

THE LECTURERS' EXPERIENCES ON STUDENTS' THESIS SUPERVISION

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Abstract

Many articles regarding thesis assessment and its problems have been published for years. The dynamic of the relationship between the lecturers and their students are highly concerned. This paper, in addition, aims at investigating the lecturers' experiences while supervising the thesis of students. 5 (five) lecturers from English Department of UIN Ar-Raniry were chosen randomly as the participants for this study. To collect the data, an open-ended interview was designed as an instrument to offer 6 (six) questions to be answered by the participants. The result of the interview showed that different strategies were applied by the participants during the supervision process. Arranging specific time of supervising was employed by each participant in order to discuss more details the thesis written. Students' writing skill, in this case, was one of the issues highlighted that required specific handling. The result also identified the way of the participants deal with the problems arose; for instance, providing extra time of supervision for the students, asking the students to have peer-reviewed session to proof-read the thesis, and many other strategies. During the consultation period of the thesis, the lecturers believed that they built good communication and relationship with their students, which is very important as the encouragement for the students in completing their theses.

Keywords: Thesis Supervision, The Lecturers' Experiences, Teacher-Students' Relationship, Open-Ended Interview

INTRODUCTION

This paper was intended to investigate the lecturer's experiences while having students' theses supervision conducted particularly at English Department of UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. It is motivating to be done since supervising the students completing their thesis is a part of lecturers' duty. At this point, the lecturers act as the supervisors in which they are as academic advisors whose official role is to provide research advice and guidance for a thesis student (Golding, Sharmini, & Lazarovitch, 2013). While correcting the students' works, different lecturers/supervisors apply different style of supervision as well. The lecturers' supervisory styles, in fact, play central roles in enhancing timely and quality completion of thesis works (Gedamu, 2018). This is because supervision is a complex pedagogical practice in which each lecturer experiences her/his own understanding towards students' thesis written (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). What is more, writing a thesis

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requires high standard of concentration where the writer should pay more attention on the selection of its vocabularies, terms used and grammatical appropriateness. This is necessary to demonstrate the students' writing skill that they obtained during their studies in the university. Writing a thesis, in fact, is important as a proof to be a satisfactory practice-oriented alternative to the highly criticized by the lecturers (Meeus, Looy, & Libotton, 2007). To that point, the lecturers are also expected to direct the students well in writing the thesis in order to achieve the best result.

The students usually write their thesis when they are at the last semester of their studies. Following the rules of thesis writing is a must for the students to meet the requirement of the university. This way is essential to educate the students in developing their skill in writing, from novice to expert (Lessing, 2011). At this point, the lecturers may face a variety style of students' writing to be verified as a part of supervisory process. As the students have their own technique in writing, the lecturers should regulate the rules of the writing based on the necessity of the university.

In addition, the lecturers have to guide as well as to supervise the students from the beginning of thesis written up to its end. In the supervision process, mostly it is not only the way of the students' writing that is the problem for the lecturers, but also the duration of the supervising itself. This means that many factors influencing the success of students' thesis written including their intelligent, diligent, social support and many others. It is noticeable, furthermore, that different supervisors expressed variations in their conception of competence (Holmberg, 2007) that the students may learn diverse style of writing as well. It is useful to improve their writing academically as well to avoid monotonous mode. The supervision process is characterized by differences between the supervisors' and the students' expectations before the start of writing a bachelor thesis as well as after its completion (Henricson, et.al, 2018). Then, if the writing is well-written, interesting and equipped with clear argument, the readers in general as well as supervisors will enjoy the reading. On the other hand, it is of great importance as well that the institution where the student's study should also provide facilities to support this thesis written period, such as administrative problem and appropriate supervisors (Lessing & Schulze, 2003).

