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PROCEEDING

EFL Theory & Practice: Voice of EED UKI

English Education Department (EED) Collegiate Forum 2015-2018

Editor
Parlindungan Pardede

Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
FKIP UKI
2019

PROCEEDING

English Education Department Collegiate Forum (EED CF) 2015-2018

"EFL Theory and Practice: Voice of EED UKI"

Editor:
Parlindungan Pardede

Reviewers:
Parlindungan Pardede
Hendrikus Male
L. Angelianawati
Asri Purnamasari
Horas Hutabarat
Lamhot Naibaho

Cover designer:
Situjuh Nazara

PREFACE

English Education Department Collegiate Forum (EED CF) is an academic forum organized by the English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Kristen Indonesia (EED FKIP UKI). Initiated in 2008 by Mr. Parlin Pardede Dean of FKIP UKI, the event was held bi-monthly in every even moth. It aims at providing a friendly and open opportunity for the faculty, students, alumni, and English teachers to share ideas, research findings, and experiences in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) field. It is expected that the forum can cater the interested parties an innovative and exciting opportunity to share, care, and collaborate for developing their professionalism in EFL learning and teaching.

Following related parties' recommendation, staring from 2015 the papers presented in the forum will be compiled and published in a proceeding in every four years. This proceeding, therefore, includes the 24 articles presented in the forum from 2015 to 2018. Since the presentation in this forum is voluntary, every resource person is free to decide the EFL topic he or she presents. Consequently, the articles in this volume cover a broad theme. Despite the broad theme, the topics covered in the articles do represent current hot issues in EFL, such as learning and teaching methodology and strategies; language skills, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar development; curriculum, evaluation and assessment matters; language research methodology, and the implementation of technology in EFL.

On behalf of EED FKIP UKI, I would like to offer my appreciation all faculties, students, alumni, and fellow English teachers who had contributed in EED CF along 2015-2018. My special thanks should go to Parlindungan Pardede whose hard work in editing the articles in this proceeding has made this publication possible.

Finally, I hope each article in this proceeding can inspire every reader as it had inspired the audiences when it was presented in EED CF.

Jakarta, July 26, 2019
English Education Department Chairperson,

Hendrikus Male

CONTENTS

Common Mistakes Committed by Pre-Service EFL Teachers in Writing Research Proposals: A Case Study at Universitas Kristen Indonesia[1]

Parlindungan Pardede
parlpard2010@gmail.com
Universitas Kristen Indonesia

Abstract

The ability to write a research proposal is very essential for the students in higher education because it establishes their first step in conducting and publishing the research required to complete their study. This study was conducted to investigate the difficulties encountered by pre-service English teachers in writing their research proposals. Fifty-four research proposals submitted by the students to be reviewed at the English Education Department of Universitas Kristen Indonesia in 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 academic year were analyzed to identify the common mistakes in terms of contents committed by the authors. Neuman's content analysis procedure was employed as the analytical framework of the study. The results showed that the students confronted problems in presenting the contents of various sections of the proposals. , Based on the mistakes frequency and appropriateness/relevancy level, the seven top problems faced by the students in writing the proposals are, respectively, summarizing and synthesizing the literature, writing the conceptual framework, justifying for studying the problem, describing the research scope, stating the topic area, and describing the materials, and describing the research procedures.

Keywords: research proposal, introduction, literature review, method, pre-service English teachers

INTRODUCTION

A research proposal is an academic text the students in higher education should write. It is essential for them because it establishes every student's first step in conducting and publishing the research required to complete his study. A research proposal is the only document specifying what he will study, why it should be done, how he will do it, and how the results will be analyzed and interpreted. Despite its use as the first step in

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[1] Presented in UKI English Education Department Collegiate Forum held on Friday, August 12, 2016

conducting a study, writing a research proposal is of high importance due to two considerations. First, it helps a student to prepare a sound study because, since it defines the process and procedures the student is going to use, and by presenting it in a seminar can provide an opportunity for him to obtain feedback before implementing the study. Second, a research proposal is the only instrument a student can use to get approval from the committee of supervising professors in his department to conduct his project because only through this document he can demonstrate that he knows what he is seeking and how to successfully complete his planned project. That is why a research proposal should convince the committee that the proposed topic is worthy of researching and that the student is competent to conduct the study (Paul and Psych, 2012).

