

QUALITY OF ENGLISH THESIS BY EFL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF MULAWARMAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: This article describes evaluation results of undergraduate theses written by undergraduate EFL students in Universitas Mulawarman Samarinda. Evaluation was based on the quality of description of sections in every chapter of the theses. The presentation of the thesis fulfilled standard presentation of academic report, describing five parts of presentation: introduction, review of related literature, research methodology, findings and discussion, and conclusion and suggestions. However, the substance of each section in the whole thesis was lack of reasoning. In terms of organization and contents, the theses were colored with trivialities in reasoning, coverage of substance to be described in the sections, and details of description. The trivialities of description resulted some crucial points were missing. In addition, language uses and mechanics in the theses were also colored with awkward sentences.

Keywords: thesis, Universitas Mulawarman Samarinda, evaluation.

THOUGH research reports may differ in scope and treatment, they follow a similar pattern of style and form that has become conventional in academic circles. The style and form are based upon of clarity of organization and presentation. The style of writing should be clear, concise, and completely objective.

The research report should be presented in a style that is creative, clear, and concise. Ideas should be explained in simple language and short, coherent sentences. Since objectivity is the primary goal, the research report should describe and explain, rather than to convince or move to action. The personal pronouns, I, we, you, my, our, and us should not be used. These personal pronouns can be avoided by the use of “the investigator” or “the researcher” (Best, 1981; Cresswell, 1994).

Of course, the ordinary rules of correct usage should prevail. Frequent errors of spelling and grammar must be avoided. Inability to write correctly is a serious limitation. Careless is a greater fault. Effective research report writing is not an easy task. Good reports are not written hurriedly. Even skillful and experienced writers revise many times before they submit a manuscript for publication. Students who have difficulty in written expression should have a competent friend or relative proofread their copy for correct usage before they type the final manuscript.

Best (1981) outlines three basic coverage in a research report: preliminary section, main body of the report, and reference section. The preliminary section comprises of title page, acknowledgement, table of contents, list of table and list of figure. The main body of

the report is the most point. This section may consist of five divisions presented in chapters. The reference section includes bibliography and appendices.

The main body of research report, as described by Best (1981:376-378) comprises of five chapters. The first section serves as an introduction to the area of consideration. The introduction discusses about problem, purposes, hypothesis, significance, scope and limitation, and definition of key-terms. The second section discusses important literature related to the study. This provides background for the development of the present study. This part gives evidence of the investigator's knowledge of the field. A brief, summary indicating areas of agreement or disagreement in findings or gaps in existing knowledge, should be included.

The third section of the main body report explains the design or methodology of the research in detail. The description served in careful elaboration includes name design, variable, population and sample, instrument, data collection procedures, and statistical procedures used in the analysis.

Section four includes presentation and analysis of the data. This is the heart of the research report. Findings of the study are emphasized here and display of the data and analysis are presented. Findings are statements of factual information based upon the data analysis. The fifth section consists of a summary. Findings are summarized here in terms of conclusion. The conclusion is answer to the research question raised, or statement of acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis. Following the conclusion is suggestion made in reference to the significant of the study. Suggestion for the future research is also important to state here, acknowledging the weaknesses of the research.

Referring to the criteria of good research report, the quality of English thesis written by undergraduate students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Universitas Mulawarman Samarinda was evaluated here. The evaluation is devoted to describing erroneous tokens of two theses performed in the thesis seminar. The evaluation and judgment were based upon the performance of the theses, using criteria of organization, substance, language use, and mechanical errors in writing. Both theses deserved unsatisfactory standard referring to mostly on organization, substance, and mechanics of writing. Parts occurred in trivialities and some emerged by design mainly because the linkage of sequent presentations from chapter to chapter digressed.

In Universitas Mulawarman Samarinda, writing a thesis is subject to write for all students before they leave the university. Thesis is the most instrument of leaving exam to end all programs of sarjana degree. The Academic Manual of Universitas Mulawarman Samarinda (2005) stipulates that thesis exam is served through three kinds of seminar: thesis proposal seminar, seminar to perform result of research, and final seminar. In the process of investigation and writing a thesis report, a student is helped with main supervisor and co-supervisor. In addition, in presenting the thesis proposal and the result of the research, a student should have three seminars facing five examiners. The examiners consist of two thesis supervisors and three examiners.

