

THE IMPACT OF SUPERVISION ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' THESIS WRITING

Misdi¹, Rina Destiana²

¹Department of English Education, Faculty of Educational and Teaching Sciences, Unswagati, Indonesia

²Department of Accounting, Faculty of Economics, Unswagati, Indonesia

¹misdirina@gmail.com, ²destirin@gmail.com

Abstract

Supervising is important and central in thesis writing since most of the undergraduate students are still novice authors. High quality of supervision produces high quality thesis writing. Having analyzed and observed the process of thesis supervising, a critical analysis was given based on the descriptive method of investigation. The data were gathered through interview, documents, and the unpublished thesis in the departments of accounting in a privat university in Cirebon. The finding implies that the thesis writing among undergraduate students sounds lack of supervision. Some issues of ethics in both plagiarism and ethics arise. The indicators of lack supervision which were found are (1) improper citation and references, (2) gap on theories and discussion, (3) insufficient data gathering technique, and (4) insufficient recent related studies. The results of the study also suggest if supervisor and the writers need to provide mutual relationships in terms of power according to time allowance.

Keywords: plagiarism, research ethics, supervising, thesis biting

1. Introduction

Writing is still regarded as a difficult activity for university students, even for English department (Emilia, 2005). This has been confirmed by the fact that the number of the students who complete their bachelor's degrees by writing a thesis is always far lower than that of those who take several courses as the substitutes for the thesis (p. 5).

But, in understanding the situation as Emilia suggests, the context is considered since academic writing, e.g. thesis writing, is done under supervision. This is a challenge (Alwasilah, 2010). Thus, the role of supervisors is central in developing students' critical thinking and critical writing. Moreover, there is a suggestion to publish the students' work in the academic journal (Dikti, 2012). Therefore, this paper provides a sensitive issue of thesis writing to discuss in terms of critical writing and critical supervision by addressing the basic aim to show some evidences of the developing critical academic writing and critical pedagogy in the perspective of critical pedagogy.

Since academic writing among the university students seems 'new' experiences, big effort should be made (Emilia, 2010) to promote critical literacy as the demand of the 21 century (Alwasilah, 2012), critical thinking and critical writing (Gebhard, 2009). Critical thinking is required to write academically (Gebhard, 2009). These academic social events are the basic steps in preparing the high literate citizens through critical pedagogy (Nainby, Warrent, & Bolinger, 2004; Mochinski, 2008) in which mutual and dialogical interaction is promoted.

Thesis is an interactive text which creates meaning and addresses academic purposes (Martin & Rose, 2004). The meaning is sent through the linguistic features which are the characteristics of the texts, e.g. accounting, English education, medical, or nurses. These characteristics, of course make it different from other texts, e.g. newspaper, report, or book. Thesis writing from a certain university is different from other university does because of the characteristics and the uniqueness (Emilia, 2010). However, the generic structure of the thesis writing remains the same (Gebhard, 2009). But, this is not only the issue of this investigation

but plagiarism which is indicated in citation and reference writing is also discussed.

The realities of the poor writing among Indonesian students, even they sit in the university atmosphere, are still the common issues (Gebhard, 2009; Emilia, 2010). And the main actors of these processes are students and the supervisors of the thesis. Thus, the aim of this research is to provide some evidences on how the academic paper writing is lack of supervision in the perspective of critical writing and critical supervision.

Academic paper: critical writing and critical supervision

Academic paper is usually written at the end of the courses as the indication of completion of the certain degree, e.g. bachelor in Accounting, or English education (Emilia, 2010). Emilia also clarifies that there some evidences why the writing is regarded as difficult since academic writing needs specific skills. It is such an anxious-provoking activity among Asian students, especially for Taiwanese graduate students, e.g. in entering both graduate and postgraduate program (Johanson, 2001). They argued that they were not encouraged adequately to prepare for academic writing which highly demands for self-driven motivation.

Gebhard (2009) has illustrated if self-driven which is stimulated in early stage of education influences the skills. Problem-based writing which demands critical thinking is the foundation. Students are asked to clarify every argument by providing sufficient evidences to indicate that their writing is critical. Gebhard, further says that critical reading is required to be critical in writing. It is critical reading, students will gradually be critical thinking who are able to make strong and valid arguments. And to do this, the role of supervisors is vital (Emilia, 2010).

