



The Role of Background Knowledge and Language Proficiency in Developing Ideas in Writing Chapter 1 of Undergraduate Thesis

Intan Husniah¹, Yenni Rozimela²

Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang, Indonesia.

Email: intanhusniah@gmail.com

Article History

Submitted: 2023-01-24

Accepted: 2023-02-09

Published: 2023-03-19

Keywords:

Undergraduate thesis, Background Knowledge, Language Proficiency and Writing Skills

Abstract

The knowledge possessed by someone who will write a thesis greatly influences what will be written. The difficulty of developing writing is one of the problems experienced by final year students when writing a thesis. This study focuses on the extent to which background and language skills play a role in influencing the development of writing ideas in the background to chapter 1. This research uses a qualitative method and purposive sampling involving 10 fourth year students who are writing a thesis proposal. The research location is in the English Education Study Program, Padang State University. Research results were collected through interview sessions where questions were made based on Neuman's theory (2014) and Brown's theory (2004). The results of the study show that knowledge is important before starting a thesis. So background knowledge and language skills greatly influence developing writing ideas in the background of chapter 1 of undergraduate thesis.

©2023 The Author(s) Publish by Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris FBS UNP. This is an open access article under the CC-BY-NC license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

How to Cite: Husniah, I., & Rozimela, Y. The Role of Background Knowledge and Language Proficiency in Developing Ideas in Writing Chapter 1 of Undergraduate Thesis. Journal of English Language Teaching, 12. (1): pp. 167-175, DOI: [10.24036/jelt.v12i1.121624](https://doi.org/10.24036/jelt.v12i1.121624)

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the English skills taught in Indonesian secondary schools. Students can gain several advantages from writing assignments, including increased information, knowledge, and scientific understanding. According to Harmer, n.d.(2001) writing is a form of communication to convey through or express feelings through written form. Hogue, A. (1999) said that writing, especially academic writing is not easy. In addition, they explained that writing an academic paper requires a lot of learning and practice to develop students' writing skills. Writing skills are very necessary in the process of writing a thesis. However, thesis is difficult for many students. Murray, R. (2018) says that a thesis is a much larger

project than most students have done before, requiring more self-study and more self-motivation.

The role of background and language proficiency is one aspect that must be considered. because these two aspects will affect when writing a thesis. In particular, the background and language skills of expressing ideas in the form of this paper are one of the main factors faced by the writer in preparing this thesis. According to Fisher et al. (2012) background knowledge is widely discussed as a critical factor in learning, but in practice it is rarely addressed outside of assessment. Background knowledge has a major influence on students' ability to understand what they read and write. In addition, Al-Sawalha & Chow (2012) said that the writing process is rarely used among students and English language proficiency affects the writing process used among students.

The lack of proper vocabulary on the part of the respondents in turn affected their own writing process as the findings indicated that these low ability respondents did not plan, edit or revise their written essays. According to Ogunrombi (1995) the inhibiting factor for writing is the lack of reading habits that can be started at home and depend heavily on the texts obtained in class and do not show a desire to read more widely. Swales & Feak (1996) argue that the length of a text can affect a writer's ability to write a well-written introduction. In addition, they believe that the reader's needs regarding the organization or structure of the introduction may burden the writer to think about what to write first and what to write next. This is indicated by the use of proper grammar and vocabulary when writing. English proficiency is important because it is one of the key components that make up one's knowledge of the language. If someone is proficient in English, they will be able to use English to create and communicate orally and in writing. Because writing skills are very important skills when loading a thesis. With skills, writers will be able to develop their writing easily.

There have been a great number of research reveals the role of background and language skills influencing thesis writing (for example Tawalbeh (2013); Nimehchisalem & R Monsefi (2017); Neuman (2014); Adytia (2020); S Rahmah - (2020); Noori (2020)); Monica 2020). From Tawalbeh (2013) said the influence of

Students' Prior Knowledge of English on Their Research Writing. The results revealed that students with prior knowledge of English performed better in research writing than those without knowledge. In addition, Adytia (2020) conducted research "The Importance of English Proficiency" based on research, Proficiency in English will have many benefits and make you a person who has better overall skills and has the benefit of being able to communicate with people from other countries others and learn more from outside sources.

