

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Thesis Writing in English as a Second Language (ESL)

Many studies have explored various problems that second-language learners encounter while they learn a second language, such as English. These studies will be elaborated further in later sections. These issues are related to language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Nunan (2003) clarified that there are productive and receptive skills generated by language learners. Speaking and writing are classified as productive skills, whereas listening and reading are receptive skills. There is also a big difference between speaking and writing. Rahilly (2004) stated that writing differs from speaking because of the absence of immediate interlocutor. In a speech act, the speaker utters a verbal message that the receiver immediately interprets and clarifies for meaning and context. Conversely, writing is a more remote and complicated task than speaking because it requires the writer to create and explain an intended message in written form to an absent audience. (p. 12).

It is important to recognize that second language writing is an interdisciplinary field. Matsuda and Silva (2005) stated that “second language writing today is arguably one of the most viable fields of inquiry in both second-language studies and composition studies” (p. xi). This is because second-language writing is interdisciplinary and encompasses both the act of acquiring a language and composing a language. Furthermore, many ESL students encounter second language writing difficulties. As researchers study the difficulties that ESL students face with second-language writing, light is shed on the origin of these difficulties. Thus, it will open doors to finding solutions for these hindrances. Second-language writing is considered an interdisciplinary field in many schools. Matsuda, Cox, Jordan, and Hooper (2011) stated that “second-language writing emerged as an interdisciplinary field situated at the crossroads between second-language acquisition and composition studies. These two disciplines often present very different perspectives on good writing, pedagogy, and research” (p. 7). Consequently, many programs are involved with second-language writing research.

1.2 Thesis Writing as Genre of Academic Writing

Thesis writing is a pivotal and distinctive genre within the realm of academic writing. It serves as a culmination of an individual's academic journey, representing the culmination of years of research, critical thinking, and scholarly engagement. This literature review explores the nature of thesis writing as a genre of academic writing, delving into its unique characteristics, purposes, and the skills required for its successful execution. By examining various perspectives from scholars and researchers, this review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role and significance of thesis writing within the academic landscape.

Thesis writing can be defined as a specialized genre of academic writing that synthesizes existing knowledge, presents original research findings, and contributes to the advancement of a particular field of study. A thesis, often required for the completion of undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral degrees, embodies a structured and well-defined format, typically comprising an introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. This format is critical in distinguishing it from other forms of academic writing.

Thesis writing is a distinctive genre of academic writing that plays a vital role in the advancement of knowledge and the development of critical research and communication skills. Its unique characteristics, including its emphasis on rigor, originality, and contribution to knowledge, set it apart from other forms of academic writing. As students engage in thesis writing, they acquire a valuable skill set that not only serves them within academia but also equips them for success in various professional endeavors. Understanding the nature, purpose, and skills associated with thesis writing is essential for both students and educators as they navigate the complexities of this significant academic genre.

There are several types of academic writing such notes, reports, projects, essays, dissertation and papers (Hajar & Mhamed, 2021). Initially writing activities such as writing thesis was significantly important for the academic world, it ranged in formats, such as journal articles, books, proceeding papers, creative writing, technical reports or instructional textbooks (Badenhorst & Guerin, 2016). This writing was produced from universities, faculties, departments, professional associations.

Green (2013) affirmed a view of academic writing as a complex socio-cognitive process implicating a range of textual and interpersonal interactions, and identifies two distinct approaches to the writing of academic texts, both of which may lead to high-quality writing and finds that some novice writers engage in textual interactions which provide information about genre, rhetoric, language and the communities of practice within which they write and that this may be one factor distinguishing more from less successful academic writers.

1.3 The Writing Challenges and Difficulties of Postgraduate Students

1.3.1 The challenges encountered by ESL postgraduate students

Arnold Toynbee (2003) in his extensive world history study, as discussed by Hall, introduced the concept of "Challenge and Response" to elucidate the dynamics of civilizational rise and decline. Toynbee criticized traditional explanations like environmental factors, racial influences, leadership, land ownership, and access to resources as being overly simplistic or incorrect. Instead, he sought the fundamental causes underlying societal success or failure.

Toynbee defined "challenge" as unforeseeable factors or events that posed threats to the traditional ways of life of a community. Importantly, not all challenges were negative; some carried opportunities for growth. "Response" referred to the actions taken by the same community to adapt to the new circumstances. These challenges could stem from various sources, including population growth, resource depletion, or climate changes, none of which were intentionally created. An effective response necessitated foresight, strong leadership, and proactive measures to overcome the threats, with the ultimate goal of ensuring survival and prosperity.

In an academic context, Ormrod et al (2016) employ the term 'challenge' to signify the threshold at which students perceive they will achieve success through adequate effort. This prompts an inquiry into the extent of belief in success required to define a situation as challenging. Differing from Ormrod et al (1981) characterizes the concept of challenge as a 'task' demanding exertion, with no assurance of success in its outcome. Similarly, Zakaria et al (2013) underscore the impact of uncertainty, enabling individuals to sustain their concentration on the task at hand. Consequently, students often encounter challenges when adapting to

the academic literacy conventions encompassing modes of thought, reading, expression, and writing that hold prominence within the academic milieu (Neeley, 2005).

