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THESIS WRITING ACROSS THE ACADEMIC LADDER: A CROSS-LEVEL INVESTIGATION OF INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' BARRIERS AND COPING STRATEGIES

Yayan Suryana[1]*, Bachrudin Musthafa[2], Eri Kurniawan[2]
[1]Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia and Universitas Kuningan, Indonesia
[2]Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

Corresponding author's email: ysuryana2021@upi.edu

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Abstract: Thesis writing is one of the most demanding tasks Indonesian EFL students face, requiring them to coordinate linguistic accuracy, methodological reasoning, and disciplinary argumentation in a foreign language. While prior research has documented individual difficulties in Indonesian EFL thesis writing, few studies have examined how these difficulties vary across undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels, or how linguistic, methodological, socio-cultural, institutional, and technological barriers interact within a single writing process. This study addresses that gap using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, combining a structured survey of 23 Indonesian EFL students (13 undergraduate, 4 master's, 5 doctoral, and 1 fresh graduate) with semi-structured interviews with six purposively selected participants across the three academic levels. Survey results show that referencing and citation management was rated as the most difficult stage of thesis writing (M = 3.17), ahead of topic selection and academic English writing, while cross-level comparison reveals that master's respondents reported the greatest difficulty with grammar and vocabulary, whereas doctoral respondents reported the greatest difficulty with topic selection and referencing. Interview data explain this divergence: undergraduate difficulties centered on idea development and citation mechanics, master's difficulties on renewed methodological and linguistic demands despite prior training, and doctoral difficulties on interdisciplinary theoretical positioning, argument coherence, and sustained self-regulation under institutional and supervisory pressure. Advisor feedback emerged as the most valued support mechanism, though its perceived quality varied considerably across participants. The findings support a developmental, level-sensitive model of academic-writing support that integrates language instruction, research methodology, feedback quality, self-regulation, and responsible use of digital and AI-assisted writing tools, rather than a uniform, one-size-fits-all approach to thesis-writing instruction.
Keywords: *academic writing; thesis writing barriers; Indonesian EFL students; mixed-methods research; academic literacies; writing support.*

INTRODUCTION

Thesis writing is a culminating academic activity in which students formulate a researchable problem, engage with scholarship, justify a research design, analyze evidence, and communicate an argument within the conventions of academic discourse. For students who write in English as a foreign language, these demands are compounded by the need to construct sophisticated academic arguments in a language not ordinarily used for everyday communication. Academic writing therefore involves more than grammatical correctness; it requires students to participate in disciplinary practices, understand expectations concerning evidence and argumentation, and negotiate institutional conventions (Hyland, 2019; Lea & Street, 1998). In many EFL settings, thesis writing has also been linked to considerable psychological strain: undergraduate English majors in China, for instance, report a range of negative emotions across the writing process (Wu, 2026), while thesis-proposal writers elsewhere describe distinct psychological barriers tied to confidence and anxiety (Shinta, 2025). Indonesian

studies report comparable patterns, with difficulties spanning grammar, vocabulary, organization, source use, argument development, and academic conventions (Alisha et al., 2019; Nahum Pasaribu et al., 2024), and case studies at individual institutions further confirm that these difficulties recur across writing stages rather than being confined to a single chapter (Alkhasanah & Kholis, 2024; Sari et al., 2025).

A growing body of research situates these difficulties beyond the sentence level. Studies conducted in Cambodia, China, Morocco, and the Philippines converge on the observation that thesis-writing barriers are shaped as much by research competence, supervision, and institutional context as by language proficiency (Aceron, 2026; Dardour, 2026; Moeurn, 2026; Wang, 2026; Wen et al., 2025). Doctoral writing in particular has been described as demanding sustained self-regulation and disciplinary positioning, with systematic reviews identifying obstacles, facilitators, and unmet needs across the doctoral-writing process (Calle-Arango & Ávila Reyes, 2023) and earlier mixed-methods work identifying persistent barriers that slow dissertation completion (Hwang et al., 2015). Supervisory interaction has repeatedly emerged as a decisive factor: Indonesian and cross-national studies show that the form and quality of supervision shapes how postgraduate writers experience and resolve difficulty (Nangimah & Walldén, 2023; Nurkamto & Prihandoko, 2022; Shahsavar & Kourepaz, 2020), while students writing in distance and online modes report additional coordination challenges related to feedback timing and self-management (Suhartoyo et al., 2021; Yunus & Bachtiar, 2025).

