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Supervising in Silence: Challenges and Coping Strategies in EFL Undergraduate Thesis Supervision in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate thesis supervision plays a critical role in shaping students' academic success, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. However, supervising EFL students poses various challenges for lecturers, often impacting the quality and progress of student research. This qualitative case study explores the experiences of eight lecturers supervising undergraduate theses in an English education program at a public university in Jambi, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Findings reveal two major categories of challenges: internal and external. Internal challenges include time constraints due to heavy workloads and mismatches between supervisors' expertise and student research topics. External challenges involve student disengagement, poor writing skills, limited progress, low motivation, and external personal issues. To address these, lecturers employed three main strategies: (1) self-management (scheduling supervision, learning new content areas), (2) assistance (giving direction, motivation, and written corrective feedback), and (3) communication and technological support (maintaining regular contact and using online platforms for supervision). The study highlights the complex dynamics of thesis supervision in EFL contexts and the proactive efforts of lecturers to navigate these challenges. The findings underscore the need for institutional support, targeted training, and better supervisor-student alignment to enhance the supervision process and student outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Earning a bachelor's degree in higher education requires meeting a set of demanding academic criteria that aim to ensure a thorough understanding of a specific discipline. A key aspect of these criteria

is acquiring a designated number of semester credit units, which cover various courses particular to the student's area of study. In Indonesia's higher education framework, undergraduate programs generally require around 144 semester credits to be completed over eight semesters, indicating a well-organized and rigorous academic program. Fulfilment of credit requirements alone does not suffice for graduation; students are also obligated to undertake and complete a thesis—a substantial and integrative research project that epitomizes the culmination of their undergraduate academic journey. The thesis functions not only as a testament to the student's scholarly competence and disciplinary expertise but also as an opportunity to engage in original research, thereby contributing novel insights to their field. Moreover, the undergraduate thesis often represents the student's inaugural experience with extensive academic writing and research, marking a pivotal milestone in their intellectual development and professional readiness. The significance of the thesis extends beyond its evaluative function; it embodies a comprehensive learning process that cultivates the student's capacity for independent inquiry under the mentorship of experienced supervisors - a skill set indispensable for both academic advancement and future career endeavours (Nurkamto, 2022).

The process of academic writing, particularly in the form of an undergraduate thesis, presents multifaceted challenges that frequently impede students' progress and the quality of their scholarly output. As an initial foray into formal research, the thesis demands a sophisticated amalgamation of cognitive and practical skills, including the generation and systematic organization of ideas, the construction of coherent conceptual frameworks, and the iterative processes of drafting, revising, and refining the manuscript. Mastery of these stages necessitates intellectual rigour and a thorough understanding of academic conventions, disciplinary writing styles, and methodological rigor—competencies that many undergraduate students are still developing. Kiriakos and Tienari (2018) underscore the inherent complexity of academic writing, highlighting its cyclical nature, which involves brainstorming, planning, drafting, and revising. This process rigorously tests the writer's critical thinking and linguistic proficiency. Given these inherent difficulties, undergraduate students often encounter obstacles that can hinder their ability to produce high-quality theses. Consequently, providing expert guidance through structured thesis supervision becomes imperative. Such supervision facilitates students' navigation through the complexities of academic research and writing by offering targeted feedback, motivational support, and methodological direction, thereby enhancing the likelihood of successful thesis completion. This indispensable role of supervision underscores its critical contribution to fostering academic growth and ensuring the production of scholarly work that meets institutional standards (Kiriakos & Tienari, 2018).