Misdi, et.al. (2013) suggest that there are some indications if the supervising, or at least writing guidance is less provided to students in terms of the access of up-to-date reading resources. They also hardly found students who accessed journal article. At the same time, books are their main readings. It indicates that trends and up-to-date information are less considered (Swalles & Feak, 2008).

At the same time, in the context of critical pedagogy, supervisor-student consultation is seen as mutual interaction. A critical pedagogy serves students sphere to facilitate public space (Nainby, Warrent, & Bolinger, 2004) in which

students are able to express their ideas critically. This, therefore demands process which sees the students' realities as existing way expression (Freire, 2001 in Nainby, Warrent, & Bolinger, 2004 p. 33). Through this process, power is reduced (Monchinski, 2008) as supervisors at the same time are learners. That is dialogic pedagogy.

The process of dialogic pedagogy is reflected in the paper. The paper which is an academic text contains specific structures and linguistic features (Gebhard, 2009). In terms of critical thinking, some evidences are directed as indicators such as the structure of the paragraphs. The coherences – a shift from an issue to another issue, from a paragraph to another paragraph are essential in providing information relating to the topic written (Chaffee, et al., 2002; Swales & Feak, 2008; Emilia, 2010; Misdi, 2013).

As conclusion, the process of supervision of academic paper is seen through a two-way critical perspective: critical reading and critical writing, and critical pedagogy at the same time. By using this perspective, academic papers are analyzed to reflect the process of supervision.

2. Methods

Adopting descriptive study, four thesis which were written by undergraduate students of Accounting Department of a private university were reviewed. The analysis was done under the umbrella of critical perspective of academic writing which are mainly suggested in critical writing (Gebhard, 2009; Chaffee, et al., 2002; Swales & Feak, 2008; Emilia, 2010) and critical pedagogy (Nainby, Warren & Bollinger, 2004; Monchinski, 2008). The papers were taken from the representation of the last two year writing (2013, 2014) by using simple random basis.

3. Findings and discussion

The analysis of the four academic papers (thesis) was done to detect the quality of the supervising process. From the perspectives of critical analysis, three findings are presented here.

3.1 Lack of supervision

This lack of supervision was drawn from the findings of improper citation and reference writing. Three out of four authors carelessly made cited many or a lot of copies without making proportional reference. All authors did cite some other works, however, there was rarely mentioned in the reference page.

In Lusy's unpublished thesis, there were more 4-5 pages using single reference or research or single theory as the only source, e.g. in page 13-16, 9-15 in Second author. In this case, the author had already committed on plagiarism. However, since these occurred for many times in her writing, it seems that the supervising was unable to provide sufficient guidance. The same occurrences were experienced by other three authors.

It seems that the undergraduate authors were still in initial stage to confirm or discuss their findings, or even made arguments relating to the theories they wished to use. However, the worst was when there was absence of the supervisor's role. It was proved by the findings by showing a lot of mistakes in the absence of stating the source in the texts.

Sometimes, the in the methods were not clarified, e.g. the technique of data collection, or even there was, insufficient sources were found. Again, there was an indicator of the absence of the supervision. The work of author 3.

When the generic structure of thesis writing was sophisticated, other matters came. There was lack of coherences in the texts, e.g. in presenting ideas of one expert comparing to other's idea, no conjunction was used. Consequently, for instance, there was missing link between paragraph one to second paragraph and so on (Emilia, 2010).

Most sentences (almost) were constructed in active form. This is less arguable and tends to be less meaningful (Emilia, 2010, Gebhard, 2009; Chaffee, et.al., 2002; Swales & Feak, 2008; Misdi, 2013).

In presenting the results of the study, the undergraduate tends to use only one theory, and only once mention during the discussion, e.g. in chapter 4 page 45-84 (Author 2) and page 39-85 of author 3. These phenomena suggest that the undergraduate author hardly connected the findings and the theories. Again, this suggests the absence of the supervision.

In term of methods of the research, e.g. using a case study, library research was adopted as the main method in collecting the data. Whereas the fact, the data were taken from the institution. This irrelevant method was as indicators of the lack of supervision quality. Is this due to poor reading? The writers often neglected the essence of readings even it is

agreed that reading is the power of being critical thinking (Gebhard, 2009; Chaffee, 2000).

