

EFL TEACHERS' WRITING STRATEGIES IN ACADEMIC WRITING WHILE PURSUING A MASTER'S DEGREE ABOARD

**Sheirly Octaviantoro Ayu Wijayanti, Nur Mukminatien,
Ahmad Heki Sujiatmoko**

Universitas Negeri Malang (UM), Malang, Indonesia
E-mail: sheirlyctv@gmail.com

Received: 2025-05-15

Accepted: 2025-06-31

Published: 2025-06-26

Abstract

The use of English for adult L2 writers encountered significant challenges in an English-mediated environment. This phenomenon is experienced by EFL teachers while pursuing a Master's degree abroad. The necessity of challenges and the lack of writing strategies may highlight the obstacles to writing productivity. Therefore, identifying the challenges and effective writing strategies is needed to achieve the goal of writing a thesis. This study used a qualitative narrative inquiry, with in-depth interviews, and focused on 3 Indonesian participants who studied abroad. The findings showed several challenges faced by participants, including academic and non-academic challenges. Academic challenge covers language and content challenge, including problems in grammar, academic style, vocabulary, finding a topic, and novelty, as well as non-academic challenge, including issues in supervisor relationship, time management, mental and emotional pressure. Also, four strategies are applied: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social. This research may guide future Master's students on the importance of specific writing strategies in academic writing and may highlight effective English teaching and impact future international writing publications.

Keywords: *academic writing; master's students; narrative inquiry; writing strategy*

1. Introduction

The unavoidable globalization and internationalization trend worldwide has made it necessary for students studying second or foreign languages to be able to write well in English, the lingua franca for communication in a variety of fields and across cultural boundaries (Khadka, 2020; Wang, 2020). As L2 learners, EFL teachers studying abroad may face challenges when writing a thesis. Unpredictable challenges and a lack of writing strategies might lead to failure in achieving the goal of writing. The feeling of being overwhelmed by writing assignments and incapable of completing a task can lead to anxiety and stress. Meanwhile, Master's students are dealing with academic writing activities. According to previous research, writing anxiety is a significant component that lowers academic performance (Sabti, Rashid, Nimehchisalem, & Darmi 2019). A thesis is a written research report on a specific topic completed in part toward a graduate degree. EFL teachers studying for a Master's degree abroad need writing strategies since writing academic papers involves a complicated process due to their complexity (Harris & Graham, 2016; Sitompul &

Anditasari, 2022). Many researchers have done studies on writing strategies to mention but a few (Bai & Guo, 2018; Bai, Shen & Mei, 2020; Raoofi, Binande, & Rahmani, 2017; Umamah & Cahyono, 2020; Marhaban et al, 2021). In the Indonesian context, a close study of how four strategies—cognitive, metacognitive, emotional, and social—were utilized by successful PhD students in Indonesian theses. However, there are no more studies on the academic paper writing strategies of Indonesian EFL students pursuing Master's degrees overseas. This research aims to address the significant gap in knowledge around the experiences of EFL adult writers with their perspectives on studying abroad. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: 1. What are Indonesian EFL teachers' challenges in writing academic papers? 2. What writing strategies are used to overcome the challenges by Indonesian EFL teachers whilst pursuing their Master's degree abroad?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Challenges in Writing

The thesis is an academic report to fulfil the Master's final assignment; it is challenging for Master's students to write their ideas, develop their criticism, and use logical thinking in English, which is not their mother language. Moreover, for the Master's students who study overseas, it will be more challenging; they should adapt to a new environment, people, and education system. Previous research focused on attitudes and challenges faced by the Master's students, such as the differences in regulation institutions, paraphrasing and expressing their ideas, and formulating their coherence and cohesion in linguistic form. In the end, the study also emphasizes that every student who studies overseas constantly struggles with different difficulties in writing an academic essay in English and adapting to the new environment (Ningrum, Hamamah, Sahiruddin, & Rohmah, 2023). A thesis is a document that presents the author's research and conclusions and is submitted for credit towards an academic degree or professional certification. Most students, even those who were proficient, were unable to synthesise, assess, or explain the literature in their writing, according to Shahsavari and Kourepaz's (2020) research findings. Issues with accessing pertinent and trustworthy sources, including academic journals and textbooks (Sukandi & Rianita, 2020), the depth of knowledge in research designs (Donohue, Lee, Simpson, & Vacek, 2021), and financial concerns during the thesis writing process (Natividad-Franco, 2021) were also present. The lack of proper assistance from thesis supervisors contributes to several difficulties. As a result, many students face a number of challenges when writing their theses, including the spread of innovation, the lack of advisors available for consultations, negative feedback from supervisors, a lack of coordination, and a limited amount of time to complete the paper (Bulling, 2020; Tiwari, 2019). Student-thesis supervisor interaction is a critical success factor in thesis writing (Karunaratne, 2018).

