



Navigating the undergraduate thesis journey: A qualitative exploration of challenges, strategies, and skills among English department students

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This study investigates the complex challenges, strategies, and skills development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduate students during their thesis writing journey. While the undergraduate thesis represents a crucial milestone in higher education, EFL students face significant linguistic, psychological, and technical barriers that impact their academic progress. Using a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews with eight undergraduate students from various Indonesian universities, this study examined their experiences in thesis writing. The research employed reflexive thematic analysis, using NVivo 15 software to process and analyze the data. The findings reveal three primary dimensions of challenges: linguistic knowledge and writing competence, psychological and emotional barriers, and resource-related technical constraints. Students employed various adaptive strategies, including self-management techniques, technological assistance, and comprehensive support networks to overcome these challenges. The study also identified the development of essential competencies in research methodology, critical thinking, and time management. The results highlight the need for integrated institutional support systems that address both academic and psychological aspects of thesis writing, suggesting curriculum modifications and enhanced supervision frameworks to better support EFL students in their academic journey.

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INTRODUCTION

Undergraduate theses represent a crucial milestone in academic achievement, particularly for English majors and students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This process demands not only linguistic proficiency but also the integration of theoretical knowledge, critical thinking, and research methodologies to generate original work in accordance with academic conventions. The challenges faced by EFL students are often intensified by linguistic and cultural barriers, rendering thesis writing a complex and multifaceted task (Deiniatur & Cahyono, 2024; Lobo, 2023; Nurkamto et al., 2022).

Research has identified a range of challenges encountered by EFL students during the thesis writing process. Linguistic challenges – such as grammatical errors, limited academic vocabulary, and issues with textual coherence – are common, along with challenges in paraphrasing and summarizing source material to avoid plagiarism (Nurkamto et al., 2022; Prihandoko et al., 2024).

Psychological factors, including anxiety, stress, and fear of failure, often contribute to procrastination and writer's block. Additionally, sociocultural factors – such as academic isolation and power dynamics in student-supervisor relationships – further complicate the writing process ([Ädel et al., 2024](#); [Agricola et al., 2018](#)). Despite these findings, a comprehensive understanding of the interplay among the various obstacles experienced by EFL students in thesis writing and the strategies they employ to address them remains limited. Previous studies have tended to focus on individual aspects of the thesis writing experience, often neglecting the broader context. This study aims to explore the multifaceted challenges – linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural – as well as the adaptive techniques used by students, thereby addressing gaps in the existing literature on EFL students' thesis writing experiences.

This study seeks to examine the thesis writing experiences of undergraduate English majors in EFL contexts through a qualitative exploration, thereby addressing existing gaps in the literature. Utilizing semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)) the study investigates the interplay of linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural challenges, as well as the strategies students employ to navigate these issues. Adopting a holistic approach, this research seeks to identify the skills necessary for successful thesis completion and to inform targeted interventions that improve support systems for EFL students.

This study has three primary objectives: (1) to identify the key challenges encountered by English majors during thesis writing in a foreign language; (2) to explore the strategies employed to overcome these challenges; and (3) to investigate the specific skills required for producing high-quality theses. Through this approach, this study aims to offer insights that can help higher education institutions and curriculum developers in refining pedagogical practices, improving curriculum design, and formulating institutional policies that promote inclusive and supportive learning environments for diverse student populations.

METHODS

Design

This study employed [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) thematic analysis because of its flexibility and suitability for exploring complex, subjective experiences. This method enabled the identification of patterns and themes essential to understanding the challenges faced by EFL students during the thesis writing process. Eight participants were selected based on principles of practicality and data saturation to ensure diverse perspectives from various Indonesian universities, while maintaining a manageable sample size for in-depth qualitative inquiry. The development of interview questions was informed by prior research and focused on linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions. To enhance clarity and relevance, the questions were reviewed and refined based on feedback from academic mentors.

These methodological choices collectively ensured comprehensive insights, reliable data collection, and alignment with the study's objective of informing and strengthening support systems for EFL students.

Participants

The study purposefully sampled eight undergraduate English majors from various Indonesian universities to ensure diversity in gender, age, regional backgrounds, and thesis-writing timelines. The participants (Participants 1-8) comprised three males and five females, aged between 21 and 23, representing both Java (East Java and Central Java) and outer islands (North Sulawesi, North Sumatra, and East Kalimantan). This diverse sample facilitated the exploration of gender disparities, regional variations, and challenges during thesis-writing process.

