

EFL STUDENTS' CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN WRITING RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate EFL students' challenges in writing the research proposal and how they deal with their challenges. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. The participants were from the 8th semester, and they are majoring in English education at a private university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The participants were six students (three with the highest score, three with the lowest score) selected through quota sampling. For the research instrument, this study used unstructured interviews and research proposal documentation to collect the data. In analyzing the data, the researcher used six procedures of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) including familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and composing the report. The result found that there are some internal and external challenges faced by EFL students in writing their research proposals. The internal challenges are related to self-confidence, lack of knowledge, self-motivation, and feeling under pressure. Meanwhile, the external challenges are related to lecturers' feedback, lack of materials, and lack of family and friend support. There were also found that EFL students used grammar-checking tools, translation tools, tricks to find journals and a technique for finding ideas to deal with the challenges. From the results, it found that more internal challenges were faced by EFL students for a total of nine challenges in students with the highest scores, and a total of 16 challenges in students with the lowest scores. While in the external challenges, there are four challenges in students with the highest scores and five in students with the lowest scores. It also shows that students with the lowest scores faced more challenges than students with the highest scores.

Keywords: academic writing, students' challenges, students' strategies, research proposal

INTRODUCTION

Writing is about how the writers be able to show their ideas and build their thoughts, and make their writing can be the ways to tell the information and communicate with the reader (Kane, 2000). Writing is one of the most difficult challenges faced by students (Murray & Moore, 2006), especially at the university level. One of the obligations of undergraduate students in Indonesia is to write academic writing in the form of research paper (undergraduate thesis) to obtain an undergraduate degree (Mutofa, 2019). Before writing the research paper (undergraduate thesis), students are required to start by writing the research proposal. However, many students have difficulty in writing their proposals and they are late in submitting their papers (Nasution, 1995). Moreover, there will be more challenges for EFL students in writing their proposal and research paper, because English is not the mother tongue of EFL students (Azizah & Budiman, 2017).

Students' challenges are influenced by internal and external factors (Syah, 2001). The internal factor comes from the students themselves. It is related to students' psychological and linguistic aspects. The psychological aspect is related to students' self-confidence, self-motivation, and anxiety. Meanwhile, the linguistic aspect is related to grammatical errors and structure. The external challenges are related to the students' setting place when they are writing. It is related to family

support, peer support, and advisor support. This shows that the challenges faced by students are not only related to mastery and understanding of the subject matter but also related to psychological aspects. Previous studies have shown that students at the university level faced many problems regarding academic writing. In the earlier study, Peng (2018) revealed that students start to have trouble in research writing even from the very beginning of the research process, such as topic selection and research proposal preparation, even the next steps were more complicated, such as a literature review. Sulaiman and Muhajir (2019) in their research also concluded that the students' difficulties were related to aspects of grammar, scientific writing style/rules, vocabulary, spelling, coherence, writing arrangement, and punctuation. The study conducted by Al-Badi (2015) showed that the common mistakes of the students are finding the relevant topic or sources and the lack of knowledge of the conventions of academic writing, and also the expectations of the institution. In addition, Rastri et al. (2023) showed that the linguistic factors got the highest score (75.49%) which highly affected students in writing research proposals.

To face the challenges, there are many strategies that students did. Writing strategies help students to make good writing (Mastan et al., 2017). It means that the strategies that students use in the writing process help students organize and perfect their writing. Abas and Aziz (2018) concluded that students used various strategies when doing writing tasks such as mechanics of writing, relating the topic to experience and knowledge, talk-writing, freewriting, outlining, listing, and using online materials, seeking help, taking the reader into consideration and text organization. A previous study by Keumala et al. (2019) has also concluded that students develop several strategies in academic writing. First, students often share information and discuss with their friends. Second, students usually make an outline and rough draft before writing. It is meant to collect and discover ideas. Third, students usually carry out organizational revision of content and writing coherence activities with their friends by asking their friends to read their work, this is done by most students because they did not have enough time to revise their writing, especially in ensuring coherence and grammar, spelling, and punctuation. In dealing with other challenges like translating and using correct grammar, the students also use translation tools (Fibriana et al., 2021) and grammar checker tools (Novianti, 2020). However, every student has different strategies to overcome their challenges based on their abilities.

