

artikel_SEMNAS- Dwi_Rahayu_7.pdf

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Submission date: 17-Jul-2023 05:36PM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 2132508987

File name: artikel_SEMNAS-Dwi_Rahayu_7.pdf (417.92K)

Word count: 3344

Character count: 19118

STUDENTS' BARRIERS IN COMPLETING THESIS DURING PANDEMIC OF COVID-19

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Abstract

The various impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are felt by students, including undergraduate students who have to finish their study. The existence of large-scale social restrictions (PSBB) implemented by the government was one of the obstacles during the time of doing their research. Thesis is one of the requirements that must be met for getting an undergraduate degree. The purposes of this study were to determine the barriers of English Language Education students of STKIP PGRI Pacitan in completing their thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic and formulating some suggestions for moving students' research forward. This research is a qualitative descriptive study. The subjects of this research are final year students, who are currently completing their thesis. The data collection techniques were questionnaires and online interviews. The results showed that the English Language Education students of STKIP PGRI Pacitan in completing their thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced difficulties in the process of determining topics, collecting data, searching for literature, and mentoring process.

Keywords: Barriers, Completing Thesis, Pandemic of Covid-19.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease-19) pandemic has affected education systems around the world, leading to the closure of schools, including colleges. Public health experts and government officials are taking several steps, including social distancing, isolation or quarantine; strengthening health facilities and encouraging people to work from home (Bedford et al. 2020). The pandemic quickly led to the closure of universities and colleges around the world with government instructions to follow social distancing that could help to flatten the infection curve and reduce total fatalities from the disease. The policies taken by many countries, including Indonesia, by closing all educational activities at schools and campuses, have made the government and related institutions have to present an alternative educational process for students who cannot carry out the educational process at educational institutions. The results of the decree from the Minister of Education (2020) stated that all learning activities both in schools and colleges were carried out at home, in their respective, through an available application. Although this is not new thing because the house has been the center of learning, especially in terms of informal education, however, when the whole learning process is carried out from home or online, this change has caused various reactions, especially from students.

STKIP PGRI Pacitan has also set some special regulations concerning with students' final project or thesis including directions for changes in titles when it is considered necessary and writing

scientific articles to replace the thesis if the data collection process will not be carried out for the current situation. However, Many problems appear during the process of thesis writing, from the stage of determining the topic which is suitable with the current situation, finding literature as supporting data for the thesis due to the closure of the library, the online mentoring process that is also considered ineffective due to limited discussion sessions and frequent miscommunication. Moreover, the requirement of using technology as a media to replace the direct interaction is also one of the obstacle faced by the students during Covid-19 pandemic.

In a specific circumstances, students of English Language Program, as English Foreign Language students, face problems in writing, especially in English academic writing for some factors, from language competence, writing motivation to writing anxiety. Haider (2012) states that student writers face various writing problems at different stages of their learning. Generally, these problems can be classified into linguistic, psychological, cognitive and pedagogical categories. Nunan (1989) argues that writing is an extremely difficult cognitive activity which requires the learner to have control over various factors. These factors vary from academic background and personal interest of the writer to various psychological, linguistic and cognitive phenomena (Dar & Khan, 2015).

Burgess, S., & Sievertsen, H. H. (2020) state that the transition from direct learning to online learning has a serious impact on their assessment and evaluation. Students experience significant disturbances in the completion and final assessment of their studies. Certainly it is not expected that students will experience late graduation due to the existence of the pandemic. It is reasonable to conduct research to uncover the students' barriers in completing the thesis during the COVID-19 Pandemic, to suggest some proper solution dealing with the problems

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Covid-19 pandemic that has hit almost all countries in the world, provides its own challenges for educational institutions, in particular college. The Indonesian government has imposed a ban on crowding, maintaining social and physical distancing, wearing a mask and washing hands to fight the spread of the virus. Through the Ministry of Education and Culture, the government has banned universities for carrying out face-to-face (conventional) lectures and order to organize online lectures or far distance learning (Kemendikbud Dikti, 2020). Many universities responded quickly to the government instructions, by issuing instruction regarding prevention of the spread of the corona virus disease (Covid-19) in the campus environment. Based on the circular of the Minister of Education and Culture, one of the points is a recommendation for implementing online learning (Yandwiputra, 2020). Almost all colleges in Indonesia have implemented online learning anticipating the spread of Covid-19 (CNN Indonesia, 2020).

Apart from being able to suppress the chain of spreading Covid-19 in the campus environment, online learning should have a good impact on students, namely being able to foster independent learning (self regulated learning). As it is stated by Oknisi, N., & Suyoto, S. (2019) that the use of

on-line applications can improve learning independence. Furthermore, Kuo et al. (2014) stated that online learning tends to be student-centered which causes them to be able to create responsibility and autonomy in learning. Learning online requires students to prepare their own learning, evaluate, organize and simultaneously maintain motivation in learning (Aina, M., 2016). Sobron, A. N., & Bayu, R. (2019) stated that online learning can increase students' interest.

