Analyzing the Background of Students' Thesis Proposal at English Education of Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah Medan

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ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the skills that have to be mastered by students in learning English, especially at the tertiary level. It is expected that the students are able to write the background of research problems since, as the first part of thesis proposal, it is very significant. This paper aimed to analyze the students' ability to provide a background for a thesis proposal. The subjects of the research were English Department students of Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah Medan in academic year 2017/2018. The descriptive research design was utilized in this study to describe the students' ability in composing the background of research problems. 10 backgrounds of research problems from different thesis proposals were chosen as the sources of the research. It consists of an opening paragraph, a gap, the reason of choosing the research topic, and the language used in writing the background of research problems. The students' ability to compose the background of the thesis proposal was rated as "fair" in the study. The average result obtained by students was 60. It indicated that the students should improve their ability in composing the background of research problems.

Keywords: Ability, Background, Thesis Proposal, Writing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the skills that have to be mastered by students in learning English, especially at the tertiary level. Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah Medan (UMN AW), as one of the tertiary levels, offers writing classes for its students in order to assist them in developing their writing skill. At the last, it is expected that the students can write a thesis proposal.

A thesis proposal is a foundation in the procedure of writing a thesis before collect the data which is started with the introduction section. [1] states that a thesis proposal must clearlytell the readers at least two things: what the writer wants to do and how the writer does it. The introduction plays an important role that contains all requirements including describing what a researcher will do in the research and what she/he will produce. The introduction written by the students includes some aspects; one of them is the background of the research

problem. As the first part of a thesis proposal, the background of the research problem is very significant because it measures the researcher's understanding of the study.

However, in writing the background of the thesis proposal seems to be the far more diffucult part for students [2]; [3]. Students get difficulties in writing the background since they have limited knowledge. Although students have learned the language for so many years, they still find it difficult to write. Along with this, several internal and external factors are also affected the students in writing backgrounds of thesis proposal[4];[5].

Thus, the students should improve their ability in writing the background of research problems. [6] says that a proposal should have a key element involving in designing a complete research. The introduction or chapter one deals with the background, research problems, objectives, and others [7]. In this research, the

researcher focused to analyze the background of the thesis proposal. [8] said that the background of the study consists of three parts namely; introductory paragraph; body paragraph; and conclusion. [8]; [9] said that in arranging an opening paragraph that can be used with an inverted pyramid model, the first paragraph reveals a general picture of the problem to be studied. This is done through the elaboration of definitions taken from the variable title of our research. This matter is done through the translation of definitions taken from variables our research title variable.

The second is the body paragraph. As stated by [9],[10] and [11] , the content in the background of research problem contains arguments why the research is important to do or why it needs to be studied. [12] Mentions that there is happening on research. However, in that event, there appear to be irregularities from existing standards, both scientific and unscientific standards rules. In this background, a researcher must analyze the problem to become clear [8];[9]. Through analysis of this problem, researchers must be able to show any deviation and write down why it needs to be studied.The last is a conclusion. The conclusion is the final paragraph is quite filled with alternative solutions that can be offered (theoretical and practical).

For this reason, the writer should know the components of a thesis proposal especially in writing the background of thesis proposal such as how to make an opening paragraph, to find a gap, the reason why choosing research, etc. Furthermore, the use of language should be considered by writer. [13];[14] mention that linguistic features of introduction chapter consists of the use of present or present perfect tense, adjective to signal the significance of the common area of research. The second, the use of gap statements to show a gap or niche in the previous research. For example: verbs, adjectives, noun phrases, etc. The last is the use of metadiscourse. In using the linguistic features of the introduction part, the researcher focused to analyze the use of language in writing background of thesis undergraduate of students.

The language use can influence the researcher's ability to compose such a well–written background of the research problem. In other words, they believe that the requirement of the readership about the organization or structure of an introduction might burden the writer to think about what comes first and what should be written next.

Some studies about thesis proposal writing have been investigated by some researchers such as [15], [16], [17] and [18]. [15] investigated students' ability in writing a thesis proposal and found that students' ability was categorized into middle and he assessed based on writing indicators such as the content; organization; vocabulary; grammar and mechanics. Then, [16] found that many students' showed good organization though using somewhat established explanations, exemplifications, or details; they also showed unity and coherence. After that, [17] investigated coherence and unity of students' writing on background of the research proposal and also found that incoherence was no repetition of key nouns, unsuitable the use of pronouns, transition signals, logical order and in unity were not clear topic sentences, stating more than one idea, irrelevant sentences, not pointing the general-specific structure, and unclear thesis statements. Meanwhile, [18] focused on research territory and establishing a niche. They found that the students tend to find it difficult in addressing the research territory (problems) and establishing a niche (gap) such as to compose their ideas started from general views, and last they found that students lack consistency in using language.

Mostly, students face different obstacles in writing each part of the background of a thesis proposal. For instance, the students have difficulties in using transition signals and the unity of the sentences. To measure the students' ability in writing research proposal, the previous studies often use content; organization; vocabulary; grammar, and mechanic [15]; [19]. However, this study focus on the opening paragraph, gap, why doing/choosing the research, and the language use (focus on tenses: present or present perfect tense and future tense). The writer investigated the ability of the students in writing the background of thesis proposal at English undergraduate students of Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah Medan.