At the same time, research on self-efficacy, metacognition, and growth-oriented instruction suggests that writing performance is closely tied to how students regulate their own learning (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Prihandoko et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2025), and broader reviews of EFL/ESL academic-writing instruction confirm that strategy use and institutional support jointly determine writing outcomes (Esperanzate, 2025; Mazhud & Muin, 2024; Reyes et al., 2026). The writing environment has also been reshaped by digital and AI-assisted tools: reference managers, grammar checkers, and generative AI systems are now routinely part of students' writing practice (Luo, 2025; Teng, 2023), yet scholars caution that these tools do not relieve students of responsibility for argument, evidence, and academic integrity, calling instead for critical, well-governed use (Alamri et al., 2025; Gabay et al., 2026; Naibaho et al., 2026; Ou et al., 2024; Spirgi & Seufert, 2024).

Despite this expanding literature, two gaps remain evident. First, most existing studies examine a single population or a single institutional context — undergraduates in one university (Alkhasanah & Kholis, 2024; Sari et al., 2025), doctoral students in one country (Calle-Arango & Ávila Reyes, 2023; DARDOUR, 2026), or direct-entry PhD candidates alone (Wang, 2026) — which limits understanding of how thesis-writing barriers change as students move across academic levels. Second, linguistic, methodological, socio-cultural, institutional, and technological barriers are typically treated as separate research problems: studies of citation and referencing (Amelia & Fadhly, 2025), summary and synthesis (Anindya & Fadhly, 2025), institutional research-productivity barriers (Kadikilo et al., 2024), publication barriers (Aydin et al., 2023), and translation-related linguistic and cultural barriers (Vula & Muhaxhiri, 2024) rarely converge into a single, multidimensional account of the thesis-writing process. A cross-level, multi-source account is therefore needed to clarify which difficulties are broadly shared across levels of study and which become more complex as academic expectations increase. This leads to the following research questions: (1) What barriers do Indonesian EFL students experience in thesis writing, and how do these barriers vary across undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels? (2) What strategies do students use to address these barriers? and (3) How do socio-cultural and institutional support systems shape their thesis-writing experiences?

The present study addresses these questions by combining descriptive survey evidence from 23 students with interview accounts from six students at undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels, offering a cross-level perspective that has been largely absent from prior single-level or single-context studies (cf. Aceron, 2026; DARDOUR, 2026; Wang, 2026). Its novelty lies in integrating linguistic, methodological, socio-cultural, institutional, and technological dimensions of thesis-writing difficulty within one analytical framework, extending a growing line of Indonesian scholarship that examines academic writing as a cognitive and social process (Fadhly, 2021, 2022; Fadhly et al., 2017, 2018, 2023) and that has more recently turned toward feedback practices and AI-age writing pedagogy (Fadhly et al., 2025a, 2025b, 2026; Naibaho et al., 2026;

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Pujawiyanti & Fadhly, 2025). By triangulating structured survey data with interview narratives, the study offers a more differentiated understanding of how support needs shift from foundational skills at the undergraduate level toward methodological and time-management demands at the master's level, and toward theoretical positioning and scholarly synthesis at the doctoral level. Its significance is therefore both theoretical, in extending the academic-literacies perspective (Lea & Street, 1998) and second-language writing scholarship (Hyland, 2019) to a cross-level Indonesian context, and practical, in providing evidence to inform how universities design differentiated, level-sensitive writing support — including supervision practices and guidance on the responsible use of AI and digital tools — rather than relying on uniform, one-size-fits-all writing instruction.

