EFL Student Teachers' Experiences in Writing Their Undergraduate Theses in Jambi

Mukhlash Abrar[1], Nunung Fajaryani[2], Roni Rizki Hutabarat[3], Failasofah[4], Masbirorotni[5]
[1]Universitas Jambi. e-mail: mukhlash.abrar@unja.ac.id
[2]Universitas Jambi. e-mail: nunung.fajaryani@unja.ac.id
[3]Universitas Jambi. e-mail: ronirizkihutabaratoo@gmail.com
[4]Universitas Jambi. e-mail: failasofah@unja.ac.id
[5]Universitas Jambi. e-mail:eka_rotni@unja.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The purpose of this qualitative study was to comprehensively investigate the experiences in writing undergraduate theses, the challenges faced, and strategies to alleviate the encountered challenges, of ten EFL student teachers at one higher education institution in Jambi. To collect the data, we employed semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol to elicit the participants' responses. The results of the study, through thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006), indicated that there are four major themes of challenges in writing an undergraduate thesis, including linguistics and writing knowledge issues, psychological issues, media and resources issues, and supervision and time management issues. To cope with those challenges, the participants employed some strategies, such as self-management strategy, technological help, and help from others. This study suggests EFL student teachers identify issues they struggle with in writing their theses. It is necessary so they could find a helpful way to deal with the challenge.

1. Introduction

In the context of EFL, writing is generally perceived as one of the most difficult language skills to master. Some scholars have consistently argued that writing is not a simple language skill to learn and do because it requires writers' competencies in many aspects, from language to writing knowledge. Bracewell (2020), for instance, describes that writing is the most demanding and complex activity to do which needs a writer's ability to comprehend the language and writing techniques. In a similar vein, Dwihandini et al., (2013), assert that writing is one of the most challenging language skills because it requires the writers to generate their writing ideas and develop them systematically. Furthermore, some other scholars (Myles,

2002; Syafii, 2017; Tribble, 1996) also separately highlight that writing is a language skill that is not easy to acquire. They further explained that in order to be able to write well, it is required for the writers to practice and learn through experiences. These suggest that writing is a complex process that requires a wide range of competencies and can only be mastered through continuous practice. It is indeed more difficult when an individual has to write an academic text, such as a thesis.

A thesis is a type of academic writing (Badreddine, 2019) in which a stated idea or theory is discussed in a logical way. In the context of Indonesia's higher education, a thesis is a research project undertaken by students both at the undergraduate and master levels with the guidance of supervisors as a part of the final project before completing their studies. This means that the students are expected to produce a thesis before their graduation. Since the term thesis is used for both undergraduate and master levels, this study only focused on the undergraduate level of study.

To date, the study on exploring thesis writing has been conducted by many scholars. However, most of the cases focused on postgraduate rather than undergraduate theses (See Abrar, et al., 2023; Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020; Ekpoh, 2016; Ma, 2020; Kourepaz & Khahsavar, 2020; Khajepasha & Sadeghi, 2015; Li & Wang, 2008). There were few studies investigating the related topic (See Dwihandini et al., 2013; Sariyanto, et al., 2015; Puspita, 2019; Lestari, 2020; Fitria, 2022; Sukandi & Rianita, 2022). Although the six studies investigated undergraduate thesis writing, the discussion solely focused on the challenges faced by undergraduate EFL learners in writing their thesis without exploring the way or strategy the students deal with the challenges. In addition, among six previous related studies, five of them employed quantitative as the method of inquiry. The fact of the scarce comprehensive investigation of the topic in the context of EFL student teachers and the scarcity of the use of qualitative methods led us to investigate this phenomenon. Based on the rationale, this qualitative study aims to 1) explore the challenges faced by EFL student teachers in writing their undergraduate theses, and 2) investigate their strategies to overcome the challenges.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Thesis and Writing Thesis

The term *thesis*, in the Indonesian context, refers to research work produced by both undergraduate and master students to graduate. It is a type of academic writing in which the idea or theory is discussed in a logical way (Badreddine, 2019). Moreover, Darmono and Hasan (2022) argued that a thesis is the result of a student's thoughts which is realized in an academic manuscript as the requirement to get the degree. They further explain that the thesis is written systematically through the process of research, either field or library research. It is clear that a thesis is a final work written by undergraduate and/or master students to graduate in a logical and systematic way through the process of research.

Writing a thesis, especially for EFL undergraduate students, is not that easy. The process itself could be very complicated and will take a long time to finish. As Berndtsson, et al (2008) stated, the thesis project is most likely the biggest project that students will take in their academic project or in their lives. Some of the challenges that EFL students may face in academic writing and/or completing their thesis are language issues (Abrar, et al., 2023; Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017; Dwihandini et al., 2013; Kristy, 2012; Mohamed & Zouaoi, 2014; Puspita, 2019;), unsupportive supervisors (Agricola, et al., 2021;

Fitria, 2022), lack of confidence (Puspita, 2019; Dwihandini et al., 2013), lack of available resources (Alyan, 2022), and lack of motivation (Constantino, 2019; Lestari, 2020; Ramage, 1990). Therefore, writing a thesis requires determination, consistency, and commitment to complete it.

