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## “SHOW ME AND I KNOW HOW TO WRITE!” UNIVERSITY STUDENT WRITERS’ VOICES DURING THESIS WRITING

Misdi<sup>1</sup>, Dwiniasih<sup>2</sup>, Nasiba Zaripbayeva<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Webster University Tashkent, Uzbekistan

\*Corresponding author: [misdirina@gmail.com](mailto:misdirina@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Critical writing in the contexts of academic writing is an interesting issue in the twenty-first century. In terms of thesis writing, student-writer and supervisor often come to a negotiation in order to gain high quality thesis. Of fifteen student-writers, two willingly joined and participated in the study. A good process of supervision conceptualizes on the students' perception on their crucial periods of their study. Both research students and supervisors have to work effectively and efficiently in terms of the quality and quantity of the process of supervision. And it, therefore, is aimed to provide a phenomenon of how academic writing (thesis writing) needs to build student researchers' autonomy.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, Academic Writing, Critical Supervision, Student Writer, Thesis Writing

### INTRODUCTION

Writing is still regarded as a difficult activity for university students, even for English department (Emilia, 2005). But, in understanding the situation as Emilia suggests, the context is considered since academic writing, e.g. thesis writing, is done under supervision. This is a challenge (Alwasilah, 2010). Since academic writing among the university students seems 'new' experiences, big effort should be made (Emilia, 2010) to promote critical literacy as the demand of the 21 century (Alwasilah, 2012), critical thinking and critical writing (Gebhard, 2009). Critical thinking is required to write academically (Gebhard, 2009). These academic social events are the basic steps in preparing the high literate citizens through critical pedagogy (Nainby, Warrent, & Bolinger, 2004; Mochinski, 2008) in which mutual and dialogical interaction is promoted.

Misdi, et.al. (2013) suggest that there are some indications if the supervising, or at least writing guidance is less provided to students in terms of the access of up-to-date reading resources. They also hardly found students who accessed journal article. At the same time, books are their main readings. It indicates that trends and up-to-date information are less considered (Swalles & Feak, 2008). At the same time, in the context of critical pedagogy, supervisor-student consultation is seen as mutual interaction. A critical pedagogy serves students sphere to facilitate public space (Nainby, Warrent, & Bolinger, 2004) in which students are able to express their ideas critically. This, therefore, demands process which

sees the students' realities as existing way expression (Freire, 2001 in Nainby, Warrent, & Bolinger, 2004 p. 33). Through this process, power is reduced (Monchinski, 2008) as supervisors at the same time are learners. Albeith a number of previous studies investigating about student-writer and thesis writing, student-writer's voice in thesis writing is still lack discussed. Thus, this paper attempts to explore student-writers' narrative during their thesis writing.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### **Thesis as Academic Writing**

The writing products reflect the process of dialogic pedagogy. The paper which is an academic text contains specific structures and linguistic features (Gebhard, 2009). In terms of critical thinking, some evidences are directed as indicators such as the structure of the paragraphs. The coherences – a shift from an issue to another issue, from a paragraph to another paragraph are essential in providing information relating to the topic written (Chaffee, et al., 2002; Swales & Feak, 2008; Emilia, 2010; Misdi, 2013).

Such research has investigated the thesis writing qualities (Hartini & Misdi, 2015). The results revealed from five academic papers, less comprehensive and critical writing were detected to show the quality of the papers and their process of the supervision. From the perspectives of critical pedagogy, three findings are presented here. The main finding is due to the less thesis-reading appreciation. The writers often neglected the essence of readings even it is agreed that reading is the power of being critical thinking (Gebhard, 2009; Chafee, 2000). The following occurrence proves this situation.

- (i) Teaching Speaking Using Story Retelling technique, (ii) Mixture of Bahasa and English in the body of the text (in chapter), and (iii) Incongruence of title and research question (a case of HF writer, 2015).
- (i) The effectiveness of using authentic materials in teaching writing descriptive text at vocational high school, (ii) incongruent the analysis and data, and (iii) incorrect tenses employed (chapter 3) (AA case, 2015)
- (i) Analysing students' use of metacognitive reading strategies on their reading comprehension task, (ii) incongruent analysis and data, and (iii) incorrect use of tenses (chapter 3) (IW case, 2015).

