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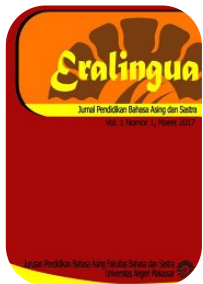
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# Undergraduate Students' Learner Autonomy during Thesis Writing: The Case of a Group of EFL Students in Indonesia

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**Abstract.** Learner autonomy has recently gained popularity among scholars of ELT as autonomy is pivotal, especially during the thesis writing process. This study aims to explore undergraduate students' learner autonomy during thesis writing. A case study method was employed to explore and record students' autonomy. A case study is a comprehensive, all-encompassing description and study of specific phenomena like a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit. The data were collected from semi-structured interviews, weekly writing progress of five EFL students in Indonesia, and observation in the classroom. As a case study, those five participants were sufficient to represent their learning autonomy demonstrated during the semester. Oxford's taxonomy of learner autonomy was used to find the emerged themes from the interviews. The data raised three themes: motivation, agency, and writing strategies. The extrinsic motivation was more dominant than intrinsic motivation in this study. Moreover, three of five participants indicated highly intense motivation. Regarding learning strategy, students with more motivation were able to explore more writing strategies. It was found that social strategies were widely employed by the participants. They like to discuss with their peers and ask for feedback from their supervisor. Agency during undergraduate thesis writing is still underrepresented, particularly the one demonstrating students' decisions about their research trajectory. This study revealed that their agency is affected by their experiences and projective dimension to make improvements. Supervisor instructions play a crucial role in the development of students' autonomy. Hence, further investigation in this area is needed. This study offers research and practical implications for future research and educators, especially in higher education. This study provides a future research direction for both students and lecturers to foster learner autonomy during undergraduate thesis writing.

**Keywords:** Agency, Learner Autonomy, Motivation, Writing Strategies

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## INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy has been a discussion for decades because it offers rich perspectives that accommodate several elements of learning (Benson, 2006; Dickinson, 1994; Oxford, 2003). Many scholars proposed different perspectives on learner autonomy (Yeung, 2016). Some of them proposed different constructs or frameworks of this term. Oxford (2003) constructs a taxonomy of learner autonomy that consists of several themes like motivation and learning strategies, to name a few (Oxford, 2003). Motivation affects students' academic performance (Zeynali et al., 2019). It is said that students with higher motivation would perform better in learning (Weda et al., 2018). The next theme is related to learning strategy. Previous studies showed that learning strategies could facilitate students in learning a language (Nazurty et al., 2019; Y.-F. Yang, 2002).

Despite its popularity among educators and scholars, the term "learner autonomy" is problematic because it is frequently confused with self-instruction. This statement is supported by Little (2003), who stated that learner autonomy is famously challenging to describe accurately; it is vague (Little, 2003). Since the concept is intangible, exploring the application in the classroom is challenging. However, previous studies showed that learner autonomy is pivotal to students' EFL success (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2019; Liu, 2016; Rahman, 2018; Tran, 2020). In other words, it can be a vehicle for students to achieve their goals. This research aimed to investigate learner autonomy during the undergraduate thesis writing process.

In Indonesia, undergraduate thesis writing becomes one of the requirements to obtain a bachelor's degree. This is considered one of the most demanding requirements for the majority of students. Writing is considerably challenging for Indonesian students for several reasons. The first reason is that writing is a complex process involving cognitive and metacognitive processes. Second, based on previous studies, it was outlined that challenges faced by the students during thesis writing including selecting an appropriate research topic, limited research and methodology training, linguistic and academic writing, and limited feedback from supervisors (Abdelrazeq, 2018; Hashmi et al., 2022). The third reason, students who study English Education must write their undergraduate thesis in English. This situation amplified the challenges as English is not their mother tongue (Gilmore, 2009; Mbato & Cendra, 2019). The fourth is that the flexible deadline can be a drawback for the students since some might need help managing their time (Mbato & Cendra, 2019).

Last but not least is related to culture. Culture is vital for language learning and education because culture is inextricably linked to language and thus makes up a portion of the content of language learning and education (Roberts, 2001). In Indonesian culture, students are not used to producing writing because most tests (for example, to enter higher education) are multiple-choice tests. Furthermore, they are used to pursuing instruction from the teachers, so when they are asked to compose their research without any specific deadline, they face difficulties completing it. In other words, they need to get used to autonomy, which is highly needed in the thesis writing process (Mbato & Cendra, 2019).

Previous studies have confirmed the importance of learner autonomy in writing (Andina, 2020; Ghufon & Nurdianingsih, 2019; Sato, 2020). From the international perspective, it is noted that learner autonomy was significant for students' writing performance (Sato, 2020; Yeung, 2016). In Indonesia, the study of learner autonomy in writing classes was dominated by correlation studies (Andina, 2020; Ghufon & Nurdianingsih, 2019). The studies found a significant correlation between writing achievement, digital competencies, and learner autonomy. Both from international and national studies, the studies of learner autonomy in writing were dominated by correlational studies. From this point, there is a need to conduct research that provides more in-depth discussion to fill the gap.