Another study entitled "Lack of Proficiency in English Language: Understanding the Circumstances among the Military Cadets in 2020" from the findings have shown that there are three main circumstances that they think have made quite of an impact towards their lack of proficiency in English language namely; the struggle of learning English, lack of confidence and low self-esteem and environmental factors. According to Oktavianti et al., (2021) there are several problems in developing their ideas in writing essays. The main problem for students is the writer's lack of motivation, and awkward structure or grammatical problems.

In fact, completing a thesis naturally by an English student at Padang State University is very difficult. Based on initial field observations, it was found that 8 out of 10 students did not understand their own research, making it difficult to express ideas in writing in Chapter 1 of the thesis. The problem faced by the writer is the lack of initial knowledge so that it has an impact on thesis writing. It is difficult to develop writing because of the limited knowledge they have. There are many studies on thesis writing, but this research only focuses on the extent to which language background and skills influence students in completing the thesis in Chapter 1 of the English Department.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To complete this research, researchers used qualitative methods. According to Pathak (2013) Qualitative research focuses on understanding a research question as a humanistic or idealistic approach. There were 10 participants in this study who were students of the English Language Education Program at the University of Padang who were working on a thesis for the 2018 school year. The reason for choosing the

2018 batch as the population was because most of the 2018 batch were working on a thesis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Finding

A. The effect of students' background knowledge in developing ideas.

For the first formulation of the problem, namely the extent to which students' background knowledge affects the development of ideas. There are 12 questions.

From the 12 questions above, it can be found that almost all students understand what background knowledge is and also know where this background knowledge comes from. In addition, respondents also know that it is important to have a background before starting a research. This was proven when asked, all respondents answered that it was important. However, not all students have background knowledge before they write. This was evident when interviewed, only 4 out of 10 students believed they had prior knowledge of writing. When asked about sources, in general respondents knew where their reading sources came from, including learning classes, Google Scholar, journals, articles, reading books and the results of discussions with supervisors. Even though they know the source of the reading, in fact almost all respondents complained that it would be difficult to find literature that was in accordance with their research. Then they look for solutions by asking friends or even the lecturer and that helps them quite a lot, although not all of them.

After that, all respondents agreed that background greatly influences the development of writing. Almost all students find it difficult to develop writing ideas because they do not have enough knowledge before they write and then they overcome them by starting to search and read a lot of previous theses, journals, articles related to their research. On the other hand, it turns out that there are also students who find it difficult to pour or write what they have read. After being interviewed, the respondents found out what made it difficult for them to develop ideas, including a lack of information such as journals, articles and books related to

their research. So it can be concluded that the more knowledge one has, the more writing ideas that make it easier to write. So the background knowledge of students is very influential on the development of ideas in the background which also depends on what they read.

B. Proficiency affects the development of ideas

The second formulation of the problem is about language skills. the interviewer provided 10 questions regarding the respondent's writing ability.

From the results of the interview above, it was found that when asked about language proficiency, almost all students knew what it meant. Then when asked if they were interested in writing academic texts, only 1 out of 10 respondents were interested even though all respondents had experience writing academic texts in learning classes. Even though they have written before, half of the respondents felt they did not have good skills to write a thesis. But these skills are very applicable when writing. All of the respondents had gone through some academic classes but only 9 out of 10 said that the experience was helpful when writing a thesis. Writing skills are very important in the process of writing a thesis. Knowledge is very influential in one's writing.

When asked how to improve language skills, 8 out of 10 respondents answered by reading a lot and looking for additional information. Mastery of language is very important for thesis writing. From the results of the interviews, all respondents stated that mastery of language is important for thesis writing because it will affect their proficiency in developing their writing ideas. When asked about the factors that affect their writing ability, 6 out of 10 respondents said that the factor that affected their writing ability was reading journals or articles related to research before writing. The last reason is not proficient in developing writing ideas. After the interviews, reasons were found including lack of reading, lack of literacy, lack of creativity in developing what has been read, not used to writing. So in conclusion the more people who read will be directly proportional to what will be written. Reading a lot will stimulate the brain so that it can generate ideas for writing.

Discussion

1. The extent to which background knowledge influences the development of writing

Background knowledge is important thing that every student should have when writing a proposal. As discussed above, this study seeks to reveal the extent to which background knowledge and language skills influence the development of writing in chapter 1. Based on the results of the interviews with the 10 students above, it can be revealed that not all students have adequate knowledge or provisions when starting a research. Even though they said that this knowledge greatly influenced the content or writing in the introduction to the thesis. Regarding research sources, in general, respondents know where their reading sources come from, including study classes, Google Scholar, journals, articles, reading books and the results of discussions with supervisors. However, they said that it was difficult for them to get information about their research due to various things such as year limits from supervisors, lack of free access to a journal and the topics discussed were still new.

