



Students' Barriers in Writing Thesis Proposal: Psychological Factors

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ABSTRACT

For undergraduate students, writing a thesis is an essential academic requirement since it offers a chance to combine theoretical knowledge with useful research techniques. However, the process of writing a thesis can be extremely difficult in developing nations like Indonesia, mostly because of psychological hurdles that have not received enough attention in local studies. The purpose of this study is to look at the psychological obstacles that Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari students enrolled in the English Language Education Program encounter when drafting their thesis proposals. Data were gathered from four final-year students using semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires using a descriptive qualitative methodology. Three primary themes emerged from the thematic analysis: challenges in starting and maintaining a writing career, effects on one's physical and mental well-being while writing, and methods and social support employed to get beyond these hurdles. It was discovered that psychological barriers including procrastination, anxiety, insecurity, and fear of failing have a detrimental impact on students' wellbeing and considerably slow down the writing process. Support from peers, family, and supervisors as well as individual coping mechanisms were essential in assisting students in handling the demands of their studies. Higher education institutions should offer holistic guidance approaches and a supportive learning environment to improve students' mental health and thesis completion, according to the study's findings, which also show that emotional and psychological preparedness is just as important for academic success as intellectual proficiency.

Introduction

Writing a thesis is a crucial academic requirement for students pursuing a bachelor's degree, offering a chance to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical research abilities. Students can refine their critical thinking, analytical, and academic communication skills through a thesis, which is more than just an academic assignment (Felix, R., & Smith, 2019). Additionally, the thesis gives students a chance to investigate problems or subjects related to their interests or desired careers. Because students must individually manage their research schedules and tackle hard problems with little supervision, this method develops intellectual curiosity as well as independence and tenacity. (Badley, 2009) asserts that the thesis is a thorough reflective learning process that transforms students into "novice

researchers" as opposed to just "recipients of knowledge." They acquire methodical thinking, study design, and scholarly communication skills through this process skills that are essential in both academic and professional settings. Active participation in undergraduate research has also been shown to improve students' employability abilities and equip them for obstacles they may face in the real world, according to (Healey, M., Jenkins, A., & Lea, 2013). Students are also exposed to the rigors of academic research through the thesis-writing process, which includes developing research questions, doing a literature review, organizing a methodology, gathering and analyzing data, and producing scholarly writing. Every one of these phases is essential to building a strong basis for subsequent professional or academic growth. The abilities acquired during the thesis-writing process are extremely pertinent and readily transferable to real-world situations in a variety of fields, including advanced research positions, project management, and policy creation. As a result, completing a thesis is a life-changing educational experience that not only gets students ready to graduate but also gives them the tools they need to approach problems outside of the classroom with consideration and competence.

However, despite its importance, the thesis writing process often proves to be a substantial obstacle for many students, particularly in underdeveloped nations like Indonesia. Numerous research have demonstrated that psychological barriers as well as technical difficulties can contribute to delays or failures in finishing theses (Lee, Y., & Kim, 2018; Stewart, S., & Hunter, 2018). This problem in higher education is not just a local one it is a global one. Numerous institutes of higher learning have attempted to assist students academically in response to these difficulties. Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari is one such instance, providing courses in educational research that address important subjects like problem identification, literature evaluation, data gathering, and analysis. The goal is to give students the tools they need to successfully finish their theses. Nevertheless, many students still find it difficult to complete their theses in spite of this academic support. These difficulties fall into two primary categories, according to (Zhang, Y., & Liu, 2020): internal barriers, such psychological stress, health problems, and misaligned learning styles; and external barriers, like peer, family, and thesis advisor pressure.