Data collection

Data collection methods included (a) in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, and (b) triangulation of data sources, which involved focus group discussions, analysis of participants' thesis drafts, and input from their academic supervisors. These data collection strategies ensured a comprehensive understanding of the participants' thesis-writing journeys.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed [Braun & Clarke's \(2006\)](#) six-phase thematic analysis framework:

1. Familiarization with Data. Researchers immersed themselves in the data by repeatedly reading interview transcripts, focus group notes, and related documents. This process facilitated the development of initial observations and the identification of potential patterns.
2. Generating Initial Codes. NVivo 15 software was employed to streamline the coding process. Its AI Assistant feature generated preliminary codes based on data content. Researchers reviewed these AI-generated codes to ensure accuracy and relevance, modifying or supplementing them as necessary.
3. Searching for Themes. The codes were organized into potential themes using NVivo 15's hierarchical node structure. Visualization tools, such as mind maps and cluster analysis, were utilized to identify relationships among codes and emerging themes.
4. Reviewing Themes. Themes underwent a two-level refinement process: At the first level, coded data within each theme were examined for internal coherence. At the second level, the themes were evaluated for their validity in relation to the entire dataset. NVivo 15's coding comparison query was used to assess inter-coder reliability.
5. Defining and Naming Themes. Themes were further refined and assigned descriptive names that encapsulated their core meaning. Detailed analyses were developed for each theme, explicitly linking them to the overarching research questions.
6. Producing the Report. The final analysis was synthesized into a coherent report that included illustrative data

extracts for each theme. NVivo 15's reporting features were utilized to generate summaries of coding patterns and theme distributions.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To ensure the credibility and dependability of the findings, several strategies were employed: First, data triangulation was implemented through the use of multiple data sources – interviews, focus groups, thesis drafts, and supervisor input – to validate findings. Second, member checking was conducted, whereby participants reviewed preliminary findings to confirm their accuracy. Third, peer debriefing involved discussions with non-study colleagues to refine interpretations and minimize bias. Finally, an audit trail was maintained through detailed documentation of research procedures, ensuring transparency throughout the study. In addition to establishing trustworthiness, this study adhered to strict ethical guidelines. During data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. All data were securely stored on password-protected devices to maintain confidentiality. By employing [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) reflexive thematic analysis alongside rigorous ethical protocols and trustworthiness measures, this study systematically explored the challenges, strategies, and competencies involved in the thesis-writing experiences of undergraduate English majors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that undergraduate EFL students encounter various challenges in writing their theses, which can be classified into three primary categories: linguistic and writing competence, psychological and emotional barriers, and resource-technical constraints. To navigate these challenges students, utilize various adaptive strategies such as self-management techniques, technological tools, and support networks. This adaptive process contributes to the development of key academic competencies such as research skills, critical thinking, and time management, which are instrumental not only for academic achievement but also for future scholarly and professional endeavors. These interrelated dimensions underscore the importance of institutional support systems that holistically address the academic, technical, and psychological needs of EFL students.

Challenges Faced by EFL Students

Linguistic and Writing Competence

Mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and discipline-specific linguistic structures is essential in academic writing, yet it presents considerable challenges for numerous English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Participant 1 stated, "Grammar, vocabulary, and linguistics present difficulties for me," underscoring a common struggle among students in adhering to formal writing conventions. These conventions, while critical for establishing an academic tone, are often difficult to master. Participant 4 noted, "Many formal words used in this class are new to me," indicating the challenges

associated with acquiring and using academic vocabulary ([Nurkamto et al., 2022](#); [Prihandoko et al., 2024](#)). The difficulty lies not only in comprehending these terms but also in applying them appropriately within complex academic contexts.

In addition to vocabulary acquisition, students face difficulties in paraphrasing, summarizing, and ethically integrating sources. Participant 2 noted that maintaining coherence and adhering to attribution norms contributes significantly to the stress associated with academic writing. This underscores the importance of mastering appropriate citation styles, such as APA or MLA, which demand a nuanced understanding that many students find challenging ([Prihandoko et al., 2024](#)). Ethical source integration is crucial not only to avoid plagiarism but also to preserve the original author's intent, requiring both technical proficiency and critical engagement. [Ulhaq et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Nunes et al. \(2022\)](#) argue that an overreliance on verbatim citation may indicate limited analytical depth or a lack of understanding of academic integrity principles.

A major challenge for students lies in achieving coherence and cohesion in their writing. Many continue to struggle with structuring ideas logically and constructing coherent paragraphs. Participant 5 remarked, "I mainly have trouble building coherent paragraphs," highlighting difficulties in systematically organizing thoughts. Coherence involves ensuring a logical progression between sentences and paragraphs, while cohesion requires the effective use of transitions and appropriate syntactic structures. Participant 6 explained, "When writing essays, my main difficulties are consistency in every sentence, academic language, and grammar," emphasizing the multifaceted nature of writing challenges. The need to synthesize complex ideas within the conventions of academic discourse further intensifies the linguistic demands of thesis writing.