It becomes clear from the outlined rationales that research on learner autonomy in thesis writing is crucial. This study aimed to investigate students' learner autonomy during undergraduate thesis writing where the level of independence is considerably high.

### **Learner Autonomy**

The leading proponents of learner autonomy define this notion as the ability to control one's learning to set objective, critical thought, judgment, and independent action (Holec, 1981; Benson, 2006; Little, 2003). It means that students can take action based on their judgment to reach their goals in learning. Furthermore, they also conceptualize learner autonomy into elements and frameworks of learner autonomy.

Holec, considered the pioneer of this theory, outlined five elements of learner autonomy; defining the objectives, outlining the contents and progressions, selecting methods and procedures, monitoring the acquisition process, and assessing what has been acquired (Holec, 1979). Later, Benson proposed a more compact dimension consisting of three dimensions of control over learning: learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content (Benson, 2006). A more complete taxonomy was proposed by Oxford (2003), who composed a taxonomy of learner autonomy which consists of four perspectives and themes. The themes are context, agency, motivation, and learning strategies.

The first theme is context. It refers to the whole situation, background, setting, or environment relevant to L2 learning. Context manifests ideological viewpoints in specific circumstances, relationships, or interactions. The setting gives learning chances for the active, involved learner (Oxford, 2003). The next theme is agency. Agency is defined as students' proactive activity. One of the well-known experts in this area is Priestley, who proposed agency through an ecological perspective. This perspective sees agency not as an individual's capacity but as what individuals and groups can achieve. To make this concept, he constructed three dimensions of agency: iterative, practical evaluative, and projective (Priestley et al., 2015). According to the iterative and projective dimension, agency is influenced by both prior experiences (formal education and training as well as informal professional and personal experiences) and by long-term and short-term goals reflected in the educational practices. In addition, agency can also be achieved in a concrete situation reflected in the practical evaluative dimension. In this

dimension, cultural, structural, and material aspects play a significant role in developing agency.

The following emerging theme is motivation. One of the most prevalent types of motivation among scholars is intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. [Ryan & Deci \(2000\)](#) distinguished motivation based on the different reasons or goals that give rise to an action. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, while extrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome ([Ryan & Deci, 2000](#)). In other words, students are intrinsically motivated when they find the tasks or activities exciting and enjoyable. When separable actions like rewards or deadlines drive students, they are extrinsically motivated.

The last is strategies, in this context, writing strategies. The development of writing strategies is a complex process. Many experts in this area proposed a different model of writing strategies ([Leki, 1995](#); [Mu, 2005](#); [Sasaki, 2000](#)). [Mu \(2005\)](#) sums writing strategies into broader categories: rhetorical, metacognitive, cognitive, communicative, and social/ affective ([Mu, 2005](#)). Metacognitive strategies deal with monitoring strategies such as setting goals, checking and identifying problems, and reevaluating the written text. Cognitive strategies involve cognitive processes such as making inferences, extending the content of the writing, and getting information from memory. Social/ affective strategies include referring to libraries or dictionaries, getting support from professors/ peers, and reducing anxiety. Examples of rhetorical strategies are organizing and using L1 language. The last is communication strategy, such as anticipating readers' responses.

### **Learner Autonomy in Writing Class**

The debate over learner autonomy in writing class is longstanding in English teaching and learning. Many scholars from different countries have researched the theme of learner autonomy in writing ([Andina et al., 2020](#); [Ghufron & Nurdianingsih, 2019](#); [Sato et al., 2020](#); [Yeung, 2016](#)). They were conducted in different settings and levels. In the international context, varied and rich studies were performed among scholars ([Sato et al., 2020](#); [Yeung, 2016](#)). The first study was conducted in the Japanese context by Sato, Murase, and Burden and investigated the effectiveness of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) of English as a foreign or second language (L2) in 2020. The result showed that MALL had a considerable impact on L2 vocabulary memory in thorough and productive assessments, as well as on attitudes toward independent learning. Unlike the previous study, which is an experimental study in nature, the subsequent study was a quantitative study exploring the construct of learner autonomy in writing, focusing on the role of motivation and the teacher's independence ([Yeung, 2016](#)). Findings from the study suggest that the proposed construct of learning autonomy in writing is mainly accurate. In addition, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play pivotal roles in developing learner autonomy. The study plays a significant role in this research because this research utilizes the construct used in this study.

Varied studies on the topic of learner autonomy were also demonstrated by Indonesian researchers ([Andina et al., 2020](#); [Ghufron & Nurdianingsih, 2019](#)). A study

conducted by Andina et al. examined the correlation between learner autonomy, digital competence, and writing achievement. A significant correlation was reported between a combination of learner autonomy and digital competence toward achievement. Ghufon and Nurdianingsih also conducted another study in 2019. It was a multi-site case study to investigate how flipped teaching with CALL takes place in EFL writing classes and to elaborate on how flipped teaching with CALL affects learner autonomy in EFL writing classes from different sites. The findings showed that Students in the EFL writing course who used the flipped classroom with CALL media demonstrated high levels of learner autonomy and motivation (Ghufon & Nurdianingsih, 2019).