Beyond the difficulties reported by students themselves, a parallel strand of research has examined how writing instruction can be designed to address these barriers directly. Harris and McKeown (2022) argue that evidence-based writing instruction must move past unresolved "paradigm wars" between skills-based and process-based approaches, a tension that is also visible in practical guides for producing empirical research reports (Galvan, 2023). In the Indonesian context, pedagogical interventions such as project-based learning have been proposed as a means of scaffolding academic-writing instruction (Nurasman et al., 2026), while collaborative assessment has been shown to improve undergraduate writing performance (Taufiqulloh et al., 2024) and broader meta-synthetic reviews of writing assessment practices in EFL contexts point toward the need for assessment criteria that capture higher-order argumentation rather than surface accuracy alone (Taufiqulloh et al., 2025). Complementing this instructional focus, studies of the cognitive and creative dimensions of writing—including argumentative writing among expert Indonesian columnists (Fadhly & Ratnaningsih, 2017) and the creative process underlying fiction writing (Nuraeni & Fadhly, 2016)—suggest that writing difficulty is best understood as a cognitive process unfolding over time rather than a fixed set of deficits, a view consistent with concerns about academic integrity and the practices of paraphrasing and citation that students must learn to manage responsibly (Patak & Tahir, 2019).

The technological and institutional infrastructure surrounding thesis writing has likewise received sustained attention. Early studies of reference-management software use among Indonesian university students documented both the benefits and the usability barriers associated with tools such as Mendeley (Hudriati et al., 2018), a concern echoed in broader evaluations of reference-management software for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Lorenzetti & Ghali, 2013). These tool-related barriers intersect with structural barriers further along the research pipeline: global analyses of thesis and dissertation embargo policies show that access and impact barriers to academic publications persist well beyond the writing stage itself (Rasuli et al., 2023), while capacity-building efforts such as journal-writing workshops for nationally and internationally reputable publications (Fadhly et al., 2025) and meta-synthetic analyses of curriculum reform in language education (Emawati et al., 2024) reflect ongoing institutional attempts to strengthen the broader academic-writing and publication ecosystem in which student thesis writing is embedded.

It is also worth noting that the "barriers and strategies" framework adopted in this study reflects a research paradigm applied well beyond language education. Comparable barrier-oriented analyses have examined obstacles to metaverse adoption in manufacturing industries (Agrawal & Wankhede, 2026) and in supply chain management (Bag et al., 2025), challenges faced by teachers in gifted education (Kalobo & Setlalentoa, 2024), and difficulties in unrelated educational settings such as school financial management (Nzuza & Fadhly, 2025) and the development of higher-order-thinking-skills tasks for senior secondary students (Nurfauziyah et al., 2024). The recurrence of this framework across such varied domains suggests that identifying barriers alongside the coping strategies used to manage them is a methodologically sound and widely validated approach for understanding complex, multi-stage practices—lending further justification to its application in the present study of thesis-writing difficulty among Indonesian EFL students.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, in which a quantitative survey instrument was administered first to identify broad patterns of thesis-writing difficulty, followed by qualitative interviews used to explain and contextualize those patterns among a purposively selected subset of respondents (Creswell & Plano Clark, as commonly applied in EFL writing

research; cf. Rahayu et al., 2025). The two strands were integrated at the interpretation stage through triangulation rather than through statistical merging, consistent with the study's descriptive and exploratory aims. Figure 1 illustrates the overall workflow.

