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**DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS IN WRITING UNDERGRADUATE THESIS****Nadya Salsabila<sup>1</sup>, Nike Angraini<sup>2</sup>, Dita Rizki Anggraini<sup>3</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Writing an undergraduate thesis is a crucial academic requirement; however, many English Education students face multiple challenges during the process. These difficulties often emerge from academic, linguistic, psychological, and social factors that interact in complex ways. While previous studies have examined these factors separately, few have analyzed them within a single comprehensive framework. This study aims to identify the major difficulties faced by English Education students in writing undergraduate theses and to analyze the contributing factors using Brown's (2007) psychological, social, and linguistic dimensions. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected from 132 English Education students at four universities in South Sumatra through a closed-ended questionnaire and structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative data followed Miles and Huberman's (2013) model. The findings revealed that academic factors were the most dominant (58.13%), followed by linguistic (22.12%), psychological (11.49%), and social (8.26%) factors. Students reported the greatest challenges in topic selection, paraphrasing, and maintaining motivation during supervision. The study underscores the need for stronger academic support, structured writing workshops, and consistent supervisory mentoring. These findings contribute to a more integrated understanding of thesis-writing difficulties and provide practical insights for improving academic writing instruction and supervision in EFL contexts.*

*Keyword : Students' difficulties, psychological factors, academic ability factors, social factors, linguistic factors*

**INTRODUCTION**

Writing is one of the most essential yet challenging skills in second language learning because it requires not only grammatical and lexical mastery but also critical thinking, idea organization, and adherence to academic conventions (Banwell, 2018; Oshima & Hogue, 2007; Handayani & Amelia, 2024). In higher education, academic writing represents the culmination of students' linguistic and intellectual development. Alwasilah (2016) emphasizes that academic writing reflects intellectual maturity, while Budiharso (2014)

asserts that thesis writing integrates knowledge, analytical ability, and research competence. Thus, the ability to produce a thesis serves as a benchmark of academic achievement and readiness for scholarly discourse.

In Indonesia, thesis writing remains one of the most demanding academic requirements. Low literacy performance continues to hinder students' academic success; Indonesia ranked 60th of 61 countries in reading interest (Central Connecticut State University, 2016), and OECD (2018) also reported weak literacy levels among Indonesian learners. Warsihna (2016) stresses that reading, thinking, and writing constitute the foundation of academic literacy. Limited reading habits and weak critical thinking skills often hinder students' ability to select research topics, synthesize literature, and construct coherent arguments skills essential for successful thesis writing.

Previous research has shown that students' thesis writing difficulties are multifaceted, involving linguistic, psychological, and social dimensions. Oshima and Hogue (2007) stress that academic writing requires organization and formality, while Brown (2007) categorizes students' challenges into psychological (motivation, anxiety, and self-esteem), social (peer and supervisor support), and linguistic (grammar, vocabulary, and coherence) factors. Hyland (2004) and Tardy (2010) further explain that second language writers must master academic conventions and synthesis skills to produce cohesive texts. These perspectives indicate that thesis writing difficulties extend beyond linguistic problems and involve emotional and social readiness as well.

Empirical studies in Indonesia confirm these challenges. Kheryadi (2018), Safitri et al. (2021), and Indah (2017) reported that students often struggled with referencing, paraphrasing, and coherence. Lestari (2020) and Irwandi & Arisanti (2019) found that many students faced obstacles in topic selection, literature review, and research methods, while Hidayat (2015) identified academic stress as a major barrier to thesis completion. Hasana and Rahmati (2022) also found that 17% of Education students failed to graduate on time due to thesis-related problems. These studies collectively show that thesis difficulties stem from both internal and external factors.

While previous studies have examined students' thesis writing difficulties, most treated academic, linguistic, or psychological problems separately. Few have categorized these challenges comprehensively based on Brown's (2007) integrated framework, which combines psychological, social, and linguistic dimensions. Therefore, this study fills that gap by applying Brown's model to provide a more holistic understanding of how multiple factors

interact in shaping students' thesis writing challenges. This study aims to identify the major difficulties faced by English Education students in writing their undergraduate theses and to analyze the factors contributing to these difficulties using Brown's (2007) framework.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to explore students' thesis writing difficulties in depth. This design enabled the researcher to analyze both academic and non-academic factors affecting students' performance (Creswell, 2014; Cropley, 2022).

### **Participants and Sampling**

The participants were 132 English Education students from the 2019 and 2020 cohorts at four universities in South Sumatra: Indo Global Mandiri University, Sriwijaya University, Raden Fatah Islamic University, and PGRI University. Purposive sampling was applied to select students who had completed their theses and were willing to share their experiences.