From the international and national perspectives, there is a methodological research gap because there needs to be a thorough discussion of successful learner autonomy in academic writing. In the Indonesian context, academic writing is not the primary indicator in schools because the curriculum model focuses mainly on pencil and paper tests. Although higher education students majoring in English education have received courses to develop their writing, previous studies showed that they still face difficulties in writing (Abdelrazeq, 2018; Hashmi et al., 2022). This situation affects their lack of autonomy when they have to complete their undergraduate thesis writing. This statement is supported by a previous researcher who stated that having autonomy during thesis writing is essential for students, yet it is sometimes neglected (Khulaifiyah et al., 2022). The inability of students to become autonomous results in late studies (Mbato & Cendra, 2019). Hence, this study discussed learner autonomy in Higher Education, especially how they complete thesis writing where the level of independence is considerably high. Based on the rationales mentioned earlier, this study aimed to answer the following research question, “To what extent do the students demonstrate learner autonomy during the undergraduate thesis writing process?”

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study aimed to explore students' autonomy during their thesis writing process. The nature of this study is longitudinal research, where the researcher observes the thesis writing process for the whole semester from September 19, 2022, to December 5, 2022. To deal with the goal, a case study was implemented as a research design in this study because a case study is a comprehensive, all-encompassing description and study of specific phenomena like a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit (Merriam, 1998).

### **Research Setting**

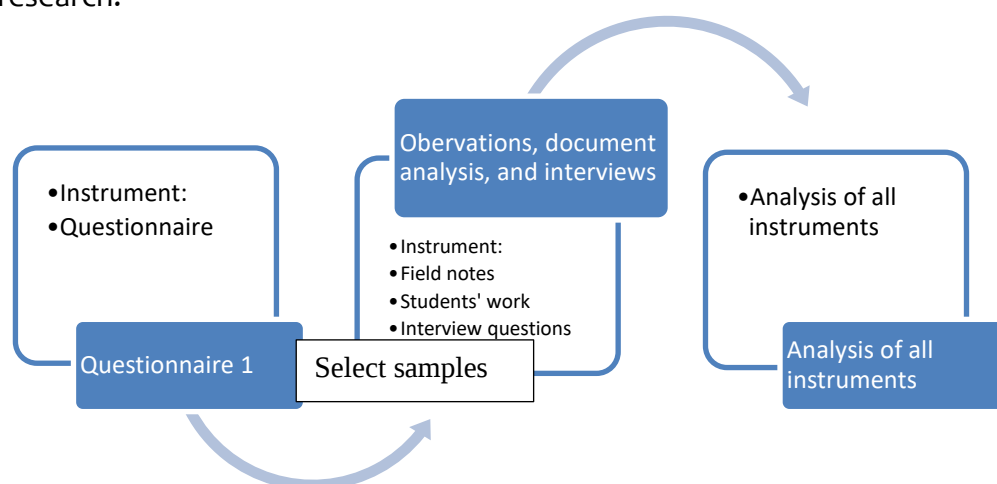
This case study was conducted in one of the undergraduate thesis writing classes at a private university in Yogyakarta. The name of the course is undergraduate thesis proposal which weighs three credits. The class was held weekly every Monday from 11.00 to 16.00 WIB. The researcher began observing the class from September 19, 2022, to December 5, 2022.

## Participants of the study

The participants of this study were a group of senior students of the English Language Education Study Program at a private university in Yogyakarta. This class consists of 13 students, 12 females, and 1 male. However, in this study, the researcher chose 5 participants as the main subjects of this research. The process of choosing the five participants was based on their writing process uploaded in Google Drive and from the results of the first distributed questionnaire. Five participants were considered sufficient as the main subjects of this study to provide an in-depth discussion of how they perform autonomy during thesis writing. The names of the participants were Beatrice, Yanna, Emma, Kate, and Jennie. They are all written in pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

## Instruments

Four instruments were used in this study to explore students' autonomy during their thesis writing. Those are field notes, questionnaires, interviews, and students' work. Below is the diagram depicting the instruments used in this research.



**Figure 1.** Research Instruments

The questionnaire was initially designed to measure students' readiness for autonomous learning in English writing (Yeung, 2016). It was initially designed using Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and Cottrell's (1995) learners' preparedness for autonomous learning instrument as a conceptualization of learner autonomy in the field of writing. The preliminary version was evaluated in a pilot study before being improved in response to participant and expert recommendations. This questionnaire consists of 4 sections, including closed and open-ended questions. The closed-ended section is divided into three categories, namely autonomous attitude (9 items), general writing strategies (11 items), and general strategies for learning writing (15 items). The researcher added three open-ended questions for the last section to gain richer data from the questionnaire.