In recognition of the challenges associated with thesis completion, universities have instituted formal policies that assign experienced academic staff as thesis supervisors to guide students throughout their research endeavors. These supervisors, typically lecturers with specialized expertise in relevant disciplines, provide essential academic mentorship that extends beyond mere administrative oversight. Their responsibilities encompass nurturing students' intellectual development, refining research questions, advising on appropriate methodological approaches, and enhancing academic writing proficiency. Djatmika et al. (2021) emphasize that effective supervision necessitates the deployment of diverse supervisory styles and adaptive methods tailored to the unique needs of individual students, thereby ensuring that guidance is both constructive and responsive. This supervisory relationship imposes significant accountability on lecturers, who must balance their pedagogical duties with the imperative to uphold academic standards and safeguard the quality of the theses produced. The commitment and professionalism of supervisors are thus pivotal in shaping the student's research experience and the overall success of the thesis project (Djatmika et al., 2021).

Despite the critical importance of thesis supervision, in the context of EFL, supervisors frequently encounter substantial challenges that can compromise the effectiveness of their guidance and, by extension, the quality of student theses. A predominant issue is the considerable workload borne by lecturers, who must juggle supervisory responsibilities alongside teaching, research, and administrative obligations. This heavy burden often restricts the time and attention supervisors can allocate to each

student, thereby limiting the depth and frequency of feedback and support. Nurkamto et al. (2022) and Fhonna (2020) separately identify supervisors' demanding schedules as a principal factor contributing to the suboptimal quality of undergraduate theses, underscoring the necessity of optimizing supervision meeting schedules to maximize productivity and student engagement. Beyond logistical constraints, supervisors may also experience emotional and professional stress, especially in situations where students make slow progress, communication deteriorates, or the boundaries between personal and professional interactions become strained. Wisker and Robinson (2016) note that such stressors can precipitate frustration and burnout among supervisors, which can adversely affect their motivation and the overall supervisory dynamic. Anecdotal evidence from a supervisor participating in this study further illuminates the complex interpersonal and institutional pressures inherent in thesis supervision. These multifarious challenges highlight the urgent need for strategies and institutional support mechanisms that enable supervisors to manage their workload effectively while maintaining empathetic and constructive engagement with their students.

The extant literature reveals a notable paucity of empirical research focusing explicitly on the perspectives and experiences of undergraduate thesis supervisors, particularly within the Indonesian higher education context. This gap in scholarship limits a comprehensive understanding of the specific challenges supervisors face and the coping strategies they employ to navigate these difficulties. Addressing this lacuna, the present study seeks to explore the lived experiences of undergraduate thesis supervisors at a university in Jambi with particular attention to the challenges encountered during the supervision process and the adaptive strategies utilized to surmount them. By elucidating these dimensions, the research aspires to contribute substantive insights into supervisory practices, thereby informing policy and pedagogical interventions to enhance the quality of thesis supervision. Ultimately, this study endeavors to support both supervisors and students in achieving successful academic outcomes, fostering a more effective and sustainable supervisory environment.

2. METHODS

The purpose of this inquiry is to elicit the lecturers' experiences in supervising their undergraduates' theses. Primarily, the study focused on the challenges and strategies for overcoming them. To achieve this, a qualitative study with a case study approach was employed. The qualitative method allows researchers to provide a deep description, explanation, and exploration of the meanings of participants (Abrar, 2024; Creswell & Poth, 2016). This indicates that a qualitative study tries to understand and make sense of the participants' feelings, experiences, and behaviors. Furthermore, a case study is a qualitative tradition aiming to describe and analyze a case or bounded system (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Yin, 2018). The use of this design is considered appropriate for the context of this study, as it facilitates the researchers in eliciting information from participants comprehensively.

The study was conducted at an English education study program in a public university in Jambi. We chose this research setting not only because it fits the study's context, but also because it is easily accessible. In this sense, the head of the study program and the prospective participants were supportive. In recruiting the research participants, the researchers employed purposive sampling. This technique allows the researchers to appropriately choose the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016) with several criteria, including 1) the participants must be lecturers who supervise undergraduate students, 2) the participants whose supervisee(s) had completed their seminar proposal and thesis exam in 2023, 3) the participants filled in the demographic questionnaire link from the researchers, and 4) the participants agreed to participate in the research voluntarily.