2.2 Empirical Study on Writing Thesis in Indonesian Context

There have many studies investigating students' experiences in writing academic writing such as thesis and/or dissertation, but many of them are from the perspective of graduate and/or post-graduate students (See Abrar et al., 2023; Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020; Ekpoh, 2016; Ma, 2020; Kourepaz & Khahsavar, 2020; Khajepasha & Sadeghi, 2015; Li & Wang, 2008). In the context of Indonesia, we believe that the topic of undergraduate EFL students' experiences in writing a thesis has been explored by some researchers, but the documented studies are still limited. One of the studies was a research conducted by Dwihandini et al (2013) under the title the analysis of factors affecting undergraduate students' Difficulties in Writing a Thesis in the English Department of Mahasaraswati University. In their study, they employed a mixed method study by administering questionnaires and doing interviews. The results of the study indicated that the students experienced three main difficulties, including difficulties in psychological, sociocultural, and linguistic factors.

Another documented study on exploring EFL students' experiences in writing an undergraduate thesis in the Indonesian context is Puspita (2019). She investigated the factors affecting EFL students' difficulties in writing a thesis in IAIN Curup. She also employed a mixed-method research design with questionnaires and interviews as data collecting techniques. Her study results revealed that linguistic, sociocultural, and personality factors became the most challenging in writing their undergraduate theses. A more current documented study of the related topic was a study by Lestari (2020). She examined the topic quantitatively. Her study results showed that the biggest concern for the students in writing their theses was their limited and/or low English proficiency.

A more current related study by Sukandi and Rianita (2022) examined the problems of EFL students in writing their thesis. The researchers administered survey questionnaires to 138 EFL students in their university and 95 students returned the questionnaire. The results indicated that the students have encountered many problems in writing, including finding the idea of research, the availability of resources, developing ideas in writing, and technical writing. During the same period, Fitria (2022) conducted a study under the title *Analysis of EFL students' difficulties in writing and completing English thesis*. In her research, she administered a close-ended questionnaire to English students from 32 universities and higher institutions in Indonesia. Her findings revealed that EFL students faced various challenges in writing a thesis, such as internal challenges (difficulty in choosing the title, boredom, fears to have a seminar, language problems, health issues, and the tendency of using online translation tools) and external challenges (problems with supervisors, financial issues and less conducive environment.

The previous studies above (Dwihandini et al., 2013; Puspita, 2019; and Lestari, 2020; Fitria, 2022; and Sukandi & Rianita, 2022) have provided insightful information about EFL experiences in writing undergraduate theses in the context of Indonesia. However, this study offered a more in-depth exploration of the topic. We not only discussed the challenges faced by EFL student teachers in writing their undergraduate theses but also provided the

strategies employed by them to alleviate the challenges. In addition, with a slightly different method by employing a qualitative case study design and using the interview as our data collection method, we hope to investigate the phenomenon in-depth and identify more related features which surely contribute to the related study.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study aimed to explore EFL student teachers' challenges in writing their undergraduate theses. To do this, qualitative research with a case study approach was considered to be an appropriate research design to holistically explain and understand the issue. The reason for choosing qualitative is because it focuses on providing an in-depth and comprehensive description, explanation, and exploration of a particular issue or phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Yin, 2015). Furthermore, a case study is a qualitative approach that explores and analyzes a case or a bounded system comprehensively (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Stake, 1995; Meriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Therefore, a qualitative method with a case study design was considered appropriate to employ in the context of this study because it helped the researchers to provide in-depth, detailed, and genuine information in relation to the EFL student teachers' challenges in writing their undergraduate theses.

3.2 Participants

The setting of the research was an English language program study at one higher education institution in Jambi. To select this research site and the participants, we as researchers utilized a purposive sampling technique. Creswell (2007) argued that this sampling technique is commonly used in qualitative research in which the researchers select the sites and/or participants of their research based on their study purposes. The rationale for choosing this research site and participants was based on the research availability and accessibility. The site offers a program that fits for EFL research context and the procedure of accessing the site and participants were not too complicated. In addition, the staff and participants were very helpful during the process of the study.

We initially planned to recruit 15 EFL student teachers to be our participants in this study. The rationale for recruiting 15 participants was to get in-depth and robust data about the phenomenon of interest. It is also aligned with the ideal range of sample size for the qualitative study recommended by Creswell (2014) and Bertaux (1981). To recruit the participants whose appropriate to the purpose of the study, we set some inclusive criteria including (1) The participants must be active student teachers of an English education study program; (2) The participants are in the process of writing their theses; (3) The participants have completed proposal seminar stage; and (4) The participants agreed to take part in the research voluntarily. After deciding the criteria, we requested the list of student teachers who met the criteria and their contact numbers from the study program administration. Then, we contacted the prospective participants individually asking about their willingness to take part in the study. As every participant completely volunteered, we eventually managed to have 10 participants. Among the participants, seven of them were females and three were males; five of the participants were in their fourth year, three were in the fifth year, one was in the sixth year, and one was in the seventh year. The information of each participant, in detail, was (pseudonym) ST1 (4th year and female), ST2 (7th year and female), ST3 (5th year and female), ST4 (6th year and male), ST5 (5th year and female), ST6 (4th year and female), ST7 (4th year

and female), ST8 (4th year and female), ST9 (4th year and male), and ST10 (5th year and male).