The hierarchical structuring of arguments is essential for addressing coherence-related challenges in academic writing. [Prihandoko et al. \(2024\)](#) proposed frameworks that systematically organize ideas to support the main thesis and improve the overall narrative structure. Transition words and phrases play a critical role in enhancing readers' understanding of complex arguments ([Gunawan & Aziza, 2017](#)). Participant 7 stated: "Creating thoughts, keeping coherence, and properly using syntax and vocabulary provide constant difficulties for me," illustrating the persistent struggle to achieve clarity and cohesion. To maintain logical flow and facilitate smooth argumentation, writers must understand and apply strategies for achieving textual coherence, including the effective use of transitions ([Enriquez et al., 2023](#); [Lobo, 2023](#)).

Additionally, academic writing requires the ability to integrate various viewpoints while maintaining clarity. This involves the capacity to critically assess sources and incorporate them into well-supported arguments. Participant 3 indicated, "I struggled with language and concept articulation to generate significant writings." Creating systematic reference lists is crucial for maintaining academic integrity and complying with citation standards ([Enriquez et](#)

al., 2023; Lobo, 2023). These practices require meticulous documentation of sources in accordance with established academic communication conventions.

Linguistic competence is essential for promoting intellectual discourse in academia, despite the challenges faced by students. This allows them to articulate complex ideas effectively and engage meaningfully in academic discussions. Addressing these barriers requires the implementation of institutional support systems that offer targeted interventions – such as academic writing workshops – to equip EFL students with the essential skills needed for academic success (Agricola et al., 2020; Soto-Rodríguez et al., 2024).

Psychological and Emotional Barriers

The process of thesis preparation often presents substantial psychological and emotional challenges, including self-doubt, stress, and pressure to perform. Many students experience feelings of inadequacy, questioning their ability to meet academic expectations. Participant 1 articulated this emotional burden by questioning, “Am I really ready for such a significant college assignment?” – a statement that reflects the commonly experienced phenomenon of imposter syndrome. As Djatmika et al. (2022) highlight, imposter-syndrome undermines students’ confidence, causing them to doubt their competence despite clear evidence of their academic potential. Moreover, stringent deadlines and high academic expectations exacerbate these psychological pressures. Participant 5 expressed a common challenge: “I worried about making deadlines, which sometimes made it impossible for me to write well.” illustrating how the demand for timely, high-quality work can impede students’ ability to focus and produce coherent academic writing.

The thesis-writing process often generates significant feelings of isolation, compounding the stress and self-doubt already experienced by many students. Prolonged periods of solitary study, often devoid of interaction with peers or access to supportive networks, can exacerbate these psychological challenges. Participant 4 noted that such isolation adversely affected her mental health and diminished her motivation to write. This sense of disconnection may further amplify other academic struggles, leading to a decline in motivation and productivity. The interaction between rigorous academic demands and social isolation creates a cyclical pattern that impairs students’ ability to maintain sustained focus. As Lobo (2023) asserts, the isolation inherent in academic writing can undermine perseverance and emotional stability. This observation is consistent with Djatmika et al. (2022), who emphasize the role of emotional resilience in supporting students’ productivity and addressing the specific psychological demands associated with thesis preparation.

Stress significantly impacts cognitive and emotional functioning and may also lead to various physical manifestations. Lobo (2023) and Ulhaq et al. (2023) indicate that stress resulting from academic pressure often presents as symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, and digestive issues, all of which further hinder students’ ability to

concentrate. Participant 6 articulated the compounded nature of this stress, nothing, “The worry of writing is made worse by the fear of not meeting the standards set by my peers and advisors.” If left unaddressed, such challenges may contribute to a decline in both mental well-being and academic performance.

Moreover, stress adversely affects decision-making and the capacity to maintain focus, thereby hindering productivity. Many students experience challenges in organizing their ideas and sustaining concentration on their research tasks. Participant 7 noted the emotional impact of setbacks, asserting, “Maintaining a good attitude in the face of research and writing setbacks is challenging.” This perspective highlights that the iterative and often unpredictable nature of thesis writing, wherein repeated revisions and unforeseen obstacles can exacerbate.

Personalized support systems are critical in alleviating psychological and emotional barriers faced during the thesis-writing process. Mentorship, access to mental health services, and structured peer support networks play a pivotal role in strengthening students’ emotional resilience and academic self-efficacy (Agricola et al., 2020). Participant 3 emphasized the significance of mentorship, remarking, “Support systems were quite crucial to me. Meetings with my supervisor clarified my thesis and provided motivation.” Such structured guidance not only alleviates feelings of isolation but also equips students with the motivation and clarity needed to navigate complex academic demands effectively.

Institutional interventions are essential in addressing the psychological and emotional challenges inherent in the thesis-writing process, extending beyond what individual efforts alone can achieve. Djatmika et al. (2022) and Lobo (2023) advocate for the integration of mental health resources within academic institutions, emphasizing the importance of cultivating environments that prioritize student well-being. Regular workshops focused on stress management, resilience-building, and time management can equip students with vital strategies to cope with academic demands. In addition, the establishment of peer-based initiatives, such as thesis-writing groups, can alleviate feelings of isolation and foster a sense of academic community.