After determining the criteria, the researchers began the process of participant recruitment by sending a demographic questionnaire link to be completed by English lecturers. We recorded 10 lecturers completing the questionnaire. Subsequently, the researchers reached out to each prospective participant individually to enquire about their willingness to participate in an interview. Among them, only eight lecturers agreed and showed interest. Therefore, this study involved eight participants,

comprising four male lecturers and four female lecturers. Having eight participants is sufficient to generate meaningful qualitative insights in case study approach (Creswell, 2013).

To get rich data for this inquiry, the researchers employed an in-depth semi structured interview. The researchers chose this data collection method because it allows them to conduct a comprehensive exploration of the issue. A semi-structured interview is considered as a more flexible data collection technique because it allows the researchers to further elaborate the participants' answers by asking for details, clarifications, and or confirmations (Abrar, 2024; Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Tod, 2006). Before conducting the interviews, the researchers asked the participants to sign the informed consent form to ensure their voluntary participation. Then, the researchers distributed a handout with interview questions and explained the study's objectives. The interview process, in general, ran well and smoothly with the help of interview guidance. The participants openly expressed their feelings, opinions, and experiences. Each interview lasted for approximately 30 to 40 minutes, and all sessions were audio recorded. In terms of language, all participants chose to respond to the interview questions in Bahasa Indonesia.

After completing the data collection stage, the researchers analyzed the data by using thematic analysis. The outcome of this analysis is to report the data in the form of theme (Braun & Clark, 2006). Practically, the researchers followed the six steps of data analysis. It began with *familiarizing the data*. The researchers listened to the recording audio and read the transcriptions of the interview several times. After that, the researchers *generated initial codes* by highlighting important information from the transcriptions with different colours. The following step was combining several codes into a single theme to *search for themes*. Then, the researcher *reviewed the themes* by ensuring the accuracy of the data. After reviewing themes, the researcher *defined and named themes* by interpreting data and finalizing the name(s) of the themes. At the end, the researchers *produced their research report* by outlining the findings and discussions. The summary of thematic analysis steps can be seen in the following figure.

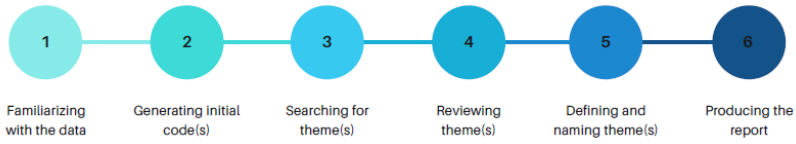


Figure 1. Steps of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006)

Subjectivity is one common issue in qualitative research (Abrar, 2024). This issue is closely related to data trustworthiness. To minimize subjectivity and to verify data accuracy (Lincloln & Guba, 1985), the researchers employed member checking. In practice, the researchers returned the transcriptions of the interview to all participants for review and confirmation. Additionally, the researchers also shared the data analysis and engaged in in-depth discussions among themselves to ensure the accuracy of their interpretation. To comply with the research ethics, the researchers anonymized the identity of participants and other identifiable information. This is to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants (Silverman, 2013).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

As previously explained, the aim of this study is to explore the lecturers' experiences in supervision, particularly the challenges they faced in supervising undergraduate students and their strategies to overcome the challenges. This section is organized into two subsections, which are supported with relevant data from interviews for each study purpose.

3.1. Lecturers' Challenges in Supervising EFL Students' Undergraduate Thesis

Drawing from thematic analysis, based on the results, the researchers found that there are two main challenges experienced by the lecturers in supervising undergraduate students, including internal challenge (temporal limitation and lack of supervisors' area of expertise) and external challenge (lack of students' motivation, lack of students' writing skill, lack of students' progress, loss of students, and students' external problems. The summary of theme(s) and sub-theme(s) of the challenges is presented in the following table.