### **Instrumentation**

This study used a combination of questionnaires and interviews as the primary data collection methods. The questionnaire was used to identify the major difficulties students faced in writing a thesis such as topic selection, argument development, and understanding academic structure while the interviews provided deeper insights into students' experiences and perspectives. Using both instruments allowed the researcher to obtain comprehensive and detailed data. The content validity of the questionnaire was based on the results of Dwihandini's (2013) research, which had been widely used and proven valid by experts. The validation process in Dwihandini's study involved two steps: (1) two experts reviewed the questionnaire and compared it with the research framework, and (2) their assessments were analyzed using Gregory's formula. The reliability of the questionnaire was also tested using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.921, indicating a very high level of internal consistency.

## Data Collection Procedures

Questionnaires were distributed online via Google Forms and WhatsApp groups. Subsequently, 12 students were selected for in-depth interviews through Google Meet to obtain richer qualitative insights.

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages), while qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (2013) model, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation was achieved by comparing questionnaire and interview findings to validate consistency and ensure trustworthiness.

## Ethical Considerations

Before distributing the questionnaire link, the researcher first provided a participant consent form in PDF format, which explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of all collected data. By completing the Google Form, participants were considered to have given their informed and voluntary consent to take part in the study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

#### *Findings from Questionnaire*

**Table 1: Students' Difficulties in Writing Undergraduate Thesis**

Factor	Percentage (%)	Description
Academic	58.13	Title selection, literature review, structuring arguments
Linguistic	22.12	Grammar, paraphrasing, coherence
Psychological	11.49	Motivation, anxiety, self-confidence
Social	8.26	Supervisor feedback, communication barriers

Note. Data were obtained from questionnaire responses of 132 English Education students from the 2019 and 2020 cohorts.

The questionnaire results revealed that students' thesis writing difficulties were distributed across four main factors: academic, linguistic, psychological, and social. The academic factor was the most dominant (58.13%), followed by linguistic (22.12%), psychological (11.49%), and social (8.26%) factors.

The academic factor included students' challenges in choosing a suitable topic, writing a proper title, formulating research problems and objectives, developing the literature review, selecting methods, and writing findings and discussion sections. The linguistic factor reflected difficulties in using correct grammar, paraphrasing academic sources, and organizing coherent sentences. The psychological factor involved anxiety, low motivation, and loss of confidence during supervision, while the social factor included limited communication and feedback from supervisors or peers.

Overall, these results indicate that thesis writing problems among English Education students are multidimensional, with the academic factor being the most significant. Students often lacked sufficient research literacy and systematic writing experience, while linguistic and psychological barriers further complicated their progress. These findings are consistent with the interview data, which provided deeper insights into the causes and experiences behind these challenges. To explore these aspects more deeply, the interview findings were analyzed to uncover students' personal experiences and perceptions related to their thesis writing difficulties.

### *Findings from Interview*

The interview findings showed that the main difficulties students experienced in writing their thesis were related to four important aspects: academic ability, psychological condition, social interaction, and language skills. However, after deeper analysis, it became clear that these difficulties did not stand alone. Many of them were also influenced by other factors, such as health problems, financial challenges, poor time management, and lack of clear academic guidance.

Academic difficulties such as choosing a topic, writing the literature review, and analyzing data often happened because students did not get clear instructions. Participant 6 expressed uncertainty from the beginning: *"I did not know what kind of title I should take... it took me almost a month to fix the title."* Similarly, Participant 3 mentioned: *"I had no idea what makes a good title... I had to revise it several times before it was accepted."* Some students also struggled with theories and data analysis. As Participant 10 explained: *"After I finished the interview, I was confused about how to present the results and analyze them with theory."* Many students also reported feeling unprepared due to limited academic experience and lack of familiarity with academic reading. Participant 7 shared: *"Many articles and journals were written in very academic English, so I had to read them many times to*

*understand.*” Without enough training or clear examples, many students felt confused about where to begin, often revising their work many times and delaying progress.

Psychological difficulties such as low motivation, stress, and anxiety were also experienced by many students. They often felt unsure about themselves and worried that their writing would not meet academic standards. Participant 4 shared: *“My biggest problem in writing the thesis was motivation. I often lost my spirit, especially when I'm in a bad mood. Sometimes I started writing, but then I stopped halfway because I thought my writing was not good.”* These emotional problems, including fear of failure and self-doubt, reduced students’ confidence and made them hesitant to continue. Some students were also perfectionists. As one participant described, they kept rewriting instead of finishing, which slowed their progress and caused more stress.

Social difficulties also appeared frequently. Some students were afraid of asking for help or communicating with their supervisors. Participant 6 said: *“I always feel nervous. My supervisor gave a lot of comments that made me doubt my writing. I became afraid of making mistakes and delayed meetings.”* Meanwhile, Participant 12 highlighted peer support as a helpful element: *“I discussed with my friends and finally found a better idea.”* However, inconsistent or unclear feedback from supervisors often left students feeling confused and isolated, especially when they had other responsibilities such as part-time work.