Various specialized books on research methodology describing the components of a research proposal and the procedures for writing one in detail have been published. Most universities or departments have also prepared guidelines for writing an effective research proposal. However, the present researcher's several years' experience in reviewing students' research proposals revealed that many students encountered difficulties to meet the requirements of good proposals. This is clarified by several current studies showing that even post-graduate students with a high level of English proficiency encountered problems in writing academic discourse, including research proposals. These studies revealed that the majority of students encountered problems related to the contents of the proposal (Kikula and Quorro, 2007; REPOA, 2007; Wang and Yang, 2012; Yusuf, 2013; Pietersen, 2014; Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza, 2015; Ahmed and Mahboob, 2016) and the linguistic aspects of the proposals (Yusuf, 2013).

Although several studies focusing on the problems related to research proposals' content encountered by students have been conducted, most of them involved postgraduate students and were conducted outside of Indonesia. Studies focusing on the problems related to research proposals' content encountered by undergraduate students, particularly students majoring in English education, are very rare. As a result, the common problems committed by undergraduate students majoring in English education in writing the contents of research proposals were not known. It was, therefore, necessary to conduct this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A research proposal is, in essence, a written plan for a project that will be submitted to others (usually, a research committee) for evaluation to get approval for conducting and publishing research. To get the approval, a research proposal should meet three requirements. First, it should show that the project to undertake is significant, necessary and achievable. Second, the study will make an original contribution to the field. Third, the study could be completed in the normal time period. In relation to this, Monash University (2014, p. 2) insisted that in a research proposals the students should: (1) show that [they] are engaging in genuine inquiry, finding out about something worthwhile in a particular context; (2) link [their] proposed work with the work of others, while proving [they] are acquainted with major schools of thought relevant to the topic; (3) establish a particular theoretical orientation; (4) establish [their] methodological approach; and (4) show [they] have thought about the ethical issues.

Anatomy of a Research Proposal

Although the outline and style of the research proposal used in one discipline or an institution can be different from the others, all research proposals use roughly a generic format. Whether the proposals are written to fulfill the requirements of a formal undergraduate project, thesis or dissertation, the general format is much the same. In general, effective research proposals have three main components (introduction section, the literature review section, and the method section) and two complementary components (cover page and references). Figure 1 illustrates the components of the research proposal suggested to use in the English Education Department of Universitas Kristen Indonesia (Pardede, 2015).

The introduction section is used to provide the answers for the "what" and "why" of the study to undertake. It usually consists of (a) background; (b) statement of topic areas, covering the problem in a broad scope; and (c) specific problem to be studied; (d) reasons why it was important to study (e.g. by showing gaps in research) and how it applied to the larger field of research, (e) research objectives, (f) significances of the study, (g) research scope, and (h) definition of operational terms.

The method section presents the answer for the "how". It describes the basic plan of the proposed research. It usually begins with the restatement of the purpose and the research questions. After that, it provides the research design, participants, materials (including settings, equipment, and data collection instruments) and procedures (treatment, testing, and data analysis).

The literature review section provides the up to date information that supports and justify the arguments and choices made in the proposal. It does not only list a number of cited information and ideas, but also summarizes, evaluates and synthesizes the information obtained from current studies and link them to the topic to be addressed so that it places the research to undertake on the platform of what is already known about the topic and what others had done in the research area. In many proposals, this section also includes the conceptual framework and hypothesis statement.