Table 2. Summary of Supervisors' Challenges

Lecturer's Challenges in Supervising EFL Undergraduate Students' Thesis	**Theme(s)**	**Sub-theme(s)**
	Internal Challenge	Temporal limitations
		Lack of supervisors' area of expertise
	External Challenge	Students' disengagement
		Lack of students' writing skills
		Students' external problem
		Lack of students' progress
		Lack of student' motivation

3.1.1. Internal Challenge

The first theme of lecturers' challenges in supervising undergraduate EFL students' thesis is internal challenge. It relates to the challenges derived from the lecturers themselves. Based on the results, two sub-themes were identified. The most prevalent one is temporal limitations. Among eight participants, five of them admitted that time constraint was one of the challenges they faced for supervision due to the excessive workload and limited time. For example, P2 explained in her interview that she teaches quite many classes and other academic responsibilities. She specifically commented:

> *"I find it difficult to do offline supervision. I am not at campus [English study program building] every day because I teach at some other campuses. I am also on the committee of seminars and conferences. If I come to campus, because of teaching many classes, I feel tired after teaching and I think it is not conducive and effective for supervision"* (P2).

Likewise, P7 described that he has many classes to teach and matching his schedule with his supervisees' schedule was not easy. He stated:

> *"My problem is about the time. I have many classes to teach and some of my supervisees have classes too. It is difficult to match my schedule with them. Sometimes, when they have time, I cannot manage it because I am too busy"* (P7).

With a different case, P8 shared her story as the second supervisor. Some of her students came to her right before the deadline for seminar or exam registration/submission. This situation required her to do supervision, but the time was limited. She shared:

> *"Because I am mostly the second supervisor and many students to supervise, I need to wait for my supervisees to finish supervision with their first supervisors. When they come to me, it's nearly the date for seminar and/or exam registration/submission. I didn't have much time to conduct proper supervision"* (P8)

The data transcription above clearly showed that temporal constraint, influenced by disproportionate workload and scheduling conflict, can be a serious issue to effectively supervise undergraduate EFL students' thesis. Although not entirely identical, the finding of this study exhibits notable similarities with the finding reported in previous studies (Nurkamto et al, 2022; Fhonna, 2020; Ortiz-Catalan, 2019; Zaheer & Munir, 2020). In their studies, they revealed that supervisors were constrained by time limitations, preventing them from providing adequate guidance due to the overwhelming workload and number of supervisees. Ortiz-Catalan, et al (2019) further argue that insufficient time of supervision may affect the quality of students' thesis.

Besides time constraints, another sub-theme of internal challenge is lack of supervisors' area of expertise. In relation to this, two participants acknowledge that they felt difficult to supervise EFL students' thesis because some research topics of their supervisees are not congruent with their area of expertise and research interests. To illustrate, P3 shared his concern in his interview that he supervises some students whose research topics are not his area of expertise. This, at some point, causes him confusion. He mentioned:

> *"I quite often feel confused to supervise my students. The topics do not suit my interest and expertise. It's an obstacle because my understanding is limited. So, I just provide general guidance on writing thesis"* (P3)

Similarly, P6 said that it was not easy for him to give effective supervision to his students whose topics are far from his area of expertise. He noted:

> "*...given supervisees in not my expertise..I feel challenged to provide guidance for them"* (P6).

The extracts of interviews above indicated that supervising students whose research topics are outside of the supervisors' area of expertise can be highly challenging. A study by Ghadirian at al., (2014) reported that One obvious issue in supervision was guiding students whose research topics did not align with the supervisors' fields of expertise. Thus, ensuring alignment between the supervisor's expertise and student's research focus is of critical importance, as experience itself is understood to encompass four fundamental components, including knowledge, skill, experience, and the ability to solve problems in thesis projects (Yousefi, et al., 2015). It is, then, believed that supervision will be more effective if supervisors mentor the students in accordance with their area of expertise.