However, online learning has special challenges, such as the separate location of students and lecturers when implementing it, causing lecturers to not be able to directly supervise student activities during the learning process. There is no guarantee that students really listen to lecturers' reviews. Szpunar, Moulton, & Schacter, (2013) reported in their research that students fantasized more frequently in online lectures than in face-to-face lectures. Therefore, it is suggested that online learning should be held in a short time, considering that students find it difficult to maintain their concentration if online lectures are held for more than one hour (Khan., 2012). The results of the study also reported that not a few students had difficulty understanding the lecture material provided online. Teaching materials are usually delivered in the form of reading that is not easily understood by students (Sadikin, A., & Hakim, N., 2019). Students assume that the material and assignments are not sufficient because they need direct explanation by the lecturer (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005). Jamaluddin, D., Ratnasih, T., Gunawan, H., & Paujiah, E. (2020) stated that learning online has its own strengths, challenges and obstacles. Furthermore, the challenge of online learning is the availability of internet services. Those who live in remote areas have difficulty connecting to the internet. This is a special challenge in implementing online learning. Online learning is not optimal when internet service is poor, and lecturer instructions are poorly understood by students (Astuti, P., & Febrian, F., 2019).

This challenge is also experienced by students who are currently writing their thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on her research, Ayu (2020) stated that students of Biological Education FKIP UMS experience difficulties in the process of examination, guidance, data collection and literature searches. The challenge is also faced by students who have to write their thesis in English Language, especially for foreign language learners. Writing is the most challenging area in learning foreign language. Students face various problems at different stages of their writing. Generally, the writing problems can be classified into linguistic, psychological, cognitive and pedagogical categories (Haider, 2012). Many factors cause lack of confidence in learners, especially in conducting academic writing, such as the structural component of English, coherency, and converting idea into text. Nik, Hamzah, & Ra dee (2010) claimed that students struggle with the structural components of English; because an inappropriate structure complicates the content and comprehension of the text, which a reader deciphers through involvement of a mental process. Similarly, an incoherent text fails to communicate ideas which causes lack of confidence in learners even if they have mastered syntactic, lexical and grammatical command over text composition (Rico, 2014). Dar & Khan (2015), in their

research found that Pakistani student writers encounter psychological, cognitive, social and linguistic problems while converting ideas into text.

METHODS

The type of this research is quantitative research in descriptive and inferential as well. The researcher applied an adapted questionnaire as an instrument. The participants required answering all the items in the questionnaire to give their own perception and feeling about their problems in completing their thesis especially during Covid-19 pandemic. The researcher also conducted an online interview as an effort to get detail information dealing with the students' barriers in completing their thesis. A small scale exploratory research was conducted to analyze problems faced by students in completing their thesis and formulate suggestions to overcome these problems.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Findings of this study have been categorized into following two major areas: students barriers' in completing thesis during pandemic of Covid-19 and suggestions to overcome the problems.

1. Students Barriers' in Completing Thesis during Pandemic of Covid-19

The results showed several barriers faced by students in completing their thesis during the Covid-19 pandemic. The first barrier is topic selection. Some students experience problems in selecting topics. The following figure 1.1 shows the result of questionnaire in term of finding topic.

I found it difficult to find a topic that fits the Covid-19 pandemic situation

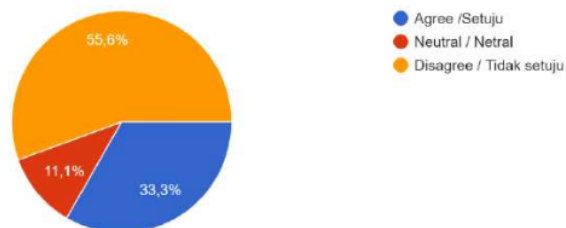


Figure 1.1 Topic Selection-item 34

Dealing with the item "I found it difficult to find a topic that fits the Covid-19 pandemic situation", 33,3% students agree, 11,1% neutral, and 55,6% disagree. It indicates that some students have problems in finding topic, but most of them have no problems with it. The problem arose because some students have to adjust their topic for the existence of Covid-19 pandemic. As it is showed in the following figure 1.2

"For the existence of Covid-19 pandemic, I have to adjust the topic of my thesis."