Almost all students experience difficulties in developing writing ideas because they do not have sufficient knowledge before writing and then they overcome them by starting to search and read many previous theses, journals, articles related to their research. Then the respondent said it was very important to have knowledge or reading before writing a thesis because the student's background knowledge or knowledge greatly influenced the development of ideas in the introduction. This is also proven by Tawalbeh's research (2013) *The Effect of Students' Prior Knowledge of English on Their Research Writing*. The results revealed that students who had prior knowledge of English performed better in research writing than those without this knowledge.

2. Proficiency affects the development of ideas

Writing habits will affect when writing a thesis. From the interview above it is known that when asked about language skills, almost all students know what it means. Then only 1 out of 10 respondents were interested in writing academic texts even though all respondents had experience writing academic texts in learning classes. Even though they had written before, half of the respondents felt they did not have good skills to write a thesis. Writing skills are very important in the process of writing a thesis. Knowledge is very influential in one's writing.

Difficulties in pouring ideas into written form were experienced by some respondents. They revealed that they experienced a condition where they had obtained reading sources but were unable to express or use their own words to defend the original idea. This causes them to experience a condition called stuck or unable to continue speaking. This is also related to the author's knowledge because if the writer has many sources of knowledge or knowledge about what is being studied it will also make it easier for them to write. This is similar to the research by Nurmallasari & Haryudin (2021) which found that students' lack of knowledge about English vocabulary resulted in difficulties for them to arrange word meanings for their understanding.

Language mastery is very important for thesis writing. From the results of the interviews, all respondents stated that mastery of language is important for thesis writing because it will affect their ability to develop their writing ideas. The last reason is not adept at developing writing ideas. After the interview, it was found that the reasons included lack of reading, lack of literacy, lack of creativity in developing what had been read, and not used to writing. So in conclusion the more people who read will be directly proportional to what will be written. A lot of reading will stimulate the brain so that it can bring up ideas for

writing. Similar results were also found by Ogunrombi (1995) who found that the inhibiting factor for writing was the lack of reading habits that could be started at home and depended heavily on the texts obtained in class and did not show a desire to read more widely.

CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the extent to which their background knowledge and language skills influence the development of their writing ideas in the background of chapter 1. From the findings, the researcher can conclude the following:

1. It can be concluded that the more knowledge one has, the more writing ideas that make it easier to write. So the background knowledge of students is very influential on the development of ideas in the background which also depends on what they read.

2. Language proficiency also depends on knowledge and writing habits. Skills will be directly proportional to what will be written. Reading a lot and writing often will stimulate the brain so that it can generate ideas for writing easily. So in conclusion, proficiency also greatly influences the development of writing.

REFERENCES

- Al-Sawalha, A. M. S., & Chow, T. V. F. (2012). The effects of proficiency on the writing process of jordanian efl university students. *Academic Research*, 3(2), 379–388.
- Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D. (2012). Building and Activating Students' Background Knowledge: It's What They Already Know That Counts: Teachers must assess and build on the background knowledge students possess. *Middle School Journal*, 43(3), 22–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2012.11461808>
- Graham et al. (2008). *Handbook of writing research*.
- Harmer, J. A. N. (2001). *The Practice of English Language Harmer 2001.pdf*.
- Hogue, A, & Oshima, A. (2018). *Writing Academic English*. News.Ge, <https://news.ge/anakliis-porti-aris-qveyinis-momava>.
- Murray, R. (2018). *How to Write. In Halfway to Revolution*. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2250xqb.1>

- Ogunrombi, S. A., & Adio, G. (1995). *Factors affecting the reading habits of secondary school students*. *Library review*, 44(4), 50-57.
- Pathak, V., Jena, B., & Kalra, S. (2013). *Qualitative research. Perspectives in clinical research*, 4(3).
- Swales, J. M., & Feak, C. B. (1996). Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills. *College Composition and Communication*, 47(3), 443. <https://doi.org/10.2307/358319>
- Tawalbeh, A., & Al-zuoud, K. M. (2013). *The Effects of Students' Prior Knowledge of English on Their Writing of Researches*. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 5(3), 156.