2.2 Strategies in Writing

Writing strategies are classified by Oxford (1990) into four categories: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Cognitive strategies refer to the use of specific techniques to finish a thesis or other writing task. Oxford (1990) states that cognitively based approaches are typically the most popular among language learners. Cognitive strategies consist of three processes: receiving signals (information), organizing input, and applying what has been learnt. Metacognitive strategies are characterized by student behaviour that extends beyond simply cognitive tools and gives them a means of directing their learning process (Oxford, 1990). Writing successfully requires the use of

metacognitive techniques, which aid in understanding and managing a writer's cognitive processes. Affective strategies are not academic in origin but play a crucial role in thesis writing because they help students effectively manage their motivation and emotions. According to Oxford (1990), the word "affective" encompasses risk-taking, motivations, emotions, attitudes, anxiety, and self-worth. Social strategy that involves other individuals and is essential to completing a thesis is described in the last category, social techniques. The two main social skills of thesis writing are asking questions and cooperating with others. Asking questions is one of the most important social interactions during the thesis writing process, and writers get a lot from it. Students can enhance their understanding and get closer to the desired result by asking questions (Oxford, 1990). The role of thesis supervisors is crucial at all stages of thesis writing. When a supervisor deals with those people of the same culture, then effective communication can be enhanced easily, as they are from the same country, speaking the same language. However, cultural differences can lead to misunderstanding and hinder the writing thesis process. Establishing a good rapport with a Master's degree adviser is very important to do as Master's students. Power relations with supervisors need special care for students who believe they have little choice but to comply with certain ideological positions or risk failure.

3. Research Method

Deriving from the study's topic, this research's primary goal is to conduct a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in which narrative data are collected from three EFL teachers concerning their writing strategies in academic writing. Although narrative inquiry is subjective, it captures the nuances of meaning in the respondents' stories and thoroughly analyzes the facts. Three participants are EFL teachers who have been teaching in the education sector for some years, and they got a scholarship from the government to study abroad in the same TESOL program. Participant 1 is a 29-year-old female in Australia. Participant 2, also a female, is 32 years old in Australia. Lastly, Participant 3 is a 33-year-old male in Russia. Participants' consent to participate in the research has been expressed informally, and their confidentiality is respected. The primary research tool in this study is the interview because it generates historical data (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The respondents' portfolio, which includes their academic papers, thesis drafts, journal articles, and others, is another data source to supplement the study. A consent form is provided to the participants to sign, attesting to their agreement for all the data to be made public to address research ethics. The research procedure was conducted by collecting experience stories, presenting the findings based on themes, proofreading the complete thesis manuscript, and reporting the study findings.

The followings table presents samples of Data extract, with codes and potential theme applied adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006).

Data extract	Potential themes
-What is your best way of writing? -Throughout the days I learnt the best way on how to keep myself feeling motivated in writing and see the purpose of my being here that is one of them to make my parents proud / they always call me regularly to support me (PR5) -What are your strategies for writing? -My supervisor doesn't agree with my writing and it makes me down but,,, I talked to myself I can't be like this I should	Family support Being so resilience

proceed go up and stay strong (PB4)	
-------------------------------------	--

Source: Preliminary interview

The followings are samples of Data extract analysis on types of strategy by Oxford 1990

Data extract	Writing strategy (Oxford 1990)
I think what makes my writing is my ability in adapting all techniques I have learnt from class	Cognitive strategy
I am writing when my mood is good, the fruitful ideas will full up there	Affective strategy
I then find out the best way to write for example I am a kind of person who always start everything from an outline, I can't write direct there should always be a guide,,,,,this outline helps me a lot	Metacognitive
I am writing better with peers,,,,peers and community...I call it my circle will always give me positive vibes to write ... I don't know why but with them I Feel I can write even much better	Social strategy

Source: Preliminary interview

4. Results and Discussion

The study finding shows that writing a thesis has challenges and provides strategies for writing a thesis. The study investigated the Indonesian EFL teachers' challenges in writing academic papers and the writing strategies used to overcome the challenges by Indonesian EFL teachers while pursuing their Master's degree abroad. The study had two findings, which have been discussed in the form of narratives below:

4.1 Challenges in writing

Braun and Clarke (2006) analysed the challenges throughout thesis writing. The challenges are divided into two big categories: academic and non-academic. Academic challenges cover language and content, while non-academic challenges cover the supervisor-supervisee relationship, time management, and mental and emotional pressure.

a. Language challenge

Language differences can hinder the thesis process and lead to ineffective communication and language challenges, such as a Lack of grammar knowledge. They responded by saying:

Participant 1: *"I usually use digital tools that we usually use to make our grammar good, for example, Grammarly or QuillBot, for me, it really helps a lot because the tools are now very sophisticated and flexible."*

Participant 2: *"I usually use Grammarly, then I also employ Turnitin to check similarity. I also use what is that, ummm, online paraphrasing like QuillBot, ... then to find novelty I usually use VOS viewer, ..."*

The statements from respondents show that the benefit is to use digital tools to improve their academic writing to support their writing. The use of Quillbot helps the writer to paraphrase and follow the English standard for the importance of language proficiency in

their thesis. Other respondents also introduced VOS viewer to help identify the research gap and find the related existing literature. However, Respondent 3 said that the help of native speakers was needed to check the grammar and language accuracy.