Recognizing the emotional impact of thesis preparation reinforces the need for balanced academic expectations and readily available support systems. Participant 8’s reflection – “Juggling thesis work with personal life wears me out and makes me doubt my development” – highlights the strain students often face and underscores the necessity of institutional recognition of students’ holistic well-being. By addressing both the emotional and psychological dimensions of thesis writing, institutions can cultivate supportive learning environments that empower students and enhance their academic performance.

Resource and Technical Constraints

Access to academic resources and technology presents a considerable challenge for English as a Foreign Language

(EFL) students in higher education. These constraints are multifaceted, encompassing limited access to both physical and digital materials, insufficient technical proficiency, and challenges in navigating institutional platforms. Participant 1 expressed concern over the volume of required English-language materials, stating, "The volume of English materials I needed to learn was overwhelming." This observation underscores a broader issue of resource accessibility, as many students rely on online databases that are often restricted by paywalls, limiting their ability to obtain essential academic references (Deiniatur et al., 2024). In addition, physical library collections are frequently inadequate, necessitating a heavy reliance on alternative digital sources. As Participant 4 noted, the library's limited reference holdings compel students to depend substantially on online resources.

In addition to resource limitations, technical barriers further complicate academic tasks for EFL students. Many students exhibit limited familiarity with essential digital tools, such as SPSS for statistical analysis and reference management software like Mendeley or Zotero. Participant 6 reported, "I used SPSS for data analysis, but it required tutorial support and help from colleagues in the Statistics department." This lack of proficiency hampers research efficiency and increases dependency on external assistance. Furthermore, inadequate training in the use of institutional learning management systems (LMS) exacerbates these difficulties. Participant 5 described these systems as "confusing or minimal, featuring crossed-out sections or question marks that lack explanation," underscoring the need for clearer user instructions and improved technical support.

Digital uncertainty, characterized by challenges in adapting to new technological tools, adds a layer of complexity to students' academic progress. This uncertainty affects their ability to complete advanced research tasks efficiently. Deiniatur and Cahyono (2024) found that inadequate digital literacy in EFL students impedes their ability to synthesize information from diverse sources, organize research materials digitally, and navigate online platforms effectively. Participant 7 highlighted this issue, stating:

"My biggest challenge is translating my ideas into academically coherent and understandable language for readers. Often, I compose and cut out text to achieve balance and clarity in my work. I frequently edit and refine text to attain balance and clarity in my work."

These challenges emphasize the importance of prioritizing digital literacy training within academic programs.

Additionally, time constraints related to technological adaptation impede the effective execution of research. Participant 8 noted that balancing thesis preparation with other responsibilities presented significant challenges, primarily due to limited time for mastering new tools. While technology has the potential to enhance teaching and learning processes, many EFL students are inadequately

prepared for its implementation (Miranty et al., 2023). Cloud-based storage systems, which promote collaboration and accessibility across devices, are often underutilized, as students face difficulties in seamlessly integrating these tools into their research workflows.

The combined effects of resource and technical limitations highlight the critical necessity for institutional interventions to enhance access to academic resources and improve technical literacy among EFL students. The implementation of open-access databases, the organization of workshops on digital tools such as SPSS and reference management software, and the optimization of institutional platforms can effectively address these challenges. Furthermore, fostering collaborative environments that encourage peer support – such as through study groups or mentorship programs – may help mitigate the impacts of resource scarcity and technical difficulties.

Strategies Employed: Adaptive Approaches to Success ***Self-Management Techniques***

Undergraduate students often face significant challenges in thesis writing, requiring the adoption of structured self-management strategies to ensure success. These techniques help students balance academic responsibilities, personal commitments, and mental well-being. Participant 1 emphasized the importance of time allocation, noting, "I set aside specific hours each day for thesis work to better manage my time." This organized approach allows students to maintain consistency and avoid procrastination. Tools such as progress trackers, achievement charts, and project management software further enhance productivity by breaking the thesis into manageable tasks (Lobo, 2023).

Time-blocking techniques and structured daily schedules have proven to be effective in enhancing focus and productivity. Participant 2 stated, "I use a daily calendar to better manage my time. I devote my mornings to TOEFL prep and my evenings to thesis research." This systematic approach enables students to meet academic objectives while simultaneously managing other responsibilities. Furthermore, the use of visualization tools, such as Gantt charts or digital applications, reinforces motivation by offering tangible evidence of progress (Nurkamto et al., 2022).

