



SECOND SUPERVISORS' EXPERIENCE IN SUPERVISING UNDERGRADUATE THESIS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH

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Abstract

In higher educational institutions in Indonesia, conducting a research and writing a thesis are often the final prerequisites for graduation. In Tonggak Equator Polytechnic, two supervisors are tasked with different responsibilities in the context of supervising the process of writing a thesis in English. However, the quality of the language used in the theses is considered insufficient. This study aims to investigate the problems faced by 2nd supervisors in supervising thesis written in English, and 2nd supervisors' input on the improvement to the supervision process. This study is approached qualitatively with phenomenological method. Data is acquired through a semi structured interview with four informants who have had the experience of supervising a thesis writing process as 2nd supervisors at Tonggak Equator Polytechnic. This study reveals that 2nd supervisors' problems involve the thesis writing guidebook, online consultation process, overlapping roles, students' English proficiency and time. Informants suggests that the supervision process can be improved by improving the guidebook and the supplements, writing clinic, communication among 2nd supervisors, and the formation of a language committee. This study implicates that the provisions concerning the duties of second supervisors in the context of thesis written in English should be improved to help increase the quality of the thesis.

Keywords: *second supervisors, undergraduate, thesis writing, English, experience*

Introduction

In Indonesia, undergraduate students generally pass through the final phase of their study by conducting a research written in a format called undergraduate thesis. Undergraduate thesis in Indonesia is a manifestation of research that students do at the end of their study. Research is an important part of students' education because it trains them to apply systematic techniques to get, modify, and integrate knowledge about observable and measurable phenomena into their knowledge about the world (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzel, 2019), to enable them to contribute to fields of science and to expand the frontier of knowledge, which in the end helps to solve problems and improve lives (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005).

Undergraduate thesis is also the standard of final exam used at English program, Business English and Management concentration, Tonggak Equator Polytechnic (Politeknik Tonggak Equator, 2019). Diploma-4 program students are required to conduct a research, write thesis, and a research article at the end of their final semester to be eligible for graduation. The writing of thesis and articles in English is one of the requirements that the Business English and Management students must complete. To enable the students to write thesis successfully, the institution assigns thesis writing supervisors, namely 1st supervisors and 2nd supervisors.

First supervisors are tasked to supervise students on research methodology and the substance of their

research related to the field of their study. Second supervisors have two tasks:

- a. To make sure that students write their *skripsi* in accordance with the technical guidance provided by the institution. It includes matters like margins, fonts, table formatting, and citations which in this case adhere to APA style guide 6th edition.
- b. Supervise the use of language in students' thesis. This include Indonesian language on thesis that are written for business and management topics, and English for thesis that are written for language related topics

Even with two supervisors the quality of the thesis written in English is considered lacking. This is important to address since the research article, which is the manifestation of the thesis, will be submitted to the repository managed by Ministry of Research and Technology/National Agency for Research and Innovation. The content of the thesis will, for the essential parts of it, will be transferred into the research article. Since the thesis is written in English, and it is the duty of 2nd supervisors to check students' language use in their *skripsi*, it is interesting to know the problems faced by 2nd supervisors in supervising the process of writing thesis in English, which in turn is hoped to bring forth improvement towards the final form of the students' work.

There are studies that discuss about the difficulties faced by students when writing thesis in English. Bakhou & Bouhania (2020) find that students find it difficult to write thesis in English due to sociocultural challenges which includes inadequate support and cooperation from supervisor, family, uncooperative respondents and poor-quality academic preparation/education, and students' lack of preparedness which includes lack of academic writing skills and lack of research skills. Another research that deals with difficulties in thesis writing process among ESL students was done by Mtra and Fajar (2015) which reveals that the problems do not only come from students lack of skills

in academic writing, but also may come from the supervisors. Peng, (2018) conducted a study of generic difficulties in thesis writing of Chinese EFL research students. The study shows that the students face generic difficulties in the form of inability to write narrative literature review and lack of ability to construct conceptual framework.

All of the studies above deals with students' difficulties in the process of writing their research in the context of EFL, mostly from the perspective of the students without any differentiation between the 1st and 2nd supervisors. This study focuses on the 2nd supervisors' experience and problems during the process of students' thesis writing supervision, related to the low-quality thesis written by students in English.