Harmonious partnership between students and supervisors is another key of success in writing the thesis. Once the students are capable of building strong relationship with their supervisors, they may easily work with their theses well. This is similar to what Blumberg (1978, as cited in Krauss & Ismail, 2010) stated that trust, warmth and honest collaboration are key elements in successful supervision. Because of this, the students may gain more

confidence and eagerly complete their theses on time. De Kleijn, et.al (2013), moreover, even put the beliefs that the lecturers as the supervisors are responsible to encourage the students in writing their thesis by granting constructive feedback. This way is considerably effective to direct the students step by step to complete their thesis.

Instead of having great collaboration with their lecturers or supervisors, the students may also apply their friends' assistance in completing the thesis. This can be conducted through thesis discussion group, for instance. In Japan, Yamada (2013) investigated the important support of group supervision by providing the students with new knowledge and skills in research and thesis completion. It is then identified that the solidarity, friendship and close bonds which were built among the members of the group motivated and encouraged the students to achieve their goals. Having provided the contribution as well as meaningful assistance by their colleagues during the thesis supervision period, it eases the students to complete their theses based on the available time. At the end, it is expected that the students are able to create a qualified thesis written. For that reason, this paper is trying to explore more on the lecturers' experiences during the thesis supervision with their students.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative research was employed in this paper through open-ended interview by asking some questions to the lecturers regarding to their experiences during their duty on supervising the students' thesis written. This research instrument was chosen because the benefits offered seem to be relevant to the study. 6 (six) items of questions are available to be answered by the participants. An in-depth analysis, then will be applied towards the answers obtained from the interview session with the participants.

5 (five) female lecturers from English Department at UIN Ar-Raniry, furthermore, were selected randomly to be participants in this study, and they were also informed that their confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. Cohen et. al. (2005, p. 51) stated that informed consent protects and respects the rights of the participants in the research, including maintaining privacy, anonymity and confidentiality as well as the right to refuse to take part or to withdraw once the research has begun.

The interview session is supposed to be different among participants to avoid the bias of the answers as well as to acquire more reliable information. The interview was held for two days, from 15th to 16th August 2019. In this case, the writer has taken notes while interviews running, instead of recording by using electronic equipment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

As has been mentioned previously, the participants were provided with 6 (six) questions to be answered. Each participant was cooperative during the interview session. All of their answers can be seen in the following:

1. How do you supervise your students in writing the thesis?

FBZ as the first participant (P1), said that she regularly supervised the students weekly by having consultation session one by one with them face-to-face. During the session, P1 corrected the students' thesis and asked the students for its revision wherever necessary. Similarly, FT, YM and AF as the second (P2), the third (P3) and the fifth (P5) participants stated that they also had special supervision day with their students. P2 and P5 even allowed their students to have communication via e-mail related to supervisory of the thesis. P3 also added that arranging supervision session together with the students is very beneficial in order to train them to practice their focus in completing the thesis. P5, yet, insisted that she prefer to have face-to-face conversation with the students to discuss their thesis while monitoring its progress. RH as the fourth participant (P4), on the other hand, had different way in supervising her students. She reported that she did not organize special time for supervision meaning that as long as she has spare time, she would permit the students to have thesis consultation with her. The most important point for P4 is the students should obey the regulation set by English Department team regarding the rules of thesis writing.

2. What kind of difficulties do you usually find while supervising the students?

From this question, it was identified that most participants find similar difficulties while supervising the students in writing the thesis, such as grammatical pattern, writing skill, and writing methodology. Time management for supervising because of too many students to be supervised is also a problem said P1. Another difficulty is to understand the content of the thesis because of wrongly used of grammar and language pattern, P3 reported. If P1 found that most students were less motivated to finish their thesis, P4 often indicated that the students made the same mistakes repeatedly while writing. P5, in addition, stated that motivating the students in generating their own ideas for writing is serious difficulty for her during the process of thesis supervision.

3. How do you deal with those problems?

Different lecturer surely applies different way in overcoming any obstacles found during thesis supervision takes place. Regarding the skill of writing, if the students used

inappropriate grammar, P1 and P3 usually suggested them to have peer-review before consultation session. The link of grammar application on website is also another alternative for this problem that can be used. P2 and P4, however, tended to correct the mistake of students' writing themselves by providing the students with extra session of supervision. Both these participants believed that this way is effective to be done that they can directly guide the students in correcting their writing. What is more, in terms of motivation in writing, P1 said that she usually encourages the students under her supervision through some motivational advice. P5, however, clarified that she preferred to ask the students to revise and re-work the thesis until it is sufficient to be approved.