Although the cover page and references are complementary, they are very essential. The cover page is usually used to identify the topic through the title, writer, degree, and institution. A proposal title must be short and explanatory. It provides a clear and concise description of the scope and nature of the research. It can be stated in one of the four types, i.e., nominal, compound, full sentence, and question, but the nominal title is the most usually used. The title is suggested not to exceed 16 words and should include keywords which allow bibliographers to index the study in proper categories. As a general guide, whatever title type is used, it should indicate (1) major variables or theoretical issues to be considered in the study; (2) nature of research (descriptive, correlational, experimental, survey, or action research); and (3) the target population.

The reference lists all publications (from which all used factual material that does not belong to the author is taken) cited in the proposal, using a proper academic referencing style. In the field of ELT, the APA Style is the most commonly employed for citing and referencing.

Some Related Current Studies

As indicated by Figure 1 the essential research proposal components and their roles are evident and can be straightforwardly identified. This nature of proposals makes it easy for the readers to locate exactly where to find the information they are looking for, regardless of the individual proposal. It should also have made it easy for students to write their proposals. However, various investigations affirm that many students encounter problems, both in terms of contents and linguistics aspects when preparing research proposals.

A research proposal is an academic text the students in higher education should write. It is essential for them because it establishes every student's first step in conducting and publishing the research required to complete his study. A research proposal is the only document specifying what he will study, why it should be done, how he will do it, and how the results will be analyzed and interpreted. Despite its use as the first step in conducting a study, writing a research proposal is of high importance due to two considerations. First, it helps a student to prepare a sound study because, since it defines the process and procedures the student is going to use, and by presenting it in a seminar can provide an opportunity for him to obtain feedback before implementing the study. Second, a research proposal is the only instrument a student can use to get approval from the committee of supervising professors in his department to conduct his project because only through this document he can demonstrate that he knows what he is seeking and how to successfully complete his planned project. That is why a research proposal should convince the committee that the proposed topic is worthy of researching and that the student is competent to conduct the study (Paul and Psych, 2012).

Various specialized books on research methodology describing the components of a research proposal and the procedures for writing one in detail have been published. Most universities or departments have also prepared guidelines for writing an effective research proposal. However, the present researcher's several years' experience in reviewing students' research proposals revealed that many students encountered difficulties to meet the requirements of good proposals. This is clarified by several current studies showing that even post-graduate students with a high level of English proficiency encountered problems in writing academic discourse, including research proposals. These studies revealed that the majority of students encountered problems related to the contents of the proposal (Kikula and Quorro, 2007; REPOA, 2007; Wang and Yang, 2012; Yusuf, 2013; Pietersen, 2014; Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza, 2015; Ahmed and Mahboob, 2016) and the linguistic aspects of the proposals (Yusuf, 2013).

Although several studies focusing on the problems related to research proposals' content encountered by students have been conducted, most of them involved postgraduate students and were conducted outside of Indonesia. Studies focusing on the problems related to research proposals' content encountered by undergraduate students, particularly students majoring in English education, are very rare. As a result, the common problems committed by undergraduate students majoring in English education in writing the contents of research proposals were not known. It was therefore necessary to conduct this study.

Kikula and Quorro' (2007) analysis on 783 post-graduate students' research proposals in Tanzania revealed that the majority of the proposals (70%) have problems in terms of the titles, introductions, writing the research problem, literature review, and proposing an appropriate method. Wang and Yang's (2012) study examining how six Chinese postgraduate students of a TEFL program learned to write their MA thesis research proposal revealed that the participants faced difficulties in choosing a research topic, designing the research proposal, understanding the style of a thesis research proposal, and critically reviewing the literature. The study of Ahmed and Mahboob (2016) focusing on the difficulties faced by postgraduate students in Pakistan when writing research proposal indicated that the participants faced difficulties related to the writing of the background/introduction section, research questions formulation, the appropriate research methodology and methods of data collection selection, and referencing. In addition, Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza's (2015) study conducted to investigate the common mistakes committed by postgraduate students in writing research proposals showed that: (1) the topics were presented broad and unclear, the gap in the literature was not identified, the problem was not clearly stated, employment of wrong methodology, wrong referencing style, and plagiarism; and (2) the main challenges faced by the participants were the unavailability of supervisors for consultation, negative comments from supervisors, limited time to write the proposals, and the lack of materials.