The procedures of thesis supervision and presentation should provide maximum advantages for the students. As a result, the thesis report should be ideally perfect in terms of methodology, result of investigation, and the quality of report writing including the style of

language and grammar. However, erroneous drawbacks are present in the theses indicating minimum supervision has been given and imperfect understanding in research appears.

Weaknesses of the quality of the thesis are easily identified from the title, literature review, methodology, findings and discussion, and closing sections. Serious awkward sentences indicating lack mastery on written expression and English grammar are present in the whole research report.

METHODS

This study used content analysis as the design. The study focused on the evaluation of thesis report, describing organization, substance, language use and mechanics of the thesis writing. In general, a thesis was evaluated its quality of the sequence of chapters and the language use. Front page chapters, including cover page, abstract, and table of contents were not included in this study. Similarly, complimentary page that included appendices was also excluded. Specifically, the evaluation was based on the rhetoric and linguistic features of the thesis.

The rhetoric of the thesis included organization of presentation and substance of details in each section of chapters. The organization described the structure of the report performing how variables were described. Theories, methodology, findings, and conclusion were identified their linkage and relevance to show the quality. The substance of thesis was evaluated based on the accuracy and completeness of details in each section of description in every chapter. In general, a thesis written by a student of Universitas Mulawarman Samarinda contained six chapters, introduction, review of related literature, research methods, data display, data analysis, and conclusion and suggestion. Specifically, thesis of English Department students included five chapters: introduction, review of related literature, research methodology, findings and discussion, and conclusion and discussion. The linguistic features included language uses, grammatical features, and mechanics of writing.

The number of theses evaluated in this study was two. Both theses focused on grammar as the topic of investigation. One thesis used description design, discussing one variable of investigation. The researcher used a test as the instrument, the data were scores, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistics contained mean, rate percentage, and polygons. Another thesis used experimental design using two variables. Data of the thesis were two sets of scores and the data were analyzed using inferential statistics. The hypothesis of this study was examined using t-test.

For the need of evaluation in this study, three main focuses were examined, organization, substance, and language use. Criteria of evaluation were based on theories of academic writing and research methodology in language teaching.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The general findings of this study identified characteristics of Chapter I Introduction, Chapter II Review of Related Literature, Chapter III Research Methodology, Chapter IV Findings and Discussion, and Chapter V Conclusion and Discussion. Characteristics and results of evaluation of each section in the whole chapters are presented separately in the following sections.

Topic of the Thesis

Topics of both theses as indicated in the title substantially indicate trivial topic. The topics are about grammar, one is the mastery of yes/no question and the other one is conditional sentence from which both topics do not show a strong position on linguistics or teaching field. In addition, the topics are examined based upon descriptive study relying on numbers that do not hold to a certain language teaching paradigm. In the field of teaching, grammar topics in these studies are apart from the new trend, issues, and needs by which contextual teaching that bases its virtue on communicative and meaningfulness approaches is ignored.

Statement of Problems and Research Questions

This part is theoretically good indicating a new model of thesis presentation. However, clarification and description on statement of the problems and research questions do not exist clearly. The substance of the parts is ambiguous and bias, adding descriptions beyond the accurate reasons and arguments of why both sub-titles are presented independently.

The statement of the problem substantially should declare various variables stated in the background of the study that make gaps confronted to the recent facts empirically or theoretically, on the basis of inductive arguments. The result of identifications of the problems is to mentioning couples of facts and gaps that are rooted from the variables. Parallel to the identifications of the problems, analysis to specific problems that are relevant to the variables is particularly discussed. Finally, the specified problems are formulated into a statement normally in question forms. In this respect, research problem is more relevant than research question. Therefore, some suggest to include identification of the problems in the background parts and analysis of the problems is compliment to the background using empirical evidence and theories.

Significance of the Study

This point does not show theoretical aspect that indicates what theory the researcher is relying on. Practically, the significance also does not show what typical contribution is revealed from the theses. Significance of the study should have linkage to whom suggestions are addressed and how the suggestion points are conducted in a good and right treats. Contributions should deal with confirming, contending, or refuting previous theories or researches. In practice, contribution should show definitive and operational treats improving or delineating empirical evidences in the suggestion sections.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

This part describes inconsistent substance, varying to describing subject and variables and discussing variables only. Scope should go with coverage of variables to be investigated and restrict to what extent the variables is described, identifying specifically on the indicators of the variables. Scope and limitation also share with readers the subjects of the study in general. This part has a strong linkage with suggestions points, restricting to whom suggestions are addressed and to what extent the topics to be suggested are delivered.