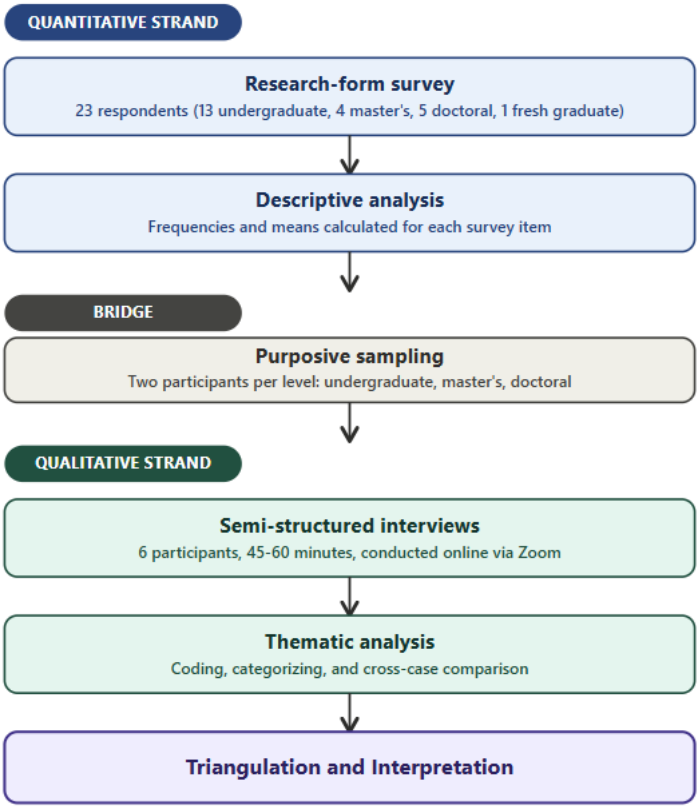


Figure 1. *Sequential explanatory mixed-methods workflow used in the study.*

The research-form dataset comprised 23 respondents drawn from three Indonesian universities. Table 1 summarizes their demographic and academic characteristics.

Table 1. *Demographic profile of survey respondents (N = 23)*

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Academic level	Undergraduate	13	56.5
	Doctoral	5	21.7
	Master's	4	17.4
	Fresh graduate	1	4.3
Gender	Female	13	56.5
	Male	10	43.5
English proficiency	Intermediate	10	43.5
	Advanced	5	21.7
	Basic	3	13.0
	Upper-intermediate	3	13.0
	Pre-intermediate	1	4.3
	Post-advanced	1	4.3
Study program	English Education	17	73.9
	English Literature/Linguistics	5	21.7
	English Language	1	4.3

Six respondents were selected purposively, using maximum-variation sampling across academic level, for semi-structured interviews: Aulia and Zul Azmi (undergraduate), Firman and Desti (master's), and Laser and Karin (doctoral). Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect participant identities.

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Table 2. *Interview participants*

Pseudonym	Academic level	Study program
Aulia	Undergraduate	English Education
Zul Azmi	Undergraduate	English Literature/Linguistics
Firman	Master's	English Education
Desti	Master's	English Education
Laser	Doctoral	English Education
Karin	Doctoral	English Literature/Linguistics

Two primary empirical instruments were used. First, a structured research form collected closed- and open-ended responses on stages of thesis writing (topic selection, literature review, methodology, data analysis, structuring, academic English writing, and referencing), language-related difficulties, coping strategies, tool use, socio-cultural pressures, institutional resources, and feedback practices. Second, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45–60 minutes were conducted online via Zoom, addressing specific writing barriers, difficult thesis sections, strategies and tools, supervisory and peer support, family and community influences, and institutional conditions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Quantitative responses were summarized using frequencies and arithmetic means for ordinal rating items; means are reported descriptively rather than as population estimates, given the purposive, non-random sample. For the qualitative strand, transcripts were read repeatedly, initial codes were generated inductively, related codes were grouped into categories, and broader themes were developed through constant comparison across participants and academic levels. Six principal thematic categories emerged: linguistic barriers, topic and literature challenges, methodological barriers, time and self-regulation, socio-cultural and institutional factors, and coping/support strategies. Survey patterns and interview themes were then compared to identify points of convergence and complementarity.

Credibility was strengthened by comparing interview accounts across academic levels and checking emergent themes against the structured survey responses. Pseudonyms protected participant identities, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and interview materials were stored securely. Findings are presented as context-specific given the small, purposively drawn sample.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Patterns in reported thesis-writing difficulty

Across the 23 respondents, difficulty was reported at every stage of thesis production, but its intensity varied by stage. Table 3 summarizes the mean difficulty ratings on the 1–5 stage-difficulty scale.