Lack of familiarity with the Academic Style also became a challenge in writing. The participants responded by saying:

Participant 1: *"As the writing of Indonesian style and English is different, ... I need to learn more about how native speakers write, so it sounds native, not Indo, not Indonesian English, by reading more and more international journals instead of the Indonesian journals."*

Participant 2: *"... I always asked to proofread by a native English speaker friend before the consultation because my supervisor said that my language is not easy to understand ... Yes, I think that is typical of Indonesian writing style like us who usually go around in circles, but academic writing is different, everything has to be to the point and clear."*

Participant 3: *"... I have learned a lot about how to write in a language that is more internationally accepted, not Indonesian English, because usually international writers, if our language still sounds Indonesian, will ask us to proofread to native speakers of English so that the writing style of our paper is more acceptable."*

The participants inform us that one of the linguistic issues we should be studying outside of our country is that the academic writing style used in universities differs from the English-language style used in Indonesia. For the language proficiency to increase, she should be used to developing her to hone his writing skills with a more natively acceptable language style by reading more international journals written by native speakers. Vocabulary limitation is one of challenge in writing a thesis, L2 Writers usually find it difficult to express their ideas in academic language, which often leads to language that is lacking in windings and wordiness. These things can be influenced by educational factors, linguistics, and experience in writing. Non-native speakers struggle to find precise academic or technical terms—limited Exposure to Academic Language. Many non-native speakers learn English in general or conversational contexts, not in academic or discipline-specific settings.

b. Content Challenge

One of the main challenges faced by participants was difficulty in selecting an appropriate research topic. This difficulty arose from the need to balance their personal interests and academic needs while also aligning with their supervisor's expectations. Participants often experienced confusion and uncertainty in matching their ideas with what their supervisors considered relevant or feasible. The challenge of choosing the right topic was further compounded by considerations such as topic relevance, eligibility, availability of resources, and the potential contribution to the field.

Determining the novelty of the research was identified as the most difficult aspect of thesis writing. Establishing a unique research gap requires extensive literature review, including numerous papers, articles, and journals, which can be overwhelming and time-

consuming. This process is crucial for developing original contributions but is often perceived as a significant obstacle.

Effective communication with supervisors emerged as another critical challenge. Supervisors play a pivotal role in guiding the research process and shaping students' academic and professional growth. However, differences in communication styles, cultural backgrounds, and expectations can create barriers in expressing ideas clearly. Although building a productive relationship with a supervisor can be demanding, it is essential for enhancing productivity, receiving constructive feedback, sharing ideas, and developing interpersonal skills necessary in academia.

Time management was also a significant concern. Participants had to juggle writing, editing, conducting research, and sometimes additional coursework or employment. Proper time management is crucial to balancing academic responsibilities with other commitments. Prioritizing key tasks and minimizing procrastination were suggested as effective strategies to alleviate the stress associated with thesis writing.

Finally, mental and emotional management was highlighted as a vital aspect of successfully navigating the thesis process. This involves regulating, understanding, and managing thoughts and emotions—a key component of emotional intelligence and overall mental well-being. Participants emphasized the importance of this factor in maintaining focus and motivation throughout their research journey.

Participant 1: *"Sometimes when I am really moody, I stop so that it doesn't get worse and hopefully this bad mood won't last long so I can write soon. When I'm moody my writing gets disrupted."*

Participant 2: *"Writing a thesis is like a roller coaster of emotions, sometimes it makes us happy sometimes it makes us really down, haha"*

Participant 3: *"Sometimes, there are things that make me down during the process of writing my thesis, and it weakens me, and I feel hopeless. And sometimes, I worry whether I can finish this thesis; that worry is always there."*

Mental and emotional management are crucial elements in the writing process. While writing a thesis can cause pressure and challenges, being aware, taking a break, and doing some hobbies can help raise the mood and produce sound writing output.

In conclusion, the finding shows that Lack of grammar knowledge, familiarity with academic style, and mental and emotional management are central challenges in writing a thesis. All respondents admit they worry about their writing quality due to substantial language barriers, so they ask a native speaker or grammar tools to overcome them. Different cultural writing styles also become an obstacle for all respondents, so they ask their peers to align with international academic standards. Balancing the mental and emotional is also crucial in writing a thesis because it can lead to stress, anxiety, and hopelessness, which can hinder the thesis journey. Besides vocabulary limitations, difficulty finding the right topic, difficulty determining research novelty, time management, and difficulty communicating ideas with the supervisor were only experienced by two or even one respondent.