Interviews were conducted to gather information regarding their autonomy in undergraduate thesis writing. The questions were composed based on the questionnaire. The interviews involved five chosen participants. There were seven

questions about autonomous learning. These interviews serve as primary data of this research to describe students' autonomy in thesis writing.

In this research, the researcher also used students' progress as the supporting data to see their autonomy in writing. The class supervisor provided a Google Drive where the students can upload the weekly progress of their writing. To get the supporting data, the researcher also observes the class regularly to record the classroom and individual consultation in the form of field notes. From their work, the researcher can monitor their writing progress which reflects their level of writing achievement.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The data in this research are classified as primary and secondary data. The primary data included interviews, while the secondary data used in this research were classroom observation and students' progress in writing. To select participants, the researcher distributed a questionnaire at the beginning of the semester. Based on the questionnaire, the researcher invited five participants to join the interviews. During the interviews, the researcher elaborates on students' responses to the questionnaire to gain rich information on students' autonomous learning. To support the interviews, secondary data were obtained by observing the classroom consultation and their progress uploaded in Google Drive. The researcher monitored their progress and took notes to support the primary data.

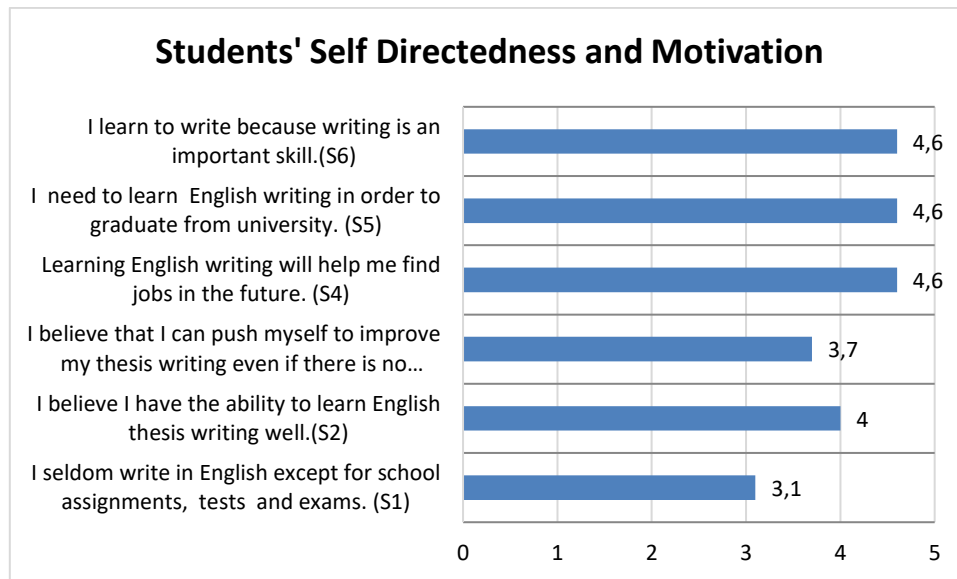
To ensure the trustworthiness of this research, the researcher used triangulation proposed by Stake in the case study, namely data triangulation and member check ([Shenton, 2004](#); [Stake, 1995](#)). The data triangulation was obtained by collecting different types of data across time, places, and people. The data used in this research involved several data collection strategies: observation, questionnaire, document analysis, and interviews. They were collected for 4 months. To ensure the accuracy of the data gathered from the interviews, the researcher asked the informants to read the transcripts of the dialogues in which they participated.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section discusses the results of the data gathered from the questionnaire, interviews, document analysis, and students' progress. From the data, three main themes emerged from this study namely motivation, writing strategy, and agency. The details of each theme are as follows.

### **The Roles of Motivation of Students' Thesis Writing Process**

The graph below depicts students' self-directedness and motivation. There were six statements labeled S1-S6. What stands out from the graph is that extrinsic motivation items (S4, S5, S6) outnumber self-directedness items (S1, S2, S3). The details are as follows.



**Figure 2.** Students' Self-Directedness and Motivation

Three of five participants indicated highly intense motivation (Jennie, Beatrice, and Yanna). The rest were also experiencing motivation, but it was less intense than these three participants. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations drove them.

Beatrice said that she wanted to finish the thesis as soon as possible so she could apply for a job.

"I am okay with looking for the theories and materials for my thesis by myself because I have very high motivation. I want to graduate quickly and apply for a job. The most important thing is that I enjoy the process. However, I will be happy if Mr. Ken (her thesis supervisor) explains." (Beatrice)

Her sense of enjoyment and her desire to graduate quickly indicated very high motivational energy. The enjoyment of writing her thesis is a reflection of her intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, she added that her family's expectations pushed her to complete her study on time which is considered an extrinsic drive.

"My family does not like it when I don't graduate on time. No matter what, I have to be able to graduate on time; the sooner, the better." (Beatrice)

The obligation from her family to graduate on time is considered the external drive to finish her thesis. The interview result confirms the questionnaire result where the item "I need to learn English writing to graduate from the university" got a score of 5 which indicated the highest level of agreement. As for Jennie, her various activities motivated her to finish her writing. She mentioned her motivation to balance her various activities affected the way she chose her writing strategies. She set daily plans and carefully managed her time to cover her activities. This statement is confirmed by the open-ended question result, which stated that her strategy in writing a thesis is to put a daily plan.