Based on the evaluation of 240 proposal submitted by 121 Ph.D. holders (35%), 178 Master Degree holders (52%), and 43 'Basic' (undergraduate) Degree holders (13%), REPOA (2007) reported that the most outstandingly identified weak aspects included unsatisfactory sampling procedure (58%), stating of hypotheses that could not be tested (53%), using inappropriate methodology (51%) and inadequate literature review (50%). Other unsatisfactorily written elements, among others, were that 71% of the title did not reflect the aim and lacked focus; 72% of the introduction section lacked clarity and focus, used poor language, included irrelevant information, and used old and out of date data and references; and 86% of the literature review were inadequately written, lacked focus, did not review any literature at all, or had poor presentation.

These findings are relevant to the results of Yusuf's (2013) study focusing on the problems faced by undergraduate students majoring in English education in State Institute for Islamic Studies Sunan Ampel Surabaya in writing their research proposal and its causes showed that the three top problems included in the matters of methodology, review of literature, introduction. The problems occurred because the students did not understand the methodology, were confused in determining the review of the literature and the found it difficult to compose a good introduction. Additionally, Pietersen's (2014) analysis on the content issues in the research proposal written by South African master's degree students showed that the participants lacked an in-depth understanding of the research proposal components and were unable to acknowledge the importance of concentrating on a central research question.

As indicated in the introduction section above, this study aims to investigate the common problems concerning the contents committed by undergraduate students majoring in English education in their research proposals. It was, therefore, necessary

Title Page: (Write this in accordance with the specification provided by the university or organization to which the proposal is addressed. Usually this component identifies the topic, writer, degree, and institution).

Chapter I: **Introduction**
A. Background
B. Statement of topic area
C. Statement of research problem and justification for studying it
D. Research Objectives
E. Research Significances
F. Research Scope
G. Operational definitions

Chapter II: **Literature review**
A. Summary and synthesis of the major schools of thought s on the topic and a review of the relevant current main findings reported on the chosen topic.
B. Conceptual framework (links the research variables which has been specified based on the findings in the literature so that the research questions and hypothesis could be explicitly stated in the next subsection). It also shows how the present proposed research could provide solutions to the problems so that the expected contribution to the topic under study (research significances) can be stated.
C. Specific research question(s) and hypothesis to be tested.

Chapter III: Method
A. Research design
B. Participants
    1. Who? How many?
    2. Characteristics (male/female, proficiency level, native language, etc.)
    3. Sampling Technique
C. Materials
    1. What equipment? What Setting?
    2. What data collecting instruments?
D. Procedures
    1. How is the treatment to be administered?
    2. How/when is the testing to be conducted?
    3. What analysis techniques to be employed?

Timeline and Budget

References

Figure 2. *Research Proposal Format of EED UKI*

to conduct this study. In the light of the discussions in the previous section, the research question to be addressed in this study is: "What are problems committed by the pre-service English teachers in writing the contents of their research proposal?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach employing the content analysis method, which, according to Krippendorff (2004) is "… a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matters) to the contexts of their use" (p. 18). In this study, the analyzed texts (or corpus) were 54 students' research proposals submitted to be reviewed at the English Education Department of Universitas Kristen Indonesia in 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 academic year. These proposals were analyzed using the content analysis procedure proposed by Neuman (2011) which consists of six stages: (1) formulate the research question, (2) decide on units of analysis, (3) develop a sampling plan, (4) construct coding categories, (5) coding and intercoder reliability check, and (6) data collection and analysis. The unit of analysis in this study was only the contents included in each section and subsections of the research proposals. Grammatical and rhetorical matters were not included.

To determine the samples, the purposive sampling technique was employed because all proposals proposed in these two academic years were included in the study. The coding categories were based on the presence of research proposal contents, their currency (being old or new), and their relevancy degree to other contents. The data were categorized based on the proposal elements and format provided in Figure 1. The obtained data were analyzed descriptively using the descriptive statistical operation in terms of percentages.