Regarding to supervision role, it indicates if there was less critical supervision. In the sphere of dialogic interaction, writer and supervisor are equal since critical pedagogy suggest this (Nainby, Warren & Bollinger, 2004; Monchinski, 2008). This finding, as the result, show that the text is less accurate and validity due to the absence of up-to-date readers (Swalles & Feak, 2008; Misdi, et.al., 2013)

### **The role of effective supervision**

Supervision was defined as encompassing many aspects of experience rather than focusing narrowly on interaction with individual supervisors (Cullen, Pearson, Saha & Spear, 1994 as cited in Conrad, 2003). Even the rationality model is suggested in campus, the negotiated model of supervision works better in the reality to meet the requirements both research students and the supervisor (Acker, 1994). This models of supervising gives moderate technique and strategies to both lecturers and research students.

Relating to moderate strategies, there are some positive perceptions of the research students during these strategies. These positive points of views are presented as follows.

1. Individual approach of relationship such as understanding, willingness to meet after hours for some reasons, opportunities for being independent, supervisor's suggestion to make notes on meetings, frequent supportive comment out of regular meetings, foreshadowing of possible problems, prompt feedback (Conrad, 2003).
2. Personal approach, in other research use different angle of terms such as personal dimension, is another process of learning facilitating (Bengsten, 2011). Reflecting from what happenings in graduate students' writing, some strategies are also used as the possible support of developing writing thesis: group supervision, peer support, structure program, working on team and collegialisation (Conrad, 2003).

In order to have effective supervision, research students have to be no-doubt to go on regular meetings and discussion process (Zainal-Abidin, 2005). When the research students are hoped to have a personal development of journey, they have to be treated from the perspective of mentoring (Brew, 2001 cited in Lee, 2007). At the same time, they meet in two conflicting pressures: producing high quality of writing and completing the thesis writing (Lee, 2007). Facilitating and encouraging supervisors are needed to gain both quality and time management (Skerrite & Roche, 2004 as cited in Lee, 2007). The results also indicate that the supervising or at least proof reading was rarely done thoroughly due to some reasons, e.g. time allocation.

Autonomy in thesis writing:

In this concept of student autonomy, teachers act as learning facilitators. Teachers provide more learning space to create democratic atmosphere (Sanaky, 2005). The concept of autonomy is defined as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1981 as cited in Chang, 2012). Learner autonomy in language education is interpreted in various ways, and various terms such as 'learner independence', 'self-direction', and 'independent learning' have been used to refer to similar concepts (Masouleh & Jooneghani, 2012). Referring to the fundamental definition given by Holec (1981) as cited in Chang (2012), the notion of autonomy entails two elements: capacity to learn and self-directed learning. Thus, the concept "autonomy" means knowing how to learn (Chang, 2012). As having capacity, the autonomous learners are having more freedom and of course, motivated students. In other words, they are independent-rely on others and forced (Little, 2007).

Learner autonomy can be seen from the three different ways: technical, psychological, and political perspectives. In term of technical perspective, learner autonomy is seen by emphasizing skill or strategies for unsupervised learning, e.g. Oxford (1990). Seen as psychological perspective, learner autonomy is seen as broader attitudes and cognitive abilities which enable the learner to take responsibility for his/her own learning. Meanwhile the political perspective emphasizes empowerment or emancipation of learners by giving them control over their learning. Autonomous learners are characterized by (1) having insights into their styles and strategies, (2) taking an active approach to the learning task at hand, (3) willing to take risks, i.e., to communicate in the target language at all costs, (4) being good guesser, (5) attending to form as well as to content, that is, place accuracy and appropriacy, (6) developing the target language into a separate reference system and willing to revise and reject hypothesis and rules that do not apply, and (7) having a tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language (Omaggio, 19978 as cited in Masouleh & Jooneghani, 2012).

Masouleh & Jooneghani had argued further if the autonomy (1) is not a synonym for self-instruction; in other hand, autonomy is not limited to learning without a teacher. in the classroom context, (2) autonomy does not entail an abdication of responsibility on the part of the teacher; it is not a matter of letting the learners get on with things as best they can, best they can; (3) autonomy is not something that teachers do to learners; that is, it is not another teaching method; (4)autonomy is not a single, easily described behavior; and (5) autonomy is not a steady state achieved by learners (Masouleh & Jooneghani, 2012).

## METHOD

### Design of the research

This research employed descriptive method (Punch, 2009) in order to describe the phenomenon of human feeling and behaviour in natural setting.