Table 3. *Mean reported difficulty by stage of thesis writing (N = 23, scale 1–5)*

Stage	Mean (M)	SD
Referencing and citations	3.17	1.19
Academic English writing	2.57	1.20
Topic selection	2.70	0.97
Literature review	2.52	0.85
Thesis structuring	2.43	1.00
Methodology	2.39	1.03
Data analysis	2.09	1.04

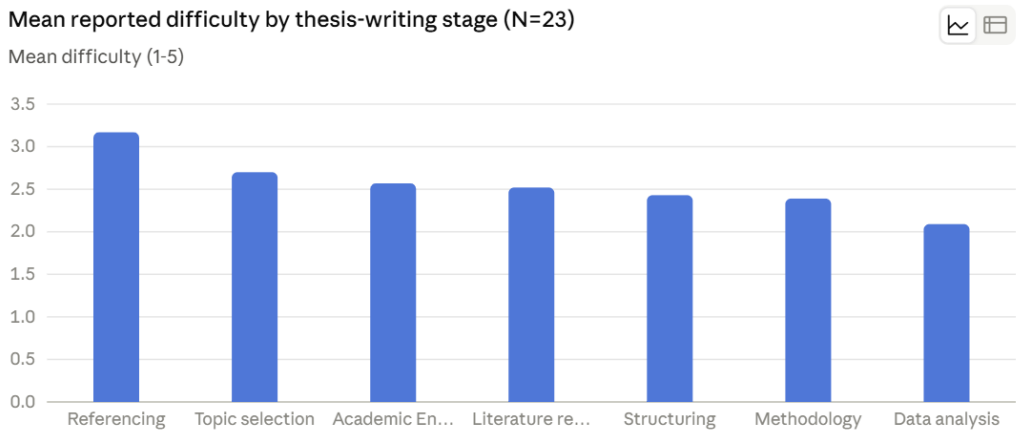


Figure 2. *Mean reported difficulty by thesis-writing stage*

Referencing and citation emerged as the single most difficult stage, ahead of topic selection and academic English writing. This complicates a purely linguistic account of thesis-writing difficulty: students reported substantial difficulty with source management and research positioning even where grammar was not the most prominent problem — a pattern consistent with earlier reports of citation-related difficulty among Indonesian EFL students (Amelia & Fadhly, 2025) and with wider evidence that referencing skills are frequently underdeveloped relative to other writing competencies (Patak & Tahir, 2019).

Language-related items followed a related but distinct pattern. Grammar and vocabulary were the most frequently reported source of difficulty (M = 3.39), followed by coherence and logical flow (M = 3.35), citation/reference management (M = 3.22), and academic tone and style (M = 3.17). For language-specific tasks, paraphrasing and summarizing carried the highest difficulty rating (M = 2.96), ahead of academic vocabulary (M = 2.83) and grammar/sentence structure (M = 2.70) — a finding directly relevant to concerns about summary-synthesis confusion documented among Indonesian EFL writers (Anindya & Fadhly, 2025).

Table 4. *Frequency and difficulty of language-related challenges (N = 23, scale 1–5)*

Item	Mean (M)
Grammar and vocabulary (frequency of difficulty)	3.39
Coherence and logical flow (frequency)	3.35
Managing citations and references (frequency)	3.22
Academic tone and style (frequency)	3.17
Paraphrasing and summarizing (difficulty)	2.96
Academic vocabulary (difficulty)	2.83
Grammar and sentence structure (difficulty)	2.70

Cross-level Comparison

Disaggregating the survey data by academic level reveals that the pattern of difficulty is not uniform across undergraduate, master's, and doctoral respondents.