4.2 Strategies in Writing

The findings show that the respondents employed four main strategies in completing their thesis writing: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

a. Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive writing strategies are mental techniques writers use to help them think, plan, organize, and revise their writing. In cognitive strategy, writers can develop their writing skills by finalizing the quality of their ideas and putting them into writing. In planning, writers actively seek ideas for their writing, focusing on topics that have not been explored before; these ideas will guide their choice of topics for their thesis research. This brainstorming will help them decide what kind of topic they will present. During brainstorming, they can read the previous research to discover the novelty, what is missing, and what makes their research worth investigating. The participants responded by saying:

Participant 1: *"Usually before writing, I do some research first by reading previous research, then I can also discuss it with friends and consult with my supervisor, then I will know what the idea is for my thesis."*

Participant 2: *"I usually start from the outline to come up with the idea. Then, I do some brainstorming to find a suitable topic. Then, I also do much reading to find out the novelty that makes my research worthwhile and synthesize previous research on the same topics...."*

Participant 3: *"My thesis topic came up after going through a long process of writing almost hundreds of brainstorming, outlines, then I evaluated my outline, was there any mistake missing? I also evaluate the problems and do some brainstorming again consult it with my supervisor and so on."*

Related to the statements, all respondents highlighted that planning is essential when writing a thesis. A crucial step in this strategy is brainstorming and outlining. Brainstorming helps generate ideas and find novelty based on developed ideas and reviewed studies. P1 emphasizes the importance of conducting preliminary research, collaborating with the community, and communicating with a supervisor. P2 also mentions that outlining is important to structured thesis writing. P3 suggests an interactive evaluation is necessary to recheck and reassess his writing. Organizing ideas helps formulate the main ideas and support details regarding the research topic. Besides, the participants also need to make their writing logical and coherent. Therefore, activating schemata or background knowledge is very important. P1 states that writing a thesis is about presenting well-supported arguments and putting aside individually thought, logical connections between ideas. Besides, P2 adds that using argumentative writing styles can lead to coherent writing and engaging and persuading the audience of the significance of research in the field. Both respondents agree that a successful thesis reflects a more argumentative writing style, does research based on previous related research, a logical and academic structure, and authentic data evidence. After planning, the next stage is the draft writing stage, pouring ideas into sentences and paragraphs using appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures. In the revising stage, a writer focuses on improving the content and structure of their draft. It's all about making the writing clearer, stronger, and more effective.

There are some activities that the participants do during the revising stage, namely clarifying ideas to make sure the main point is clear and well-developed. Next, the participants also reorganize the content by moving paragraphs or sections around for better

flow and logical order, adding more detail or examples where needed, and trimming unnecessary or repetitive parts. Besides, the participants also improve transitions, smooth out how ideas connect from one paragraph to the next, and enhance word choice and tone to make the language more precise, engaging, or appropriate for the audience. The following process is the evaluating process, where participants evaluate their manuscripts before being consulted or after revision, and will be submitted back to the supervisor. In this case, P1 and P2 use the help of AI tools such as Grammarly and QuillBot, while P3 prefers to ask his native speaker friends to read his draft. By consulting with native speakers of English, as done by P3, he hopes he can obtain responses or feedback regarding his writing. The participants responded by saying:

Participant 1: *"I usually use digital tools that we usually use to make our grammar good, for example Grammarly or QuillBot, for me it really helps a lot because the tools are now very sophisticated and flexible."*

Participant 2: *"I use Grammarly and employ Turnitin to check similarity. I also use online paraphrasing like QuillBot, which is good and helpful for writing in an acceptable English style. Then to find novelty, I usually use VOSviewer, it's incredibly sophisticated, so I can know which research has been done and which research hasn't and where my research is positioned"*

Participant 3: *"I always recheck my grammar by consulting it with native speaker friends and they help me make corrections and give me insight to correct the mistakes so my writing is improving. I don't use grammar tools for it, I think my native speaker friends do better than that machines like Grammarly and so on"*

The statements from P1 and P2 show that using digital tools to improve their academic writing to support their writing is beneficial. P1 also highlights that "sophisticated and flexible" shows that the utility of advanced features to check their grammar can be used anywhere and everywhere to enhance the effectiveness. The use of Quillbot helps the writer to paraphrase and follow the English standard for the importance of language proficiency in their thesis. P2 also introduced VOS viewer to help identify the research gap and find the related existing literature.

b. Metacognitive

Metacognitive activities in thesis writing refer to strategies and practices that help students become more aware of their thinking, planning, and decision-making processes during the research and writing stages. These activities support deeper learning, improved self-regulation, and a stronger and more coherent thesis. Using Braun and Clarke (2006), the metacognitive aspects come into the following themes: self-monitoring and reflection. Self-Monitoring In the process of writing thesis, the participants carried out some metacognitive activities the monitoring process by rereading the outline that had been made, or the draft that had been made, whether anything was missing, what needed to be revised, and others by rereading what had been written, this is significant because this process will determine the smoothness of the following process. Participants also asked if they are still on the right track and if they are making significant progress or not. The participants responded by saying:

Participant 1: *"I usually reread the draft and find out what is not right to then revise it, reread it again and again until there is nothing to worry about."*

Participant 2: *"I frequently ask myself regarding the thesis I am writing questions like "am I making progress or not? Do I walk too slow ...what was wrong?" Am I somewhat stuck or questions to ensure I am still on the right track?"*