On the other hand, Yanna's motivation and strategies in writing her thesis were affected by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. She said she enjoyed the thesis proposal class and wanted to move out of the city to pursue a job.

"My motivation is also very high because I'm in LDR (Long Distance Relationship) with my boyfriend, so I want to graduate as soon as possible to move to another city and apply for a job. I wonder why the research proposal class was the most enthusiastic for me, even though it was tough. I have to make progress every day, although I am exhausted from being busy with MPD. I force myself to write if there are no urgent events, knowing it's not good. I usually stay up until late at night to write my thesis." (Yanna)

For Yanna, the motivation to finish her thesis is very intense. Her motivation is driven by the external factor that drives her intrinsic motivation to write daily. One of her extrinsic motivations is to move to another city so she can get a job. Her goal to graduate as soon as possible kept her awake until late at night to write her thesis, and she was aware that it was a bad habit. Meanwhile, she also experienced intrinsic motivation as she found that the research proposal class was the most enthusiastic for her. From the questionnaire, it was revealed that among other items, an item that is related to her self-directedness gained the highest agreement. The item is "I believe I can learn English thesis well."

On the other hand, the other two students did not experience intense motivation to write the thesis. Their motivation seemingly originated from external factors such as the external pressure of their peers and parents.

"My motivation mostly comes from an external factor, from my friends. Oh, they are already there, and I just got here." (Emma)

The closed-ended questions from Emma and Kate confirm the results. Both gained high agreement on extrinsic motivation items, scoring 4 for Emma and 4,3 for Kate on average.

According to the psychological perspective, autonomous learners include characteristics such as strong motivation, self-efficacy, positive attitudes, a need for accomplishment, and a blend of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Oxford, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The students with more intense motivation were driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Their intrinsic motivations are reflected in their vivid goals to graduate as soon as possible and their enjoyment of the writing process. They also showed the need for achievement, which is to graduate as soon as possible. Meanwhile, their extrinsic motivation was mostly from their peers and parents. The pressure from family and peers might be a form of introjected regulation in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This type of motivation does the action with pressure to avoid guilt or anxiety or to attain ego-enhancements or pride (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, they also added more autonomous types of extrinsic motivation, namely identification and integrated regulation. Both types require the personal importance of the activities and are finally assimilated within the individuals (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The results indicated that students who had and were aware of their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation outperformed students who only mentioned their extrinsic motivation. It can be seen from their writing progress. As the interview was

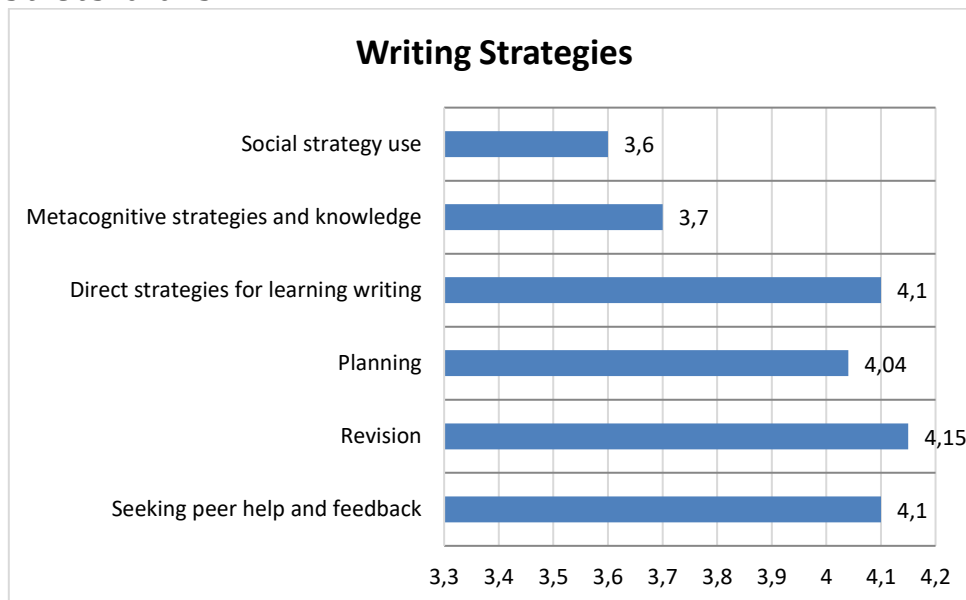
conducted, three students submitted their data collection results while the others were still writing chapters 1, 2, and 3. This finding supported a previous study conducted by Yeung in 2016 which claimed that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play pivotal roles in the development of learner autonomy (Yeung, 2016).

