

## EFL Student and Supervisor Perceptions of the Difficulties in Writing Undergraduate Thesis Results and Discussion Section

Endar Rachmawaty Linuwih<sup>1)</sup>, Slamet Setiawan<sup>2)</sup>, Ahmad Munir<sup>3)</sup>

<sup>123)</sup>Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya 60213, Indonesia

<sup>1)</sup>Universitas Widya Kartika, Surabaya, 60112, Indonesia

*endar.20009@mhs.unesa.ac.id*

### ABSTRACT

In an undergraduate study, writing a thesis is one of the requirements to be fulfilled by the students. Numerous studies have revealed that students often struggle with this genre. Most studies have focused on the student and supervisor perceptions on student difficulties in writing the thesis as a whole instead of a particular section. The current study examined student challenges in writing the results and discussion section of their thesis through in-depth interviews with three students and three supervisors. The study revealed that the students' understanding of the function of results and discussion section was more limited than their supervisor. This study also found that the students had limited understanding of the nature and cause of their difficulties compared to their supervisors. The results of the study emerged new understanding that students encountered issues to achieve the requirements of the genre and the supervisors had a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of these difficulties than the students had. For future research, it is suggested to identify the writing difficulties in students' written text to recognize the specific causes of the difficulties experienced by students.

**Keywords:** genre requirement, results and discussion, thesis writing

### INTRODUCTION

For years, researchers have been studying the difficulties that EFL student writers face at various skill levels. Much emphasis has been paid to detecting issues in college coursework papers at the sentence and paragraph levels and determining how serious these challenges are for undergraduate EFL students writing a thesis in English. More recently, studies have begun to look into whether and to what extent such students have trouble understanding and meeting the thesis' genre requirements.

Various papers have reported on supervisor impressions of the problems faced by undergraduate EFL students. According to Puspita (2019), EFL undergraduate thesis students had more difficulty with grammatical accuracy and appropriateness, vocabulary appropriateness, spelling, and punctuation accuracy at the sentence level than at the paragraph level. Lestari (2020) found that the biggest challenges in writing a thesis are related to their

English competence, which is still low and limited, in their study of 74 seventh semester English Education Department students at a private university in Indonesia. His study revealed that the usage of definite articles and subject-verb agreement, difficulty in lexical choice, particularly levels of appropriateness and formality, can be more frustrating than problems with formulating logical ideas and arguments. In addition to these issues, Bulqiyah et al. (2021) discovered in her research that EFL graduate students have difficulty with lexico-grammar and vocabulary problems. In surveys conducted by Dwihandini et al. (2013) and Sukandi & Rianita (2020), EFL students' assessments of the factors influencing undergraduate students' difficulty in writing a thesis were also reported. Linguistic aspects were discovered to be one of the variables, with difficulty in minimizing grammar errors and recognizing and selecting which grammatical components should be eliminated, replaced, supplied, and reordered being one of them. Due to a lack of vocabulary and grammar expertise, they struggle to develop their ideas and organize their sentences. Their findings are consistent with Puspita (2019), who found that one of the language issues students face is difficulties paraphrasing sentences from the source to the thesis writing.

Along with these challenges at the sentence and paragraph levels, supervisors and students have noted additional problems related to the thesis genre. Numerous studies have found that constructing an argument with consistency and balance is difficult. Peng (2018) investigated the general problems in thesis writing experienced by graduate supervisors of their research students. The findings show that the research students' general difficulties with thesis/dissertation writing were related to narrative literature. Students have trouble recognizing what content belongs to a certain chapter. Bitchener & Basturkmen (2006) added that the students showed their uncertainty about how each section in a thesis should be ordered. These difficulties could be a result of insufficient and illogical reasoning, but as Starfield & Paltridge (2019) and Swales & Feak (1996) demonstrate, they are equally likely to be the result of a lack of comprehension of the genre's characteristics. This is supported by Shahsavar & Kourepaz (2020) who discovered that one of the students' concerns was a lack of adequate literature review as one of the thesis chapters. As a result, they were unable to synthesize, evaluate, or explain the literature in their work. They mainly concentrated on summarizing and interpreting the findings and interpretations of other scholars.