4. Do you have any strategies to help the students in producing a good thesis written? If any, what kind of them?

Many strategies have been provided by the lecturers to support the students in producing a good thesis written. P3, for example, convinced the students to follow academic rules while writing based on the guide book set by English Department. They can also create the essential outline first before writing the thesis as a 'brainstorming', so that the students are able to identify which important element that can be inserted in the thesis. P1 used another strategy to encourage the students to produce a good writing by asking them for reading some articles in academic journal as well as thesis from qualified universities, in order that they are exposed with good writing. Reading on academic writing features is also essential for the students in order to understand how to write academically, said P1. Peer review (the students sometimes may create such a discussion group) in this case is suggested by P2 that the students may ask their friends to proof-read their writing before handing it to their supervisors. This is different from the strategy proposed by P4 in which she firstly pushes the students to find and correct the mistakes themselves. After three to four times of supervision, she guides them step by step to produce better writing. This is similar to what P5 offered to the students in which objections together with their own solution can be one of the strategies used in order to support the students in writing their thesis.

5. What is the most challenging moment for you as supervisor for the students in completing their thesis?

Challenging moments happened differently among supervisors; P4 for example, she confirmed that cheating, including plagiarism, is an unacceptable habit to be apologized. Some students sometimes are also dishonest with their supervisors regarding the thesis' approval. Another tricky moment while supervision session is the way to enable the

students to understand the mistakes they made repeatedly in writing. This was experienced by P1 in which she used to provide some examples of how ungrammatical sentences can lead to misunderstanding. In this case, the students should revise the thesis more than twice and surely they are unhappy with this, P1 convinced. P2, in addition, experienced difficult moment when the students are lack of ideas in writing, so that they do not understand what they have written. In one side, it is a requirement for the students to finish study on time, but on the other side, it is annoying to revise the thesis many times. For P3, the tough experience during the session of supervision is when the first and the second supervisors have extremely different ideas in addressing the issues of thesis writing. The students will be confused and less confident in writing because of this, and thesis revision will be time consuming as well. The students' laziness is also the problem that is uneasy to be handled during thesis supervision based on P5's experience. The supervisors, consequently, should be more patience to solve this partiality.

6. How is your relationship with the students under your supervision so far?

All participants agreed that they have good quality of relationship with their students during thesis supervision. They believe that building strong correlation with the students is one of the ways to empower them to gain more confidence in writing. The more they are connected each other the easier supervisory process conducted. Mostly the lecturers as the supervisors are open and approachable enough to assist their students in writing the thesis. Most students under P5 supervision even voluntarily works for her social project at the social foundation.

Discussion

It has been explained previously how the lecturers as the supervisors engaged the students in the session of supervision. Although they experienced various difficulties while doing supervision, they keep providing the best assistance to the students needed. In fact, thesis supervision is not an easy thing to do; it is not only the matter of time management, but it also concerns qualified academic issue. During the supervision session, the supervisors tried their best to inspire the students in finishing their theses writing; starting from contents correction, grammatical issue up to psychological problems, such as confidence and honesty. As P4 stated that cheating in writing is not allowed meaning that the students have to write on their own words; no plagiarism. As has been identified that plagiarism is a serious issue growing these days in higher education, and the use of the internet made this problem becomes worst (Eret & Ok, 2014). The students, hence, have to follow the rules of writing based on the guidance provided by the institution. It is expected

that at the end the students are able to produce readable and enjoyable writing since the supervisors actually hope to read a thesis that is academically sound – for example, engages with the literature, and has an appropriate methodology and a logical structure – but they also expect a thesis to be clear, interesting, polished and easy to follow (Golding, Sharmini, & Lazarovitch, 2013).