Key-Terms

This point indicates focus that is trivial. Procedures to describe key-terms are not present, ignoring to state definition from theory and definition for an operational function in the study formulated by the researcher. The ultimate goal of defining concept theoretically and description operationally based on the specific use of the study are trivially termed.

Review of Related Literature

Evaluation on chapter II about how theories are developed in the theses is given in brief only. Evaluation on Chapter II requires detail description involving writing theories and understanding on related theories. Therefore, this report did not discuss the focus in details. Rather, it describes general characteristics of the chapter.

The review of literature discusses salient presentation, defining constructs of variables mostly in simple manners. The use of word “concept” accompanied with simple illustration where the use of point of view is beyond the control as indicated by “the you” showing how the researcher takes position is not clearly defined. The word concept is not relevant presented in such the simple matter. Other drawbacks of this point are to reviewing similar previous studies. The basic theories as a strong foundation to describing the variables to be investigated and review of previous studies as reference to developing discussion section are not defined in comprehensive ways.

Research Methodology

This point digresses much in nature, resulting incomplete and trivial description. Starting from research design, the description does not clearly define what specific design is employed by the researcher. In addition, variables to be investigated are not specified in this part so that linkage among design, population, instrument, data collection, and data analysis varies.

The point should start to discuss the terminology used as the title: research methods or research methodology. Research methods indicate combination of various methods for the foundation of analysis. Simply, some argue that the word methods is more relevant to show the nature of process, analogizing “method” is “metode” in bahasa Indonesia and methodology refers to the science of research. In this respect, one method and another method are combined partly as one takes place separately than the other.

The above argument does not indicate explanatory adequacy, when the whole process in the chapter 3 is identified. Essentially, the methodology shows how a researcher should integrate various knowledge into incessant procedure. In the methodology, the researcher is subject to have correct understanding on research design and its characteristics of the best use, sampling strategies, devising and operating instrument, for example a test, procedures of test validation, procedures to collect data relevant to their characteristics, and statistics knowledge for analysis. The knowledge is inter-dependent and the researcher should take the integral understanding in the research. Therefore, the word “research methodology” provides strong relevancy to the context, besides, convention on research agrees to use methodology rather than methods. However, for some extent, the word methods are acceptable for a study where one focus of procedure is dominant, for example, classroom action research.

Population and Sample

The researcher does not talk two basic principles of defining population and sample as a sub-title. The population should deal with identification of possible number of subjects that will be involved. Characteristics of the population in general are necessary to inform, providing relevant sampling strategies that will be employed. Sampling strategy basically involves sample size, proportion of individuals, and individual selection. Therefore, the main description on the sampling should strongly indicate how individuals are selected representing the target population and the researcher comes to a strong conclusion that the strategy is best for the research. Sampling techniques quoting for example, “if the number of population is 100, the sample is 50% of the population,” is beyond accurate argument, because different design requires different sampling strategy. In the descriptive design, the more the sample is the more convincing the result of the study will be obtained.

Research Instrument

Research instrument discusses kinds of instrument employed, how items of the instrument are constructed, who devises the instrument, and a report how individual items of the whole instrument are validated. The theses describe the procedures but the information on how the instrument is calibrated does not indicate complete understanding on the procedures. First, there is no report on how individual items are selected from initial instrument using analysis of the degrees of difficulty and discriminating power. The goal to identify the degrees of difficulty and the discrimination is not defined. Second, how validity and reliability are processed is not accurate; one thesis places reliability, validity and items selection successively, the other thesis states item selection, validity, and reliability. What makes the matter worse, both theses do not report the results of calibration process, including item difficulty, discrimination, validity, and reliability.

Data Collection Techniques

In this section irrelevant information is included. The researcher states that data collection is claimed to commence from developing instrument, try-out procedures, and sample selection. The substance of data collection that should strongly show to the readers what kinds of data are used relevant to the instrument, how data are identified, how data are sorted and classified, how data are administered, and how data are tabulated for preparation of analysis are ignored. Pre-data collection and procedures of data collection are described in the theses making the substance of the sub-titles are bias.