Based on the aforementioned explanation, the previous studies are more focused on students' difficulties in linguistic and grammar aspects, only a few examined other aspects such as challenges (from internal and external factors) and their strategies for dealing with the challenges. Therefore, this study investigated the students' challenges in writing their research proposals both from internal and external factors. Additionally, many previous studies used a quantitative approach, so this study used a qualitative approach. So, this research can be more focused on the internal and external factors that affected the students in writing the research proposal and finding the strategies to overcome the students' challenges in writing the research proposal.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. The reason why the case study is used as the research design is to be more detailed and focused on finding the students' difficulties and strategies in writing their research proposals. In addition, another reason is that most of the previous studies used a quantitative approach, so this study used a different research design from the previous study. The participants were students from the 8th semester who are majoring in English education at a private university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. They carried out research proposal writing activities in Thesis Writing Seminar course when they were in the 7th semester. The six students from the three classes were selected through quota sampling based on the scores of the Thesis Writing Seminar course to select two students for each class (one with the highest score, one with the lowest score). For each class, the researcher asked the lecturer for a list of scores. The researcher contacted the students with the highest scores and the lowest scores in each class, some of

them responded and they were willing to become participants. Finally, the researcher got six students from three classes.

To collect the data, the researcher used interviews and documentation as the instrument. The researcher conducted interviews with the six students through online meetings and the duration of each interview was approximately 10-15 minutes. The points that elicited are what challenges students faced in writing research proposals (from internal and external factors), and how they deal with their challenges when writing research proposals. For documentation, the documents collected were students' research proposal documents that have been interviewed. The researcher asked students for the draft research proposals that have been corrected by their advisors. The researcher contacted the participants to ask for their willingness to provide documentation of their research proposal. After that, the researcher asked for photos of their research proposals via the online platform (*WhatsApp*). Finally, the researcher got documentation from three participants based on their willingness. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the data by using six procedures of thematic analysis adopted from Braun and Clarke (2006) including familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and composing the report.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Question 1: What challenges do the EFL students face in writing research proposal?

After analyzing the results of the interview, the challenges of students in writing research proposals are divided into two themes. The two themes are internal challenges and external challenges.

A. Internal challenges faced by EFL students in writing a research proposal

Internal challenges consist of self-confidence, lack of knowledge, self-motivation, and feeling under pressure. Meanwhile, external challenges consist of lecturers' teaching styles, family and friends' support, and materials. Based on the results of interviews conducted with six EFL students. The students faced many internal challenges in writing research proposals. There are 25 total internal challenges found based on the thematic analysis. It can also be seen that students with low scores faced more internal challenges than students with high scores. The internal challenges are related to self-confidence, lack of knowledge, lack of self-motivation, and feeling under pressure. Here, the four categories of internal challenges contain several codes found through thematic analysis (see, Table 1).

Table 1 The four categories in internal challenges contain several codes found through thematic analysis

Codes			File (participants)	Quotation
Internal Challenges	Self confidence	Feeling doubtful	2 (P2, P4)	2
		Afraid of being wrong	2 (P2, P4)	2
		Feeling anxious	1 (P4)	1
		Feeling unconfident	1 (P4)	1
	Lack of knowledge	Lack of understanding the material about research proposal	3 (P1, P2, P5)	3
		Lack of understanding in grammar	2 (P4, P6)	2
		Lack of ideas	3 (P4, P5, P6)	3
		Difficulty in translating	1 (P6)	1
	Self- motivation	Laziness	5 (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6)	5
		Desperate in finding references	1 (P2)	1
		No intention to do	1 (P3)	1
		Lack of enthusiasm	1 (P4)	1
		Unfocused	1 (P4)	1
	Feeling under pressure	Has limited time	1 (P1)	1
Total				25