3.3 Instruments

In order to gather the empirical data, semi-structured interviews guided with an interview protocol were employed. The use of semi-structured interviews was helpful to obtain robust data as it allowed us as the researchers to elaborate interview questions by asking more related questions, clarification, and even confirmation. Before the process of interviews, we reconfirmed the participants to voluntarily participate by signing an informed consent form. Apart from some issues in managing interview schedules and its medium, the process of interviews was generally fine and smooth. All interviews were audio-recorded and approximately 40-50 minutes were allotted for the interview of each participant. Related to the language used for the interview, we gave the participant freedom to use the language, English or Bahasa Indonesia that they are comfortable with. All of them chose Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of discussion during the interviews. They argued that speaking in Bahasa Indonesia could help them answer the questions in detail.

In the process of interviews, we used an interview protocol as the instrument of the study. This was used to guide the researchers to conduct the interview properly and appropriately. Moreover, the interview protocol helped the researchers stimulate the participants to answer questions. The questions listed in the interview protocol related to the research questions. Some of the questions were: 1) Can you share your thesis writing experiences? 2) Do you find it challenging to write your thesis in English? If yes, what challenges do you face, and explain it? 3) Do you sometimes feel burnout when writing your thesis? Why?.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

To analyze the data, we employed thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clark (2006). It is a method of data analysis in qualitative research which identifies, analyzes and reports patterns in the form of themes within the data. In its process, we started the analysis by *familiarizing ourselves with the data* by listening to the recording, transcribing the data, and studying the transcriptions multiple times. Thenceforth, we *generated the initial codes* by highlighting and/or underlining important parts of the transcriptions. The following step was *searching for themes*. To do this, we combined several codes into a single theme. After that, we *reviewed the themes* by making sure of the accuracy and useful representations of the data. Then, we *defined and named themes* by interpreting the data and coming up with a name for each theme. Finally, we *produced the reports* by writing the findings and discussions. The summary of the phases can be seen in the following figure.

Figure 1. The phases of Braun and Clark's thematic analysis (2006)

4. Findings

This study aimed to explore EFL student teachers' challenges in writing their undergraduate theses and their strategies to overcome the encountered challenges. This section is divided into two subsections which provide relevant data from the interviews for each study purpose.

4.1. EFL Student Teachers Challenges in Writing Their Undergraduate Theses

Based on the data analysis, we identified four main themes of EFL student teachers' challenges in writing their undergraduate thesis, including 1) linguistics and writing knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, paraphrasing, and referencing); 2) psychological issues (lack of confidence and lack of motivation); 3) media and resources issues (online platforms and limited references) and 4) supervision and time management issues (unsupportive behavior of supervisor and poor time management). The following table summarized the themes and sub-themes of EFL student teachers' challenges in writing their undergraduate thesis.

Table 1. Themes and Sub-themes of EFL Student Teachers' Writing Challenges

	Theme(s)	Subthemes(s)
EFL Student Teachers' Challenges	Linguistics and Writing Knowledge	Grammar
		Vocabulary
		Paraphrasing
		Referencing
	Psychological Issues	Lack of Confidence
		Lack of Motivation
	Media and Resources Issues	Online Platforms
		Limited References
	Supervision and Time management Issues	Unsupportive Behavior of Supervisor
		Poor Time management

4.1.1. Linguistics and Writing Knowledge

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was linguistics and writing knowledge. This theme is one of the most prevalent themes in the study. As stated earlier, this theme has four subthemes. Among them, the most challenging aspect, based on the data from interviews, was grammar. Seven participants acknowledged that their low proficiency in grammar was a stumbling block for them to write their thesis well. To illustrate, *ST1* shared in the interview that she often mixed up the use of tenses in writing her thesis. Her confusion to write her thesis with appropriate structure prolonged her target to finish her thesis because she had to revise her writing. She specifically said, "... I frequently mixed up the use of simple present, past tense, and future tense. My supervisor kept asking me to revise the structure of my writing and it was challenging". Similarly, *ST5* found that grammar is a serious problem for her to write her thesis. She noted, "I found it very hard dealing with grammar because I personally am not very knowledgeable in that matter". Moreover, *ST2* commented, "I struggle in Grammar because, in undergraduate theses, there are a number of tenses involved". These data obviously showed that a lack of grammar proficiency can be a serious challenge to write the thesis well.

The data also showed that vocabulary is another prevalent issue for EFL student teachers to write their undergraduate thesis. Six out of 10 participants voiced this challenge in their interviews. One female participant in her fourth year, *ST6*, acknowledged that vocabulary is

one of her main issues in writing her thesis. She uttered, "One of the biggest challenges that I faced in my thesis writing is vocabulary because I have a limited range of vocabulary". In a similar vein, *ST7* shared that it was problematic for her to find the synonym and use proper diction in writing her thesis. She said, "When writing my undergraduate thesis in a foreign language, I found it struggles in finding synonyms and employing proper diction to my writings". The data from the interview indicated that limited knowledge of vocabulary, at some points, slowed down the process of writing.