Data Analysis Techniques

The description of data analysis techniques is presented beyond the linkage of research problems, instruments, and goal of analysis. Data analysis substantially should indicate how research problems are answered. If a research has one research problem, techniques of data analysis describe the tool of data analysis in linear way to answer only one research problem. In a research that has more than one research problem, presentation of the tools of data analysis should indicate how the research problems will be answered one by one. The data

analysis should have strong indication to kinds of instrument and kinds of data. In addition, data analysis should also outline how findings in the next chapter will be presented.

Data Analysis, Discussion and Interpretation

The presentation of data analysis, apart from discussion and interpretation rises two significant questions. **First**, data analysis does not indicate how research problems are presented. In the current theses, the research problems consist of three parts, elaborating similar topics into artificial different questions. In essence, each problem requires a set of instrument that has strong evidence of validation. Consequently, the data should cover three different kinds and data analysis should also indicate different procedures.

In the current theses, data analysis is presented in a single chapter and the linkage among research problem, instrument, kinds of data, and tools of data analysis is not clarified. Data analysis here tends to indicate an arena to demonstrating statistical process, showing that the researcher is proficient to using the complexity of various statistical formula.

Second, discussion and interpretation indicate reserved word order. The discussion section presents merely comments on how data analyses operate. The lengthy arguments in the discussion substantially are the clarification of the result of data analysis, interpreting the results of analyses of each finding. Unfortunately, interpretation that infers how findings and discussion are linked does not exist in the whole contexts.

What is reported in this part is basically the findings of the study and discussion. The findings are the result of data analysis and interpretation how findings relate to the investigating variables. In this respect, the findings should be in line with research problems in terms of the substance and the presentation procedures. Findings are the body of the study and research problems are the soul of the study. Raw data, formula operation, and statistical analyses are not findings of the study; they are annexed in the appendix pages complimentary to the findings.

In addition, discussion is the clarification and comments of the findings. The clarification and the comments can be identified from the strength of the findings, the weaknesses of the findings, or analytical evidence obtained from inferring one finding and another finding. The discussion should take for one of the three conditions.

First, discussion can confirm or clarify previous research findings or theories presented in the literature review. If the finding of current research is clarified, in what aspect the clarification conforms and a strong statement should be made that the current findings support previous study or previous theories.

Second, discussion should declare falseability of the previous theories or previous studies. This means that the current findings reveal enough evidence that previous theories or studies are wrongly proven. In this regard, the current findings are true and the result should revise the previous theories.

Third, the discussion can indicate that the current findings have strong evidence to emerge brand new theories. The new findings describe specific characteristics of the findings that are evidently different from previous theories and dictate how the current findings operate.

With this view in mind, data analysis and interpretation would be best integrated in terms of findings of the study. The raw data and process of analysis showing sophisticated operation of statistical formula are put in the appendix. The reference to present the findings is research problems, kinds of data, and tools of data analysis. In adherence to the findings, discussion section is presented complimentary. The discussion section is not interpretation, it is a forum to explore and link among the findings, related literature, previous studies, and current inference.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This section by principle depicts an integral unit. Substantially, however, conclusion and suggestions are developed based upon different strategies. Relying on the findings of the study, conclusion is developed based on the purpose of the study. The description of the conclusion, therefore, should match with the purposes of the study defined in chapter I. Between purposes of the study and problems of the study, there is a closed relationship. Therefore, the presentation of findings is in line with research problems and the conclusion indicates the presentation of the purposes of the study. Similarity obviously exists in the purposes of the study and research problems in that both statements focus on the same points. Distinction is revealed in that research problems are stated in the “interrogative sentences” and purposes of the study are declared in the “positive statement.”

In the suggestion section, four points are addressed. First, suggestions should refer to the scope and limitation of the study and significance of the study. The scope and limitation of the study provide contribution on what variables are relevant to suggest, to what extent the suggestion should be defined, and what definitive indicators are specified. With regard to the significance of the study, the suggestions should clearly address individuals related in the research. The individuals have been clearly specified in the significance of the study so that suggestions should indicate individuals that are previously stated in the significance of the study.

Second, suggestions should be begun with a statement showing an evidence in the findings that the comment and suggestion will be addressed. Starting from a specific statement, an operational and definite statement to improve or contend the statement is defined.

Third, to define the suggestions, researcher should wisely consider that if the suggestions are accepted for application, the results should be better. If the results of the application of the findings are worse, the suggestions are useless. In this regard, defining suggestions is not easy, evidence that supports the suggestions is required to formulating the considerable suggestions.