### Participants and selection procedure

The subjects of the research were the students of English Education Department. All were finishing their thesis when this study took place. Therefore, the research participants were acknowledged as student-researchers. In coding and analysis, student-researcher was written as SR: SR1, SR2 and SR3.

Two student-researchers fully participated in this study as the other one were unable to join the interview session. The three were girls who were going to proceed their examination of their thesis. Both of the student-researchers were members of the group of my supervision. To make it clear, these three SRs involved in my supervising group supervised by whatapps application.

### Technique of data collection and analysis

The main technique of data gatherings was in the form of interview and document. The selected data (after coded) were initially described. The next step was critical interpretation according to the theories available in chapter 2. Details and thick description were done. Data from related sources will be crossed as the validity ensurance and functioned as triangulation (Punch, 2009). The data collection and analysis are illustrated in the following conceptual design.

## REDULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Feeling competence in thesis writing

Having competence, or at least feeling competence, is the basic concept of autonomous SRs, as show in the following script.

Sp: tulisan kamu sangat bagus.. bisakah cerita siapa yang bantu?

SR1: tidak ada Bapak, Ag sendiri

This initial interview implies that the SRs have feeling competence. At least, it shows an alert of selfness. In advanced, the SR explained more details about her argument as shown by the following script.

Sp: Bener?

SR1: benar, Bapak. Khan sudah diajari ambil dari jurnal, dicopy dibaca dan ditulis ulang.. Ini belum saya baca lagi Bapak... kalau sudah baca, pasti bisa...

The findings are also cross-checked to other SR who also argue the same thing as shown in the following script.

Yang penting saya masih ada semangat mengerjakan tugas akhir ini dan percaya bahwa saya akan lulus tepat waktu dan berdoa heheh.

These findings are closely related to the feeling, at least, of competence. As Oxford (1990) defines autonomous students poses enough competence in order to execute the projects (Little, 2007; Chang, 2012).

### **Knowing what and how to do**

Autonomous SRs are also knowing what to do and how to do thing they need, e.g. finding some references for their writing as indicated by the following proves.

SR1: benar, Bapak. Khan sudah diajari ambil dari jurnal, dicopy dibaca dan ditulis ulang.. Ini belum saya baca lagi Bapak...

SR2: Kan baca-baca skripsi di perpustakaan Bapak

It clearly shows that SRs knew where and how to find the readings for their references. This is an indication of self-directed SRs as they exactly knew what to do (Oxford, 1990; Little, 2007; Chang, 2012). The findings above are also confirmed by their reflection in document found in following 2 chats.

SR1: Gaya dan strategi penulisan skripsi saya yaitu dengan berusaha semampu saya mencari tahu Sumber2/buku yg akan saya gunakan dlm penulisan saya. Sebagai referensinya.

SR1: Mencari di internet seperti e-book, journal, skripsi2 lain, dan ada sebagian buku yg sudah dimiliki. Banyak kesulitan juga si saat menemukan referensinya, kadang ada e-book yg tidak full, hanya sebagian saja, kadang ada journal yg tidak ada volumenya. saya melakukan sharing dgn teman2 saya saling tuker2 buku juga, misalkan saya punya e-book A, teman saya punya e-book B dan kami saling membutuhkan jadi bisa tukeran gitu 😊😊

As stated by Chang (2012), autonomous students take their learning responsibility. Thus, a plenty of efforts are done to reach their goals. The interesting findings such as reflected by SR1.

Menyelesaikan study saya dgn tepat waktu pak 😊😊

Where other respondent says

SR2: Iya pak karena saya ingin cepat menyelesaikan study saya dan lulus tepat waktu, agar saya bisa memulai mencari pekerjaan sesuai bidang saya. Dan bisa membalas jasa orangtua saya yg telah menyekolahkan saya sampai sejauh ini.

The two scripts elaborate how the autonomous SRs are really motivated in finishing their thesis. Autonomous SRs are self-directed learners (Little, 2007) as indicated by the SR2.

Saya paham isi skripsi saya karena memang saya sendiri yg melakukannya dari mulai mencari judul, teori expert yg berkaitan sampai ke penelitian murni saya lakukan sendiri 😊. Saya suka membaca manga yang sudah di translate kedalam bahasa inggris karena saya dapat 2 keuntungan dari situ yaitu; kesenangan saya membaca manga terpenuhi dan juga sedikit2 dibiasakan membaca menggunakan bahasa inggris pula terpenuhi. Banyak vocab baru yg saya dapat dari membaca manga tersebut

The SR2 elaborated further that she, even not scheduled, employed certain strategies to do the thesis writing at early morning. Simply, she argues that the brains are still fresh in after having night sleep, e.g.