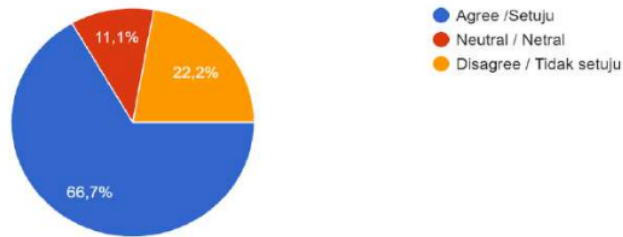


Figure 1.2 Topic Selection-item 33

It is supported by the result of interview that it is not a problem to find a topic but the problem is that they have to adapt to the current situation. As what a respondents said: “*Untuk pemilihan topic tidak terlalu bermasalah. Hanya saja, saya harus menyesuaikan topik yang saya ambil dengan kondisi saat ini. Misalnya saja Pembelajaran di masa pandemic*”. In addition, the other respondent said: “*Topik yang saya pilih harus menyesuaikan keadaan sekarang sedangkan saya sudah mempersiapkan judul yang berbeda sebelumnya dan sesuai dengan kemampuan saya*”. She stated that she had to adjust his topic with the current situation, whereas she had prepared the other topic which is suitable with her competence.

The second barrier is dealing with data retrieval. Answering the question about the biggest problem in completing thesis during Covid-19 pandemic, most interviewee said that the most problem is obtaining data. It is caused by some factors such as the absence of direct meeting with the respondents, so they have to take the data via online. In addition, some students said that they had problem with internet signal so they have difficulty in obtaining data.

The third barrier is online mentoring. 53,8% respondents agree with the item “Online mentoring is an obstacle for me in completing thesis report”, 23,1% neutral, and 23,1% disagree. It means that most of them feel difficult when they cannot communicate face to face with the advisors.

“Online mentoring is an obstacle for me in completing thesis report.”

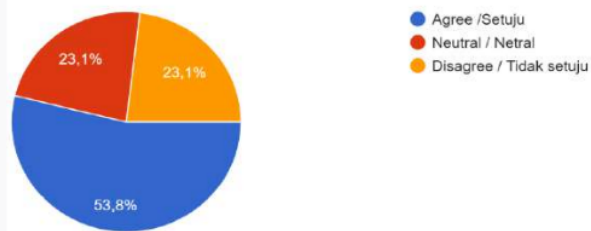


Figure 1.3 Online Mentoring-item 27

It is supported by the result of interview. One respondent said: “*Saya rasa pembimbingan skripsi saat pandemi belum bisa maksimal. Seperti yang kita tahu kita tidak bisa bertemu dan berkonsultasi secara langsung dengan dosen pembimbing. Walaupun terkadang menggunakan pertemuan virtual , tetapi itu belum bisa membantu saya*”. Regardless of virtual guidance, students still feel that they have not been maximally helped.

The forth barrier faced by students in completing their thesis is referencing. In terms of finding reference, 66.7% of the students agreed that after determining the research topics, they have difficulty in obtaining appropriate references. As it is seen at the following figure 1.4

“After finding topic, I found difficulty in getting relevant reference sources”

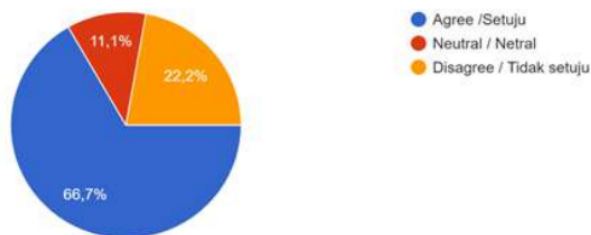


Figure 1.4 Referencing- item 35

The interview result indicates that students have some obstacles in finding references during the pandemic. Starting from the unsupported network and media they have to their hesitance in determining a good reference to support their thesis, as well as limited opportunities to find references offline. One interviewee said: *“Kendala dalam mencari referensi saat pandemi itu sangat banyak. Mulai dari jaringan dan media yang saya miliki itu kurang memadai, kemudian masih bingung dalam menentukan referensi yang baik untuk mendukung skripsi saya, juga kesempatan untuk mencari referensi secara offline menjadi terbatas”*

Further, with regard to referencing students feel hesitant in forming accurate citation. The findings indicate that some respondents admitted that they are all experienced difficulty in incorporating other works into their research report. It includes the technique of paraphrasing.

“I feel hesitant in forming accurate citation”

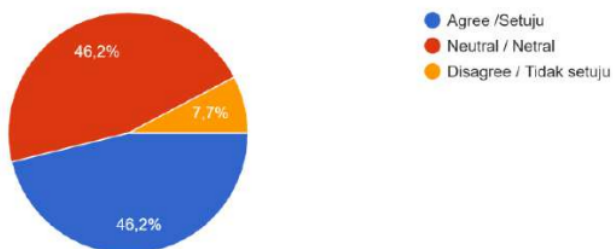


Figure 1.5 Referencing- item 23

In addition to this, there are other factors that contribute to the students difficulty in completing their thesis, namely their linguistic competence and their knowledge of research methods. The following figure 1.6 reveals that their most difficulty in academic writing is language use, including grammatical features and vocabulary use.