Mental health practices are essential for sustaining cognitive resilience alongside effective time management strategies. Participant 8 stated, "I wait until I'm emotionally ready to write and complete chapters in a focused manner." This underscores the significance of recognizing emotional readiness as a key factor influencing productivity. Proactive self-care strategies, including regular physical exercise, mindfulness practices, and relaxation techniques, are effective in mitigating stress and preventing burnout (Lobo, 2023). Integrating leisure activities with academic responsibilities promotes mental rejuvenation, allowing students to maintain sustained concentration over time.

Support systems also play a crucial role in facilitating thesis-writing success. Participant 3 emphasized the importance of such systems, noting, "I had a few meetings

with my supervisor. These infrequent face-to-face contacts facilitate better talks and clarify my thesis." Regular engagement with supervisors offers both academic guidance and emotional reassurance, thereby reducing feelings of isolation. Furthermore, peer support groups provide additional advantages by creating collaborative learning environments where students can share challenges and develop collective strategies ([Djarmika et al., 2022](#)).

A systematic approach to planning constitutes an essential self-management strategy. Developing a clear chapter structure and adhering to a comprehensive work plan enhances writing clarity and deepens students' understanding of academic standards ([Prihandoko et al., 2024](#)). Participant 5 emphasized the effectiveness of such approach: "I created a system in which I switch between 'executing' and 'waiting list' members. I use this approach to manage my workload." These techniques allow students to prioritize tasks effectively, supporting consistent progress toward thesis completion.

Furthermore, the implementation of self-reward systems can significantly enhance motivation during extended writing periods. [Cahyono and Rahayu \(2020\)](#) suggest that celebrating small achievements fosters perseverance and a sense of gratitude, both of which are critical for maintaining enthusiasm throughout the thesis-writing journey. By integrating adaptive strategies—including time management, mental health practices, support systems, and structured planning—students are better equipped to navigate the complexities of thesis writing with confidence and efficiency.

Technological Support

Technology offers essential solutions to multifaceted challenges of academic writing, particularly for EFL students engaged in thesis development. AI-driven tools such as Grammarly, ProWritingAid, and ChatGPT provide immediate feedback on grammar, style, and academic tone, thereby enhancing writing quality and fostering greater confidence in language production ([Miranty et al., 2023](#)). Participant 1 noted that "Conversational GPT helps me determine my study topic. I use AI to understand scientific journals."

Reference management systems also play a pivotal role in streamlining research organization and citation practices. According to [Nunes et al. \(2022\)](#), platforms like Mendeley and Zotero allow students to focus more on the substance of their research by automating citation formatting and bibliography creation. Participant 8 described a collaborative initiative: "I created a WhatsApp group chat with my supervisor and my fellow mentees. My supervisor asked us to install Mendeley."

Digital storage solutions and cloud-based platforms have significantly improved accessibility and collaboration in academic writing. [Syafudin et al. \(2018\)](#) highlighted that cloud storage facilitates seamless access to research materials across multiple devices, thereby enhancing collaborative efficiency and flexibility. This adaptability proved crucial for Participant 2, who noted, "I utilize the

cloud for online exams and communication with supervisors and examiners." Similarly, Participant 3 adjusted to remote consultation, stating, "My thesis consultation is mainly done remotely, with drafts sent via WhatsApp."

Moreover, online academic resources play a vital role in enhancing research capabilities and ensuring alignment with supervisory expertise. [Deiniatur et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasize that digital academic profiles assist students in identifying research topics that correspond with their supervisors' specializations. Participant 5 utilized this approach: "To gain insight into my supervisor's academic background, I check her Google Scholar profile, ResearchGate account."

Specialized software for data analysis also constitutes a critical component in thesis development. Participant 6 demonstrated adaptability and initiative: "I used SPSS for data analysis, accompanied by tutorials on YouTube and help from colleagues in the Statistics department." This example reflects the creative integration of digital learning tools and peer support in addressing technical challenges and enhancing research proficiency.

Enhancing focus and efficiency is essential in the academic writing process. Website blockers effectively reduce online distractions, enabling students to maintain concentration during writing sessions ([Deiniatur et al., 2024](#)). Similarly, note-taking applications with multimedia integration and advanced search functionalities have revolutionized how researchers organize and document their ideas. These digital productivity tools enhance workflow efficiency and support in the management of complex research tasks.

Text-to-speech software offers additional support for editing and revision by allowing students to detect grammatical errors and assess the appropriateness of academic language ([Miranty et al., 2023](#)). The integration of such technologies cultivates a dynamic and interactive learning environment, leading to measurable improvements in grammar, vocabulary, and fluency among EFL students ([Cahyono et al., 2023](#)). These technological strategies not only address immediate academic writing challenges but also equip students for sustained engagement with evolving digital practices in academic and professional contexts.

Seeking Support Networks

The thesis writing process for undergraduate EFL students relies heavily on robust support networks that help address challenges and enhance academic outcomes. These networks encompass supervisory relationships, peer collaborations, institutional resources, and emotional support systems, all of which collectively foster resilience and academic achievement.