Numerous international studies have emphasized the important role psychological factors play in influencing academic success, including internal psychological hurdles. Students' academic performance and thesis writing skills have been demonstrated to be directly impacted by a variety of factors, including motivation, anxiety, self-esteem, personality traits (introversion vs. extroversion), empathy, and risk-taking inclinations (Muenchen, R. A., & Choi, 2017; Taylor, J., & Davis, 2020). For instance, (Jones, M., & Green, 2019; Jönsson, A., Beach, D., & Erlandson, 2021) discovered that students who have low self-esteem and high anxiety levels typically do poorly while writing under pressure. Furthermore, it has been discovered that interpersonal factors such as the rapport between students and their thesis advisors have a big impact on how easy or difficult it is to write a thesis (Khan, A., & Shaw, 2021; Robinson, D., & Harris, 2021). Although the association between psychological characteristics and academic achievement has been thoroughly examined in the international literature, the majority of this study has been carried out in

industrialized nations. Research on the psychological obstacles to thesis writing in poor nations, especially in Southeast Asia, is noticeably lacking (Kumar, R., & Singh, 2018; Martinez, E., & Silverstein, 2017). Students' experiences with academic pressure and psychological difficulties during the thesis writing process may be greatly impacted by the distinct social and cultural backdrop of these nations. Furthermore, there are still few studies in the literature that explicitly look at psychological hurdles in English language education programs, which require high levels of academic and language competency.

Few studies have looked at the environment of developing countries, especially in Southeast Asia, despite the fact that many worldwide research have looked at psychological aspects that affect academic achievement and the thesis writing process. Additionally, there is also a dearth of studies explicitly examining internal psychological hurdles in English language education programs, such as procrastination, academic anxiety, poor self-confidence, and fear of failure. This is concerning because these programs require high levels of academic and linguistic proficiency, which could put students under more psychological strain. Additionally, students' academic experiences may be greatly influenced by the distinct social and cultural background of places like Southeast Sulawesi. Empirical research is therefore required to show how students in regional academic environments encounter these psychological obstacles. This work intends to close that gap and provide a theoretical and practical contribution to the creation of academic assistance tactics that are more contextualized and sensitive to the affective requirements of students.

By addressing internal psychological impediments that have rarely been the main focus of thesis writing research, especially within the Southeast Asian setting, such as procrastination, academic anxiety, low self-confidence, and fear of failure, this study offers substantial innovation. This study examines a more intricate and particular set of psychological issues by concentrating on the English Language Education program at a university in Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, where students must meet high standards for both academic and linguistic proficiency. In addition to advancing theoretical discussion, the study suggests academic support techniques with psychological underpinnings that are attentive to context and students' emotional needs. Therefore, in addition to addressing a gap in the international literature that frequently ignores the Southeast Asian context, the study provides workable methods that can be used to increase thesis completion rates among students who face particular social and cultural difficulties.

Research Methods

The descriptive qualitative method used in this study places a strong emphasis on fully comprehending the lived experiences of the participants. Through detailed verbal descriptions in a natural setting, qualitative research seeks to investigate behavior, perceptions, intentions, and experiences (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2018). The interpretivist paradigm, which aims to comprehend the meanings people ascribe to their experiences, is consistent with this methodology (Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, 2011; Schwandt, 2015). This method was chosen in order to collect comprehensive and nuanced information about students who experience psychological difficulties while writing their theses.

Four final-year thesis candidates were selected based on their relevant experiences and capacity to provide insightful knowledge on the topic. Intentional sampling, which is especially helpful in qualitative research for identifying and choosing instances with a wealth of information to maximize the use of few resources, was used to recruit participants (Gentles, S. J., Charles, C., Ploeg, J., & McKibbin, 2015; Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, 2015; Patton, 2002). In their study of the stress Iranian PhD students had while writing their theses, (Bazrafkan, L., Shokrpour, N., Yousefi, A., & Yamani, 2016) employed a similar purposive sample technique, highlighting the importance of rich, context-specific narratives for analyzing emotional challenges. . The emotional experiences of master's students writing theses under English Medium Instruction (EMI) were also examined by (Tsou, W., & Kao, 2024) using qualitative research, emphasizing the vital role that emotional stability and resilience play in academic achievement.