“What I suffer from the most in academic writing is the language use”

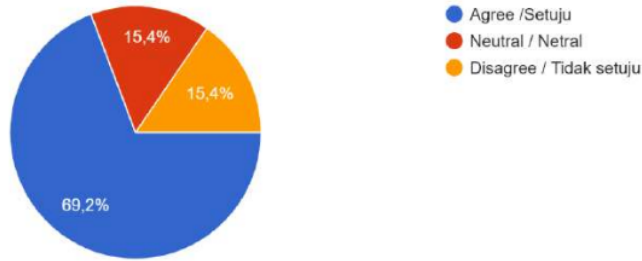


Figure 1.6 Linguistic competence- item 16

The finding is also emphasized in the following item of questionnaire which show that more than half of respondents admitted that they cannot identify their own mistake in writing, so that they got difficulty in revising their writing.

“ I have difficulty in revising my writing as I have no ability to see my own mistake”

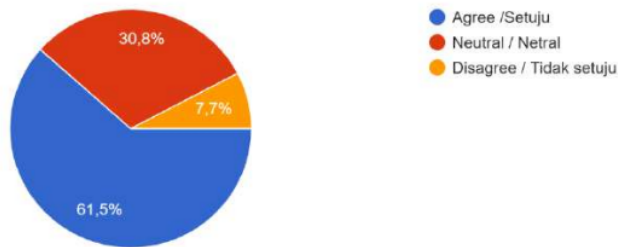


Figure 1.7 Linguistic Competence- item 17

Dealing with the knowledge of research methods, respondents confirmed as shown in Figure 1.8 below.

“I do not fully understand the research methodology and the rules of writing scientific paper”

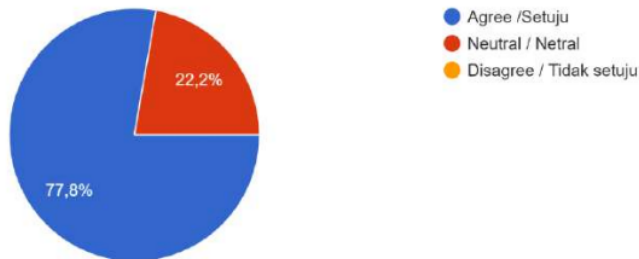


Figure 1.8 knowledge of research methodology-Item 29

77% respondents agree with the item, and 22,2% of them neutral. It indicates that their knowledge of research methodology is till low.

2. Suggestions to Solve the Students' Barriers in Completing Thesis during Pandemic of Covid-19

Encouraging students to complete their thesis on time to avoid late graduation due to the existence of the pandemic, there must be recommended suggestions both for students and lecturer to address the problems. Depending on the analysis of data gathered from students of English Education Program STKIP PGRI Pacitan, a number of solutions to the difficulties they face in competing thesis is presented.

For Advisors:

- a. Create a specific group
- b. Monitor progress on guidance routinely
- c. Share references to students
- d. Held a video conference
- e. Always Keep Healthy

For Students

- a. Choose easy and low cost research topics but not contrary to the academic values, so that it is easily to find the references and inexpensive to implement the research.
- b. Digital-based data collection. Take the advantage of digital technology in obtaining research data.
- c. Looking for a place that has a sufficient internet network, use videocall-based applications such as zoom, Whatsapp, Skype or others to ask for more explanation from the advisor if the previous explanation is not understandable.
- d. Make an appointment or schedule to conduct online consultations for a certain duration of time, so that the work or preparation of the article is completed at the right time.
- e. Related to students' lack of understanding in carrying out research methods, the solution is to carry out online consultations. Students can take advantage for being able to do it anywhere.
- f. Take an initiative to ask the advisor if there are some problems that are not clearly understood.

CONCLUSION

Results have shown that students have difficulties in adjusting the research topic to the current situation, in obtaining data for the absence of direct meeting with respondents, online counseling that is ineffective for students to understand clearly the information from the advisors, in revising their own writing pieces as they can hardly detect their mistakes, in referencing as the students feel hesitant about finding appropriate reference source and how to form a good citation, and insufficient internet network and media for the students who live in remote areas. Additionally, linguistic competence including grammatical features and vocabulary use form another problems that cannot be overlooked and the students' lack understanding of research methodology also affect to the process of completing the thesis. Moreover, the study concluded by suggesting some ways to deal with the problem for both students and advisors.

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