Supervisory engagement is a critical determinant of thesis success. Effective supervisors provide timely feedback on student performance, offer targeted guidance on complex issues, and maintain consistent communication throughout the research process ([Nurkamto et al., 2022](#); [Rahayu et al., 2024](#); [Sabarun et al., 2024](#)). Participant 2 emphasized the value of such support: "My supervisor helped me stay focused on the study question and find relevant sources."

This mentorship enables EFL students to navigate intricate academic demands while cultivating a positive and supportive learning environment (Djarmika et al., 2022; Prihandoko et al., 2024). Moreover, the integration of technology into supervisory practices enhances communication and learning engagement (Cahyono et al., 2023; Rahayu et al., 2024), thereby improving students' self-efficacy and metacognitive awareness.

Peer support networks significantly enhance academic performance and research capabilities. Deiniatur et al. (2024) and Stappenbelt and Basu (2019) emphasize that thesis writing groups operate on principles of accountability and idea exchange, effectively fostering motivation among participants. Participant 1 reflected on this experience: "To combat my insecurity, I joined a group that helped others write their thesis. Talking about our problems and progress boosted our confidence and motivation." Collaborative environments facilitate constructive peer critique, promote the refinement of ideas, and help identify weaknesses in academic writing (Agricola et al., 2020; Djarmika et al., 2022). Moreover, peer dialogue often extends beyond formal group structures. Participant 3 noted that informal discussions with peers—particularly those who had already completed their theses—provided critical insights into structural expectations and academic standards. Similarly, Participant 6 engaged in "peer checking with friends and older people I trust to give me good feedback." These interactions not only improve students' academic and research competencies but also contribute to the expansion of their professional networks (Lobo, 2023; Prihandoko et al., 2024).

Institutional resources provide structured support that complements peer collaboration and supervisory guidance. Writing centers contribute to improving the clarity, coherence, and consistency of academic writing (Djarmika et al., 2022), while library-led workshops develop students' research strategies and database navigation skills—both essential for conducting comprehensive literature reviews (Nurkamto et al., 2022). Additionally, departmental advisors assist students in interpreting and adhering to institutional requirements (Agricola et al., 2020). Participant 5 shared their experience: "I discussed my concerns about writing my thesis with graduates. I received suggestions from other instructors." This proactive engagement with institutional resources enhances both research quality and overall academic performance.

Emotional also plays a critical role in the thesis-writing process. Support from family members, partners, and friends provides reassurance during periods of stress and self-doubt. Participant 8 stated, "My family, my girlfriend, and my friends helped me with money and gave me support when I felt down." Participant 7 similarly remarked: "I also talked about the difficulties I encountered while completing my thesis with friends and family." Such emotional support helps students maintain motivation, mental well-being, and perspective throughout the demanding process of thesis completion.

Cross-departmental consultation offers valuable access to specialized knowledge beyond the immediate academic discipline. Participant 6 noted that they sought assistance from outside their primary academic environment: "I used SPSS for data analysis, accompanied by tutorials on YouTube and help from colleagues in the Statistics department." This interdisciplinary approach not only enriches the research methodology but also strengthens the analytical frameworks.

Essential Skills Developed – Beyond Academic Writing Research Skills

Thesis writing plays a crucial role in developing advanced research skills that extend beyond the mere collection of information. This process involves identifying relevant sources, synthesizing diverse perspectives, recognizing research gaps, and critically evaluating existing knowledge to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework. Participant 3 highlighted the importance of research skills acquired through reading scholarly journals, noting that they were vital for establishing a solid theoretical foundation for the thesis. This underscores the value of deep engagement with academic literature in promoting intellectual growth and enhancing students' ability to tackle complex academic issues.

Students must navigate an extensive body of literature to refine their chosen topics and generate novel ideas. Participant 2 remarked, "I read relevant material, which includes a lot of journals and articles." Participant 4 similarly emphasized the significance of extensive reading: "A lot of reading helped me understand the subject better and find answers to the questions I had." These insights illustrate that engaging with a broad range of academic sources not only strengthens the theoretical framework but also nurtures the critical thinking skills essential for thesis development.

Research skills are fundamental to academic writing, enabling the analysis of multiple perspectives, the integration of diverse sources, and the presentation of well-supported arguments. Participant 6 stated, "I spent a lot of time reading previous research, especially theses from the library, to get used to the study process and figure out the best way to approach my chosen topic." Participant 7 emphasized the significance of identifying research gaps: "I carefully looked into my problem by reading a lot of scientific papers. This method helped me find problems with my study." This approach facilitated the identification of challenges within the research. This analysis demonstrates that engaging in thorough research activities fosters critical thinking skills in students, enhancing their ability to pinpoint gaps in existing knowledge and enabling them to make meaningful contributions to their academic field.