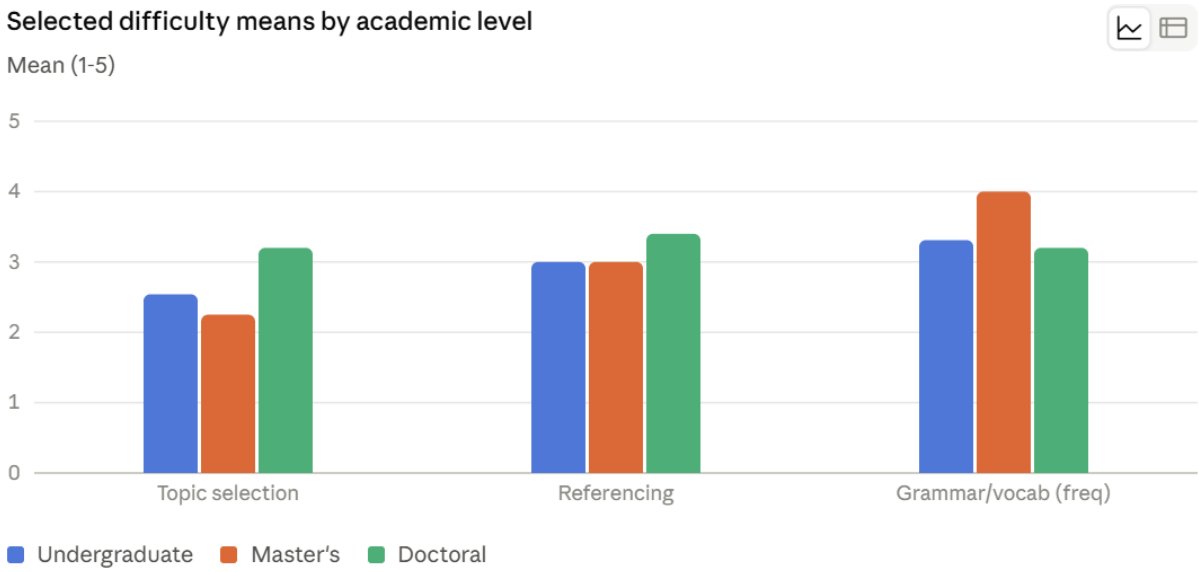


Figure 3. *Cross-level comparison of selected difficulty items*

The survey does not show a simple monotonic increase in difficulty across levels: master's respondents reported the highest difficulty with grammar and vocabulary (M = 4.00), while doctoral respondents reported the greatest difficulty with topic selection (M = 3.20) and referencing (M = 3.40). This divergence — rather than a uniform hierarchy — is precisely what the interview data help explain (see Discussion).

Socio-cultural and institutional factors

Most respondents described their social environment as broadly supportive: 15 of 23 rated family and friends as "very supportive" and 8 as "somewhat supportive." Cultural obligations were

reported as taking little time by 10 respondents, moderate time by 7, significant time by 4, and no time by 2. Societal expectations concerning academic success produced a mean of 3.55 on the five-point agreement scale, indicating that pressure was present for many respondents without being uniformly intense.

Institutional resources were generally perceived as accessible, though unevenly so across resource types.

Table 5. *Institutional accessibility and feedback usefulness (N = 22–23, scale 1–5)*

Dimension	Item	Mean (M)
Accessibility	Advisor meetings	3.91
	Academic databases	3.86
	Library resources	3.82
	Writing workshops	3.18
Feedback usefulness	Content relevance and depth	4.27
	Academic writing style	4.23
	Structure and coherence	4.23
	Grammar and language accuracy	4.09
Support-mechanism effectiveness	Advisor feedback	4.45
	Reference tools	4.36
	Peer mentoring	3.82
	Writing centers	3.73

Notably, advisor feedback received both the highest accessibility rating (M = 3.91) among institutional resources and the highest effectiveness rating (M = 4.45) among support mechanisms overall, ahead of reference tools, peer mentoring, and writing centers — indicating that students value supervisory feedback for improving content and argumentation, not merely for correcting errors.

Strategies, help-seeking, and tool use

Most respondents reported combining multiple strategies rather than relying on a single intervention. External help was most often sought "only when necessary" (14 respondents), while 8 reported seeking help weekly. Feedback was most often received only after completing a full draft (10 respondents), followed by weekly feedback (6 respondents); advisors were the most frequently named feedback providers (10 respondents exclusively, 8 more in combination with peers). When feedback was received, most respondents reported implementing it "always" (10) or "often" (10).