Saya lebih suka mengerjakan skripsi jam 3 pagi atau menjelang fajar karena otak lebih fresh untuk digunakan berfikir.

Being self-regulated learners also implies independent (Holec, 1981 as cited in Chang (2012); Little (2007)). SR1 proves the claim as she said,

Ada banyak pastinya yg saya rasakan masih bnyak kelemahan untuk penulisan skripsi. Contohnya dlam masalah grammar, suka typo, maslaah spasi, font yg digunakan harus sesuai, cara penulisan referensi yg menggunakan apa style, cara menuliskan kutipan, dan masih bnyak lagi kelemahan mahasiswa untuk menuliskan tugas akhirnya (skripsi).

When the SR2 explained,

Saya sadari saya banyak sekali kekurangan dalam membuat thesis ini yaitu lemahnya saya dalam grammar dan typo yang sangat sering terjadi haha 😊 serta kurang ahli ahli penyampain pendapat, tp saya sering bertanya kepada teman saya dan meminta pendapat mereka.

As independent SRs, they show their capacity in fixing problems by employing suitable techniques and strategies by making access to friends and supervisors. The followings are the evidences shown by both Sri and SR2.

Tapi dengan ada nya bimbingan dan pengarahan dari dosen jdi mengerti dn bisa diperbaiki, kadang nanya2 teman juga yg sama2 sedang menyelesaikan tugas ahirnya ataaupun yg sudah selesai tentunya bnyak pengalamannya. Saling sharing gitu pak (giggling)

untuk mengatasi masalah itu saya cuma berfikir ini baru awal maslaah yg sya hadapi dn pastinya akan ada masalh2 lagi yg lebih berat dri ini, disitu saya kadang ada semangat lagi untuk berusaha mengerjakan dn tanya2 teman liat2 rferensi lagi, bimbingan lagi. Kadang kalo udh lelah dn sikon tidk bisa mendukung saya suka pergi refresh otak sma tmn2 dan yg paling mmbuat sya semangat untuk menyelesaikan study saya dn segera lulus saat melihat ke2 org tua saya.

These two scripts postulate initial findings of “control” (Oxford, 1990) over their thesis writing. In the perspective of autonomy, learning over their learning is a manifestation of autonomous student in the framework of political perspective.

### **Initial empowerment entailment**

The findings about the SRs’ autonomy in thesis writing suggest a path for providing more space for student to develop. SRs, in advanced, should be treated as they do: having no-under pressure supervising atmosphere, having choices to search references, having awareness of ownership, and involved in decision making as indicated in the following script.

Sp: SR2, is it important? (pointing to the paragraphini penting tidak (sambil menunjuk satu paragraph pada thesis)

SR2: heee.. tidk diperlukan ya Pak?

Sp: Kenapa tidak diperlukan?

SR2: tidak ditanyakan ya Pak? (sambil senyum)

The following interaction, showed by SR3, is also evidence signaling an atmosphere of being democratic.

Bapa punten nn mau nanya tentang proposal punya nn. Kira2 RQ yg ke 2 kan mau d rubah, menurut bapa perubahannya sprti apa? trus nn boleh penelitian ke sekolah terlebih dlu tdk pa? D karenakn skripsinya qualitative.

In the framework of negotiation (Misdi & Hartini, 2015), student-researchers tend to make negotiation in terms of timetable for having discussion. Therefore, this finding shows another phenomenon as student-researchers are potential, in democratic atmosphere, to make negotiation academically. This can be indication of having broader sense of abilities, e.g. attitude (Oxford, 1990).

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The concepts of student autonomy have already revealed. Students’ capability and self-directed learning have been discussed. Not only the autonomous SRs beautifully demonstrated their abilities to show their feeling of competence but they also proved their self-directness well. Discovering potential SRs in perspectives of SRs as the key informants, SR’ autonomy is, at least learned. It, however, still indicates less coverage in terms of SR empowerment as path for SR empowerment. Therefore, further research involves other elements of empowerment such as ownerships, choice, and decision making need to investigate further.

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