These findings confirmed previous studies on motivation and thesis writing (Blankenstein et al., 2019; Diasti & Mbato, 2020; Fitriani & Agustina, 2022; Yeung, 2016; Zainuddin et al., 2021). Motivation regulation would aid students in maintaining and boosting their motivation to successfully complete writing their thesis (Diasi & Mbato, 2020). Intrinsic motivation implies the desire for accomplishment and knowledge to fulfill a learning goal (Ramírez, 2014). The desire of the students to accomplish their thesis writing so that they can graduate and work as soon as possible reflects their internal motivation.

Other aspects need to be considered in student autonomy in writing a thesis. This study found that students aware of their motivation can explore learning strategies according to their needs. Regulation by identification is an autonomous or self-determined kind of extrinsic motivation; It means the person has acknowledged the significance of behavior to them personally and accepted responsibility for its management (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Thus the discussion of learning strategies employed by the students is as follows.

### Learning Strategies Employed by the Students during the Thesis Writing Process

The following figure depicts the results of writing strategies used by the students. Overall, all students apply all strategies at a moderate to a high level. The details are as follows.



**Figure 3.** Students' Writing Strategies during Thesis Writing

From the chart, it was shown that the majority of the students applied revisions, seeking peer help and feedback, and direct strategies to learn writing. On the other hand, metacognitive and social strategy use are the least agreed by the

students. During the interviews, the majority of the students also mentioned peer help and feedback as their strategies, and only a few students mentioned metacognitive strategies.

Students caught up in highly motivated currents could explore more learning strategies that reflect their autonomy in writing. They were able to explore specific plans and steps to accomplish their goals. These steps are either observable, such as making a draft and discussing with more capable others, or unobservable, like mentally analyzing words. Meanwhile, the other students are more into technical strategies.

Jennie's strategies include setting daily goals, making drafts before writing, and brainstorming with her friend.

"I usually set up daily goals. I plan what I should accomplish today. Before writing, I make points on what I want to discuss. Then I search for related theories. Sometimes when I feel insecure about my writing, I discuss it with my friends." (Jennie)

Different from Jennie, who is more into metacognitive strategies. Beatrice and Yanna mentioned social, metacognitive, and cognitive strategies. When facing difficulties, Beatrice usually searches on YouTube to find the solution. She added that she also read her friends' thesis to learn the steps of writing. Furthermore, she applied cognitive strategy by consulting the Cambridge dictionary and analyzing the words whenever she was unsure of certain words. From the open-ended question, it was also revealed that the preferred strategy employed by Beatrice was to read more journals and use some platforms and tools like YouTube and an online dictionary.

On the other hand, Yanna mentioned situational strategy when writing her thesis.

"I have a hard time thinking and focusing during the day, so I prefer to write my thesis at night." (Yanna)

When first asked about the learning strategy, Emma said she did not have one. However, later in the interview, she mentioned that she used several tools to assist her writing, such as Grammarly, paraphrasing tools, and a dictionary, although she barely used them. Meanwhile, Kate seemingly applied technical strategies during her thesis writing process. The results from the open-ended question also stated similar things.

"I use google scholar, Grammarly, google translate, and pdf drive. Basically, I can work anywhere as long as I have a good mood and am not tired. I always do my thesis with my friends." (Kate)

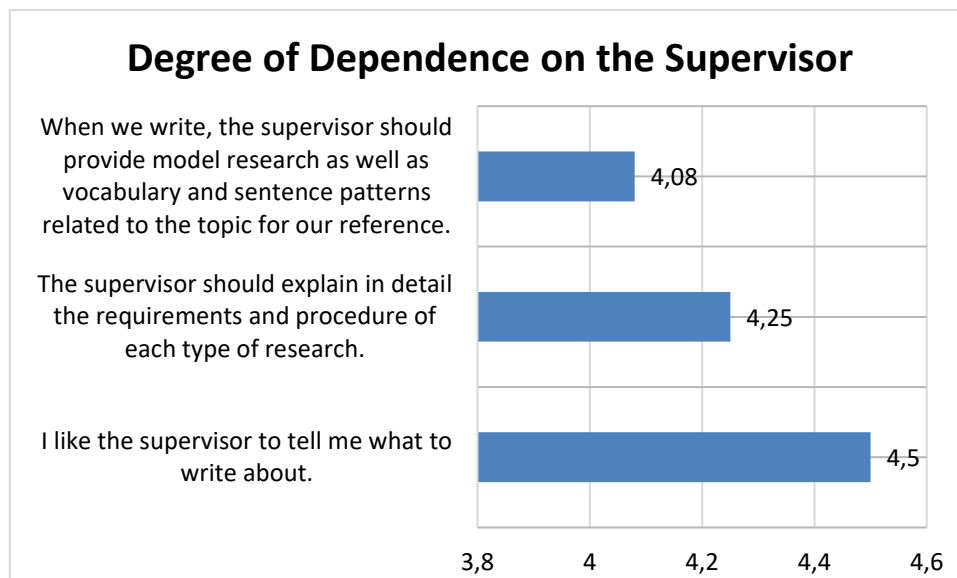
The findings revealed that students with more motivation applied various writing strategies like cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Cognitive strategies involve cognitive processes demonstrated by Beatrice, who analyzed some words using the Cambridge dictionary when unsure about some words. In addition, Yanna applied metacognitive and social strategies by making plans and resourcing from their peers (Mu, 2005). During the class, the supervisor asked them to set weekly goals. This is considered a metacognitive strategy ignited by the supervisor.