Participant 3: *"Maybe I have written hundreds of outlines, I don't remember because after I reread it, I reread it, I need to check what was missing, and again and again" until finally I found what I was looking for, which is my current thesis."*

All the participants do a similar iterative process by rereading their draft to ensure their ideas and clarity, to minimize errors in their thesis. Self-monitoring is helpful to improve their writing and enhance their thesis and critical thinking. Evaluating their work repeatedly is useful for rechecking their writing errors and ensuring that the writing is aligned with academic writing. The last is reflection; all the participants do what is called reflection. Reflection allows participants to interconnect their prior knowledge and what they have experienced, and would be beneficial for them in the future when they have to go back to teaching. The participants responded by saying:

Participant 1: *"... Writing if here it is not just the final stage of study, the peak of college, but writing and researching is a package of processes that an academic must go through. The dialogic process builds our logical reasoning between what we argue and what others understand as readers of our thesis."*

Participant 2: *"From writing this thesis, I learned a lot about which strategies are the most effective when writing, which are lacking, and which I will apply when I return to teaching later."*

Participant 3: *"Writing this thesis taught me that theory and practice sometimes do not go hand in hand, there are various things when writing that we cannot avoid because the writing process is a dialogic process between us as writers and the person who reads our writing, in this case the supervisor, who has different beliefs from us"*

All the statements above (P2 & P3) show that multifaceted perspective writing experiences are crucial in the thesis writing journey. The complexity of the academic process requires logical, critical thinking, and effective writing. The "Dialogic process," as mentioned by P1 and P3, indicates the importance of elaboration to get the external perspective from supervisors. This case is also challenging, remembering that they have differences in belief and culture. Self-awareness in the reflection process is also crucial for mind growth or future teaching endeavours.

c. Affective

Positive thinking is one of the effective strategies the participants employ when writing a thesis at a foreign University. This has proven very effective in maintaining sanity in

the writing process. Being optimistic and positive is the primary key to completing the final assignment. Training a steely mentality when writing a thesis, especially abroad, far from parents, really helps the mental condition of students to remain stable. Maintaining a positive mindset is also achieved by P3 by reducing depression, mixed feelings, and mental block, which indicates that mental health also plays a crucial role in academic productivity. A critical factor in terms of effectiveness is the importance of avoiding stress. Participants said stress would hinder various kinds of progress, including making them feel down and not progressing. Whereas we know that writing a thesis requires a good mood and good mental condition, the participants responded by saying:

Participant 1: *"... I understand the meaning of resilience is self-restraint to always focus on the goal, never give up, never stop, keep moving forward, never give up. We must have resilience when we study abroad and are far from family" .*

Participant 2: *"I am writing when my mood is good, the fruitful ideas will be full up there... if I'm stuffy and bored, I stop writing, stop the process first, take a break to give myself a chance to recover"*

Participant 3: *"If my mood is no longer good, I leave the thesis for a while to do fun things, such as hanging out and doing things we like, such as hobbies. This is very important because it can refresh our minds so that we will be refreshed and enthusiastic again".*

The correlation between mental condition and the writing process is very close because it can impact the writer's productivity and creativity in achieving writing success. All respondents show that managing mental problems, especially stress, is essential to face the challenges of thesis writing. Based on the findings, several things were found related to the social strategies used by participants to support their efforts in completing their theses abroad, some of which are revealed in the following findings based on themes analysed using Braun and Clarke (2006). The Family Support system is an essential element in completing the thesis. Family is a support system that will always support the child's struggle in difficult times, including when the child is studying abroad. Positive impact increases resilience, motivation, and reduces pressure in academic journeys. Fellows' friends when studying abroad can be very valuable and be the closest supportive environment, because they have similar challenges, so that they can strengthen and encourage each other. Maintaining a good relationship with the thesis supervisor is an absolute and unavoidable thing because one of the determinants of whether or not we write a thesis smoothly lies in good communication between students and their supervisors. The findings also show that participants join writing communities both offline and online. This community helps provide knowledge and insights about acceptable academic writing and various tips on good writing. Findings demonstrate that all participants do the planning (cognitive), evaluating (cognitive), self-monitoring (metacognitive), reflection (metacognitive), and avoiding stress (affective), which is the highest strategy used by all the participants. By brainstorming in planning, they admit to reviewing the previous research to find the novelty. Evaluating their manuscripts can ensure the language appropriateness before submitting to the supervisor. Self-monitoring helps all the respondents to reread their outline that they had made. Reflection

benefits from interconnecting prior knowledge, experiences, and self-awareness. Avoiding stress is crucial to balancing the mental and emotional condition in the thesis journey.

Based on the findings, several key discussions emerge regarding the challenges encountered by participants writing theses at overseas campuses. These challenges can be broadly categorized into academic and non-academic difficulties. Academic challenges primarily involve language issues and content-related problems, whereas non-academic challenges pertain to the supervisor-supervisee relationship, time management, and mental and emotional well-being.