3.1.2. External Challenge

As shown in table 2, The second theme of lecturers' challenges in supervising EFL students' undergraduate thesis is external challenge. This challenge is mainly from the students' factors. One of the most frequently discussed issues by faculty members is students' disengagement. What is meant by students' disengagement is the disappearance of students from supervision for an extended period without any communication and/or notification. Of eight participants, seven of them acknowledged that they experienced students' loss in supervision. P4 told the researchers in the interview that most of his supervisees skipped the supervision and came back before the semester ended. This made him struggle to properly supervise his students. He stated:

> *"I am quite struggling with some of my supervisees. They often disappear without news even though they promised to have supervision at least once every two weeks… Well, most of them rarely met me. Just right before the semester ended, they suddenly came to me"* (P4).

With a similar vein, P1 explained the type of his supervisees, including the one who did not ask him for supervision and cannot be contacted. He commented:

> *"There are two types of my supervisees, active and passive. Passive supervisees are indifferent and always not ready for supervision. For a long time, they were absent for supervision. They never contacted me and could not be contacted"* (P1)

Another striking experience shared by P7 in her interview. She supervised some students in their 14th semester who were at risk of dropping out and they could not really be contacted. She specifically said:

> *"...I lost them who were at risk of academic dismissal. I called them but they did not pick up my call. I looked for them and asked their friends, but I barely got information. When they met me, they made some excuses, such as working, had some sickness. Got into an accident. That's how it was"* (P7).

The transcriptions above illustrate that prolonged student absences from supervision constitute a major concern for supervisors. Essentially, Supervision aims to develop students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to both the content of the thesis and the processes and demands of conducting research (Chang & Strauss, 2010; de Kleijn et al., 2012; Masek & Alias, 2020). Obviously, without supervision, the process of completing a thesis is significantly hampered. Moreover, the act of withdrawing from supervision is closely related to students' discipline and determination. Some previous studies have consistently reported that students' discipline is essential, and its absence may result in delays in thesis completion (Ngozi & Kayode, 2013)

The second subtheme of external challenge is lack of students' writing skills. Regarding this, seven out of eight participants observed that their supervisees struggled with writing skills, which also posed a challenge for the supervisors themselves. P8. For instance, P8 described that most of her supervisees lack proficiency in nearly all areas of writing. She mentioned:

> *"I think most students' writing skills are poor. They do not only lack in the aspect of thesis organization, but also lack in content, grammar, vocabulary, research method, and way to review the literature. They surely need help from supervisors"* (P8).

Likewise, P5 revealed that she encountered difficulties in supervising students who had weak English writing skills. She conveyed:

> *"Frankly, it is not easy to supervise students with poor English writing skills. Their problems are mostly about the way to write. One obvious issue is coherence. Sometimes, there is a lack of coherence between lines and paragraphs, and their ideas jump abruptly"* (P5).

Based on the quotations above, it can be concluded that students' poor writing skills can pose significant challenges for their supervisors. Students' proficiency in writing is a crucial component of successful thesis writing. This study result corroborates the findings of previous studies (Abrar, 2023; Fhonna, 2020; Nurkamto et al., 2022; Peng, 2018; Yunus et al., 2023).which claimed that students' lack of writing skills is an obstacle that hinders students' writing progress and effective supervision.

Another prevalent issue raised by the participants as the challenge in supervising undergraduate EFL students' thesis writing is students' external challenge. Literally, students' external problems refer to conditions that are not directly associated with their writing thesis abilities, but are related to other factors such as finance, family, health, and also housing. Seven participants confessed that students' external problems led to difficulties in supervision. One participant, P3, told the researchers that some of his supervisees did not attend supervision sessions frequently due to housing issues. He noted:

"Some of my supervisees reside in rural areas, making it challenging for us to meet both in person and online. To attend supervision sessions, they have to go back and forth to Jambi. That makes it difficult" (P3).

With a different issue, P1 highlighted that his supervisees struggled with financial issues which directly affected the supervision and students' thesis progress. She specifically shared:

"I supervise some students who are financially struggling. I feel pity for them. They have to work to earn some money for themselves and their family. They become, you know, like breadwinners. This certainly slowed down their thesis progress and a challenge for me to help them graduate on time" (P1).