The other two sub-themes from the data of interviews were paraphrasing and referencing. In terms of paraphrasing, five participants mentioned that this is a challenge for them in writing their undergraduate theses. For example, *ST8* explicitly stated that paraphrasing is challenging. She said, "The most challenging thing is the language itself, paraphrasing in Indonesia is one thing however when it comes to English, it is on a whole another level of difficulty". Moreover, *ST10* expressed that he had to revise his thesis several times because he just copied others' statements without paraphrasing them. As a result, his supervisor asked him to revise his thesis. He specifically argued, "I found it really difficult to paraphrase the sentences that I cited. I got confused because my supervisor kept telling me to paraphrase them correctly". Besides paraphrasing, an act of providing and acknowledging sources and citations which is known as referencing was also another challenge for participants as five participants highlighted this issue. *ST9* commented in his interview that he felt difficult to correctly quote an author's statements. He explicitly said, "Most people, including me, were troubled in quoting an author's statements". In a similar vein, *ST1* explained that she found it challenging to write in-text citations. She revealed, "When I was quoting statements from more than one Author, I was troubled at punctuating the proper rules for in-text citation, for instance: the use of a comma, full stop, and semicolon". These data suggested that the inability to paraphrase and reference well may lead to student teachers' confusion in writing their undergraduate theses.

4.1.2. Psychological Issues

The second emerging theme from the data was psychological. It relates to a condition that influences one's mental state, feelings, and behavior. Regarding this issue, we identified two subthemes. The first subtheme is lack of motivation. All 10 participants shared that they experienced insufficiency of motivation when writing their theses. A male student teacher in his fourth year of study, *ST9*, elucidated his experience. He uttered, "There were times when I personally felt down when writing my thesis...there were a lot of revisions in my thesis. Even the smallest mistakes were counted, which made me less motivated in finishing my thesis". With a different case, *ST4* illustrated her downhearted experience in accomplishing her thesis. Her motivation was lost due to the major changes she had to do to her thesis. She shared, "After my seminar proposal, there were many changes in my thesis, and because of that I had to start over from scratch. Those made me lose my motivation to finish my thesis." Furthermore, *ST3* commented in her interview, "I sometimes felt not motivated to write because I had to do unpleasant activities, such as reading many articles". The interview transcription above showed that lack of motivation may influence the process of writing completion and it can be triggered by some factors, including major revision of the thesis.

Aside from lack of motivation, the data indicated that lack of confidence also can influence writing progress. Of all participants, three of them explicitly mentioned this issue in their

interviews. **ST1** in her interview explained that she often felt unconfident to show her progress to her supervisors because she was afraid to make the same mistakes. She said, "Sometimes, I feel a bit low in my confidence...to show my progress to my supervisors, the hesitation came from the mistakes that I previously made. I was scared to disappoint them in a way if I kept messing up my writing". With a different story, **ST9** told that his lack of confidence developed his compulsive tendency to submit his revisions repeatedly. He uttered, "I felt my confidence level is low. Thus I had a compulsive tendency to keep submitting my revisions over and over again". These data indicated that low confidence, at some points, affected the progress of thesis writing.

4.1.3. Media and Resources Issues

The information gathered from the interviews indicated that media and resources turned out to be another theme of the study. We found two sub-themes that belong to this theme, including limited references and online platforms. Between the two sub-themes, limited reference was identified as the most prevalent issue in this theme. Four participants affirmed that a lack of writing references was one of the reasons for their slow writing progress. **ST3**, for instance, claimed that getting related references to her research was challenging. She noted, "I had difficulties in finding references, especially ones that aligned with my topic of research". Similarly, **ST1** conceded that her difficulty to find appropriate references for her thesis took much longer than she expected. As a result, this influenced her writing progress. She explained, "One of the challenges that I faced while working on my thesis was finding references and this took much of my time". Another participant, **ST10** argued that limited references provided by the university made it difficult for him to get relevant references. He had to spend his money to get requited articles because they cannot be accessed freely. He uttered, "One of the aspects that made thesis writing hard was finding resources due to limited references and access provided by the university ... I had to pay a certain amount of monetary expenses just to be able to have access to the said journals. It is obvious that limited references provided by the university could hinder the participants' writing progress.

Following limited reference, online platforms were another challenge faced by some participants in writing their undergraduate theses. Two participants admitted that communicating with their supervisor through online platforms was not a good idea due to poor connection. **ST2** in her interview emphasized that her communication with her supervisors was not effective through online platforms during Covid-19. Therefore, it affected the completion of her thesis. She said, "In 2020 when Covid-19 was at its summit, the form of communication in supervisions switched off ...and were mostly conducted via online platforms. As a result, the communications between me and my supervisor were a bit detrimentally affected as well". With a different condition, **ST1** found it challenging to communicate with her supervisors through online platforms of communication. She shared "While I was writing my thesis, at the same time I joined one of the programs from a university in a remote area. Thus, inevitably I had to do supervision remotely through Zoom and I found it challenging due to some reasons such as poor internet connection and blackout". This can be inferred that the use of online platforms, in certain circumstances, during supervision can be a hindrance for the students to completing their theses.

4.1.4. Supervision and Time Management Issues

The last theme of writing challenges is supervision and time management issues. This theme consisted of two subthemes. The first subtheme related to supervision was the unsupportive behavior of supervisor(s). Among 10 participants, two participants argued that their supervisors were not very supportive. A female student teacher in her fifth year, *ST5*, explained in the interview that her supervisor was busy and she had to wait quite a long to get a response and feedback from her supervisor and which made her slow. She said, "My supervisor was quite a busy person and it was very hard for me to get in touch with her. I had to wait a long time to receive the revisions from her. Therefore, I had slow progress". Likewise, *ST10* described that his supervisors were not responsive and were difficult to get in touch with. He expressed, "It was difficult to be able to have consultations with my supervisors. For instance, in a week, I have been trying to reach them twice, but there was no response whatsoever". The difficulty to reach supervisors could definitely affect the participants' progress in writing their undergraduate theses.