Scholarly research demands precision and adherence to academic standards, particularly for EFL students who often face challenges related to language proficiency. Participant 7 explained, "I read carefully everything I could find on the subject I chose, focusing on national and foreign journals." The thorough examination of credible sources is crucial for

developing a coherent and effective thesis. Educators and institutions can enhance students' research skills by offering targeted workshops on citation styles, database navigation, and ethical considerations in academic writing (Agricola et al., 2018; Nurkamto et al., 2022).

Additionally, academic writing requires students to express their ideas clearly, integrating their research findings into a well-organized structure. Participant 1 described the initial experience as "confusing and stressful," but acknowledged that consistent interaction with research materials eventually improved her writing skills. Systematic documentation of research, adherence to citation standards, and organization of references using tools such as Zotero or Mendeley are essential for efficient knowledge synthesis and the promotion of academic integrity (Deiniatur et al., 2024; Syaifudin et al., 2018).

The research skills cultivated during the thesis-writing process extend beyond the academic domain, preparing students for lifelong learning and future professional challenges. Critical engagement with scholarly content fosters the intellectual capacity required to address complex issues, generate original ideas, and contribute meaningfully to disciplinary knowledge. These competencies not only support the successful completion of academic objectives but also serve as essential foundations for sustained academic and professional development.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a vital skill for EFL undergraduate students engaged in thesis writing, encompassing a range of cognitive processes required for academic research. This skill involves the systematic evaluation of sources, the construction of logical arguments, and the integration of complex information across disciplines.

Instructors promote analytical reasoning through diverse pedagogical methods such as Socratic questioning, argument mapping, collaborative problem-solving, and inquiry-based learning (Deiniatur & Cahyono, 2024; Syaifudin et al., 2018). These approaches support the deconstruction of complex arguments, the identification of implicit assumptions, and the critical appraisal of evidence, while encouraging a stance of constructive skepticism.

The practical application of critical thinking is evident throughout the thesis development process. Participant 1 emphasized the multifaceted nature:

"Strong analytical and critical thinking skills are required to synthesize knowledge from various sources and present clear arguments. In my research, I evaluate sources, formulate arguments, and reach conclusions."

This comprehensive approach allows students to navigate the complexities of academic discourse while maintaining intellectual rigor.

Source evaluation constitutes a fundamental component of critical analysis. Participant 2 highlighted this process by stating: "To successfully get useful information from research sources and make necessary changes, I need to be able to use critical thinking skills to look at research materials and revise my work." As emphasized by Ulhaq et

al. (2023) and Nunes et al. (2022), this process fosters active engagement with scholarly texts, encourages students to question established viewpoints, and deepens their understanding of both linguistic structures and subject-specific content.

Identifying research gaps represents a critical application of higher-order thinking skills in academic writing. Participant 3 highlighted that critical thinking is essential for evaluating scholarly articles, discerning gaps in existing literature, and integrating diverse sources of information. The ability to identify such gaps enables students to position their research meaningfully within broader academic discourse. Reinforcing this perspective, Participant 5 stated: "To read journals, find research gaps, and process knowledge, you need to be able to think critically."

In addition to source evaluation, critical thinking significantly contributes to the structural coherence of thesis writing. Participant 4 emphasized the role of critical thinking in connecting ideas across various chapters to ensure clarity and organization within the thesis. This structural function supports logical progression and enhances argumentative coherence throughout the research document. Similarly, Participant 6 affirmed that critical thinking is essential for integrating ideas across sections and maintaining the clarity and logic of the thesis.

Moreover, the effective use of theoretical frameworks is greatly facilitated by analytical reasoning. Participant 7 stated: "Critical thinking helps me connect my problems to a wide range of examples and situations and use theories correctly in my study." This ability to apply theoretical constructs appropriately is particularly valuable in interdisciplinary contexts. Supporting this view, as Participant 8 noted: "I can connect my topic to different situations and cases and use theories well in my study because I can think critically."

Cahyono et al. (2023) and Prihandoko et al. (2024) illustrate that an integrative approach to critical thinking enhances creative problem-solving and deepens students' understanding of language, literature, and culture. This cognitive framework enables learners to examine language within complex cultural contexts, applying diverse evaluative strategies to enhance both feedback literacy and writing proficiency.

Time Management

Time management is an essential skill for EFL undergraduate students who must navigate the multifaceted demands of thesis writing. In today's academic landscape, where students often juggle multiple responsibilities both within and beyond the university setting, the implementation of structured time-allocation strategies is critical to ensuring successful thesis completion (Deiniatur et al., 2024; Lobo, 2023). Time management encompasses various competencies, including project planning, task prioritization, and the ability to adapt to unexpected challenges.