Evidently, the production of thesis at the graduate student level remains relatively limited, primarily serving the purpose of culminating assessments or fulfilling requirements for postgraduate students aiming to attain their academic credentials. These publications contribute to bolstering their curriculum vitae and qualifications when seeking employment opportunities aligned with academic careers (Pu & Evans, 2019). Notably, Paltridge (2009) has observed that during the process of composing thesis, students may grapple with impostor syndrome, characterized by feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, and confusion regarding their writing abilities.

Postgraduate students in Nigeria have encountered considerable pressure to disseminate their thesis writing. Their challenges encompass insufficient mentorship, support, skills, knowledge, financial resources, and constrained access to essential materials, including journal articles, databases, and related resources (Ojo et al., 2014).

In Australia and subsequently in the United Kingdom, Lan (2015) conducted research that unearthed several notable concerns pertaining to academic writing. These concerns encompassed a lack of constructive criticism, subdued authorial voice, inadequacies in referencing, the presence of unsubstantiated claims, a choice of language characterized by elements of fiction, inconsistency with the prescribed criteria, issues of competence, and a lack of clarity in focus, including inappropriate learning styles. In a similar vein, within the United States, graduate students have encountered a distinct set of challenges in academic writing. These challenges encompass grammatical issues, vocabulary deficiencies, organizational and structural deficits in presenting ideas, critical thinking limitations, difficulties in sentence structure, issues related to the clarity of written content, and concerns surrounding plagiarism (Ravichandran et al., 2017).

Similar regulations also govern students in Australia, where 27 postgraduate students, whose first language is not English (English as a second language, ESL), have faced notable challenges. These challenges include linguistic and socio-cultural aspects. Despite their advanced English language proficiency, these students have experienced discomfort when required to write immediately in

English. Challenges have encompassed the intricacies of grammar, limited experience, disparities in learning expectations and outcomes, and the pace at which they can produce written work. Consequently, these students have found it necessary to allocate more time for their writing endeavors (Corcoran, 2015).

Flowerdew and Suresh Canagarajah (1996) have articulated the challenges encountered by non-native English speaker (NNES) researchers, highlighting issues related to expressive abilities, vocabulary mastery, and potential interference from their native language. It becomes apparent that the primary factors contributing to students' writing difficulties are situated within the rhetorical domain, particularly in the realms of grammar, lexicon, substantiating claims, the employment of hedging language, initial drafting, and discussion sections (Azizah & Budiman, 2017).

1.3.1.1 Discursive Challenges of Writing Thesis

A significant challenge frequently encountered by scholarly authors during the research article writing process pertains to discourse, or the organization and expression of ideas within text. While previous studies have explored the concept of "discursive" in various contexts, including aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, and genre (Corcoran, 2015; Flowerdew, 2000), Corcoran (2015) has sought to provide a distinct categorization of discursive-related challenges in the context of thesis writing. Specifically, Corcoran identifies four core elements linked to discursive issues that often trouble scholarly authors: lexico-grammatical accuracy, clarity of expression, adherence to genre conventions, and the impact of linguistic transfer. It is essential to note that Corcoran's categorization is not meant to represent an absolute framework, but rather, it serves as a heuristic tool acknowledging the considerable overlap between the identified challenges and their respective categories (Corcoran, 2015, p. 113).

An extensive review of studies examining the practices and challenges associated with non-native English speakers (NNES) writing for thesis reveals several prominent discursive areas of concern. These areas encompass both rhetorical and linguistic aspects, including grammar, citations and referencing, argument structure, discourse organization, assertion of knowledge claims, authorial voice, the use of hedging, and the composition of introduction and discussion sections. These issues have been explored in research conducted by

scholars such as (Baldauf& Kaplan, 2005; Bazerman, 1988; Cho, 2004; Duszak&Lewkowicz, 2008; Flowerdew, 2001; Huang, 2010; Mur Dueñas, 2011; St. John, 1987; Swales, 1990).

Numerous studies emphasize the challenges faced by NNES individuals when endeavoring to publish in English, highlighting the potential for editorial rejection due to surface-level language problems (Duszak & Lewkowicz, 2008; Li, 2006). As a leading figure in NNES writing research, Flowerdew (1999) noted that NNES researchers encounter difficulties in various areas, including the fluency of expression, time required for writing, vocabulary usage, the ability to assert research claims persuasively, interference from their first language during the composition process, crafting quantitative articles, maintaining a clear and straightforward style, and tackling the intricacies of composing introductions and discussion sections (Flowerdew, 1999, pp. 255-7).

Nevertheless, the preponderance of studies, including those conducted by Flowerdew, underscores that the primary discursive challenge in thesis writing, for NNES individuals, pertains to rhetorical aspects rather than surface-level concerns related to grammar, punctuation, or vocabulary.