The researchers modified a previously validated open-ended questionnaire with nine items, initially derived from (Brown, 2000), to investigate participants' perspectives and experiences. Semi-structured interviews were the main technique used to collect data, and because of their adaptability and responsiveness, they allowed for a more thorough investigation of participants' subjective experiences (Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, 2008; Jamshed, 2014; Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview guide was created to concentrate on important psychological issues while being receptive to fresh and pertinent information.

The questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp to start the data collection process. The researcher interviewed each participant individually in a semi-structured manner after obtaining their responses. To guarantee clear communication, these interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and were videotaped. To ensure accuracy, the researcher listened to the audio several times after transcription. The data was then analyzed using thematic analysis, which allows for the detection, interpretation, and reporting of patterns within qualitative data (Braun, V., & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, 2013). This technique preserved the depth and complexity of the data throughout the research process by offering a methodical yet adaptable way to interpret students' psychological challenges while writing their theses (Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, 1985; Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, 2017).

Findings

Numerous psychological problems that impair students' capacity to draft their thesis proposals were found in this study. Three major themes that represent the fundamental difficulties that the students confront surfaced from the examination of the questionnaire and interview data. The first theme focuses on obstacles to producing proposals, such as trouble coming up with concepts and structuring the text. The second subject focuses on the psychological and physical effects of writing, including weariness, tension, worry, and a decline in motivation. The third element focuses on the coping mechanisms and support systems that students utilize to get over these difficulties. These include personal coping

mechanisms like time management and increasing internal motivation, as well as emotional support from classmates and supervisors. In the context of preparing thesis proposals, these three main topics are further subdivided into a number of sub-themes that offer a more thorough understanding of the kinds of challenges faced and the ways in which students overcame them.

Factors that Prevent Writing Proposals

The numerous obstacles that prevent students from starting and finishing their thesis projects are examined in this section. The difficulties noted have deep psychological and interpersonal roots in addition to being technical or academic in character. These challenges, which range from self-doubt and procrastination to fear of criticism and communication issues with supervisors, highlight the intricate realities of the proposal writing process. The discussion that follows is divided into a number of important subthemes that arose from the data, each of which emphasizes a particular kind of obstacle that students commonly face.

Postponement of Writing

Some students claim that they usually have trouble putting off writing their thesis proposals. The findings suggest that internal dynamics are more likely to be the cause of delays, even when external factors may have some influence. Things like mood swings, a sense of sluggishness, lack of motivation and a lack of confidence are the biggest obstacles for many students. For instance, participant "p" said:

"I find it challenging to concentrate and stay consistent when writing proposals because of my frequent mood swings and feelings of laziness."

This illustrates how changing emotional states can directly impact academic performance. Lack of motivation also played a key role, as students described struggling to find a sense of purpose or drive to write. Another participant "a" mentioned that a lack of understanding of the selected topic was one of the primary reasons for the delay:

"I can put off writing for months due to a number of reasons, including my fear of making mistakes in my writing and my belief that I do not fully understand the topic I have chosen."

Additionally, as participants "pt" and "rd" said, a major contributing cause to procrastination was the fear of repeated modifications. These results imply that writing a thesis is not only a cognitive activity but also a highly emotional one, with students' decisions to put off their work being greatly influenced by their fear about evaluation and a lack of intrinsic motivation further compounded these emotional barriers.

Having Trouble Beginning to Write

Students struggle to begin the proposal writing process for a variety of psychological reasons. Anxiety about one's own and academic superiors' expectations is one of the primary causes. For instance, participant "p" mentioned that students frequently fear their ideas would be disapproved of or need to be significantly revised.

"I find it difficult to begin writing a proposal because I'm worried that I won't live up to my supervisor's or my own expectations."

This demonstrates the existence of psychological constraints from both the inside and the outside, where pupils feel their thoughts are insufficient even before they start writing. Furthermore, participant "rd" highlighted how deadlines exacerbate emotional strain:

"When I have to finish the proposal in a short amount of time, I get anxious and find it difficult to get started..."