Literature Review

You can elaborate on your review of related literatures and the theoretical framework of your study in this section. Use the appropriate in-text citation format as suggested by this template. This section should also contain the conceptual definition of the subjects under the discussion of your study. You should also present your analysis of the previous studies related to your topic.

Method

This study is approached qualitatively (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010, p. 22) by employing phenomenological method, because it aims to describe and interpret the experience of multiple subjects by gaining their insights or perspective respectively towards a phenomenon, and to see whether there is any point where those subjective insights converge and form a universal essence (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010, p. 471; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018, pp. 300-301; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, pp. 432-433; Newby, 2014, p. 39).

The informants in this research consist of the lecturers of English Language

Program who have had the experience of being appointed and take the responsibility of becoming the 2nd supervisors. There are three female informants and one male informant, ranging from 28 to 60 years old. All of them holds master's degree in linguistics and English teacher training program. According to the students' thesis writing guidebook (Politeknik Tonggak Equator, 2019), these lecturers must be the ones who teach in the study program which is English Language, Business English and Management concentration, diploma IV program Politeknik Tonggak Equator. The guide also reveals that to be eligible as supervisors, the lecturers' scientific background must be relevant with the field of science studied in the study program. The guidebook recognizes both 1st and 2nd supervisors, but does not explicitly convey the differences in the responsibility and the criteria for eligibility between both positions.

The informants all hold master's degree in English language education from various educational institutions. Four females and one male, with different age, and different level of experience in conducting their duties as 2nd supervisors. At least one of them hold the duty as the 2nd supervisor for the first time. Hence, there are differences in the number of times they have been conducting duties as 2nd supervisors, and the number of students that they have supervised. In 2020, typically, a lecturer supervises 20 students in the context of his or her duty as a 2nd supervisor.

Since this is a phenomenological study, the perspectives of everyone who has ever assumed the role of 2nd supervisor are taken into account. It has been conveyed in the previous paragraph that the 2nd supervisors have different characteristics in the context of their duty as 2nd supervisors. This provides the opportunity to have diverse data due to differences in the level of experience, and those data are the ones that this study aims to acquire. Therefore samples, or in this case, the informants, are

chosen purposively, with maximal variation sampling strategy (Creswell, 2012, pp. 207-208).

The primary instrument used in this study is the author himself who interviewed the participants to elicit the essence of their experience (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010, p. 424). An interview guide based on the theories covered within this study is used to structure the questions to help keep the interview process true to its purpose. The questions are delivered to the lecturers through a semi structured interview which is done face to face (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, pp. 119-121), which makes it possible to expand the discussion about the experience recalled by the participants (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010, p. 473) while maintaining coherence. The live interview is recorded using voice recording app on an Android phone. The purpose of this is to make sure the primary data can be corroborated in the future, and to help ease the process of codification.

Findings and Discussion

The Second Supervisors' Problems in Thesis Writing Process

The problems faced by 2nd supervisors based on the experience of the informants include problems with the students' thesis writing guidebook, the problem in providing feedback through long distance consultation process, an ambiguity in the roles of 2nd supervisors which are related to cohesion and coherence in the students' writing, students' English proficiency, and time.

The guidebook becomes a problem for three reasons: the examples of format that are not synchronized with the instruction, the use of language that is confusing, Indonesian for the guidebook and English for APA citation supplementary, and the reluctance of the students to read it. The informants tend to agree that this is not a significant problem. However, the guidebook provides no basis for conformity for thesis written in English and this

confuses both the students and the 2nd supervisors. Small inconveniences will be solved with better guidebook. The lecturers in the study by Mtra & Fajar (2015) agree on this point where they ask for a comprehensive guide book that contains information that can help students from the process of starting their thesis until finalizing as well as the specific explanation about the roles of the 1st and 2nd supervisors.

Long distance consultation poses two problems for the 2nd supervisors. The first one is the difficulty in providing effective and efficient corrective feedback to the students due to the distance that prevent direct contact that facilitates discussion between the 2nd supervisor and the student, where students often returned their manuscripts still containing similar problems like the ones addressed in the previous online consultation. The second one is the difficulty faced by 2nd supervisors who are not familiar with the use of technology to able to use all of the available options to make sure the students understand the intention of the 2nd supervisor. These difficulties are confirmed in studies by Paudyal (2006) with two points from the weaknesses of distance thesis supervision: isolation and less chance to discuss with the professor. This circumstance also shows that the students cannot provide the best version of their manuscript in each consultation since they fail to integrate the suggestions from previous revision as expected by supervisors in the study by Mtra and Fajar (2015).

