.

Table 3. *Literature, reading materials, constructing the title, and grammar in the writing thesis*

Statements	Responses				
	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I had difficulty in writing a thesis because it was difficult to find literature and reading materials	5.0%	5.0%	50,0%	30.0 %	10.0%
6. I feel frustrated in constructing the title of the thesis	20.0%	15.0%	40.0%	20.0 %	5.0%

7. I feel that mastering grammar makes it easier for me to write my thesis	5.0%	-	15.0%	40.0 %	40.0%
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Relating to the statement number 5: 30.0 % students choose Agree and 10.0 % strongly Agree with the statement. According to them that literature and reading materials is the most important part in writing thesis, because it has a lot of advantages, like it can add students' idea, add their knowledge of how to produce a good writing, improve their competence in writing thesis and make their writing is better. But, unpredictable there are 50.0 % in the Neutral category.

The next is statement number 6: in this case, it clear enough that the students' responds are various, but there is the sameness point among Strongly Disagree and Agree are 20.0 %. Only 5.0 % the respondent Strongly Agree if they feel difficult to determine the title of the thesis, how to construct the title, how to determine the object of the research as well as its novelty. some students in Disagree position. It means that it is not a difficult step of writing a thesis. Then, some students receive that in constructing a title it needs time to revise it.

Statement number 7 related to grammar mastery. It obviously seen that subject of this research 40.0 % Agree and 40.0 % also Strongly Agree if they should master English grammar well to help them easily in writing thesis better. Based on the result above, some students also think that grammar is the difficult aspect in writing thesis.

Table 4. *Support and motivation*

Statements	Responses				
	S D	D	N	A	SA
8. I felt hopeless when writing my thesis, because there was no support and motivation from the people around me	35.0%	10.0%	35.0%	15.0%	5.0%
9. Support from family is very important in the process of writing a thesis	15.0	5.0%	15.0%	15.0%	50.0%

In statement number 8, there is 15.0% and 5.0% students perceive that external motivation become the most important things in completing the writing thesis because they need more attention from close

people to support them so they have the spirit in doing the revision from advisors in order to produce good thesis.

Meanwhile, 35.0% and 10.0% think that external motivation is not the strongly issue in writing thesis, the students can finish the thesis with patient and hard work without the attention and also motivation from the people around them..

Most students think that family is the important part in completing the writing thesis. Because the students agree that support from the family is the prior to finish the thesis. It proves from the score above that is 50.0% students receive support from the family is the important things.

*Table 5. Recapitulation table (The highest score of each statement)*

Number of Statement	Response
1	50% - D
2	70% - SA
3	50% - SA
4	35% - A
5	50% - N
6	40% - N
7	40% - A&SA
8	35% - N&SD
9	50% - SA

Based on the results of the questionnaire above, the researchers explain that all the statements in the questionnaires; the main factors are about motivation and supports from supervisors are very influential in the process of writing thesis. The students also did not find difficulty to communicate with the supervisors. The guidance from supervisor makes them have the spirit and know which part of their writing should be revised or correct, so they know the way to finish it. Then followed by economic factors and the last statement is number 9 about the support from family which is very important in the process of writing a theses. Also, the mastering of grammar is the challenges for the students to to write thesis. If students have good ability in grammar, it will help them in construct good writing too. Those thing above is the most part that influence the students in the process of writing thesis.

Beside the application of questionnaire, this research also employed interview in order to strengthen the result questionnaire. The interview consisting of 7 questions, and based on the answers from the respondents, it can be concluded that there are two factors that make it difficult for the students to write their thesis, namely internal factors and external factors. The internal factor itself is the lack of students' understanding of grammar and also the

feeling of laziness and boredom that often faced by them when they are writing their thesis.

While, the external factors that make them difficult to write is lack of motivation from the people around them and they need more communication as well as the guidance from their supervisors because with more time given by the supervisor is actually the big support for students to write well because all their problems can be solve by the guidance from advisors. In addition, economic factors are still one of the main factors influencing students in the process of completing their thesis.

After combine the result from distribution of questionnaire and interviews above, it seen clearly that factors caused students' difficulties in writing a thesis were internal factors that came from within the students themselves that is the capability in mastering grammar and their laziness as well as boredom, while the external factors are coming from student's environment, supervisor and economic factor.

The finding is in line with the opinion Fauzan (2022) the causes of these problems were the interference of students' native language and the lack of knowledge about the rules of the development of paragraph and writing elements. Bulqiyah (2022) based on the findings; those aspects of academic writing should be given serious attention by both EFL students and teachers to overcome the problems.

## CONCLUSION

From the results of the data analysis and discussion described above, it can be concluded that there are two main factors faced by English department students of Muhammadiyah University of North Maluku in writing their thesis; they are internal factors and external factors. Internal factors include students' ability in mastering about grammar, their laziness and boredom during the process of writing is running. While, the external factors are coming from their environment which includes family, friends and supervisor as well as economic factors.

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