There are various reasons why students may struggle to understand the thesis' objectives, substance, and structure explicitly. To begin with, Elton's research (2010) has demonstrated that supervisors have implicit rather than the explicit understanding of the aspects of the thesis in their particular disciplines. As a result, this may be one of the reasons why the thesis requirements are not communicated to the students. Second, students will almost certainly have read research articles relevant to their field of study before beginning

their thesis, but they may have missed the distinguishing characteristics of different sections. Additionally, only a minority of students are likely to have read any of the studies identifying the characteristics of distinct sections of research articles. Finally, students might consult established assistance in thesis writing guidelines and handbooks. However, the amount of information provided regarding certain aspects of a thesis is frequently limited (Starfield & Paltridge, 2019)

This literature review reveals that postgraduate EFL students face a variety of challenges, not only at the sentence and paragraph levels but also in comprehending and meeting the thesis genre's requirements. Because a thesis has so many different components, some will probably be more challenging for students to write than others. Bitchener (2006) stated that according to the data, the cognitive demands of the results and discussion section of the thesis are likely to make this component of the thesis difficult for students. As a result, It is critical that studies look into how well supervisors and students understand the function of the results and discussion part. Second, the literature has documented a variety of supervisor and student perspectives on the types of challenges that EFL students face when writing their thesis. This consideration, however, has not focused on the specific challenges they face while writing the findings and discussion sections. Two research questions were investigated in this study in order to address these needs:

1. What are the functions of the results and discussion section, according to supervisors and students?
2. What are the supervisors' and students' perceptions of EFL students' challenges in writing the findings and discussion section?

## RESEARCH METHOD

This descriptive qualitative study involved three English Department students who finished their thesis in 2020-2021 focusing on Linguistics, while three lecturers served as their supervisors at a private university in Surabaya, Indonesia. The following table highlights the demographic characteristics of the study's participants.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants

Participants	Gender	Linguistics Background	Educational Background	Length of English Learning Experience	Length of English Teaching Experience
Learner 1	Female	East Javanese Indonesian	Undergraduate Study	13 years	-
Learner 2	Female	East Javanese Indonesian Chinese	Undergraduate Study	13 years	-

<b>Learner 3</b>	Female	Indonesian Chinese	Undergraduate Study	13 years	-
<b>Lecturer 1</b>	Male	East Javanese Chinese	Postgraduate Study	> 20 years	10 – 15 years
<b>Lecturer 2</b>	Female	Central Javanese Indonesian	Postgraduate Study	> 20 years	10 – 15 years
<b>Lecturer 3</b>	Male	East Javanese Indonesian	Postgraduate Study	> 20 years	10 – 15 years

To address the study's difficulties, in-depth interviews were conducted. According to Barada (2013), in-depth interviews are framed around a few key topics and are designed to elicit information about an individual's thoughts and feelings about a subject. The study used in-depth interviews to discover how participants conceptualized the results and discussion parts of student essays. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and were recorded on video via ZOOM Cloud Meeting. The researchers transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews and had another researcher proofread them. Two phases of data processing were performed. The initial phase involved an extensive examination of each transcribed interview. The second phase of data analysis included a micro-level evaluation of how participants described various components of the results and discussion sections and students' issues with writing the thesis results and discussion section.

## DISCUSSION

### A. Perception of the function of results and discussion section

The participants' comments on the functions and content of the results and discussion section were analyzed. The supervisors' viewpoints are shown in Table 2, whereas their students' perspectives are shown in Table 3. As shown in Table 2, supervisors had similar viewpoints. All agreed that the results section should both present and comment on the findings, and discussion sections should provide connections between the current study's findings and those found in the literature and summarize and discuss the findings. One supervisor recognized three additional functions/content areas. Table 3 demonstrates that common knowledge among students was restricted, despite all students having the same opinion about the results section's content. All students viewed the discussion section as a means of summarizing the results. However, only one student believed that the discussion should include a summary of the findings and references to the literature and an opportunity to express her thoughts and analyze their significance. The interview findings indicated that students had less to say than supervisors on the functions and

substance of the results and discussion section. They perceived it to have one or two distinct functions/content areas. One student believed that the discussion should include a summary of the findings and references to the literature and an opportunity to express her thoughts and discuss the implications.