Table 6 *Reported help-seeking, feedback frequency, and technology use*

Category	Response	n
External help-seeking	Only when necessary	14
	Weekly	8
Feedback frequency	Only after completing a draft	10
	Weekly	6
	After examination	2
Feedback provider	Advisor only	10
	Advisor + peers	8
Grammar/vocabulary tools	Online tools (ChatGPT, Grammarly, Thesaurus)	11 (exclusive)
	Online tools + peer/advisor feedback	5
	Grammar books + online tools + peer/advisor feedback	5

Reported tools spanned distinct functional categories rather than a single technology: reference managers (Mendeley, Zotero) for bibliographic organization; grammar checkers and paraphrasing tools (Grammarly, QuillBot) for language revision; and generative AI (ChatGPT) for drafting support and idea generation. This pattern was echoed in the interviews, where undergraduate participants emphasized translation and grammar tools, while master's and doctoral participants (e.g., Firman, Karin) additionally described reference managers, AI-assisted literature tools (e.g., Elicit, Semantic Scholar), and, in one case, statistical consultation for quantitative data.

The survey and interview findings converge on a central point: thesis-writing difficulty among Indonesian EFL students cannot be reduced to a single "English problem." Referencing and citation management were rated as more difficult, on average, than academic English writing itself (Table 3), and the interview data explain why. Aulia described topic selection and methodology as demanding not because of language but because instrument choice had to be defensible in relation to the research questions, while Zul Azmi identified "novelty" — distinguishing a study from prior work — as the most difficult intellectual task he faced. These accounts support Hyland's (2019) view that academic writing requires coordinating linguistic resources with higher-order disciplinary decisions, and align with prior Indonesian findings that citation practices remain a persistent site of difficulty even for otherwise proficient writers (Amelia & Fadhly, 2025).

The cross-level divergence shown in Figure 3 is best interpreted through the interviews rather than the survey means alone. Master's respondents' comparatively high grammar/vocabulary difficulty (M = 4.00) is consistent with Desti's account of experiencing a "culture shock" in academic expectations when she moved from an undergraduate to a graduate program, where background sections had to move systematically from general to specific and every methodological choice was scrutinized more closely than before. Doctoral respondents' higher difficulty with topic selection and referencing, by contrast, is illuminated by Karin's and Laser's descriptions of needing to synthesize and challenge findings against a large, often internationally dominated body of literature — a difficulty of literature evaluation and positioning rather than literature access. This shift from access-and-identification problems at the undergraduate level toward evaluation-and-synthesis problems at the doctoral level is consistent with research on postgraduate literature-review difficulty (Shahsavar & Kourepaz, 2020) and with broader academic-literacies accounts of writing as a socially situated, discipline-specific practice (Lea & Street, 1998).

Methodological difficulty was similarly inseparable from writing difficulty. Aulia, Desti, and Karin each described how a methodological choice reverberated into revisions of the research questions or thesis title, while Firman described the analytic chapter as requiring him to interpret data in relation to prior studies rather than merely report a procedure. This supports treating methodological writing as an argumentative rather than a purely technical task, a view consistent with calls to move writing instruction beyond a skills-versus-process dichotomy (Harris & McKeown, 2022) and with evidence that collaborative, criteria-based assessment can improve undergraduate writing performance precisely because it makes such argumentative expectations explicit (Taufiqulloh et al., 2024, 2025).

The socio-cultural findings temper any assumption that Indonesian EFL students face uniformly high external pressure. While the mean societal-expectation-pressure score (3.55) and Zul Azmi's account of inflated family expectations toward "English majors" indicate that pressure exists, most respondents also rated family support highly, and Firman explicitly credited his spouse's support and disciplined 2 a.m. writing schedule as central to his progress. This is consistent with research connecting Indonesian EFL writing performance to self-regulation and a growth-oriented mindset rather than to social pressure alone (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Prihandoko et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2025).