Fourth, suggestions should acknowledge that the current research is not perfect. Certain pitfall, e.g. the instrument, the data analysis, the number of sample, is identified due to the limitation of some aspects. The drawbacks should be declared and further researcher interested in the same field is suggested to improve.

Language Use and Mechanics of Writing

The language use refers to the grammatical sentence, structures, tenses, agreements, word orders, paragraphing, development of paragraphs, citations, supporting details in the paragraphs, coherence and cohesion. Mechanics of writing indicate the correct use of punctuation, spelling, capitalization, style of typing, tables, references, as shown in the title page, page of approval, abstract, table of contents, list of table, list of appendices, numbering of pages, layout, etc.

Grammatical errors appear anywhere in the whole texts of the current theses, indicating minimum correction is focused. The use of language style that is not English nuance is salient. In addition, mechanics of writing are identified in various versions, starting from title page, page of approval, references, table of contents, table presentation, etc. Grammatical errors and mechanical errors are trivial and intolerable. Frequent errors in this matter are lamented, decreasing the quality of the research.

CONCLUSION

Quality of thesis report writing by EFL Undergraduate Students of Universitas Mulawarman Samarinda does not indicate the ideal procedures. The title of the research is trivial indicating rough understanding on the language teaching perspectives. Grammar topic and reading topics are dominant. The presentation of every chapter among five chapters in the thesis is not accurate. Drawbacks appear in the sections for three ways. The content of the section does not specify the substance; the detail of reasoning in the section is trivial or digresses; and the grammatical features are colored with awkward sentences.

In the section that discusses theories, the theses are colored with similar pattern. The presentation of theories defines and translates the literal meaning of title using word by word definition. Fundamental concepts of the variables in the research are not provided. The writing style as indicated in the citation on the whole chapters is “replication form. Theories are quoted as it is from the sources and critical thinking does not appear. Synthesis techniques combining two or more theories are not well handcrafted by the researcher.

The methodology of research is weak. Reasons to determine the design are short and the logic why the selected design is relevant with the object of investigation does not appear. Procedures of sample selection are also weak and the development of research instrument is not clear. Data collection and data analysis techniques used in the study are similar, indicating replication of one researcher to another.

Consequently the findings of the study, discussion, and conclusion are not matched. Findings of the study are colored with presentation for the raw data and statistical analysis display. Discussion section refers to the interpretation of the data and no theoretical or empirical references are linked with the recent research findings in the discussion section. The conclusion therefore is biased from the research question and the findings. In addition, the suggestion section does not show the relevance with purposes, significance of the study, and findings.

The language use in the thesis is colored with various errors in all level of discourse. Syntactical errors, grammatical error, and structural errors are present in the sentence levels, paragraph levels, and text levels. Written expression mastery seems to be main problems and

inability to write well strongly appears. It seems that supervisory in the thesis writing process and seminar exams to present the result of investigation does not improve the quality of the thesis.

SUGGESTIONS

Considering the findings of the study and characteristics of thesis quality obtained in this study, the following suggestions are put forward:

- 1) Topic of the research by EFL undergraduate students of Universitas Mulawarman Samarinda is too simple, focusing on grammar and reading and the research design varies in description studies that are trivial. Instructors of research methodology in language teaching in Universitas Mulawarman Samarinda are suggested to innovate and reform their teaching focuses that help students to conduct research using qualitative design, classroom research, or content analysis. The topics of the research should change from language skills to the SLA, linguistics, discourse analysis, curriculum, and teaching methods.
- 2) The language features in theses are colored with awkward sentences indicating imperfect mastery on grammar and inability to write well. Thesis advisors are suggested to work with more focus on the correction of the language in the theses more intensively. Extensive supervisions may be required to remedy students' weaknesses.
- 3) Inability to write well indicates attitude and understanding on the writing process that need practices, revisions, and editing. Students are suggested not to write in a hurry, running after schedule of seminar without considering the quality of the thesis. They need to have more practices under intensive supervision of the thesis advisors.
- 4) Seminars for thesis exam are exhausted and the frequency of seminars is too many. The seminars does not provide substantial revision for the thesis improvement, rather it is a procedure of bureaucratic. The faculty members are suggested to examine the significance of the seminars, and change the procedures into only final seminar exam. Proposal seminar is conducted individually by the researcher and the advisor and the final seminar is conducted after the thesis report finishes. The seminar involves only three examiners, two advisors and one examiner.

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