These findings show that anxiety is not limited to the revision stage but also influences students' motivation and readiness to begin the writing process. A lack of intrinsic motivation further compounded these emotional barriers, making it harder for students to take the first steps in writing their proposals

Insecurity in Communicating Concepts

When it comes to exchanging ideas with their thesis advisors, many students struggle. Many students struggle with this confusion because they question the caliber or applicability of the arguments they make. This is frequently the result of a lack of faith in their intellectual skills and a lack of intrinsic motivation. As stated by participant "p":

"I often feel that my ideas won't be enough, so I'm afraid to voice them in meetings with my supervisor..."

Not every student, though, had this kind of trouble. For instance, participant "rd" showed assurance in voicing their thoughts and saw consultations as chances for learning:

"I never hold back when voicing my thoughts... Speaking with my supervisor will allow me to think more deeply..."

These variations show that students' perceptions of their supervisors' responses whether positive or negative have an impact on their capacity to express their academic views. People who see consultations as a learning experience are more likely to be candid and self-assured while sharing their opinions.

Difficulty in Adjusting Writing to Supervisor Expectations

A few students also mentioned that they had trouble matching their writing to their supervisors' standards. This demonstrates how difficult it is for pupils to balance conflicting academic demands. The disparity between supervisors' writing preferences and academic requirements was one of the main problems identified. Pupils frequently find it difficult to live up to the many expectations set on them and a lack of intrinsic motivation. Participant "a" made the following observation:

"I sometimes find it difficult to modify my writing to meet the expectations of my supervisor, particularly when the advice is rather ambiguous."

In the meantime, participant "rd" stated that they had no trouble fulfilling expectations because of the precise and organized feedback they received:

"My lecturer consistently provided me with helpful and unambiguous instructions..."

These results highlight how crucial it is for students and supervisors to communicate effectively. Supervisors can greatly lessen students' mental tension and boost their writing confidence by providing clear and consistent assistance.

Impact of the Proposal Writing Process on Students' Physical and Mental Health

The effects of the proposal writing process on students' physical and mental health will be covered in length in the section that follows. Examining the psychological and physical symptoms that students have while juggling the academic responsibilities of preparing their proposals is part of this. Three main topics will be covered in the conversation: the impact of academic pressure on physical health, students' emotional coping strategies, and the psychosomatic repercussions of stress. These subthemes offer a thorough grasp of how academic difficulties might impact pupils in ways that go beyond their academic achievement.

Anxiety's Effect on Health

Excessive academic pressure throughout the proposal writing process has been shown to have an impact on students' physical and emotional health. It has been demonstrated that excessive worry has a detrimental impact on students' academic achievement as well as their physical and emotional well-being. Participant "p" noted erratic eating and sleeping patterns as a result of the stress of preparing the proposal:

"Because, I was hectic approximately drafting the proposal, I had problem sleeping and eating properly..."

In a similar vein, participant "pt" reported feeling less hungry, however participant "rd" reported experiencing bodily symptoms like headaches and lightheadedness. These answers imply that psychosomatic health problems may result from extreme academic strain while creating a proposal.

Excessive Anxiety in Receiving Criticism

Writing a thesis proposal often involves responding emotionally to criticism from academic supervisors. When their supervisors gave them feedback, several students said their anxiety levels rose. The idea that criticism being interpreted as an indication of intellectual inferiority is one prevalent worry. "a" participant said:

"I usually get anxious when I come across modifications or fresh suggestions because I worry that the feedback will suggest that my abilities are inadequate."

These inferiority complexes are frequently exacerbated by a lack of intrinsic motivation. Feedback may be seen more adversely by students who lack personal motivation because they worry that they won't be able to live up to expectations. Additionally, they might feel disengaged from the work at hand, which would make them more anxious. Nonetheless, some students like "rd" have started to believe that feedback is a crucial component of the learning process:

" I rarely become overly anxious... I try to see criticism as an opportunity to improve..."

These results suggest a variety of emotional coping mechanisms. Compared to students who see criticism as a danger to their self-worth, those who have a growth mindset are better able to handle the demands of the classroom.

Assistance and Techniques for Getting Past Challenges in the Proposal Writing Process

The results show that students used a variety of techniques to get around obstacles when crafting their proposals. Three main themes surfaced: social support, preferred writing styles, and personal coping mechanisms. The parts that follow go into greater detail on these subthemes.