*P = Participant

*P1, P2, P3 = students with the highest score

*P4, P5, P6 = students with the lowest score

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the four categories of internal challenges contain more specific aspects. First, self-confidence is further divided into four aspects, namely feeling doubtful, afraid of being wrong, feeling anxious, and feeling unconfident. The second is lack of knowledge contains aspects of do not understand the material about research proposals, lack of understanding in grammar, lack of ideas, and difficulty in translating. Third, there are aspects of laziness, desperation in finding references, no intention to do, lack of enthusiasm, and difficulty staying focused on writing the research proposal which is included in the category of self-motivation. Last, there is the feeling under pressure category which contains only one code, namely has limited time. It also showed that the total internal challenges faced by P1, P2, and P3 are 9. Meanwhile, the total internal challenges faced by P4, P5, and P6 are 16. This shows that students with the lowest scores faced more internal challenges than students with the highest score. Students with the highest scores faced more internal challenges related to a lack of self-motivation. Meanwhile, students with the lowest scores faced more internal challenges related to a lack of knowledge.

In the thematic analysis, after the coding stage is the defining themes stage. In this study, the researcher divided internal challenges into four themes consisting of self-confidence, lack of knowledge, self-motivation, and feeling under pressure. The followings are detailed excerpts from the interviewees related to their internal challenges:

1. Self-Confidence

In the interview, it was found that two out of six participants faced internal challenges in writing research proposals. In this case, the challenges they faced are related to student self-confidence. Some of the aspects included in students' self-confidence are feeling doubtful, afraid of being wrong, feeling anxious, and feeling unconfident. The quotations are as follows:

- P2: "When I wanted to start writing a proposal, I couldn't write it right away because I am not sure. Then, afraid what if the grammar is not correct or afraid what if the language sounds less professional or less academic."
 P4: "In writing the research proposal I often feel afraid if there is a mistake and anxious."
 P4: "I feel less confident and I wonder whether I can write a research proposal according to what the lecturer wants."

2. Lack of Knowledge

It was also found that five out of six students faced challenges in the lack of student knowledge. This challenge is divided into four more specific aspects. At this point, three students did not understand the research materials, two students did not understand grammar, three students had difficulty finding ideas, and one student had difficulty translating. Besides, data were also obtained from the documentation of students' research proposal drafts. From the interview, this can be seen through the quotation below:

- P1: "There are some difficulties in the structure of writing which can be said if you look at some of the examples in the library or in the articles it might be different from what I have to write."
 P2: "One of the obstacles was also in the previous research class, I didn't understand how to do research, and some insights and knowledge about other research."
 P5: "I had difficulties with the preparation. How to arrange the words. Then also, for example in the introduction, I don't understand what structure I should make. So, for example, in the introduction, paragraph 1 is about what paragraph 2 is about. So, I sometimes feel confused about the arrangement."

This can be proven by the documentation below:

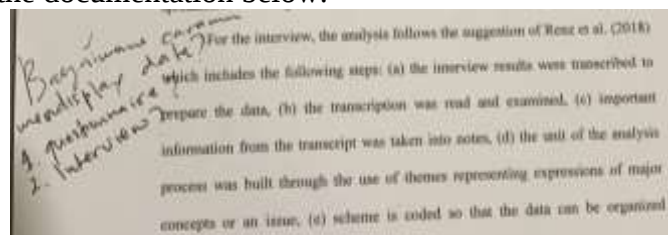


Figure 1 P1's research proposal draft showed the challenges in understanding the structure of the research proposal

Based on Figure 1, P1 has difficulty how to compose the correct paragraph in the data analysis section. So, the lecturer gave feedback by writing what he should write in that section.

In writing research proposals students also faced difficulties in using correct grammar. In this study, it was found that two students experienced these difficulties as shown in the interview excerpts below:

- P4: "I don't understand grammar, I still feel like compiling grammar, I still make a lot of mistakes"
 P6: "Many of the difficulties I faced were related to grammar as well so I encountered a lot of difficulties in doing from chapters 1 to 3."