FINDINGS
Problems Related to the Proposals Titles

As revealed by Table 1, two-thirds of the proposal titles was written in the nominal type, while the rest one-third was in the compound type. In terms of elements, all of the titles using the compound type included the three elements: variables (for quantitative research) or theoretical issues/phenomenon (qualitative research), research nature (experimental, correlation, ethnography, action research, etc.), and target population. Among the titles using the compound type, 100% included the variables or phenomenon, but only almost 20% excluded the research nature and one-third excluded the target population. This finding indicates only a minority of the students found a significant problem in writing their proposals title.

The exclusion the research nature could be seen in the following examples. In the first title, the exclusion of the research nature makes it difficult for the reader to ensure whether the author would conduct an experimental study, a survey or action research. In the second example, the exclusion of the research nature causes no problem because the reader can easily determine that the study is action research because it will use storytelling to develop students' speaking performance, and developing something or solving a problem is a typical feature of action research.

(1) The Use of Video in Young Learners' English Speaking Class at SDN Cahaya, Jakarta
(2) Using Storytelling to Develop Students' Speaking Performance at SMPN 222 Jakarta

Table 1.
Problems Related to the Proposals Titles (N= 54)

No	Types	f (%)	Elements Inclusion		
			Variables/ Phenomenon or Issues	Research nature	Target Population
1	nominal	36 (66.7%)	36 (100%)	29 (80.6%)	24 (66.7%)
2	compound	18 (33.3%)	18 (100%)	18 (100%)	18 (100%)
3	full sentence	0	0	0	0
4	question	0	0	0	0

The exclusion of the target population could be seen in example 3 and 4. Although both of them were able to reflect what was going to do, the exclusion the target population makes the research topic too broad.

(3) Problems of translating English Idioms into Indonesian
(4) The Correlation between Reading Habits and reading Comprehension

Problems Related to the Components in the Introduction Section

As shown by Table 2, seeing from the inclusion or exclusion of the introduction sub-components, the three top problems faced by the students in writing the introduction section are, respectively, justifying for studying the problem, describing the research scope, and stating the topic area. One-third of the students did not include justification for studying the problem, 26% excluded research scope, and 15% did not state the topic area. However, in terms of appropriateness or relevancy, writing the background of the study seemed to be the most problematic to the students. More than 40% of them failed to provide proper context to frame the research question and to set the limit of the boundary conditions of the study. Many of the background subsections had too little detail on major issues but too much detail on minor issues so that their relevancy was categorized "poor". The other 37% of the backgrounds had acceptable context and set the limit of the studies' boundary conditions. Yet the proposed research contexts were not supported with coherent and persuasive argument and lacked relevant previous studies' results. Such conditions made their appropriateness/relevancy categorized "fair" Only 22.2% of the proposals had background with relevancy categorized into a "good" one.

In terms of appropriateness or relevancy, describing the research scope is the next most problematic. Findings show that the proposals which excluded the research scope sub-component were 26%, while those which included it but in "poor" category were 25.9%). This indicated that limiting the finite scope of the study due to administrative, geographical, time and budget constraints seemed to be difficult for the students. They also failed to show the extent to which they believe the limitations degrade the quality of the study.

Table 2.
Problems Related to the Components in the Introduction Section (N=54)

No	Components	Inclusion		Appropriateness / Relevancy Level		
		Yes	No	Poor	Fair	Good
1	Background	54 (100%)	0	22 (40.7%)	20 (37%)	12 (22.2%)
2	Statement of topic area	46 (85%)	8 (15%)	8 (14.8%)	18 (33.3%)	20 (37%)
3	Research problem statement	54 (100%)	0	7 (13%)	14 (25.9%)	33 (61.1%)
4	Justification for studying the problem	36 (66.7%)	18 (33.3%)	10 (18.5%)	15 (27.8%)	11 (20.4%)
5	Research objectives	54 (100%)	0	6 (11.1%)	14 (25.9%)	34 (63%)
6	Research significances	54 (100%)	0	9 (16.7%)	21 (38.9%)	28 (51.9%)
7	Research scope	40 (74%)	14 (26%)	14 (25.9%)	16 (29.6%)	10 (18.5%)
8	Operational Definitions	20 (37%)	34 (63%)	12 (22%)	3 (5.6%)	5 (9.3%)