In relation to the issue of time management, three participants explained in their interviews that they have poor time management which resulted in slow progress on their theses. *ST10*, for example, mentioned that her inability to manage her time in studying and writing her thesis made it difficult to progress well. She commented, "*While I was in the sixth semester, my schedules were very congested. At that time, I took full-time schedules of course credits for the semester. Hence, my focus was divided between my thesis writing and my study. Inevitably, one of the two was deserted*". With a different case, *ST3* shared that her poor time management between working part-time and writing her thesis distracted her from completing her study. She voiced, "*I personally was troubled to time my schedule in writing my thesis especially because I had a part-time job to attend*". These transcriptions clearly showed that students' inability to manage proportional time in writing a thesis due to other activities and/or reasons such as working, procrastination habits, and studying influences them to progress to a significant level.

4.2. EFL Student Teachers' Strategies to Overcome the Challenges in Writing their Undergraduate Theses

Going through thematic analysis, aside from identifying the challenges, we also pinpointed three major themes of EFL student teachers' strategies in overcoming their thesis' writing challenges, such as self-management (doing positive activities, abstaining from the thesis and making schedule notes); technological help (language application and referencing application); and help from others (help from supervisors and help from friends and families). These can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Themes and Sub-theme(s) of EFL Student Teachers' Writing Strategies

	Theme(s)	Subthemes(s)
EFL Student Teachers' Strategies	Self-management	Doing positive activities
		Abstaining from thesis
		Making schedule notes
	Technological Help	Language Application
		Referencing Application
	Help from Others	Help from Supervisor(s)
		Help from Friends and Families

4.2.1. Self-Management

What it means by self-management is a strategy initiated by individuals to overcome their challenges without any help from third parties. In this case, self-management refers to the efforts and also thoughts used by student teachers to alleviate their encountered challenges in writing their undergraduate theses. From the data, we identified three interrelated subthemes. The first subtheme is doing positive activities. Five participants shared that positive activities helped them alleviate the challenges in writing their thesis. One of the participants, *ST2,* told the interviewer that she tried to reflect on what she had done and consider who had supported her and this boosted her motivation to progress. She specifically said, "I regretted every second of wasted time that I have spent writing my thesis ... I started to think about everyone who has been supporting me so far and convinced myself to not disappoint any of them. In a different case, *ST3* tried to read and learn the dictionary and grammar books to anticipate the same mistakes. She expressed, "To minimize mistakes, especially in grammar, I used a dictionary and grammar book. I initially made many mistakes in grammar, and then I anticipated the mistakes by reading a dictionary and grammar book". The data indicated that doing positive activities by self-reflection and self-learning could motivate and help the participants to progress.

The second and third subthemes are abstaining from the thesis and making schedule notes. In terms of abstaining from the thesis, two participants highlighted in their interviews that getting away from the thesis is needed as it helped them cleanse fatigue after a stack of work that they faced. *ST9*, for instance, took some days off from writing and even thought about his thesis to calm himself when he got stuck with his thesis. He commented, "The first thing I did was take a rest for several days. I tried to pull myself together and got myself sometimes to regain my own composure. After having calmed myself a little, I continued writing my thesis". With a more extreme decision, *ST4* took a semester off to get rid of the disappointments and fatigues he had been enduring in writing his thesis. He unveiled, "After my seminar proposal, I took roughly one semester off. As a result, I was completely abstaining from anything that had to do with the thesis. It was worth it to refresh and reset my focus". Concerning organizing schedule notes, two participants affirmed that this helped them overcome their chaotic schedules during writing their undergraduate theses. *ST6*, for example, noted her supervision schedules as reminders. She uttered, "I took notes on every appointment I made with my supervisors. This is a reminder for me not to easily forget my schedule". *ST3*, with a different context, recorded all of her activities in a day. This helped her manage her free time to work on her thesis. She voiced, "I had a few notes that recorded all my activities. It started off when I woke up and ended when I slept. I planned everything from A-Z ... The notes made me more organized on my activities throughout the day and helped me to spare time for my thesis". The data from the transcription showed that having scheduled notes and abstaining from the thesis could alleviate the fatigue and chaotic problems in writing theses.

4.2.2. Technological Help

Based on the data, the participants employed technology to overcome their challenges in writing their theses. The first technology that the participants employed was language application. Seven participants admitted that language application was very helpful in the process of writing their theses. The language application used by the participants was

Grammarly. **ST2**, for instance, asserted that Grammarly was helpful in checking her grammar but she knew this application late. She shared, "I did use Grammarly for grammar problems, but only at the end of my thesis writing. Because initially, I did not know such an App existed. This application has helped me quite a bit in my thesis writing". Another participant, **ST4**, specifically explained the feature of the Grammarly application that helped her correct grammatical mistakes. She stated, "I used Grammarly to minimize mistakes in grammar. This app provides the form of suggested corrections. That was very helpful in overcoming grammatical mistakes". Besides Grammarly, **ST4** also mentioned in his interview that the Quillbolt application is fruitful for paraphrasing. He noted, "I used Quillbolt to paraphrase the sentences. It was a lot easier and much more efficient for the times spent". Another technological help used by the participant was a reference application. This relates to the application which helps the referencing system. One participant, **ST7**, said that she used Mendeley to systematically help her arrange the reference lists. She explicitly uttered, "The way I organize my references was by using an application called Mendeley. It was helpful and I never revise my references section many times". The use of Grammarly, Quillbolt, and Mendeley applications, from the statements of participants, can be alternatives to overcome language and referencing challenges, especially grammar, paraphrasing, and referencing.