In the context of their roles, 2nd supervisors appear to be in constant state of keeping the balance. The presence of the examples that include writing format that is closely related to content, cohesion that affect coherence, and the differences in defining the roles related to language use, shows that here are issues that need to be addressed among supervisors. As comparisons Saifuddin et al (2018) include language as the element that should be

observed by supervisors. Language element, according to Saifuddin et al is related to the logic, correct, proper, and scientific use of the language. On the other hand, Bitchener et al (2010) reveal that the majority of supervisors in their study believes that language accuracy should be the responsibility of the students, both L1 and L2 students. The problem lies in the situation where each supervisor assumes that an element of the thesis is the domain of the other party, the chance is, a problem that has every potential to be fixed can be left alone without anyone dare or care to fix it. Informant 1 and 4 worked around this issue by contacting the 1st supervisors directly through text to confirm where they stand on a specific problem brought by the students in their manuscript. In this case, informant 4 mentioned that this can be done especially with 1st supervisors who can be considered cooperative.

Students' English proficiency which can also be seen from the language related problems that they face, poses the questions that include whether any students should be allowed to write in English, and whether, combined with issues of time and administrative process can be expected to produce acceptable result. The supervisors tend to agree that administrative process is not something that can be changed or adjusted. But the pressures to help students to produce proper thesis in such a limited amount of time really affect how the 2nd supervisors define their role. This is in line with the findings by Mtra and Fajar (Mtra & Fajar, 2015) related to the inability of the supervisors to read the manuscripts thoroughly due to their busy schedule which hinders the provision of valuable input. Despite the circumstance, the supervisors are still willing to see the process through, and not let the students find third party aid to help them in accomplishing their thesis.

Improvement to The Process of Supervision of Thesis Written in English.

There are four informants who contributed their suggestion that they think

can improve the process of supervision for thesis written in English. Actually, the number of suggestions was higher. However, some of the suggestions fall outside of the scope of this study, they were discarded.

The suggestions given by informant 1 is related to the improvement of the supplementary guide related to citation based on APA 6th edition, and the use of application to manage that can be used by the students to manage their references. The supplementary guide itself focuses on the limited number of ways to cite references that they students need to use. The actual APA guide book itself is a challenging read, even when only the citation part is considered. The fact is, students rarely read the guidebook. Compiling a more comprehensive guide may have negative impact to the cost and willingness of the students to read it.

The use of reference manager is actually has been implemented by some students. Most of them use reference manager which is integrated to Microsoft Word. It is not a perfect reference manager and the input process leaves much to be desired. But it works. However, training on how to use it may be necessary both for the supervisors and the students.

Writing clinic itself, suggested by informant 2, is somewhere outside the scope of thesis writing, since it is suggested to run parallel with research methodology course. It is implemented in 7th semester, it will only add burden to the students, and if it is not compulsory, then it will hard to ask students to participate. Other possibility is to really utilize other English classes, especially the ones related to writing.

Informant 3 suggests the 2nd supervisors to gather to discuss the issue and create a better guidebook for English thesis. However, good preparation should be made to know about the problems faced by the 2nd supervisors along the process of supervision, which might have been forgotten by the supervisors when the thesis writing season has ended.

The suggestion given by informant 4 related to the formation of committee which consists the lecturers who are specialized in English teaching and learning to filter the students who can and cannot write in English, can actually reduce the burden carried by the 2nd supervisor in terms of language used in thesis writing.

Conclusion

Problems encountered by the 2nd supervisors in helping students to write their thesis in English include the guidebook, long distance consultation, overlapping roles, students' English proficiency, and time and administrative process. While he ways to improve the process of supervision for thesis written in English to help produce better thesis as suggested by the informants include an improvement in the supplementary guide to APA citation, and the use of reference manager, writing clinic or research methodology course that last two semesters, discussion among 2nd supervisors to provide a guidebook in English, and the establishment of a committee to assess the eligibility of the students to write their thesis in English.

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