Students who demonstrate proficiency in time management often adopt specific organizational systems. Participant 1 described an effective approach:

"Having a comprehensive timetable with specific periods each day for thesis-related tasks helped me better manage my time. This allowed me to maintain a balance between studying for classes and writing on my report."

This systematic scheduling exemplifies the practical application of research findings indicating that clearly defined temporal boundaries can enhance productivity and reduce cognitive load during complex academic tasks.

The implementation of evidence-based time management strategies provides students with structured approaches to improve their academic efficiency. [Djarmika et al. \(2022\)](#) highlight task prioritization techniques such as the Eisenhower Matrix (also referred to as the ABCDE method) and the Pomodoro Technique, which alternates concentrated work intervals with scheduled breaks to minimize fatigue and optimize focus. Participant 3 reflected this structured approach:

"I used a disciplined daily calendar to deal with time management issues. I set aside evenings for thesis-related reading and research, and the mornings for TOEFL practice."

The capacity to manage various responsibilities is a fundamental component of effective time management. Participant 5 highlighted the importance of balance:

"Good time management helped me balance my teaching duties, thesis writing, and other responsibilities. I devised procedures to deal with contradictory feedback from superiors and ensure ongoing progress."

The ability to manage competing demands corresponds with the findings of [Prihandoko et al. \(2024\)](#), which indicate that sustaining productivity amid complex academic challenges requires effective communication, strategic delegation, and continuous reassessment of priorities.

Time management plays a critical role for students, particularly during periods of emotional or physical fatigue. Participant 2 highlighted the importance of effective time management in overcoming frequent fatigue and low morale experienced while working on the thesis. This observation resonates with the findings of [Deiniatur and Cahyono \(2024\)](#), which suggest that identifying and prioritizing key tasks is essential for maintaining productivity during challenging periods.

The benefits of time management extend beyond the immediate demands of thesis writing. Participant 7 emphasized that effective time management was integral to the thesis development process, noting that the timely completion of the thesis was largely dependent on regular meetings with advisers, adherence to self-imposed deadlines, and the efficient management of research and writing tasks. These practices cultivate transferable skills that not only contribute to successful thesis completion but also enhance students' capabilities in subsequent academic and professional contexts.

Mastering time management entails specific challenges. Participant 8 acknowledged,

"The primary problem I faced prior to preparing the thesis was time management. I encountered a series of overlapping duties and personal situations that severely hampered my ability to concentrate on thesis writing."

This reflection aligns with the findings of [Stappenbelt and Basu \(2019\)](#), who assert that mastering the management of competing demands significantly enhances both the balance and productivity of the academic experience, despite the initial challenges faced during the process.

CONCLUSION

The study titled "Navigating Undergraduate Thesis Journey: Qualitative Exploration of Challenges, Strategies, and Skills in English Department Students" provides an in-depth analysis of the various challenges faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) undergraduate students during the thesis writing process. Linguistically, students encountered difficulties with grammar, vocabulary, academic tone, and source integration—elements essential for producing scholarly work. Psychologically, the process engendered stress, anxiety, and self-doubt, often resulting in procrastination and writer's block. Furthermore, limitations in resources, including access to digital materials, comprehension of academic conventions, and proficiency in utilizing technology for research and writing, were identified as significant obstacles.

To navigate these challenges, students implemented a range of strategies. Self-management techniques, including structured time management, mental health practices, and motivational approaches, were essential in maintaining progress. Technological tools, such as grammar checkers, reference management software, and productivity applications, played a pivotal role in enhancing writing quality and managing citations. Support systems, encompassing effective supervision, peer support, and institutional resources such as writing centers, were crucial for providing guidance, feedback, and emotional assistance. The thesis writing process also facilitated the development of several key skills. Research abilities were refined through the critical evaluation of sources, identification of research gaps, and application of research methodologies. Critical thinking and analytical skills were strengthened, allowing students to dissect complex arguments, assess evidence, and synthesize information. Additionally, time management and organizational skills were vital for balancing the long-term nature of the thesis project with other academic responsibilities.

The implications of this research suggest the need for integrated institutional support systems that address linguistic, psychological, and technical challenges. The incorporation of research and writing skills throughout the undergraduate curriculum could better equip students for the thesis process, thereby reducing anxiety and improving the overall quality of their theses. Additionally, training for supervisors in effective mentoring and communication practices could enhance the thesis supervision process,

making it more transparent, supportive, and productive. Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of thesis writing on students' academic and professional development.

Developing and evaluating intervention programs focused on improving specific skills such as academic writing, time management, and psychological resilience could provide practical solutions to the challenges identified in this study. Additionally, exploring the integration of technology into the thesis writing process, particularly in areas such as digital literacy and access to resources, would be valuable. This study emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to supporting EFL students in their thesis writing journey, underscoring the need for comprehensive institutional strategies that address the diverse needs of students. Such strategies would contribute to creating an environment that fosters both academic success and personal growth.

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