Table 2: Perceptions of supervisors concerning the functions and content of the results and discussion section

<b>The Function of Thesis Results and Discussion Section</b>	<b>Lecturer 1</b>	<b>Lecturer 2</b>	<b>Lecturer 3</b>
<b>Results</b>	√	√	√
To present the results	√	√	√
To comment on the results			
<b>Discussion</b>	√	√	√
To sum up the results	√	√	√
To make the link between the results and literature	√	√	√
To interpret the results	√	√	√
To discuss the implication of the results	√	√	√
To deliberate the limitation of the results	x	x	√
To give the recommendation for the next researchers.	x	x	√

Table 3: Perceptions of students concerning the functions and content of the results and discussion section

<b>The Function of Thesis Results and Discussion Section</b>	<b>Student 1</b>	<b>Students 2</b>	<b>Student 3</b>
<b>Results</b>	√	√	√
To present the results			
<b>Discussion</b>	√	√	√
To sum up the results	√	x	x
To make the link between the results and literature	√	x	x
To discuss the implication of the results	√	x	x
To express opinions about the results	√	x	x

Considering their skill in doing their research projects and advising other final paper students, it is natural that the supervisors had similar knowledge of the findings section's functions. Two of them identified four rather than six functions of discussion, demonstrating that their knowledge does not conform to the Paltridge & Starfield's genre criterion (2019). In terms of student viewpoints, it was expected that all students would acknowledge the importance of summarizing their study's results, making connections between the results and the literature, discussing the implications of the results, and interpreting the results based on their own opinion. However, just one student mentioned the previously listed four roles. Additionally, all of the students stated that the results section's primary intention is to present the findings.

Numerous factors could contribute to this lack of comprehension. They may have gotten more micro feedback on specific ideas and stylistic requirements than macro criticism on the results and discussion sections' general structure and content parameters (Suryarini, 2013; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Swales, 2007 ) While each of the four students had completed a course on research methodology before beginning their thesis writing, this does not mean that the functions of specific components had been discussed. Additionally, the information contained in manuals and handbooks is frequently constrained. As a result, new researchers may not have been prepared to absorb all of the criteria for the thesis results and discussion portion. As writing the results and discussion phase of the thesis places a more significant cognitive strain on students than other sections, students may require more supervision when writing the results and discussion section than other sections.

### **B. Perceptions of Student Difficulties in Writing the Thesis Results and Discussion Section**

The comments given by participants regarding the problems encountered by students with their thesis outcomes and discussion section were analyzed. The supervisors' viewpoints are provided in Table 4, whereas Table 5 presents their students' perspectives. The perceptions among the supervisors are similar, stating that students' lack of comprehensive knowledge of the thesis results and discussion part as a genre is the main issue. One issue raised in this regard was that the purpose of the results and discussion sections is to establish connections between the current research and the literature. The students tend to interpret the results without being supported by the relevant studies.

All supervisors agreed that the student's overall level of English proficiency could be a problem at times. They thought that the students expressed their ideas was inadequate. Specific issues dealt with the ideas that are not clearly connected; thoughts that were complicated; and ideas that were not completely developed. Each student identified four to seven issues. All stated that they did not understand what was expected in the results and discussion part. One student stated that she should consult her supervisor regarding the substance of the results and discussion sections. Another stated that she discovered she had jumbled up the findings and discussion of results sections after receiving supervisor feedback. The students, like the supervisors, brought up the subject of their English skills.

This was considered as the primary obstacle to students writing properly. Each individual referred to particular linguistic issues (tenses, limited vocabulary, and language to express statistical information or make comparisons). One student attempted to overcome linguistic barriers by transferring phrases and pieces of text from books to her writing. Three students, like their supervisors, expressed difficulty describing the relationship between ideas. However, unlike the supervisors, they viewed this through the lens of particular word choice

(however, nevertheless, despite, etc.). Two students expressed dissatisfaction with their writing style. They were required to write clearly and felt that their writing had become monotonous and straightforward as a result. Both felt they had difficulty composing paragraphs and struggled with content selection.