4.2.3. Help from Others

The last theme of EFL student teachers' strategies to overcome their challenges in writing their undergraduate thesis is getting help from others. From the data analysis, two sub-themes were identified. The first subtheme is help from the supervisor. Eight participants confessed that they used this strategy to overcome their writing issues. **ST8**, for instance, got help from her supervisors to get journals because she did not know how to do it. She asserted, "My supervisor helped me find some references on Google Scholar. After I tried, it turned out to be quite easy to find journals that I initially was looking for". With different types of help, **ST2** got moral and encouragement from his supervisors. He specifically commented, "My supervisors were very supportive …they also gave me the advice to be more responsible with my thesis, and that encouragement really helped me to be able to keep going and eventually completed my thesis". These data suggested that the role of supervisors is pivotal and getting their help could be the best solution for students' challenges.

The second subtheme is help from friends and family. Seven participants explained that friends and family were their support system in writing their thesis. **ST9** described his friends' contribution in writing his thesis. He said, "When I had trouble with vocabulary or when I was on a deadlock and could not think of relevant questions in devising my interview protocol, I did peer-checking with my friends and it was very helpful". **ST2**, on the other hand, admitted that her family played a significant role in the process of writing her thesis. Her family members gave her endless support for her. She expressed, "As for my family, they would always remind me not to prolong the completion of my thesis. They would ask me repeatedly if I faced some kind of problems and tried to console me about that". These showed that friends and family can provide good support.

5. Discussion

The purposes of this study were to explore EFL student teachers' challenges in writing undergraduate theses and strategies for minimizing challenges in writing a thesis. This study was guided by two research questions: 1) what challenges do EFL student teachers face while

writing their undergraduate theses? and 2) How do EFL student teachers deal with challenges? The results of data analysis indicated that there were overarching themes and subthemes, including 1) linguistics and writing knowledge issues; 2) psychological issues; 3) media and resources issues; 4) supervision and time management issues; 5) self-management strategies; 6) technological help; and 7) helps from others.

The first challenge is linguistics and writing knowledge issues. Being an EFL student means that, so to speak, surfing in uncharted territory where everything seems very unfamiliar with the traditions they are accustomed to. In other words, there are some linguistics aspects and writing knowledge that falls under the radar, thus, resulting in those said EFL students having a hard time using the target language. The most commonly found aspect of this theme is the use of grammar. The statements of participants claimed to be troubled by the use of grammar, especially by applying appropriate tenses and auxiliary verbs in their writings. The findings are in line with many previous studies (Abrar et al., 2023; Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017) who found that one of the major difficulties of EFL students in writing was grammatical aspects, especially in the use of appropriate tenses, subject-verb agreement, and the use of auxiliary verbs. These were caused by the students' very limited and poor basic understanding of knowledge of writing. This gives people proper perspectives on how EFL students perform very poorly in their grammatical aspects of writing and reaffirms the culprit that causes all the difficulties.

The second identified challenge is psychological issues. The most prevalent identified challenge from this theme is lack of motivation. Motivation is one of the most integral aspects of writing, as it is one of the factors that will boost students' willingness in completing their theses. The deficiency in this aspect will be very detrimental to the progression of the thesis. From the data collected, it could be implied that the reasoning behind the low motivation aspects was physical and mental fatigue; congested activities; and saturated/bored mental states. Parallel with a study by Ramage (1990) that suggested how motivational factors could be a determining factor in learning foreign languages including writing. The research indicated that motivational factors and attitudinal factors could distinguish between continuing and discontinuing students in learning a foreign language. On the other hand, a rather unique case also proved to be present as well, for instance, how a total change in thesis affected the psychological states of one of the participants. In this special case, the said participant claimed to start over his own thesis due to some change in the title. As a result, he was overwhelmed by mental fatigue and disappointment that significantly affected his psychological state to the point where he needed to take a semester off from his thesis.

The third challenge surfacing is media and resources issues. This theme has three distinguished sub-themes with the most prevalent one being limited resources. The limited number of existing journals, books, and other resources related to participants' research is the main reason behind this challenge, mostly owing to the fact that participants conduct research that has the element of novelty as their main topic of research. In line with the previously explained challenge, Alyan (2022) also suggested findings that indicated one of the main challenges in writing a thesis for EFL students was limited resources and online digital materials. The very few resources that participants could use as references to their research have impactful repercussions on their progress. Additionally, this challenge seems to be universal and is ubiquitous for university students especially in writing a thesis that involves a rather novel subject as the topic. The fourth challenge is supervision and time

management issues. This theme entails two different sub-themes with the most dominant one being time management issues. Time management issues are deeply rooted in EFL students, the reasoning ranging from procrastination habits to other activities such as part-time jobs and university study. Based on the interviews, time management issues are proven to deter EFL students' progress to a certain extent. In compliance with the finding, research by Lestari (2020) found that time management is one of the difficulties that EFL students face in writing their theses. Thus, it is evident that time management issues are prevalent among EFL students. In addition, Mack (2017) indicated time management is one of the aspects that EFL students find very hard to deal with. It was further explained that poor time management would get students into a time scramble and lead them missing deadlines.