The Role of Social Support During the Proposal Writing Process

Students who are under psychological pressure when composing their thesis proposals want assistance from their social surroundings in addition to their own skills. For students to successfully manage academic stress, support from classmates, family, and academic supervisors is crucial. Participant "p" emphasized how friends provide emotional support:

"My buddies are a great source of emotional support when I'm feeling nervous or stressed..."

In the meantime, "pt" highlighted the importance of family members' moral support and encouragement. The notion that robust social networks act as protective barriers against academic stress is corroborated by these data. This implies that having supportive and emotionally stable close friends and family members can help students stay strong during the difficult proposal writing process. However, a lack of intrinsic motivation may cause some students to withdraw or hesitate to seek help, even when social support is available, thereby intensifying their academic stress.

Preferences in the Proposal Writing Process

Students frequently have varying tastes when it comes to how they approach the task of producing a thesis proposal. Some students discover that writing on their own helps them stay more focused and autonomous, which aids in their ability to handle the intricacy of the writing process. As an example, participant "p" said:

"I feel more at ease making proposals on my own..."

However, some students continued to be receptive to the views of others in order to expand their horizons and bolster their claims. There is no one-size-fits-all method for preparing a thesis proposal, as these varying choices demonstrate. These differences imply that each person's learning style has a significant impact on their comfort level with the academic writing process.

Students' Techniques for Handling Stress and Anxiety

Students used a variety of coping strategies to deal with the stress and anxiety they encountered while writing their theses due to psychological demands. During this difficult academic journey, these techniques helped them stay emotionally and physically healthy while increasing their productivity and efficiency. In order to lessen the detrimental effects

of academic stress, the students emphasized the significance of preparation and self-care. They employed a variety of strategies, such as being well-prepared for consultations, talking to friends about worries, staying physically healthy, and keeping an optimistic outlook. "Pt," one of the participants, said:

"I also try to keep my expectations reasonable and remind myself that the goals are learning and development, not perfection."

These strategies demonstrate students' attempts to cope with academic pressure while also emphasizing the value of proactive planning and self-care as critical components in improving their wellbeing and output during trying academic times.

Overall, the study's findings show that drafting a thesis proposal is a complicated psychological process impacted by a number of internal and external circumstances rather than just being an academic assignment. A deep understanding of the actual experiences of students in the English Language Education program may be gained from the three primary themes that arose from the data: obstacles to writing, emotional and physical effects, and coping mechanisms used by students. These results serve as a vital starting point for the debate that follows, in which these psychological difficulties will be examined in more detail in light of pertinent ideas and earlier studies. The researcher will evaluate these results in the context of previous research in the discussion part and offer suggestions for better academic assistance techniques to assist students in overcoming psychological obstacles while writing their theses.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the psychological issues that develop and the barriers that students face when composing their thesis proposals. The results demonstrate that psychological obstacles like fear, inhibition, and low motivation are significant difficulties that students encounter. These impediments not only impair academic productivity but also their entire psychological well-being. (Brown, 2000) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which highlights the substantial impact of psychological factors on learning outcomes, is consistent with these findings. This idea holds that negative emotions like dread and anxiety impair pupils' capacity to comprehend and remember academic material, forming an emotional "filter" that impedes learning and advancement. The study's findings highlight how important it is to address these psychological and emotional issues in order to enhance students' academic achievement and general wellbeing while they are writing their theses.

According to (Brown, 2000), psychological obstacles such as shyness, a fear of making mistakes, and a negative self-perception are examples of inhibition. Students in this study showed a lack of confidence and a fear of failing, which made it difficult for them to openly express their thoughts in academic writing. Negative interpretations of supervisor feedback, which were frequently interpreted as personal failure rather than helpful criticism, exacerbated these sentiments. Writing anxiety and achievement motivation among EFL students in Iraq were found to be significantly correlated negatively by (Sabti, A. A. A.,

Rashid, R. A., & Tadros, 2019). Higher anxiety levels tend to make students less inclined to write, which has an impact on how well they write for academic purposes. Similar to this, (Tsao, C.-W., Wang, Y.-S., & Lin, 2017) observed that students' ability to improve their writing is limited by high anxiety levels, which have a detrimental impact on their perception of feedback and self-evaluation.