Regarding academic challenges, participants reported difficulties with grammar, limited knowledge of specialized English vocabulary and terminology, and struggles to adapt to the writing styles of native speakers. The complexity and rigor of thesis research can vary significantly depending on the country, university, or specific academic program (Jain et al., 2021). Another major hurdle was the process of selecting a research topic, which often proved exhausting due to frequent changes in topics and outlines. This aligns with Saini et al. (2023), who describe topic selection as a dilemmatic process that impedes Master's students' progress. Additionally, identifying research novelty posed a significant challenge, as participants needed to convincingly demonstrate to their supervisors and readers that their research was both relevant and original. This process demands substantial prior knowledge, typically acquired through extensive review of existing literature, to accurately identify research gaps (Farooq, 2017; Miles, 2017; Bams & Tiimub, 2021).

Beyond language and content issues, non-academic challenges were also significant. Participants experienced mood swings and emotional fluctuations, often triggered by the frustration of repeatedly changing research topics, which negatively impacted motivation. This corresponds with findings by Bazrafkan et al. (2021), who emphasize the importance of managing such emotions to prevent reduced academic achievement (Bazrafkhan, 2016). Moreover, maintaining effective communication with thesis supervisors emerged as a critical factor in facilitating successful thesis completion (Griffith et al., 2015; Gedamu, 2018; Sahabuddin, Hakim, & Bismar, 2020). Conversely, poor communication led to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, impeding progress (Stubbe, 2010; Mncina, Letsie, Nkhi, & Mofana, 2024). Given the cultural differences between Indonesian students and their host countries, communication barriers may be exacerbated by differing cultural expectations and communication styles (Bitchener, 2010; Paltridge, 2002).

Time management also represented a significant non-academic obstacle. Inefficient use of time often hindered the smooth progress of thesis writing, thereby increasing stress and reducing productivity (Gottlieb, 2017). The combination of academic and non-academic factors contributed to delays and difficulties in meeting thesis deadlines.

In response to these challenges, participants employed four main types of strategies to support their thesis completion: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Cognitively, participants engaged in activities such as extensive reading of articles from reputable international journals, following a structured writing process—including pre-writing, drafting, revising, and finalizing—and creating summaries to build their theoretical frameworks. This process-oriented approach aligns with Gebhard's (2000) assertion that writing is rarely flawless in a single draft and requires multiple stages. Cahyono (1999) highlights that this method not only focuses on the writing process itself but also on how instructors can support students as they develop their writing skills. Participants demonstrated awareness of the importance of following systematic writing procedures to successfully complete their theses.

Metacognitively, students planned and organized their thesis activities, monitoring their progress to enhance the quality of their work (Ruan, 2005). However, many required regular reminders, guidance, and explicit instruction to develop self-reflective skills (Joseph, 2006). Encouraging the use of structured writing phases aims to build students' confidence as writers (Sulistyo & Heriyawati, 2017). Reflecting on unexpected events or difficulties during the thesis process was also crucial, as it allowed participants to analyze what occurred, why it happened, and how to improve future efforts (Thorsen & DeVore, 2013).

Affectively, participants maintained motivation, positive attitudes, and emotional resilience by persevering with their writing tasks. This supports Sulistyo and Heriyawati's (2017) findings that motivation strongly influences students' efforts to produce quality work. Ushida (2005) and Bråten and Strømsø (2006) similarly emphasize the critical role of motivation and positive attitudes in second language learning outcomes. Despite the well-documented link between stress and Master's student attrition (Lovitts, 2001), participants remained committed, engaging in academic activities such as publishing research, attending conferences, and delivering lectures. Their persistence reflects Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of learning as a social practice involving both technical and interpersonal skills. Positive relationships with supervisors and faculty members provide opportunities that extend beyond academic knowledge to include life skills and mentorship, which participants valued highly. This dual role of supervisors—as educators and mentors—helps students navigate both academic challenges and personal development. While some students may focus solely on completing their research quickly, overlooking its broader benefits, cultivating constructive relationships with academic staff fosters mutual growth and a deeper appreciation of research as an ongoing professional journey.

Socially, participants aligned themselves with family, friends, and academic communities to build a supportive network. Participation in academic forums, collaboration with peers, and engagement in scholarly discourse emphasized the importance of belonging to a community of practice. Such communities provide opportunities for knowledge exchange and social interaction, which are essential for learning (Ampartzaki et al., 2013; Graven, 2003). Participants reported improvements in research knowledge and publication skills after joining online learning communities, enabling them to publish in high-impact journals. This cooperative approach reflects Dulebohn and Hoch's (2017) findings that virtual teams facilitate communication, overcome time and distance barriers, and support professional development.