In order to overcome the encountered challenges in writing undergraduate theses, the participants employed some strategies or efforts. The first strategy is self-management strategies. Self-management is defined as a strategy used to manage one's own behavior, evaluate one's performance, and discipline them when certain standards are not met (Bakker, 2017). As stated, self-management is carried out by individuals when their personal standards are not fulfilled and off the rail. In this particular theme, the most utilized self-management strategy is self-introspection. The interviewed participants stated that they reflected on their own performance and tried to evaluate why it did not work as they'd have expected. This is adhered to the research by Chung et al (2021) that found students' reflections have a positive impact on students' self-efficacy in writing. In addition, it also was revealed that the higher the efficacy the better the writing produced.

The second strategy that EFL students used is technological help. The use of language Apps is the most prevalent sub-theme with seven of ten participants stated to have used it at some point in their thesis writings. Based on the transcriptions, the participants took advantage of language apps such as Grammarly in assisting them to minimize grammatical errors in their writing. They acknowledged that the features provided by the App had given them so many advantages and expanded the level of efficiency in their writing. Likewise, Lailika (2019) found that EFL students had positive perceptions and perceived Grammarly to be a useful tool to check their grammar, especially in spelling and punctuation. Grammarly also is apparent in assisting EFL students in completing their theses faster. Furthermore, Fitria (2021) indicated that the use of Grammarly increased performance in writing. It is evident based on a previous study that Grammarly manages to minimize errors in grammatical aspects and boost the writing performance of students; it is very beneficial time-wise for EFL students to use this AI-powered tool to help them in the process of completing their theses.

Last but not least is help from others. The most prevalent challenge from this theme is help from supervisors. Contingent on conducted interviews, six of ten participants affirmed that they got a hand in distinguished form from their supervisors. Some of them are directly involved to provide help, while some are indirect involvements such as oral remarks like words of encouragement, moral support, and advice. In other words, the help of supervisors, directly and indirectly, are equally important for EFL students in finishing their theses. In line with the findings, Almatarneh et al (2018) found that help-seeking strategies from seniors, classmates, supervisors, and peers are the best way possible to overcome challenges in academic writing. Furthermore, research by Wang and Yang (2012) indicated that help from surrounding people will significantly increase students' performance in academic writing. That being said, help from others is very essential for EFL students to be able to tackle and

for some people, this might be the best possible way of resolving the challenges while writing a thesis.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the challenges faced by EFL student teachers in writing their undergraduate theses and their ways to alleviate the challenges. Based on the data analysis, EFL student teachers' challenges in writing their theses are linguistics and writing knowledge issues (grammar, vocabulary, paraphrasing, and referencing), psychological issues (lack of confidence and lack of motivation), media and resources issues (limited references and online platforms), and supervision and time management issues (unsupportive behavior of supervisors and poor time management). The results of the study also revealed that participants employed some strategies to overcome their writing challenges, including self-management strategy (doing positive activities, abstaining from a thesis, and making schedule notes), technological help (language and referencing applications), and help from others (help from supervisor and help from friends and families).

Despite the comprehensive exploration of the topic, this study has some limitations. First, this study exclusively focused on EFL student teachers' points of view, and supervisors were excluded. Further studies can explore the supervisors' views related to the topic. Second, the sample of this study was relatively small, with exactly 10 participants. Future research may include larger samples which may provide an in-depth exploration of the topic.

References

Abrar, M., Mukminin, A., Fitriani, N., Fajaryani, N., Razak, R. A., Mulyono, H., & Ningsih, S. K. (2023). Examining the Cultural Adjustment Experiences of International Students in Writing Dissertations in UK Campus. *Qualitative Report, 28*(1), 33-48. DOI: https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2023.4793

Agricola, B. T., Prins, F. J., van der Schaaf, M. F., & van Tartwijk, J. (2021). Supervisor and student perspectives on undergraduate thesis supervision in higher education. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 65*(5), 877-897. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2020.1775115

Al-Khasawneh, F. M. S., & Maher, S. (2010). Writing for academic purposes: Problems faced by Arab postgraduate students of the College of Business, UUM. *ESP World, 9*(2), 1-23.

Almatarneh, A. H. M., Ab Rashid, R., & Yunus, K. (2018). The academic writing experience of Jordanian postgraduate students at a university in Malaysia. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ), 9*(3), 248-257. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no3.17

Alyan, A. A. A. (2022). Thesis Writing Challenges Facing Palestinian EFL Master's Students: A Qualitative Case Study. *International Journal of English Language Teaching, 10*(5), 38-49.

Ariyanti, A., & Fitriana, R. (2017, October). EFL students' difficulties and needs in essay writing. In *International Conference on Teacher Training and Education 2017* (ICTTE 2017) (pp. 32-42). Atlantis Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2991/ictte-17.2017.4

Badreddine, A. (2019). *An investigation into the perceived academic writing difficulties that face the Algerian Ph.D. students studying in the United Kingdom: a case study of the Algerian Ph.D. student at the United Kingdom universities*. Master Thesis. Faculty of Letters and Languages, Department of Foreign Languages, Mohamed Khider University of Biskra.