The exclusion of the operational definitions in the majority of the proposals (63%) did not indicate that writing this sub-component was the top problem to the students because it was identified in qualitative research proposals which generally do not need to state operational definition. In spite of this, among the 20 proposals having the operational definitions subsection, more than a half were categorized "poor". Because the definitions included in this subsection were just taken them from general dictionaries, not from a specific dictionary or studies related to the research topics.

Problems Related to the Components in the Literature Review Section
Of the three sub-components in the literature review section, the biggest problem encountered by the students was to provide current and topic-focused literature and to analyze the sources in terms of justification to be correlated to the proposed study. These two failures caused 55.6% of the literature review categorized "poor". Almost 30% of the literature did report some previous studies, however, the main findings were not well and convincingly correlated to the study to undertake. This made such literature review was categorized "fair".

Table 3.
Problems Related to the Proposals Literature Reviews (N=54)

No	Components	Inclusion		Appropriateness / Relevancy Level		
		Yes	No	Poor	Fair	Good
1	Summary & Synthesis of thoughts	54 (100%)	0	30 (55.6%)	16 (29.6%)	8 (14.8%)
2	Conceptual framework	54 (100%)	0	22 (40.7%)	20 (37%)	12 (22.3%)
3	Specific research question(s) & hypothesis	54 (100%)	0	4 (7.4%)	12 (22.2%)	38 (70.4%)

In terms of the conceptual framework, the problems students faced were related to their failure to clarify the relationships among the particular variables (quantitative) or key concepts of the phenomenon (qualitative) in their study based on the synthesis of thought in the previous subsection. Consequently, the interconnection between the literature review and the formulation of research questions and hypothesis is not clear.

Problems Related to the Components in the Method Section

The biggest problem encountered by the students in the method section was related to the writing of the materials sub-section. More than one-third (37%) of them failed to provide a detailed description of the methods and instruments for collecting data. That's why such material sections were categorized poorly. Another 37% of the material section did present data collecting instruments and methods. Yet, they were not described in details and the test employed to determine the instruments' reliability was not included.

Table 4.

Problems Related to the Method Sections (N=54)

No	Components	Inclusion		Appropriateness / Relevancy Level		
		Yes	No	Poor	Fair	Good
1	Research design	54	0	18 (33.3%)	20 (37%)	16 (30%)
2	Participants	54	0	12 (22.2%)	23 (42.6%)	19 (35.2%)
3	Materials	54	0	20 (37%)	20 (37%)	14 (26%)
4	Procedures (Protocols)	54	0	18 (33.3%)	24 (44.4%)	12 (22.3%)

The next major problem was related to the research procedures. One-third (37%) of them failed to provide a detailed description of the protocols. The reasons for employing the procedure was also not provided. Therefore, replication of the study seems to be impossible to conduct. In terms of research design, one-third (37%) of the students failed to clearly describe the choice of research paradigm, method, and design. These findings indicated that many of the students were unable to implement the concepts they had learned or they could find in research methodology textbooks.
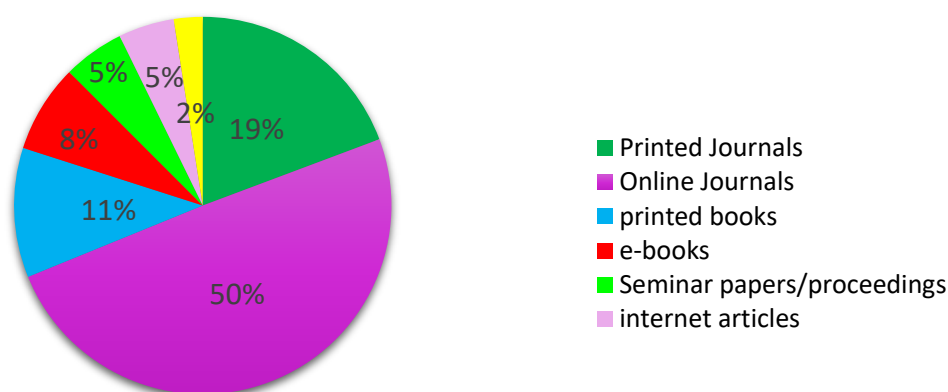
Figure 2. *References by Forms Publication* (N=648)