The interview data related to the students' challenges in using correct grammar is also supported by data obtained from the documentation of the student's research proposal draft below:

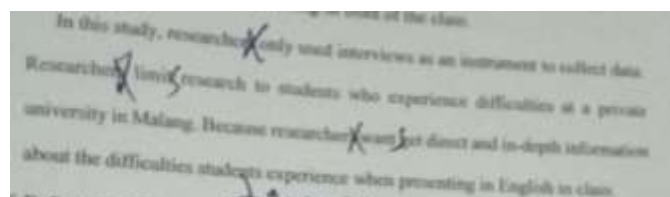


Figure 2 P6's research proposal draft showed the challenges in using correct grammar

As shown in Figure 2, P6 faced the challenge of using the correct singular and plural nouns in a sentence. The lecturer crosses the "s" in the word "Researchers", and adds an "s" in the words

“limit” and “want”. This shows that students faced challenges in writing research proposals using the correct grammar.

Not only grammar but P4, P5, and P6 also faced challenges related to their ideas. In writing research proposals P4, P5, and P6 experienced challenges in expressing their ideas, even at the beginning of doing a research proposal. It took sufficient time to determine the research topic. This can be proven by the excerpts below:

P4: "Actually I have an idea but I can't express it in clear words so it's like fighting thoughts like that. Unable to express or can be called not easy to channel ideas."

P5: "It was also difficult to come up with the idea at first. So, from the start to determine the topic of the research proposal it also takes quite a long time, to find the idea."

P6: "In finding ideas, I also experience difficulties."

To support the interviews data, the researcher also obtained data from documentation of student research proposal drafts related to challenges in finding ideas:

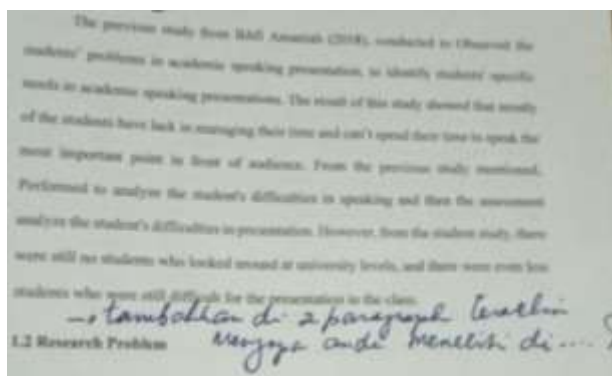


Figure 3 P6's research proposal draft showed the challenges in finding ideas

In Figure 3, the lecturer has given written feedback to add the last paragraphs explaining the reasons for conducting the research. This shows that P6 faced difficulties in finding ideas.

Besides that, P6 also faced challenges in translating from Indonesian or vice versa, especially when reading references. It is proven through the P6's statement that:

P6: "When I was working on chapters 1 to chapter 3, I had difficulty translating from Indonesian to English or vice versa. In the sense that I have to translate a lot of vocabulary first to include it in my proposal because there are also many words that I can't understand when reading references."

The interview data above is also supported by data obtained from the documentation of student research proposal drafts which show challenges in translating. This is evidenced as follows:

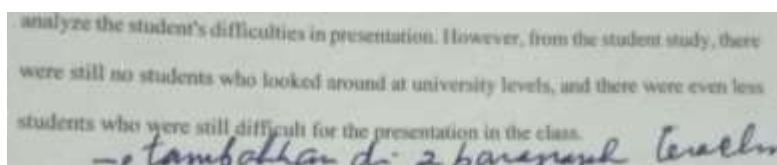


Figure 4 P6's research proposal draft showed the challenges in translating

In Figure 4, P6 wrote the sentence "There were still no students who looked around at university levels". The word "looked around" is not suitable, it is more suitable to use the word "investigate". This shows that P6 faced challenges in translating or using suitable words to write research proposals.

3. Self-Motivation

Based on the results of the analysis, students' self-motivation is divided into five aspects. First, students faced the challenge of laziness when writing research proposals. Students admit that they are lazy to complete their thesis proposals because they feel tired of college and they think that writing research proposals is difficult, so they are lazy to complete their research proposals. It was found that five students faced this challenge based on the interview excerpts below:

P1: *"For the internal maybe it's like my own laziness"*

P3: *"First, I'm lazy. Because I'm in the final semester, right, so the motivation has diminished because I'm tired of lectures. So, the first one is my laziness"*

P4: *"When I wrote the research proposal, I felt lazy"*

P5: *"When I write a proposal, I like to be lazy. Because I think that writing a research proposal is very difficult"*