Drawing from the statements of the above-mentioned participants, it is evident that supervisors struggle in supervising students who face external problems, such as financial, family, and housing issues. These problems slowed down the students' thesis progress and even put them at risk of dropping out. A number of prior studies focusing on students have reported similar findings, suggesting that financial difficulties and other external challenges significantly impact the process of completing a thesis (See Arthur & Fenyi, 2023; Khozaei, et al., 2015).

The next issue of external challenge is lack of students' progress. This pertains to the delayed progress of students in completing their thesis writing. Four participants mentioned that the slow progress of students gave them a headache. One participant, P5, explained about her struggle in supervising the students. She uttered:

"I supervise a student, and her proposal draft is short. She came to me eight times for supervision, and I asked her to make revisions. But there were not many changes in her draft. It gave me a headache" (P5).

With a rather similar case, P7 described that her guidance proved ineffective, and students made no progress in writing their thesis. She said:

"For some students, the challenge is when they were given suggestions, but they didn't understand what was being suggested…I told them to do A, but their direction went to A-. No progress. It didn't work. It didn't meet my expectation" (P7)

The above excerpts imply that supervising students with slow progress is not easy and requires extra patience. Therefore, the role of the supervisor in providing a supportive, constructive, and engaged supervision process is pivotal (van Rensburg, et al., 2016) to boost the students' progress.

The last theme of external challenge is students' lack of motivation. Undergraduate thesis supervisors often face challenges related to students' motivation during the thesis writing process. Of eight participants, three of them mentioned that students' low motivation disrupts the supervision. This has been highlighted by P6. He uttered:

"One obvious challenge I face is lack of students' motivation. They lack motivation to quickly complete their thesis writing" (P6).

With a more detailed explanation, P5 illustrates that some of her supervisees felt discouraged and unmotivated after reading her comments and realizing they needed to revise their draft. She noted:

"As a supervisor, I gave some comments to my supervisees' drafts. I wrote so many comments, and they had to revise them. The dilemma was the students felt down because of major revision. They did not come to supervision for a long time"

Based on the excerpts above, it is evident that students' lack motivation in supervision and writing their theses causes a challenge for supervisors. Over time, the lack of motivation had an adverse impact on the progress and completion of their theses. The finding of this study confirms the results of other previous studies (Mbato & Cendra, 2019; Nurkamto et al., 2022). The findings indicated that insufficient student motivation had a substantial impact on the successful completion of theses. Motivation, including for students working on their theses, is a crucial factor in determining their success, as it helps keep them on track (Ellis, 1994; Mali, 2015).

3.2. Lecturers' Strategies in Supervising EFL Students' Undergraduate Theses

Based on the data analysis, researchers identified three major themes of strategies employed by supervisors to overcome their challenges in supervisions, such as self-management strategy (managing supervision schedule and studying a new field of study), Giving assistance strategy (giving direction, correcting students' work, and giving motivation and advice), and communication and technological support strategy (employing technology and maintaining communication with students). An overview of the identified themes and corresponding sub-themes is presented in the table below.

Table 3. Summary of Lecturer's Strategies in Supervision

Lecturer's Strategies in Supervising EFL Undergraduate Students' Thesis	**Theme(s)**	**Sub-theme(s)**
	Self-management Strategy	Managing supervision schedule
		Studying a new field of study
	Giving Assistance Strategy	Giving direction
		Giving motivation
		Giving written corrective feedback
	Communication and Technological Support Strategy	Maintaining communication with students
		Employing technology

3.2.1. Self-management Strategy

The first strategy employed by supervisors in thesis supervision is self-management strategy. This refers to the strategy initiated and implemented by the supervisors themselves. Two sub-themes were identified from the data. First, as shown in Table 3, the supervisors organize their supervision schedule. Four participants shared that this strategy was moderately effective to overcome temporal limitations and students: lack of motivation. One participant, P1, stated in his interview that he managed his supervision schedule by adjusting it to accommodate the supervisees' availability. He particularly expressed:

"For offline supervision, I always manage my schedule by adjusting to my schedule and my supervisees' availability and I find it effective. Whenever they contact me for supervision, I check my schedule and offer a time when I'm available. If there isn't any conflicting schedule with my supervisees, we hold a supervision session" (P1).