The institutional findings reveal a further nuance: accessibility does not guarantee usability. Library resources, databases, and advisor meetings were all rated as reasonably accessible (Table 5), yet Desti's account of a qualifying-exam and academic-advisor structure that could suddenly invalidate an approved topic shows that procedural friction can persist even where resources exist. This distinction is important for interpreting Figure 4: advisor feedback was rated both the most accessible and the most effective support mechanism, yet Firman's account of inconsistent, sometimes contradictory feedback from his supervisor shows that access to feedback does not guarantee its instructional quality — a tension also visible in supervision research showing that feedback quality, not mere frequency, drives postgraduate writing development (Nangimah & Walldén, 2023; Nurkamto & Prihandoko, 2022).

Finally, the technology-use findings (Table 6) show a clear functional differentiation rather than interchangeable "AI use." Reference managers, grammar checkers, and generative AI served distinct purposes across levels, with doctoral participants such as Firman and Karin layering AI-assisted literature tools onto more traditional reference management. This is consistent with calls for critical, responsibility-oriented AI literacy in academic writing rather than blanket encouragement or prohibition (Ou et al., 2024; Spirgi & Seufert, 2024; Teng, 2023), and suggests that institutional guidance on AI and digital tools

should be differentiated by academic level in the same way that other forms of writing support appear to need to be.

Taken together, the findings support a multidimensional, level-sensitive model of thesis-writing support: foundational language and topic-formulation support at the undergraduate level, methodological and time-management support at the master's level, and support for theoretical synthesis, scholarly positioning, and sustained self-regulation at the doctoral level — with supervisory feedback quality functioning as a support mechanism that cuts across all three.

CONCLUSION

This study examined thesis-writing barriers, coping strategies, and support systems among Indonesian EFL students using descriptive survey data from 23 respondents and interview evidence from six students across undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels. The findings show that thesis writing involves interconnected linguistic, methodological, cognitive, socio-cultural, institutional, and technological demands rather than a single, language-based difficulty. In the survey, referencing and citation, topic selection, academic English writing, and coherence were among the most prominent areas of difficulty, while cross-level comparison revealed that master's respondents reported the greatest difficulty with grammar and vocabulary, whereas doctoral respondents reported the greatest difficulty with topic selection and referencing — a divergence that the interviews, rather than the survey means alone, were able to explain. Interview accounts further showed that the character of difficulty differed qualitatively across academic levels: undergraduates frequently emphasized language, topic development, and basic methodology; master's students described renewed difficulty despite prior training, alongside time and methodological alignment; and doctoral students highlighted theoretical positioning within interdisciplinary work, argument-level coherence, and sustained self-regulation under pressure from both institutional deadlines and supervisory scrutiny.

Students responded to these difficulties through combinations of supervisory feedback, peer support, repeated revision, structured writing routines, reference-management software, grammar checkers, and generative AI tools, with the specific combination shifting from translation- and grammar-oriented tools at the undergraduate level toward literature- and analysis-oriented tools at the doctoral level. Family and institutional environments functioned as both enabling and constraining conditions simultaneously rather than as uniformly positive or negative forces, and advisor feedback was consistently identified as the most valued support mechanism even where its delivery was, in some participants' accounts, inconsistent or harshly critical. The study therefore suggests that effective EFL thesis support should extend beyond sentence-level correction toward a developmental, level-sensitive academic-literacy model that integrates language instruction, research methodology, source use, argumentation, feedback quality, self-regulation, and responsible digital-tool use.

Because the sample was purposive and relatively small, the findings should not be generalized statistically to Indonesian EFL students as a whole; they are best read as analytical tendencies within this dataset rather than as a universal developmental hierarchy. Future research could draw on larger, multi-institutional samples, longitudinal designs that track individual writers across academic levels, and direct analysis of students' thesis drafts alongside their reported experiences, in order to examine how perceived difficulties correspond to observable features of writing development. Such research would help refine level-sensitive academic-writing support while retaining attention to the institutional, supervisory, and socio-cultural conditions in which thesis writing in Indonesian EFL contexts actually takes place.

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