P6: *"Actually, I am also less self-motivated. Because when working on research proposals, I have difficulty being lazy"*

This study also found a student lost her motivation and despair because she had not immediately found references related to their research. In this study it was found that P2 faced these challenges based on her statement below:

P2: *"Lost motivation because when I tried to find references, I couldn't find the topic of discussion that I wanted to include in the proposal. So, I felt a little desperate, so several times I did not immediately continue writing the research proposal."*

There was also no intention, a lack of enthusiasm, and difficulties to stay focused on finishing the research proposal. This is stated based on the P3 and P4 statements below:

P3: *"Sometimes it's hard for me to get back my intention to finish my research proposal because it takes quite a long time to get back in a good mood."*

P4: *"I am not motivated or lack enthusiasm even though the people around me support me that I can do it"*

P4: *"I already have the intention to do it, and I've opened my laptop but my mind still can't focus on my research proposal"*

4. Feeling Under Pressure

Based on the results of the analysis, students also faced challenges when writing research proposals in the form of feeling under pressure. This was mentioned by P1 in the interview that in writing the research proposal, P1 needed a lot of time so he had to be able to manage the time. This is evidenced as follows:

P1: *"The time I have may also be a challenge that I have to deal with, because I need a lot of time to do my research proposal, and I have to be able to manage the time I have"*

B. External challenges faced by EFL students in writing a research proposal

The external challenges faced by EFL students in writing research proposals are factors that come from outside of the students or come from the students' environment. Based on the results of interviews conducted with six EFL students. The students faced many external challenges in writing research proposals. There are a total of nine internal challenges found based on the thematic analysis. It can also be seen that students with low scores faced more external challenges than students with high scores. External challenges can be related to the lecturer's teaching style, materials, and the support of family and friends. Here, the four categories of external challenges contain some codes found through thematic analysis. The following is a table of codes from the three categories of external challenges:

Table 2 The three categories in external challenges contain several codes found through thematic analysis

Codes			File (participants)	Quotation
External	Lecturers' Feedback	The lecturer explains/speaks too fast	1 (P4)	1
		Unclear lecturer's explanation	1 (P6)	1
	Materials	Difficulty in finding the relevant and latest references or research articles	5 (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6)	6
	Family and friends support	No friends to support	1 (P2)	1
Total				9

*P = Participant

*P1, P2, P3 = students with the highest score

*P4, P5, P6 = students with the lowest score

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the three categories of external challenges contain more specific aspects. These aspects are codes that are found through thematic analysis. First, the lecturer's feedback is further divided into two aspects, namely the lecturer explaining/speaking too fast, and the unclear lecturer's explanation. The second is about materials that contain a code about the difficulty in finding relevant and latest references or research articles. And finally, there is the no friends to support aspect which is included in the category of external student motivation or family and friends support. It also shows that the total external challenges faced by P1, P2, and P3 are four. Meanwhile, the total external challenges faced by P4, P5, and P6 are 5. This shows that students with the lowest scores faced more external challenges than students with the highest score. In this case, the most external challenges are in materials or students' difficulties in finding the references.

In this study, the researcher divided external challenges into three themes consisting of lecturers' feedback, materials, and family and friend support. The following are detailed excerpts from the interviewees related to their external challenges:

1. Lecturer's Feedback

In this case, two out of six participants faced external challenges related to lecturers' teaching styles. The first was experienced by P4. Sometimes she was challenged when the lecturer explained too fast so she had difficulty understanding what the lecturer explained. The second is the lecturers' unclear explanation that was experienced by P6. Here, he felt confused about the material of the research proposal when the lecturer explained unclear. It can be proven by the excerpts below:

P4: "Okay. From external factors, in my opinion, the teaching style of the lecturer is easier to understand. but sometimes the lecturer interprets or explains too quickly. So, I'm still a bit confused."

P6: "For external factors, I also experienced a bit of difficulty. I don't understand the lecturer's explanation in class, so I experience difficulties and get confused."