This study is chosen because they have learned how to make a background of thesis proposal and the researcher is interested to know how far the students' background of thesis proposal. In this study, the researcher examined the ability of students in writing background of research problems which is hoped to give important feedback for the lectures or students.

2. METHODS

This research was conducted on eight-semester students at English Department of Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al_Washliyah Medan. The descriptive research design was used in this study. There were 10

backgrounds of research problems. To know the ability of the students in writing background of thesis proposal, the researcher analyzed the students' writing background of thesis proposal, including the opening paragraph [8];[9], the gap [8];[9], why doing/choosing the research [9];[20],and the language use (focus tenses: present tense or present perfect tense [13];[14] and future tense. The background of the thesis proposal was categorized as Poor (1), Fair (2), Good (3), and Very good(4).

The formula is as below:

$$SC = \frac{students\ score\ for\ each\ aspect}{16} X\ 100$$

Note:
SC: Students Score

After that, the students' scores in composing the background of thesis proposals were calculated and analyzed by using the above rubric and were categorized as stated in the table below.

Table 1. Final score category

Range of Scores	Categories
85-100	Very Good
70-84	Good
55-69	Fair
25-54	Poor

Source: (Jacobs, et. al., 1981)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2. Students' score

Name	OP	G	RWD	L	Score
D1	3	0	1	3	43.75
D2	2	0	1	3	37.5
D3	3	4	3	3	81.25
D4	4	1	3	4	75
D5	3	2	3	4	75
D6	3	0	1	4	50
D7	3	0	1	2	37.5
D8	4	0	1	3	50
D9	3	3	3	3	75
D10	4	3	2	3	75
Total Mean Score					**60**
Category					**Fair**

Note:
D : document
OP : opening paragraph
G : gap
RWC: the reason why doing/choosing the research
L : Language

Based on Table 2, it was found that there were three out of ten students (D1, D2, and D7) were included to poor category (43.75, 37.5 and 37,5) while two students (D6 and D8) were included to fair category (50). Moreover, four students (D4, D5, D9, and D10) were included to good category (75). Then, only one student was included to the very good category (81. 25).

4. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to find out the eight-year English Department students' ability in writing the background of thesis proposals. Based on these findings, it can be seen that the writer found that the students' ability in writing backgrounds of thesis proposal was considered as fair. Similarly, the result can also be found in research conducted by Abbas. In his research, he supported that the ability of the students' in composing a thesis proposal was rated into the middle (67.1). The difference between Abbas's research and this research was that Abbas conducted the research Kuning which focused on content, mechanic, vocabulary, grammar and, vocabulary. Meanwhile, in this study, the writer conducted to revealed the students' ability in writing background of thesis proposal focusing on opening paragraph, gap, why doing this research and the language use. next

The findings of this research indicated that the student's ability in composing an opening paragraph of the thesis proposal to be very good, good, and fair. The students' ability in composing a thesis proposal was considered to be very good, good, fair and poor. Data of this research found that there are five students did not use gap in the background of their thesis proposal. The students' ability in writing GAP of thesis proposal was mostly considered as poor and five students did not use a gap. This finding was also found by [18];[21]. They found that it was difficult for students to find the gap. Meanwhile, [22] investigated idea development and organization of research proposal written by students and they found that several gaps found in the previous studies. [23] also found that only a small students which shows to find a gap in previous studies rather than the

educational practice. However, [24] who investigated problem statement sections of thesis at English Education graduate students and found that the students dominantly used a gap in their thesis proposal. Thus, generally, the undergraduate students faced more difficulties in finding a gap than the graduate students. Next, the student's ability in writing the reason to research was considered good, fair, and poor. Overall, the students' ability in using language of thesis proposal was considered to be very good, good, and fair. Only one student got a score of 2 (fair).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of this study, it was showed that there was only one student gained a very good score. There were three students who got good scores, three students obtained fair score, and three students obtained poor score. From this result, it can be said that the students' ability in composing the background of thesis proposal was categorized into "fair". The average score achieved was 60. Therefore, they need to be provided a more explanation about the criteria of a good background of the research proposal.

Referring to the conclusions above, some suggestions are proposed as follows:

1. It is suggested to the English Department students of Universitas Muslim Nusantara Al-Washliyah Medan especially for those who have a lack of ability in writing an opening paragraph, gap, the reason why choosing the research to learn more about how to write a good background of the research problem.
2. It is suggested to the Writing Subject lecturers especially those who teach research in language teaching and seminar to facilitate their students to enhance the students' competence in writing a good background.
3. For other researchers who will conduct further research about the students' ability in writing background of thesis proposal. It is hoped to them to dig more about the component background of thesis proposal.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The description in this study is proposed to be used as consideration for the next researchers to examine further research about students' ability in writing introduction of thesis proposal because it is a foundation in the process of writing a thesis before research. The first part of introduction is the background. It is very significant because it measures the researcher's understanding of the study.

So, in the next research, there should be some methods to cope with it. Various strategies need to reduce problems in writing thesis proposal or help the students how to overcome writing difficulties particularly background of research problems.

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