Problems Related to the Reference List

The Findings indicate that referencing was the least problematic to the students in writing a research proposal. Overall, the whole proposals listed 648 references. Thus, every proposal used 12 references on average. This finding indicated that the in terms of quantity, the inclusion of references in the proposals was relatively adequate.

Viewed from their types, as shown by Figure 2, the most dominant publications cited in the proposals were online journals (50%). The next forms were printed journals (19%) and printed textbooks (11%). The least dominant were others (dictionary and encyclopedia).

Despite the quantitative adequacy, in terms of appropriateness or relevancy level of the sources to the topics proposed, only 44% of the journals and 40.7% of the textbooks were categorized "good". In other words, more than 50% of the publications referred to was inappropriate or irrelevant (see table 5).

Table 5
Problems Related to References (N=54)

No	Components	Inclusion		Appropriateness / Relevancy Level		
		Yes	No	Poor	Fair	Good
1	Textbooks	54 (100)	0	10 (18.5%)	22 (40.7%)	22 (40.7%)
2	Journals	54 (100)	0	9 (16.7)	21 (38.9%)	24 (44.4%)
3	Seminar papers/proceedings	21 (38.9%)	33 (61.1%)	5 (9.3%)	8 (14.8%)	8 (14.8%)
4	Internet articles	19 (35.2%)	35 (64.8%)	5 (9.3%)	8 (14.8)	4 (7.4%)
5	Others (dictionary, encyclopedia)	6 (11.1%)	48 (88.9%)	3 (5.6%)	2 (3.7%)	1 (1.9%)

Another problem committed by many of the students was their failure to include every reference cited in the reference section. Some others included some sources in the reference section that they never cited in the body, whereas in the guidelines provided by the English Department it was clearly stated that the sources quoted in the body of the proposal should be included in the reference section and vice versa.
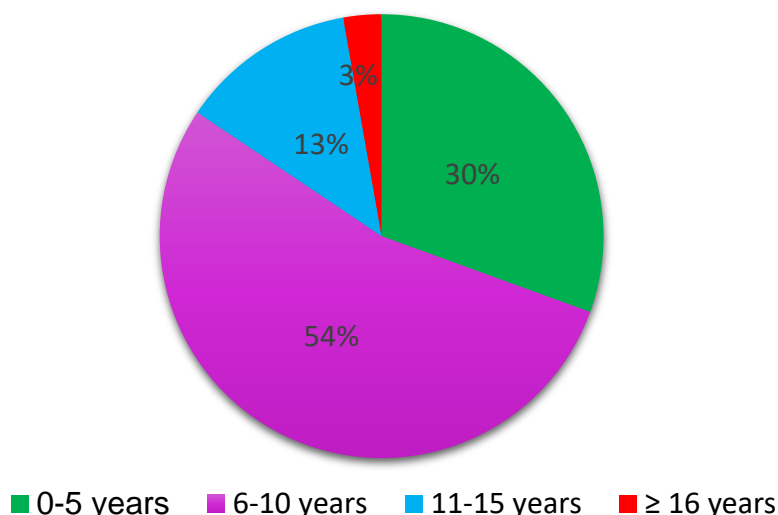