2. Materials

In this case, students faced difficulty when looking for references related to their research. Besides, students also admit that they don't know where to look for references from any site, and sometimes they faced difficulty in finding references that are free to access. Some of the excerpts below proved it:

- P1: "If the external challenges come from references. References from the topics I took were difficult to find the references"
- P2: "To find the references, several times there were obstacles. For example, only finding the old published references. Then, there is only a printed version and there is no PDF version on the internet that I can read to be my reference."
- P3: "For external factors, it is more difficult to find references. The problem is that some of the references related to my title have different contents."
- P4: "In writing research proposals, I encountered several challenges or difficulties. First, the lack of reading the references for each article. Because I still had difficulties in finding references related to my research proposal"
- P5: "Initially, I found it difficult to find the references because I didn't know where I have to find the references, other than Google Scholar".

3. Family and Friends Support

Based on the results of the analysis, the student also faced challenges in writing research proposals when the student did not have support from other people as stated by P1 in the interview. This is evidenced as follows:

P2: "I have difficulty finding friends to share and discuss writing a research proposal"

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that EFL students faced many internal and external challenges in writing research proposals. The internal challenges can be related to self-confidence, lack of knowledge, lack of self-motivation, and feeling under pressure. Meanwhile, the external challenges are challenges related to the lecturer's teaching styles/feedback, family and friends' support, and materials.

Question 2: How do they deal with their challenges in writing research proposal?

There are many strategies used by students to face challenges in writing research proposal, and the strategies are grouped into six challenges faced by students in writing research proposal. The following is Table 3 of students' strategies in dealing with the challenges in writing research proposal:

Table 3 Student strategies in dealing with the challenges in writing a research proposal

Challenges	Strategies
Lack of self confidence	- Find good quality references or articles and use them as examples. - Using grammar checking tools (Grammarly) - Asking friends for suggestions and sharing
Lack of knowledge	- Using translation tools (Google Translate) - Using technique in finding ideas (Freewriting) - Reading a lot
Lack of motivation	- See the persistence of their friends who are more diligent - Asking their friends to do together in the same place - Remembering the parents' advices
Feeling under pressure	Manage the time
Lecturer's feedback	- Asking friends - Asking the lecturer again - Looking for additional references
Lack of materials	- Download and search for many articles - Using a tools/filter to determine the articles in latest year - Asking the lecturer

Based on Table 3, it can be seen that there are many strategies used by students to face challenges in writing research proposal, and the strategies are grouped into six challenges faced by students in writing research proposal. This is evidenced as follows:

A. Lack of Student Confidence

Related to the lack of self-confidence, the researcher found strategies or solutions mentioned by the student. The researcher presented the interview excerpt as follows:

P2: *"To overcome this, I try to find good references or research articles as examples, and I use tools like Grammarly to ensure that what I write is correct."*

P4: *"To deal with this, I try to find good references, then I use them as examples, other than that I ask for advice and share with friends"*

From the excerpts above, the students tried to find good-quality references or articles and use them as examples. Second, P2 used tools such as *Grammarly* to ensure that her writing is correct. Third, P4 also asked for suggestions or sharing with her friends.

B. Lack of Student Knowledge

On challenges related to lack of knowledge, the researcher presents the interview excerpts as follows:

P4: *"If I have a new idea, I immediately type it or write it down. Then, if some sentences or words are not quite right, they can be replaced or corrected again, that's a kind of Freewriting technique. I always use Google Translate while writing research proposals. Because honestly, if I write purely from my thoughts, I'm not sure."*

P6: *"To overcome difficulties in translating, I can overcome this by using tools such as google translate. To find ideas I also experienced difficulties, but the way I did to overcome this was to read a lot of references and articles related to my research."*

From the excerpts above, students faced the challenge related to a lack of knowledge about research proposals. In dealing with their understanding of grammar, P4 and P6 used translation tools such as *Google Translate*. Meanwhile, P4 used the Freewriting technique to deal with her challenges in finding ideas. But, P6 has a different way of finding ideas. He tried to read many references or articles that are related to his study.