3.2 The ethics: Commit on plagiarism and absence of ethics

All unpublished thesis randomly taken here suggest that the authors committed to plagiarism. The interesting findings also show us that the research ethics was absence, e.g. no source cited/mentioned. This implies if the department was unable to provide good guidance for the undergraduate authors.

Regarding to supervision role, it indicates if there was less critical supervision. In the sphere of dialogic interaction, writer and supervisor are equal since critical pedagogy suggest this (Nainby, Warren & Bollinger, 2004; Monchinski, 2008). This finding, as the result, show that the text is less accurate and validity due to the absence of up-to-date readers (Swales & Feak, 2008; Misdi, et.al., 2013)

3.3 The need to provide mutual relationships in terms of power according to time allowance

The data of questionnaire and of the interviews clearly show if power was exercised. This findings were proved by, for example

“Silahkan dikumpulkan (simpan), nanti ambil berikut revisiannya (Kindly collect or save your paper draft, and you can take the revision and comments later)”

“sulit mengatur waktu untuk bertemu (it's hard to manage the time to discuss) “terlalu sibuk sehingga susah ditemui (too busy that unable discuss)” was commonly expressed by the undergraduate authors to respond the supervisors' situation (behaviour). This expression implied that there was no time allowance due to the busy supervisors

In conducting supervision, students often considered as lower position so that dialogic pedagogy is rarely done. Thus, the finding suggests the importance of reducing the gap so that supervisor at the same time acts as a learner, too. Hence, the discussion such as question – answer goes smoothly (Nainby, Warren &

Bollinger, 2004; Monchinski, 2008). The results also indicate that the supervising or at least proof reading was rarely done thoroughly due to some reasons, e.g. time allocation.

4. Conclusion

From the overall discussion above, the dynamic sphere of critical pedagogy of the supervisors are hardly found to facilitate democratic space within the process of consultation. This means, the supervising and consultation run poorly. Even the writers are the university students who are independent and have their own strategies (Misdi, 2013), critical supervising is still needed. However, the findings also indicate that other evidences are absent, e.g. the supervisor experiences and time constraints.

REFERENCES

- [1] A.C. Alwasilah, "Language, Culture, and Education: A Portrait of Contemporary Indonesia". Bandung: Andira, 2010
- [2] _____, "Pokoknya Rekayasa Literacy". Bandung : Kiblat, 2012
- [3] E. Emilia, "A Critical Genre-based Approach to Teaching Academic Writing in A Tertiary EFL Context in Indonesia", University of Melbourne: Dissertation, 2005 unpublished
- [4] _____, "Teaching Writing: Developing Critical Learners", Bandung: Rizqi Press, 2010
- [5] J. Chafee, "Thinking Critically", USA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000
- [6] J. Chaffee, C. McMahon, & B. Sout, "Critical Thinking, Thoughtful Writing: A Rhetoric with Readings." (2nd Ed). USA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002
- [7] J. Swalles & C.B. Feak , "Academic Writing for Graduate Students: Essential Tasks and Skills". (2nd Ed). USA: UMP, 2008
- [8] K.E. Nainby, J.T. Warren, C. Bollinger, "Articulating Contact in The Classroom: Towards in Constitutive Focus in A. Phipps & M. Guilherme (eds), Critical Pedagogy in Critical Pedagogy: Political Approaches to Language and Intercultural Communication".UK: Multilingual Matter, Ltd., 2004
- [9] Misdi. "Abstract Writing: A Path Way in Developing Critical Thinking of Undergraduate Students," 2014, Unpublished.
- [10] _____ , Tasks and Socio-affective Learning Strategies of Good Language Learners. Proceeding: TIE ALLSAW ISSN 2337-5043 University of Galuh, 2013
- [11] Misdi, N. Hartini, & D. Farijanti, "Beyond Critical Thinking in Academic Writing: A Discourse Perspective," A Paper presented in the 60th Teflin International Conference, Jakarta 27 August 2013
- [12] R. Johanson, "The Self-Reported Perspectives Regarding Academic Writing among Taiwanese Graduate Students Specializing in TEFL". ERIC: Texas Papers in Foreign Language Education, v6 n1 p19-35 Fall 2001 (available on www.eric.gov)
- [13] T. Monchinski, "Critical Pedagogy and Every day Classroom", NY: Springer, 2008
- [14] www.dikti.go.id