With a slightly different method, P8 asserted that she created a list of available times for supervision. She added that this method is effective for managing time to avoid scheduling conflicts and boost students' motivation. She mentioned:

"I manage my supervising time by organizing a weekly schedule for my supervisees. At first, I looked at my entire schedule. Then, I decided to set aside several days a week for thesis supervision, and my students can choose which day they prefer for the session. This is effective to prevent conflicting schedules and to motivate my supervisees to complete their thesis" (P8).

The statements from some participants above clearly indicate that managing the supervision schedule is needed to ensure the supervision process runs smoothly and at the same time to facilitate the supervisees complete their thesis on time. This finding, at some point, confirms the study finding of Fhonna (2020). Her study revealed that most supervisors agreed one effective strategy is to allocate dedicated time to discuss and support their supervisees in writing their theses.

The next sub-theme of self-management strategy is studying a new field of knowledge. This represents a novel finding in the context of this study. Two participants who struggled with supervising students whose research topics are outside their expertise employed this strategy to both support their supervisees and expand their own knowledge. As stated by P3 in his interview:

"My strategy for my limited understanding about my supervisees' research topic is by reading and trying to understand the topic through the related literature. It helps me broaden my knowledge and helps my supervisees too" (P3).

In a similar thread, P6 chose to enhance his understanding of a particular topic through reading relevant literature. In his interview, he commented:

"I downloaded and read several articles related to my supervisees' proposal so I could supervise them well. It also helped me understand the new field and research topic" (P6).

The excerpts suggest that exploring a new field of knowledge is beneficial both for supervising their supervisees and for deepening their own understanding. Besides, over a long period of time, consistent learning can make a person an expert in the field. As it is highlighted by Bazrafkan et al., (2019) that a supervisor can be an expert in a certain field through self-directed learning. They also argue that expertise can be obtained through continuous interaction, learning and experience.

3.2.2. Giving Assistance Strategy

The second theme of lecturers' strategy in supervision identified from the data is giving assistance. Assisting generally means the supervisees' need in the process of conducting their research and writing their theses. This theme comprises three sub-themes. The first prevalent sub-theme is giving directions to supervisees. In this sense, the supervisors provide directions to guide their supervisees through various ways, such as reading thesis guidelines, reading articles, watching videos, seeking peer-feedback, and proofreading the drafts. Six participants claimed that this strategy is useful and effective to overcome some challenges, including lack of students' writing ability, students' low progress and loss of students/supervisees. For example, P7 shared her story that she instructed her supervisees to proofread their drafts by using grammar applications. She said:

"You know, during supervision. I directed my supervisees to check their draft. For example, if they have problems with grammar, I ask them to check it with grammar applications, such as Grammarly. I found it effective" (P7).

Moreover, P5 directed her supervisees to find their knowledgeable peers to discuss their work with and get feedback from. She specifically uttered:

"To overcome the lack of students' writing skill challenge, I ask my supervisees to find knowledgeable and trusted friends from the same field of study to get their feedback" (P5).

The data transcription from the participants showed that giving direction and guidance is needed for students who work on their theses. This strategy encourages supervisees to work independently and is considered one of the supervisor's key roles in supporting the successful completion of students' theses and/or dissertations. (Mhunpiew, 2013).

The second sub-theme of giving assistance strategy is giving motivation. According to the research participants, six out of eight, this strategy helps them address students who lack motivation in conducting research or writing their theses. As stated by P4 in his interview:

"I sometimes do not know what my students' problems are. But, every time we meet, I motivate and encourage them. They change to be more positive and responsive".