C. Lack of motivation

On challenges related to lack of self-motivation, the researcher presents the excerpts as follows:

P1: *"If I motivate myself, maybe one of the ways I can do this is by looking at my more diligent friends. Maybe there are friends whose research proposals are almost complete. So, that can also be a motivation for me."*

P4: *"Usually I deal with this challenge by remembering the advice of my parents, they told me to do my best, as much as possible. That was their motivation for me."*

P5: *"Sometimes, I look at my surroundings. That's the most important in my opinion. If I want to be motivated, I usually ask my friends who also write research proposals to work on it together, so we help each other."*

From the excerpts above, students faced the challenge related to self-motivation in writing research proposals and there are three strategies. First, P1 saw the persistence of his more diligent friends to increase his self-motivation. So, he thinks he can be more enthusiastic and he does not get left behind by his friends. Second, P4 remembered the advice from her parents. Last, P5 asked their friends to work together in the same place.

D. Feeling Under Pressure

On challenges related to feeling under pressure, the researcher found strategies or solutions mentioned by one out of six students. students mentioned that there was a strategy to deal with these challenges. the researcher presents the interview excerpt as follows:

P1: *"Because I need a lot of time to work on my research proposal, so I have to be able to manage the time I have. At least I work on my research proposal every day, 3 hours a day, to finish it quickly."*

From the excerpts above, P1 faced challenges related to feeling under pressure in writing research proposals. here, P1 felt under pressure because he had limited time to finish his research proposal. To overcome this, P1 managed his time to do his research at least 3 hours per day.

E. Lecturers' Feedback

On challenges related to lecturers' feedback, students mentioned that there were three strategies undertaken to deal with these challenges. The researcher presents the interview excerpts as follows:

P4: *"When I don't understand the lecturer's explanation, I ask my friends, and sometimes I dare to ask the lecturer to explain again."*

P6: *"For external factors, I also experienced a bit of difficulty. I don't understand the lecturer's explanation in class, so I have difficulty and get confused. So, I have to look for more references myself and sometimes ask my friends."*

From the excerpts above, students faced the challenge related to lecturers' feedback. When the lecturer explains research material too fast and unclear, students faced difficulty to understand the lecturer's explanation. To overcome this, three strategies are carried out by students. First, when the lecturer's explanation was not understood, P4 and P6 asked for information about the material explained to their friends. Second, to overcome this P4 tried to ask the lecturer to explain again because the explanation was too fast. And finally, P4 looked for additional references to improve her understanding.

F. Lack of Materials

On challenges related to finding the materials for writing the research proposal, students mentioned that there were three strategies undertaken to deal with these challenges. The researcher presents the excerpts as follows:

P4: *"Every time I look for references, I download a lot of articles and read them one by one, looking for the ones that are relevant and looking for the newest ones. Sometimes, I also use filters to determine the most recent year of publication."*

P5: *"To overcome this, I asked the lecturer and my lecturer told me where to find the source of the journal. So, my lecturer gave me suggestions on where to look for articles or references."*

From the excerpts above, students faced the challenge related to finding the references. To overcome this, three strategies are carried out by students. First, P4 downloaded or searched for many articles. Then, sorting which ones are related to their study. Second, P4 also used a year filter to determine the latest article references. Third, P5 tried to ask the lecturer where to look for references.

From the data above, it can be seen that there are many strategies used by students to face challenges in writing research proposal. Their strategies are using grammar-checking tools, using translation tools, doing tricks to find journals, and using techniques in finding the ideas like Freewriting, and even the students work together with their friends and ask for their family's support.

The findings from the first research question showed that there are internal challenges and external challenges. This is in line with Syah's (2001) statement that there are two factors affecting students' difficulty in writing, namely internal factors and external factors. Internal challenges are challenges that come from the students themselves related to psychological and linguistic factors. Meanwhile, the external challenges are challenges related to lecturers' teaching styles, writing aspects, materials, and classroom atmosphere. In this study, it was found that students' internal challenges in writing research proposals were related to student self-confidence, lack of knowledge, student self-motivation, and students' feeling under pressure. First, in students' self-confidence, students are found to face challenges related to feeling doubtful, afraid of being wrong, feeling anxious, and feeling unconfident. This is in line with Martínez and Villa (2017) that self-confidence is an aspect of psychology related to language learning process development. The problems often faced by students in academic writing are not only about grammar, diction, and vocabulary but also