Bakhou, B., & Bouhania, B. (2020). A qualitative inquiry into the difficulties experienced by Algerian EFL master students in thesis writing:'Language is not the only problem'. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ), 2*(11), 243-257. DOI:10.24093/awej/vol11no2.17

Bakker, A.B. (2017). Strategic and proactive approaches to work engagement. *Organizational Dynamics, 46*(2), 67-75. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2017.04.002

Berndtsson, M., et al., 2008, *Thesis Projects – A Guide for Students in Computer Science and Information System*, 2nd Ed., Springer-Verlag London Ltd., London.

Bertaux, D. (1981). From the life-history approach to the transformation of sociological practice. In D. Bertaux (Ed.), *Biography and society: The life history approach in the social sciences* (pp.29-45). Sage.

Bracewell, R. J. (2020). Investigating the control of writing skills. In *Reading Empirical Research Studies: The Rhetoric of Research* (pp. 436-463). Routledge.

Chung, H. Q., Chen, V., & Olson, C. B. (2021). The impact of self-assessment, planning and goal setting, and reflection before and after revision on student self-efficacy and writing performance. *Reading and Writing, 34*(7), 1885-1913. DOI:10.1007/s11145-021-10186-x

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative Research*. Pearson.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.

Darmono, A., & Hasan, A. (2002). *Menyelesaikan skripsi dalam satu semester*. Grasindo.

Dwihandini, L. A., Marhaeni, A. N., & Suarnajaya, I. W. (2013). The Analysis of the Factors Affecting Undergraduate Students' Difficulties in Writing Thesis in the English Department of Mahasaraswati University*. Jurnal pendidikan dan pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia, 2*, 1-12.

Ekpoh, U. I. (2016). Postgraduate studies: The challenges of research and thesis writing. *Journal of Educational and Social Research, 6*(3), 67-74. DOI: 10.5901/jesr.2016.v6n3p67

Fitria, T. N. (2021). Grammarly as AI-powered English writing assistant: Students' alternative for writing English. *Metathesis: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching, 5*(1), 65-78. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.31002/metathesis.v5i1.3519

Fitria, T. N. (2022). Analysis of EFL students' difficulties in writing and completing English thesis. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching, 25*(1), 295-309. DOI: https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v25i1.3607

Lailika, H. I. (2019). *Students' perception of the use of Grammarly as an online grammar checker in thesis writing.* Digilib UIN Sunan Ampel. Accessed from http://digilib.uinsa.ac.id/34607/.

Lestari, D. M. (2020). An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Writing Undergraduate Thesis at English Education Program of Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu. *Journal of English Education and Applied Linguistics, 9*(1), 17-29. DOI:10.24127/pj.v9i1.2588

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1990). Judging the quality of case study reports. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 3*(1), 53–59.

Ma, L. P. F. (2021). Writing in English as an additional language: challenges encountered by doctoral students. *Higher Education Research & Development, 40*(6), 1176-1190. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1809354

Mack, S. (2017). *The effect of having poor time management skills.* Accessed from live strong.com

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). *Designing qualitative research.* Sage publications.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study application in education.* Josset-Bass Publisher.

Myles, J. (2002). Second language writing and research: The writing process and error analysis in student texts. *Tesl-Ej, 6*(2), 1-20.

Puspita, C. (2019). Factors affecting students' difficulties in writing thesis: A mixed-methods research at eighth semester of English study program in IAIN Curup. *ELLiC Proceedings, 3*, 13– 22.

Ramage, K. (1990). Motivational Factors and Persistence in Foreign Language Study. *Language Learning, 40*(2), 189–219. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1990.tb01333.x

Sadeghi, K., & Shirzad Khajepasha, A. (2015). Thesis writing challenges for non-native MA students. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 20*(3), 357-373. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2015.1063808

Sariyanto, S., Supardi, I., & Husin, S. (2015). An analysis on factors causing undergraduate students' difficulties in writing thesis. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Khatulistiwa, 4*(3), 1-12. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.26418/jppk.v4i3.9226

Syafii, M. L. (2017). BACK and DRAW activities for improving writing skills. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language, 7*(2), 119-134. DOI: https://doi.org/10.23971/jefl.v7i2.501

Shahsavar, Z., & Kourepaz, H. (2020). Postgraduate students' difficulties in writing their theses literature review Postgraduate students' difficulties in writing their theses literature review. *Cogent Education, 7*(1), 1–11. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2020.1784620

Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*. Sage.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage.

Tribble, C., (1996). *Writing (Language teaching: A scheme for teacher education).* Oxford University Press.

Wang, T., & Li, L. Y. (2008). Understanding international postgraduate research students' challenges and pedagogical needs in thesis writing. *International Journal of pedagogies and Learning, 4*(3), 88-96. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5172/ijpl.4.3.88

Wang, X., & Yang, L. (2012). Problems and strategies in learning to write a thesis proposal: A study of six MA students in a TEFL program. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics, 35*(3), 324-341. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/cjal-2012-0024

Yin, R. K. (2015). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford publications.