On the other hand, the other two students were familiar with social strategies like referring from dictionaries or other tools (resourcing) and getting support and feedback from the supervisor/ peers. These findings confirm the claims of other researchers regarding motivation and learning strategies. In the large-scale studies of foreign learning in Egypt, Singapore, Taiwan, and the USA, motivation was vital in the learning strategy used (Bai & Wang, 2020; O'Malley et al., 1990). Based on the questionnaire and interviews, students are more likely to use and become familiar with seeking help and feedback strategies. They like to discuss with their peers.

Similarities and differences can also be found between this study and previous ones. Peer feedback was a common strategy applied by the students (Pravita & Kuswandono, 2022; Wirantaka, 2022). Pravita & Kuswandono (2022) concluded that students are mostly involved in goal planning and getting help to regulate themselves during the thesis writing process to overcome procrastination. This finding firms the claims regarding the use of social strategy in thesis writing. However, some students were more comfortable utilizing tools or other resources as their strategies. Individual differences might contribute to the writers' different employment strategies.

### **Students' Agency in Thesis Writing**

From the technical perspective, agency is when the students are given greater control over the curriculum, greater access or access to resources, or negotiated what, when, and how they want to learn (Pennycook, 2014). Theoretically, thesis writing should stimulate their agency as they have to decide and design their writing process individually. However, agency is not a gift that can be given to the learner (Freire, 2000). It means that giving students full responsibility for their learning cannot by itself create agency; the role of a more capable other, in this case, the thesis supervisor, should also be considered. Hence, the researcher analyzed their agency based on how they determined their research topics and how they perceived the roles of supervisors during the writing process. From the questionnaire, the results under the theme of the degree of independence of the teacher received high agreement among all the students. Below is the graph depicting the results.



**Figure 4.** Degree of Students' Dependence on the Supervisor

From the graph, it can be said that all students like to be directed by their supervisor. The results from the observation interviews support this finding. During the observation, the students consulted individually to get feedback from the supervisor. They also said during interviews that they asked for their supervisor's approval before proceeding to the next step of their research writing.

"For the procedure of the research, I usually followed my supervisor's instruction to make it clearer." (Emma)

However, some students are also looking for the procedures from other sources like friends and YouTube. Hence, their agency is varied. The following is further exploration.

The interviews revealed that each student demonstrated a different level of agency. Their agency can be seen in how they decide what research to conduct and how they act to reach their goals. Three students determined their research topics based on their willingness to improve students' English skills while doing their teaching practice for the PLP (School-Based Practicum) course. They stated that they want to improve students' skills after having the experience of teaching them.

Jennie conducted the research because she is already familiar with the students and the teachers. Moreover, she also claimed that students' proficiency in English was low, especially related to their vocabulary mastery.

"My research thesis is about extending vocabulary, so it increases students' vocabulary. I chose the school where I took my PLP because I already know the students and the teacher. The students are still at the beginner level of vocabulary." (Jennie)

She also added that she wants to bring something new to the students in learning. She explained that recently the school just intensified the students to be more literate in technology; hence, she wanted to use word wall as the media of learning.

During the process of deciding on the research design, she followed the instructions from her supervisor. She also gained high agreement from the questionnaire related to the supervisor's instruction.

"I followed Mr. Ken's instructions regarding the research design because, at first, I wanted just do observations and interviews, but he said it was not optimal because the data would be too little. So, he suggested classroom action research for my research design. After that, I read from Mr. Ken's sources." (Jennie)

This process of determining the topic based on teaching experience was also demonstrated by Yanna. She mentioned that she wanted to improve students' speaking skills.

"I tutored at SMKN 7, so the first time I taught them, they were still awkward and did not dare to speak. Then I thought of trying another way, using games and groups. Then I try to use role-play; at least I wanted them to dare to speak." (Yanna)

Unlike Jennie, who preferred to follow the supervisor's instructions regarding her research steps, Yanna seemed more independent as she autonomously learned how to conduct her research from other resources like peers and YouTube. Unlike Yanna, Emma's inspiration in determining her research topic is based on her experiences.