how to express the idea in a target language (Raimes, 1983). This is related to the finding of this study that the student's challenges are do not understand the material about the research proposal, lack of understanding in grammar, lack of ideas, and difficulty in translating. A similar finding from this study also showed by Islamiah (2020) that students faced difficulties in doing the research in the form of finding the topic or problem to be studied, the lack of understanding of the research proposal material, and the stage of doing the research. Third, students also faced challenges related to self-motivation. In this case, the challenges faced by students were laziness, desperation in finding references, no intention to do, lack of enthusiasm, and unfocused. It means that self-motivation in students is very influential on students' writing abilities. This is in line with Boscolo and Gelati (2007) that students' motivation in writing is influenced by their insight on writing competence.

Furthermore, students also faced external challenges in writing research proposals. In this research, students faced challenges related to lecturers' teaching styles, materials, and family and friends' support. In the lecturers' teaching style, students faced challenges when their lecturers explain material in class unclearly and speak too fast. So that students feel confused and not interested. This is in line with Rosalia (2017) that the student's interest in learning is influenced by teaching style. Meanwhile, the materials here mean students' difficulties in finding the relevant and latest references or research articles. The results of these findings are similar to the findings of Budjalemba and Listyani (2020) who found that difficulty in finding journals is a challenge faced by students in academic writing. Another challenge faced by students in writing research proposals is the lack of social support from family or friends. So that the student's motivation decreased and students tend to procrastinate their proposals. This is supported by Tuasikal and Patria (2019) that low social support can be the cause of thesis writing procrastination.

For the second research question, it was found that there were many strategies that students did to face challenges in writing research proposals. First, to face the challenges of lack of confidence related to afraid of being wrong and feeling doubtful in writing research proposals, students tried to find good references and then used them as examples. In addition, to reduce doubts in writing research proposals, students also used tools such as *Grammarly*. This is supported by Novianti (2020) in her research that *Grammarly* is very helpful in improving writing skills and students' confidence in writing. In facing the challenge related to lack of knowledge, students used a strategy in looking for ideas, namely when they find new ideas, they write these ideas, then correct them if they feel that the writing is not suitable. This activity is also included as one of strategy in writing, namely freewriting. This is in line with previous studies by Abas and Aziz (2018) that the students used various strategies in writing tasks, one of which was freewriting. In addition, the previous study conducted by Fibriana et al. (2021) concluded that *Google Translate* could help students in academic writing. This supports the findings of this study that to overcome students' challenges in writing research proposals using English, students also used online dictionary tools such as *Google Translate* to facilitate their work.

In conclusion, writing a proposal is the first step that must be taken in completing an undergraduate thesis as a student's final project. It can be seen from the result of this study that there are many difficulties in writing research proposals. This study concluded that the EFL students faced many internal and external challenges in writing the research proposal, so students also have different strategies for dealing with the challenges.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study aimed to investigate the EFL students' challenges in writing the research proposal both internal and external, and also investigate how the EFL students deal with their challenges in writing the research proposal. Based on the findings, the researcher concluded that there are many internal and external challenges faced by EFL students in writing their research proposal. The internal challenges were categorized as self-confidence, lack of knowledge, self-motivation, and feeling under pressure. Meanwhile, the external challenges were categorized as lecturers' feedback, lack of materials, and lack of family and friend support. After analyzing the data, the researcher also found

that the most challenging are from internal factors and students with the lowest scores faced more challenges than students with the highest scores. To deal with their challenges, students have various ways such as using grammar-checking tools, using translation tools, doing tricks to find journals, and using techniques in finding ideas, even working together with their friends.

It is suggested for the students that they must be able to increase their self-confidence and increase their knowledge related to writing a good research proposal. In this case, students can use tools such as *Google Translate* and *Grammarly*, and use freewriting strategies. In addition, students must also be able to motivate themselves and manage their time well in finishing the research proposal. Lecturers also have a very important role in increasing students' understanding to be able to write a good research proposal. Therefore, it is expected that lecturers have a teaching style that is easy to understand so that the students can get good knowledge and understanding of the materials. Additionally, this research has many shortcomings and therefore future researchers are expected to be able to investigate the challenges faced by students in writing research proposals using different methods with larger participants. If possible, to research for many universities.

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