Table 4: Perceptions of supervisors concerning student difficulties in writing the thesis results and discussion section

Student Difficulties	Lecturer 1	Lecturer 2	Lecturer 3
• Lack of linking between ideas	√	√	√
• Lack of generalization	√		
• Language proficiency problem	√	√	√
• Insufficient explanation	√	√	√
• Inconsistent use of terms		√	
• Unpolished writing		√	
• Lack of knowledge of results and discussion as a genre	√	√	√

Table 5: Perceptions of concerning their difficulties in writing the thesis results and discussion section

Student Difficulties	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3
• Expression between the links between ideas	√	√	√
• Clarity of ideas	√	x	√
• Overall organization of the section	x	√	x
• Writing paragraph	√	√	x
• Delimiting content	x	√	√
• Giving the reasoning for ideas	√	x	x
• Simple writing	√	√	x
• Language proficiency problem	√	√	√
• Knowing what should go in the results and discussion section	√	√	√

The second study question examined supervisor and student opinions of the problems faced during the findings and discussion section writing process. Unsurprisingly, there was much overlap in supervisors' viewpoints. As previously reported (Wardhana et al., 2019; Thompson, 2015), all supervisors acknowledged their linguistic competency challenges (grammar and vocabulary). Additionally, the majority of supervisors referred to the difficulty in communicating and developing ideas consistently. Other research, such as those by Malimas et al. (2017) and Zaid (2016), have documented the difficulties of developing coherent ideas when arguing. Students expressed their doubts regarding the content and organization included in the results and discussion section. Given the amount of time and critique given by the ' supervisors, this was somewhat surprising. As a result, future research is suggested investigating why this may occur so late in the supervisory process. The students, like their

supervisors, highlighted on their linguistic limitations. On the other hand, the students saw their difficulties in terms of setting up definite meaning at the sentence level, whereas supervisors saw it in terms of establishing specific meaning at the paragraph level and comprehending the genre's rhetorical and organizational criteria. According to the interviews, supervisors were more aware of the underlying causes of their ' problems than their students. This indicates that supervisors have a role in supporting the students in identifying the cause(s) of particular difficulties.

## CONCLUSION

It was discovered in this study that students and their teachers and supervisors perceived difficulties in writing sentences and paragraphs in English as a foreign language. It also revealed some new insights into the difficulties students and teachers perceived in writing the results and discussion section. One of the fresh findings acquired from this research was the degree of difficulty students experienced in meeting the genre's standards. According to the same sources, EFL students were reported to be unfamiliar with the multiple functions and content characteristics of the thesis results and discussion sections by both supervisors and students. It was revealed that supervisors had a more full and in-depth understanding of these difficulties than students, which was particularly important. The lack of agreement between supervisors and their student respective students about the principal difficulty students had when writing the results and discussion part and the underlying cause(s) of the difficulty was another notable finding. Student issues were typically explained by a lack of language competency, whereas three out of four supervisors provided responses that had nothing to do with second language ability as their preferred mode of explanation.

Several suggestions to supervisors may be made in light of these findings. Among these are: If they can identify the primary difficulty their students are experiencing and reflect on the underlying cause of the problem, they may be able to address and resolve the issue during the period of supervision provided. Specific barriers, on the other hand, may be more difficult to overcome within this time range. For example, those who are more reliant on language proficiency may be more difficult to resolve than those who are more dependent on needs specific to a particular genre (function and content). Based on their observations, the supervisors speculated that the difficulty in expressing and connecting thoughts might be a cognitive issue instead of one related to language.

According to the findings of this study, several issues should be investigated further in future research. For starters, it is essential to assess whether or not the findings of this study can be extrapolated to a broader sample of EFL students. The degree to which these findings varied across and within fields is the second source of consternation. Furthermore, future



studies should focus solely on identifying writing difficulties in written material to determine the particular reasons for these difficulties.

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