In conclusion, developing and maintaining positive relationships with supervisors, peers, and family is vital for thesis success (Griffith et al., 2015; Gedamu, 2018; Sahabuddin, Hakim, & Bismar, 2020). Conversely, poor communication can cause misunderstandings that significantly hinder progress (Stubbe, 2010; Mncina, Letsie, Nkhi, & Mofana, 2024). Students must also be aware of intercultural communication challenges, particularly between Indonesian students and their host countries (Bitchener, 2010; Paltridge, 2002). Ultimately, participants' experiences reflect the complex interplay of academic, emotional, and social factors that influence thesis writing, underscoring the need for situational awareness and effective relationship management throughout the Master's research journey.

5. Conclusion

This study portrays writing challenges and strategies during thesis writing while studying in overseas Universities. The findings inform empirical evidence on the Master students' experiences and writing strategies when writing thesis in overseas Universities. In short, the challenges of thesis writing abroad cover both academic and non-academic challenges. The academic challenges cover the difficulty in setting up the topic and novelty of research while the non-academic challenges cover the ability to manage emotion, mental and time as well as the ability to maintain good communication skills with the thesis supervisor. Then, the study also found that there are four types of strategies applied by participants to help them complete their thesis writing namely cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. In the cognitive aspect, participants engaged in a number of activities, including reading several articles from respectable international journals, using the writing process to cover pre-writing, drafting, rewriting, and writing the final thesis, and creating a summary to develop a theoretical framework. In a metacognitive way, students must use acceptable writing methods that will affect the quality of their work; therefore, they planned and organized their thesis writing activities, including tracking or assessing their overall progress. In effective strategies, the participants really utilized their motivation, positive attitudes, and emotions by working. The participants in social strategies demonstrate their alignment with their families and friends as a support system as well as an academic community by participating in a variety of learning processes, which calls for them to be more cognizant of the significance of becoming recognized in a community.

However, the present study encompasses some weaknesses. First, the current study's findings may not be generalizable to all Master students because it is based on only three participants. The limitation of having only three participants is very clear for there are certain aspects that those three persons may not be able to reveal compared to having more participants. More participants involvement may provide more diverse and comprehensive findings about Master students' writing strategies in relation to the role of community practice in supporting Master degree education through the enactment of academic writing and professional learning communities. Apart from this weakness, the authors would like to emphasize on the strengths or uniqueness the participants have with regard to how they revealed their experiences and writing strategy.

This present study, therefore, offers some pedagogical implications. First, the experiences of Master students drawn from this study may provide some guidance for further Master candidates on the importance of specific strategy in academic writing enabling them to learn more academic writing skills and other soft skills which might be absent during the class setting. This is important as the demand for writing thesis for a Master candidate is seen as mandatory and obligatory for it is used as one of the measurements in evaluating one's study success. In the academic world, as the expectation is going high and somewhat demanding, pressure from institutions of college where the master learning is high too. Therefore, institutions need to participate in this goal by providing choices of access for the students. Second, in order to facilitate academic writing while earning a Master's degree, a Master candidate must possess specific writing techniques. It can be demonstrated by using four different kinds of writing techniques namely cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social. Lastly, the interaction between supervisors and Master students is the focus of Master education. In order to help the Master students, write better scholarly works, we might need to reconsider their emotional struggles as well as the supervisor's function as a mentor or teacher.

References

- Bai, B., & Guo, W. (2018). Influences of self-regulated learning strategy use on self-efficacy in primary school students' English writing in Hong Kong. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 00(0), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10573569.2018.1499058>
- Bai, B., Shen, B., & Mei, H. (2020). Hong Kong primary students' self-regulated writing strategy use: Influences of gender, writing proficiency and grade level. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 65(0), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100839>
- Bitchener, J. (2010). *Writing an applied linguistics thesis or dissertation: A guide to presenting empirical research*. New York, US: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bråten, I., & Strømsø, H. (2010). Effects of task instruction and personal epistemology on the understanding of multiple texts about climate change. *Discourse Processes*, 47, 1-31. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01638530902959646>.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brown, H. Douglas. (2001). *Teaching by principle and interactive approach to language pedagogy*. New York, US: Longman Inc.
- Bulling, T. B. (2020). Entailing professional training and thesis development. An innovation experience at Universidad SEK Chile. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(3), 7391. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no3.5>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry. Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, US: Jossey-Bass Publishers
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach: Research design (5th ed.)*. New York, US: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Donohue, W. J., Lee, A. S. J., Simpson, S., & Vacek, K. (2021). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on doctoral students' thesis/dissertation progress. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 16, 533-552. <https://doi.org/10.28945/4818>
- Dulebohn, J. H., & Hoch, J. E. (2017). Virtual teams in organizations. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27(4), 569–574. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2016.12.004>
- Gedamu, A. D. (2018). TEFL graduate supervisees' views of their supervisors' supervisory styles and satisfaction with thesis supervision. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 6(1), 63–74. <https://doi.org/10.30466/ijltr.2018.20490>
- Graven, M. (2003). Teacher learning as changing meaning, practice, community, identity and confidence: The story of Ivan. *For the Learning of Mathematics*, 3, 25.
- Griffith, M., Walker, J. R., Spies, N. C., Ainscough, B. J., Griffith, O. L. (2015). Informatics for RNA sequencing: A web resource for analysis on the cloud. *PLoS Comput Biol*, 11(8), e1004393. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1004393>
- Harris, K. R., & Graham, S. (2016). Self-regulated strategy development in writing: Policy implication of an evidence-based practice. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 3(1), 77-84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732215624216>
- Jain, V. K., Gautam, D., Iyengar, K. P., Vaishya, R. & Malhotra, R. (2021). Challenges in conducting and completing the orthopaedic postgraduate thesis during COVID-19 pandemic. *Indian Journal of Orthopaedics*, 56, 492-494. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43465021-00503-5>
- Karunaratne, T. (2018). Blended supervision for thesis projects in higher education: A case study. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning*, 16(12), 79.