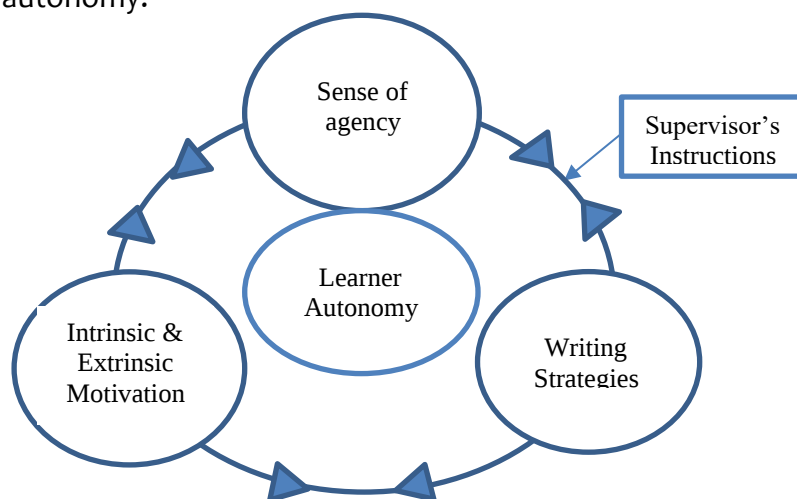
"Because of the pandemic in 2020, the university applied distance learning for classes. There were many group assignments, and the final exam was also a group project. So I used those experiences to determine my research topic." (Emma)

Those students demonstrated a sense of agency from how they wanted to affect students' speaking positively. Based on their experiences, Bandura stated that agency means the quality of being an active force in producing an effect (Bandura, 1997). As stated by Yanna and Beatrice, they wanted to improve students' speaking skills, it shows their agentic quality by actively producing an effect. On the other hand, Emma seemed to use her experience as her inspiration in determining her research topic. This finding indicated that their prior experience shaped their agency. A previous study conducted by Yang in 2020 supported this finding. He concluded that students' professional experiences shaped the case participants' beliefs and motivation (W. Yang et al., 2020). From the lens of ecological perspective proposed by Priestley et al., (2015), their agency is shaped by their past experience and their future projection to bring changes and improvement. They belong to iterational and projective dimensions (Priestley et al., 2015).

Agency is also implicated in the undergraduate writing process through students' decisions about their thesis. The writer's agency is required to determine the research design and decide which theoretical framework to use (Magalhães et al., 2019). In this study, some students had chosen their research design before consulting it with their supervisors. However, they changed their initiated research design after getting feedback and correction after the consultation. This finding confirmed what experts claimed: agency is not a gift but can be ignited by more

capable others, in this case, supervisors (Magalhães et al., 2019; Freire, 2000; Yang et al., 2020).

Moreover, former researchers found similar findings regarding agency and supervisor support (Freire, 2000; Magalhães et al., 2019; W. Yang et al., 2020). Magalhães et al., (2019) found that doctoral students relied principally on their supervisor's support during doctoral writing. This finding is supported by W. Yang et al., (2020) who found that the competencies and directions of the participating students in designing a solid project were changeable and dynamic to meet the supervisor's expectations by responding to their feedback and gaining knowledge in the target topic area (W. Yang et al., 2020). This type of agency belongs to sociocultural perspectives where agency is reflected in a cognitive apprenticeship and actively participating with expert practitioners (Oxford, 2003). From these findings, it can be said that the supervisor's instruction plays a pivotal role in igniting students' autonomy.



**Figure 5.** The Construct of Learner Autonomy during Undergraduate Thesis Writing

The above figure depicts the significance of how learner autonomy is constructed during the undergraduate thesis writing process. It comprises several aspects, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, writing strategies, and a sense of agency. Those aspects are crucial as they are interrelated with one another. When students catch up with more intense motivation, they are likely able to explore writing agency and manage to develop their sense of agency. The more intense the motivation is the greater the possibility of them performing learner autonomy. In the Self-Determination Theory, the types of extrinsic motivation affect the students' autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, in performing learner autonomy, the supervisor's instruction is considerably prominent to help students explore their strategies and ignite motivation and agency. In this study, the supervisor arranged a weekly meeting with the students for more intensive individual consultation. In addition, the supervisor also likes to direct their students to set weekly goals. This construct serves as a compass for both students and teachers in writing. By understanding and being aware of the aspects of autonomy, students can

determine actions that foster their autonomy to maximize their writing performances.

## CONCLUSION

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the construct of learner autonomy during thesis writing involves several aspects, such as motivation, agency, and writing strategy. In this study, extrinsic motivation is relatively more dominant than intrinsic motivation. Their motivation somehow affects their ability to explore and apply writing strategies. In this study, it was found that the majority of the students are more likely to apply peer help strategies. Their sense of agency can be seen in how they make decisions about their thesis. It was affected by their experiences and future projections. However, autonomy is not a gift that can be given away to students. The supervisor's instructions also play pivotal roles in developing learner autonomy. This study found that supervisors' instructions led them to apply writing strategies such as setting goals and utilizing tools to assist their writing. The aspects of motivation, agency, and writing strategies are interrelated. The relationship styles between the supervisor's instructions and other aspects like motivation and agency need further investigation for future research as they determine the degree to which the students perform learner autonomy. In addition, this study is expected to enrich and foster the practice of learner autonomy in the undergraduate thesis writing process. Future research can be conducted with more specific students' research trajectory to provide a deeper understanding of the students' writing strategies and kinds of agency involved.

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