2.4 Previous Studies of Indonesian Postgraduate Students in Writing Their Thesis

In the realm of academia, postgraduate students in Indonesia face a complex and demanding journey as they endeavor to juggle the responsibilities and intricacies of their thesis work. A comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges and experiences encountered by these scholars is essential for facilitating their academic growth and success. Drawing upon the insights and findings from previous studies, this exploration sheds light on the multifaceted aspects of postgraduate life in Indonesia and the various elements that contribute to the successful completion of their theses.

2.4.1 The Challenges Encountered by Postgraduate Students

In the realm of academic pursuits and the arduous journey of thesis writing, a multitude of challenges and intricacies come to light. Ermiami (2021) discusses the different kinds of support students get during thesis work, the issues they face like stress and pressure, and what they expect to learn. Aisah (2019) looks at the problems

undergrads encounter when defending their thesis, such as feeling nervous, forgetting their material, or struggling to answer questions. Sulinda (2015) talks about how students have trouble translating thesis summaries from Indonesian to English, dealing with things like forming questions or using the right words. Defina (2011) examines language issues in thesis writing, like sentence structure, paragraphs, and quoting sources, often due to a lack of guidelines, reading materials, and practice. These studies show that Indonesian postgraduate students have various challenges in finishing their theses, including support, stress, translation, and language problems. While another studies, Dwihandini et al. (2013) found that students face difficulties because of psychological, cultural, and language factors. Fitria (2022) used questionnaires to discover problems both inside, like choosing a topic or language issues, and outside, such as issues with supervisors or money. Our research goes deeper into this topic. Puspita (2019) looked at challenges for EFL students in IAIN Curup, including language and cultural issues. Lestari (2020) used numbers to show that students struggle with English proficiency.

2.4.2 The Approaches Employed by Postgraduate Students

To overcome the challenges that arise during the thesis writing process, it is necessary to employ a range of strategies that can be applied to navigate these issues effectively. Thesis writing requiring careful planning, research, and writing skills. In this context, several researchers have explored the strategies and challenges faced by postgraduate students in their thesis writing journey.

Perry (1998) offered a structured approach for presenting theses, outlining the sections of a thesis and providing guidance on writing style. Afful (2022) delved into supervisors' perceptions of postgraduate students' literature review writing, shedding light on the challenges students encounter, such as reading comprehension and criticality, along with the coping strategies they employ, including summarizing and paraphrasing. Odena (2017) examined facilitating experiences and strategies for thesis writing, underlining the significance of tailored feedback from supervisors, personal organization, and the unique learning strategies of ESL students. Pozzo (2019) focused on the specific challenges of thesis writing in engineering and computer science fields, considering the disciplinary differences in writing approaches and learning styles. Collectively, these research papers provide valuable insights into the

diverse approaches and challenges encountered by postgraduate students as they tackle the task of writing their theses, offering guidance for both students and supervisors in navigating the complex thesis writing process.

2.5 The Gap of the Studies

The gap in the previous studies is the lack of a comprehensive exploration into the combined and nuanced challenges faced by postgraduate students during the thesis writing process, particularly in the context of diverse academic disciplines. While the mentioned studies have provided valuable insights into specific aspects such as thesis structure, literature review writing, supervisor-student dynamics, and discipline-specific challenges, they have not collectively addressed the holistic picture of the multifaceted difficulties encountered by postgraduate students as they navigate the intricate terrain of thesis writing. Additionally, there is a need to bridge the gap in understanding how these challenges may vary across different academic disciplines and how students from various backgrounds may employ distinct coping strategies. To provide more holistic and discipline-specific guidance to both students and supervisors, further research should delve into the synthesis of these challenges and strategies across diverse academic domains.

In light of the aforementioned gap, the researcher aims to conduct a more in-depth examination of the challenges and strategies pertaining to the diverse linguistic and writing proficiency backgrounds of the participating students. This is particularly significant as the researcher is gathering data from informants within the same academic department, albeit with varying language proficiency, writing abilities, and diverse schedules.

2.6 Recent Research on Challenges and Strategies of Postgraduate Students in Thesis Writing

In the academic landscape, the pursuit of advanced degrees often comes with a host of challenges that demand thoughtful consideration and innovative solutions.

There are several recent studies, Afful (2022) pointed out challenges like reading, critical thinking, synthesis, referencing, and language use. Supervisors also suggest strategies like summarizing, paraphrasing, and concept mapping. Wang (2008) looks at international postgraduate students, highlighting their challenges due to cultural backgrounds and academic traditions, stressing the need for intercultural sensitivity in supervision. Hajar (2021) explored the experiences of Kazakhstani students writing their

master's theses in English, revealing challenges related to supervision styles, identity, time management, and imposter syndrome. Bitchener (2006) focused on L2 students struggling with the discussion section of their theses, showing limited understanding of its purpose and a gap in perceptions between students and supervisors. In summary, these studies collectively emphasize challenges such as language proficiency, cultural differences, and understanding the components of thesis writing, while also identifying strategies used by postgraduate students to overcome these challenges.