Discussing the challenges faced by the lecturers along the process of supervision, in addition, it varies. The results of the interview show that the supervisors have to deal with the students' laziness, misunderstanding and their variation skill in writing. This definitely disrupted the fluency of supervisory process due to its influences can be seen on time pressure, language difficulties, a lack of critical analysis and a prevalence of personal problems (Brown, 2007). The supervisors, then, have to rapidly modify and adapt this issue within a short completion of supervising time. Yet, the lecturers as the supervisors have to be more cooperative in this situation due to the students are in the level of adaptivity. This means the students are trying to adjust the supervisory style between their main and co – supervisors. Even though a mismatch may arise between the supervisor and the student in terms of writing competence together with its satisfaction, they may be developed during the process of thesis supervision (Del Río, Díaz-Vázquez, & Sanfiz, 2017). To reach the expected goal of thesis supervising process at the end, this phase is needed to be more concerned.

In terms of the strategy used to empower the students in writing, peer review is one of those that were suggested. Proof reading is essential and helpful to check the accuracy of writing before handing it to the supervisors. This strategy is also believed to improve the supervision skills (Samara, 2007) among students in which they carefully write and revise the writing before supervisors' turn. At this point the writing's content including its coherence and cohesive should be prioritized to avoid readers' misunderstanding. Since they work as a group, they may support and advice to each other, to recognize that 'they are not the only one' and listen to feedback offered to individuals that may be relevant to their own situation (Shadforth & Harvey, 2004). Another beneficial effect of having peer revision is that the increase of students' self-confident in writing. They may be less worried about the thesis they have written because they believe that their friends' supports enable them to reduce the tension that may be obtained during thesis supervision. With respect to support strategies, what is more, it is suggested that supervisors adapt to student needs in terms of explicating standards, quality or consequences, division of responsibilities, providing more/less critical feedback and sympathizing (De Kleijn, et.al, 2015).

Another issue in this study, that is an essential and unavoidable factor, is the relationship between the supervisors and their students. De Kleijn, et.al (2012), claimed that an important aspect of supervision is the supervisor–student relationship, in which their research investigates how perceptions of the supervisor–student relationship is related to three dependent variables: final grade, perceived supervisor contribution to learning, and student satisfaction. Good quality of relationships between supervisors and their students should also supported by the institution as an academic developer (Roberts & Seaman, 2018). It is believed that Maintaining good relationships between both supervisors and their students, will be able to reduce students’ dissatisfaction and deteriorate attrition (Parker-Jenkins, 2016, as cited in Ibrahim, 2018). The students’ overall satisfaction with their supervision, in particular, with the supervisory support, impacts the overall elements of thesis supervision process. If all related components and stakeholders support each other, as consequent, the supervisory process must be success and satisfied.

CONCLUSION

Many issues have been shed light during the supervision period. Both lecturers, as supervisors and the students are trying to cope with the problems arose in order to enjoy the supervisory session. During this process, the lecturers provide a range of strategies to support as well as to encourage the students to complete their theses on time. Most supervisors arrange special time for the students that they may use to discuss the thesis written. Some others also allow the students to communicate via email due to some reasons, such as the distance and time available. From the interview, in addition, it is demystified that the lecturers face different difficulties and challenges during the supervision session. The students’ skill in writing is the point to be concerned since it should meet the academic requirement that has been set by the university. In the process of writing, the students should pay more attention on its mechanical rule and technique in order to construct a good quality of sentence. The students, consequently, are expected to be able to produce a thesis with convincing approach that is readable and publishable. Even though various obstacles were highlighted during the process of supervision, the lecturers keep encouraging and motivating the students by providing valuable advice and other better solutions. In terms of the relationship between the supervisors and their students, the lecturers – as the participants believe that they have positive connection with their students during the time of supervision. Considering as one of the keys of success, building strong relationship with the students is important in order to stimulate their enthusiastic in writing. As a result, both the lecturers and the students enjoy the process of thesis supervision.

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