Figure 1. *References by Date of Publication* **(N=648)**

In terms of publication date, the majority (54%) of the sources of the citation was published between 6 to 10 years before it was used in the proposals, while the more

recently published source (published 1 to 5 years before) covered 30% of the references. Only 3% of the whole references was published 16 years or older before it is used (see Figure 3). This indicates that most of the references used in the proposals were quite recent.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings revealed that writing the literature review section of the research proposals was most problematic to the students. In providing the three sub-contents of this proposal section, summarizing and synthesizing relevant ideas to place the research to undertake on the stage of what is already known about a topic and what others had done in the research area was the biggest problem. Although the students could successfully found relevant resources in an appropriate number (as shown by the findings that the majority (69%) of the references was in the forms of e-journal and printed journal and was published in the late ten-year period, they found it hard to evaluate, synthesize and link the information obtained to the topic to be addressed.

The next sub-content the students found most difficult to write was the conceptual framework. This problem could have been caused by the students' failure in the previous sub-section, (summarizing and synthesizing relevant ideas) which made them unable to clearly identify and interconnect the particular variables in the study to undertake and to link the literature to the research question and hypothesis. In line with this, Iqbal's (2007) described the struggle to identify and prepare the theoretical framework for the dissertation as "the most difficult but not impossible part of [the] proposal" (2007, p.17).

After the literature review section, the next most difficult to write by the students was the introduction section, in which justifying for studying the problem, describing the research scope, and stating the topic area were three top problems. This is in line with the finding of Stapa, et.al. (2014) in the preliminary analysis of the undergraduate theses majoring in English Language studies that majority of the students were unable to write their introduction section adequately. It also clarified Fudha, Rozimiela, and Ningsih (2014) findings that undergraduate students found it difficult to write research proposal introduction because that they were not able enough to compose such well-structured writing based on the demanded Swales' Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) rhetorical structure. According to Chandrasegaran (2012), such problem may be caused by inadequate English proficiency levels and "incomplete understanding of the conventions governing written academic discourse and the thinking processes involved in realising these conventions" (p. 10).

The third section of the research proposals that caused difficulty for the students was the method, in which writing of the materials sub-section and describing the research procedures were two most difficult subsections. Only about a quarter of the students could write these two subsections in the good appropriateness level. Many of the proposals did not provide an appropriate detailed and clear description of the materials and methods and instruments for collecting data. Some others did not present an appropriate description of the protocols and the reasons for employing the procedure.

Overall, these findings confirmed Ahmed and Mahboob's (2016) study revealing that postgraduate students in Pakistan faced problems related to the writing of the

background research questions formulation, the appropriate research methodology and methods of data collection selection, and referencing. They are also in line with Manchishi, Ndlovu and Mwanza's (2015) findings that the common mistakes committed by postgraduate students in the school of education at the University of Zambia were, among others, "unclear topics, unclear statement of the problem, ignorance about research limitations, none inclusion of philosophical concepts (proposal not theorised), poor literature review, inappropriate methodology, …" (136).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Writing a sound research proposal is not an easy task. It essentially requires effective training and appropriate guidance, particularly for novice researchers and undergraduate students. As revealed by the previous sections, the pre-service English teachers pre-service English teachers whose proposals were analyzed in this study committed various mistakes, particularly summarizing and synthesizing the literature, writing the conceptual framework, justifying for studying the problem, describing the research scope, stating the topic area, and describing the materials and the research procedures subsections.

This study focused on the difficulties encountered by the students concerning the research proposals' contents. Consequently, the findings are not viewed from the linguistics or rhetorical perspectives. Thus, future studies are recommended to make a rhetorical perspective one of the analysis focuses in order to get more comprehensive findings.

In light of the findings in this study, it is also recommended to review the research methods courses offered in the English Department of Universitas Kristen Indonesia, in terms of contents and teaching approaches. By doing this the mistakes committed in the proposals included in this study are likely to be decreased. Providing special training seems to be an alternative solution to facilitate the students to produce a sound research proposal.

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PROCEEDING
English Education Department Collegiate Forum (EED CF) 2015-2018

(A bimonthly academic forum organized by the English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan) Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta)

"EFL Theory and Practice: Voice of EED UKI"

Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
FKIP UKI Jakarta
2019