- Khadka, S. (2020). Meaning and teaching of writing in higher education in Nepal. In K. Bista, S. Sharma, & R. L. Raby (Eds), *Higher Education in Nepal: Policies and Perspectives* (pp. 201-213). Oxford, UK: Routledge,
- Kim, Y. S., Al Otaiba, S., & Wanzek, J. (2015). Kindergarten predictors of third grade writing. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 37, 27-37.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Lovitts, B. E. (2001). *Leaving the ivory tower: The causes and consequences of departure from doctoral study*. Lanham, US: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Marhaban, S., Puspitasari, Y. Mukminatien, N. Widiati, U., Sulisty, T., Suhastyany, W. D., & Muslem, A. (2021). Strategies employed by EFL doctoral candidates in dissertation completion. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 8(2) 546-560.
- Mncina, T., Letsie, H., Nkhi, S., & Mofana, M. (2024). Effective communication in postgraduate supervision: Shaping experiences and overcoming challenges. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research*, 6, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijer-2024.vol6.13>.
- Natividad-Franco, V. (2021). Difficulties and challenges of library and information science students in thesis writing during the pandemic. *Puissant*, 3, 353-365. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED618103.pdf>
- Ningrum, R. W., Hamamah, H., Sahiruddin, S., & Rohmah, Z. (2023). Academic writing difficulties for Indonesian students in pursuing postgraduate studies abroad. *Premise: Journal of English Education and Applied Linguistics*, 12(1), 93-109.
- Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York, US: Newbury House.
- Paltridge, B. (2002). Thesis and dissertation writing: An examination of published advice and actual practice. *English for Specific Purposes*, 21(2), 125–143.
- Raoofi, S., Binandeh, M., & Rahmani, S. (2017). An investigation into writing strategies and writing proficiency of university students. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(1), 191.
- Ruan, H. (2005) *Spectroscopic studies of nano-structures of Al and Fe phases, bauxite and their thermally activated products* (Doctoral Dissertation). Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.
- Sabti, A. A., Rashid, S. M., Nimehchisalem, V., & Darmi, R. (2019). The impact of writing anxiety, writing achievement motivation, and writing self-efficacy on writing performance: A correlational study of Iraqi tertiary EFL learners. *Original Research*, 00(0), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019894289>
- Sahabuddin, Hakim, H., & Bismar, A. R. (2020). Analisis kinerja guru pendidikan jasmani olahraga dan kesehatan terhadap motor ability dan hasil belajar pada siswa SD Negeri di Kabupaten Pinrang. *JCESports, Journal of Coaching Education Sports*, 1(1), 27–36. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31599/jces.v1i1.84>
- Shahsavar, Z. & Kourepaz, H. (2020). Postgraduate students' difficulties in writing their theses literature review. *Cogent Education*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2020.1784620>
- Sitompul, S. K., & Anditasari, A. W. (2022). Challenges in writing academic research: An exploration of master's students' experiences. *Getsempena English Education Journal*, 9(2), 136-148.

- Stubbe, M. (2010). *Was that my misunderstanding? Managing miscommunication and problematic talk at work* (PhD Thesis). Victoria University: Wellington.
- Sukandi, S. S., & Rianita, D. (2020). Problems of Indonesian EFL students in writing thesis in the field of English education. *Proceedings of the 1st Bandung English Language Teaching International Conference*, 448-459.
- Sulistyo, T., & Heriyawati, D. F. (2017). Reformulation, text modelling, and the development of EFL academic writing. *Journal on English as a Foreign Language*, 7(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.23971/jefl.v7i1.457>
- Tiwari, H. P. (2019). Writing thesis in English education: Challenges faced by students. *Journal of NELTA Gandaki*, 1, 45-52.
- Umamah, A., & Cahyono, B. Y. (2020). Indonesian university students' self-regulated writing (SRW) strategies in writing expository essays. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(1), 25-35. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v10i1.24958>
- Ushida, E. (2005). The role of students' attitudes and motivation in second language learning in online language courses. *CALICO Journal*, 23, 49-78. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.v23i1.49-78>.
- Wang, Z. (2020). Computer-assisted EFL writing and evaluations based on artificial intelligence: A case from a college reading and writing course. *Library Hi Tech. Emerald Publishing Limited* 0737-8831. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LHT-05-2020-0113>.