Anxiety over writing a thesis can show up as anxiousness during consultations, trouble commencing the writing process, and dread of making mistakes. According to (Brown, 2000), this kind of anxiety is crippling and can significantly impede academic achievement. Students frequently use procrastination as a coping strategy to deal with the psychological stress they encounter. (Taffs, K., & Holt, 2019) demonstrated how pedagogically created digital materials might increase students' confidence and lessen their writing anxiety. The need for more adaptable academic support systems is further highlighted by (Mitchell, K., Snyder, C., & Abernathy, 2019) finding that students with high writing anxiety frequently seek out extra help yet believe that feedback is ineffective.

Motivation is a key factor in determining how well students can endure academic difficulties when writing theses. Effective learning requires both external and internal motivation. Students who lack motivation frequently put things off and feel alone, especially when they are confronted with theoretical or methodological challenges. Lack of social support makes this issue worse. This is consistent with the Self-Determination Theory of (Deci, E. L., & Ryan, 1985), which holds that people become motivated when their core psychological needs autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied. Additionally, (Sabti, A. A. A., Rashid, R. A., & Tadros, 2019) found a significant correlation between writing self-efficacy and motivation, suggesting that motivated students are more likely to believe in their academic prowess. Similarly, (Papi, M., Bondarenko, A. V., Nejad, A. M., & Feng, 2021) discovered that students' academic performance in writing assignments is significantly improved by motivation fueled by curiosity and personal objectives. Thus, encouraging and maintaining student motivation is essential to assisting them in successfully finishing their theses while reducing psychological suffering.

Examining how students actively manage the psychological difficulties they encounter during the thesis writing process is just as crucial as comprehending the significance of motivation and self-efficacy. Participants used a variety of coping strategies to address these challenges, such as staying physically well, looking for peer support, and being well-prepared before supervision sessions. (Taffs, K., & Holt, 2019) assert that incorporating pedagogically directed digital tools is a successful tactic for lowering anxiety and enhancing writing skills. Furthermore, it's critical to cultivate a growth mentality, which holds that intelligence may be enhanced via work and education. Students who adopt this mentality are better able to see criticism as a teaching tool rather than a sign of their own shortcomings. In this situation, students' psychological health and academic resilience are strengthened via emotional support and adaptive learning techniques. Accordingly, (Howell, 2021) discovered that students who possess a growth mentality are more capable of handling academic pressure and sustaining productivity when faced with challenging writing assignments.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significance of affective elements in academic writing, particularly in higher education environments, by demonstrating how psychological barriers including inhibition, anxiety, and poor motivation significantly impair students' ability to create and finish their thesis proposals. The results may not be as broadly applicable as they may be due to the study's limitations, which include a small sample size and its exclusive focus on one school and culture. Furthermore, the information was based on self-reported experiences, which could be biased. In order to comprehend the dynamic psychological experiences of students during the thesis writing process, future research is advised to use a mixed-methods or longitudinal approach. Additionally, the scope should be expanded to include diverse institutions and cultures in order to identify more context-specific psychological factors. Future research might also examine the usefulness of interventions like structured writing workshops, peer mentorship programs, or digital self-regulation tools in lowering academic anxiety and enhancing writing efficacy. The research's conclusions highlight the necessity of an all-encompassing strategy for academic supervision that offers structured psychological support in addition to cognitive and methodological elements. Academic supervisors ought to receive training on how to spot the symptoms of academic stress and provide supportive, helpful advice. In order to promote student well-being and improve academic quality, higher education institutions are urged to incorporate writing support programs and mental health services into their academic structures. This will ultimately create a more psychologically supportive learning environment that increases student resilience, academic performance, and thesis completion rates.

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