Language difficulties in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure were also major obstacles. Participant 5 said: *“I always doubted my sentence structure. I often wrote very long sentences that were hard to understand and that made me revise repeatedly.”* Many students admitted that they were not used to writing in academic English and often translated their ideas from Indonesian, which resulted in awkward or incorrect expressions. This caused them to feel shy, less confident, and stressed, especially when they believed their English proficiency was weak.

In conclusion, the four main aspects, academic, psychological, social, and linguistic, represent the key challenges students face during thesis writing. However, the interviews revealed several additional issues beyond these four main factors, including health problems, financial difficulties, poor time management, and lack of academic guidance or resources. Participant 8 shared: *“I was also struggling with my health. Because of stress and lack of rest.”* Another participant added: *“Sometimes I delayed submitting revisions just because I did not have money to print them. Financial problems really added pressure.”* These emerging factors show that students’ thesis writing difficulties are not only academic or

linguistic in nature but are also shaped by personal and institutional conditions that require greater attention and support.

## **Discussion**

The findings show that academic difficulties emerged as the most influential factor affecting students' thesis writing performance. Many students found it challenging to decide on suitable topics, formulate research problems, and organize their literature reviews effectively. These challenges indicate limited academic literacy and weak research awareness. This finding is consistent with Cahyadi et al. (2021) and Dwihandini (2013), who reported that inadequate background knowledge and insufficient academic preparation often hinder students' progress. Similarly, Gezmiş (2020) and Brown (2007) highlight that academic competence involves both cognitive and strategic elements, suggesting that thesis writing problems are not merely linguistic but also reflect students' readiness to conduct independent research and think critically.

In addition to academic challenges, linguistic issues also played a significant role in shaping students' writing performance. Many students struggled with grammar, paraphrasing, and sentence coherence, and tended to translate directly from Indonesian into English. This habit often resulted in ungrammatical and awkward expressions, consistent with the findings of Irwandi and Arisanti (2019). Oshima and Hogue (2007) emphasize that academic writing requires accuracy, unity, and coherence, while Brown (2007) notes that linguistic competence underpins confidence and fluency. Hence, insufficient mastery of academic English not only affects writing quality but also contributes to students' hesitation to express their ideas clearly.

Psychological factors further complicated the thesis writing process. Feelings of anxiety, low confidence, and reduced motivation were common among students, particularly during supervision and after receiving repeated revisions. Such emotional struggles often led to procrastination and loss of focus. These findings are consistent with Yani (2022) and Amalia (2023), who identified motivation and anxiety as key predictors of thesis completion. According to Brown (2007), affective variables such as motivation, self-esteem, and anxiety play a vital role in determining language learning success. Therefore, providing psychological support and fostering a positive supervisory environment are essential to enhance students' perseverance and writing performance.

Social challenges, though less prominent, were also evident in students' experiences. Difficulties in communication with supervisors, limited feedback, and lack of peer collaboration were commonly mentioned. Rahayu and Mulyana (2020) found similar patterns, noting that ineffective supervision can slow thesis progress. From Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, learning is mediated through social interaction and guidance, which means that constructive collaboration between students and supervisors can enhance both motivation and writing confidence.

Overall, the results demonstrate that academic, linguistic, psychological, and social factors are closely interconnected and collectively influence students' thesis writing outcomes. Brown's (2007) framework supports this view by emphasizing that language learning involves both cognitive and affective dimensions. The present study contributes to the understanding of these interrelated difficulties in the Indonesian EFL context and extends previous research (Safitri et al., 2021; Rostanti, 2019) by integrating these aspects into a unified analytical model. This multidimensional perspective suggests that effective thesis supervision should combine academic guidance, linguistic support, and emotional scaffolding to promote students' research competence and writing confidence.

Despite these valuable insights, this study has certain limitations. The investigation was confined to English Education students from four universities in Palembang, and the data relied on self-reported questionnaires and interviews. Future research should involve a wider range of institutions and employ mixed or longitudinal designs to explore how academic, linguistic, and psychological factors evolve throughout the writing process. Experimental studies could also test targeted interventions, such as writing workshops or mentoring programs, to improve students' writing competence and thesis completion rates.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This study concludes that English Education students face multiple challenges in writing their undergraduate theses, with academic ability being the most dominant factor, followed by linguistic, psychological, and social aspects. These findings show that thesis writing is influenced by the interaction of cognitive, linguistic, and emotional elements. The study provides a comprehensive view of how these factors overlap and affect students' writing performance. It highlights the importance of improving academic literacy, consistent supervision, and emotional support to help students complete their theses successfully. This research was limited to English Education students from four universities in Palembang and

relied on self-reported data. Future studies should involve more diverse participants and use longitudinal or experimental approaches to explore how academic, linguistic, and psychological aspects develop over time. Further research can also design and test specific interventions, such as writing workshops or mentoring programs, to support students in overcoming their thesis writing challenges.

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