Similarly, P8 mentioned that she kept motivating her supervisees during supervision sessions. She stressed the importance of students' behavior and the need to maintain their motivation. She commented:

"...Sometimes I motivate my supervisees for their research project. I told them to manage their time, maintain their motivation, and arrange their schedule properly. I kept telling them that research is a collaborative project between supervisor and supervisee. This helps us maintain motivation and collaboration to progress well" (P8).

The excerpts from participants highlighted the importance of giving motivation to supervisees. With sufficient motivation, supervisees are more likely to view research projects positively. The same finding has been reported from some previous research (Casado-Lumbreras & Colomo-Palacios, 2014; Fhonna, 2020). They separately revealed that encouraging and motivating students increases students' enthusiasm for writing and helps them overcome doubts and disbelief in the thesis writing process.

The last sub-theme of giving assistance is giving written corrective feedback (WCF). It is generally defined as a written response towards students' errors, particularly linguistic errors, in their writing projects, aiming to seek to either correct the inaccurate usage or provide information about the quantity of errors to be corrected (Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994). In other words, WCF is seen as error correction by the teacher to guide the students' writing process. Six participants admitted that this strategy helps students' writing. P5 exclusively shared her ways to help her supervisees. She mentioned:

"If there was a mistake that needed to be corrected, I gave some words to consider for the replacement of the wrong word. When the supervision was in asynchronous mode, I used the trackhanges feature to correct and comment on my supervisees' drafts. After that, I uploaded the files to the online supervision platform" (P5).

With a similar perspective, P8 checked and corrected her supervisees in detail when her role was as the second supervisor. She said:

"If I am a second supervisor, I just give feedback by correcting the supervisees' grammar, spelling, and also diction. I used the Microsoft Words application to review the drafts" (P8).

From the above excerpts, it can be concluded that WCF is crucial in helping students' writing, including writing a thesis, to be more directed. Several studies highlighted the importance of giving WCF to supervisees (Al-Bakri, 2016; Ellis, 2010; Mughal & Qian, 2023). Nevertheless, supervisors are

advised to offer written corrective feedback (WCF) that is both positive and constructive. Negative feedback is potentially more harmful than positive feedback (See Nurie, 2018).

3.2.3. Communication and Technological Support Strategy

The last theme emerged from the participants' data is communication and technological support strategy. This strategy has two main focuses. First, it emphasizes the importance of effective communication between supervisors and supervisees within the thesis supervision relationship. Second, it highlights the crucial role of technology in facilitating the supervision process.

In line with its focus, two sub-themes were identified in this strategy. The first one is maintaining communication with supervisees. All participants employed this strategy to deal with some challenges in supervision, including students' disengagement and students' external problems. As illustrated by P1 in his interview, He made every effort to reach out to his supervisees who rarely attended supervision sessions. He noted:

> *"For my supervisees who rarely came to meet me for supervision, I contacted them. When I saved their contact number, I called them. On the contrary, I asked their friends when I could not reach her. To me communication is important"* (P1)

With a different case, P2 explained that maintaining contact with her supervisees brought positive effects in supervision. Her students were more open and trusted her to discuss personal problems they faced. She said:

> *"I know that some of my supervisees struggled from external problems, such as financial and family problems. I continuously maintain communication with them and provide motivation. They share their problems and we try to find solutions. This helps maintain a good supervisory relationship."* (P2).

Based on the data transcription mentioned by the participants, maintaining communication with supervisees plays a pivotal role in supervision. The effective communication between supervisors and supervisees bridges a good supervisory relationship (Mahlangu, 2021). On the contrary, a poor supervisory relationship can be a stumbling block in supervision because the supervisory relationship is the most decisive factor for better or worse of research (Sambrook et al., 2008; Tahir et al., 2012).

The last sub-theme of this strategy is employing technology. Regarding this, Participants reported in their interviews that they utilized technological tools to facilitate smooth and effective supervision. Some of them, six participants, claimed that the use of technology helps them overcome several supervision challenges, including time constraints and supporting supervisees facing external difficulties. As explained by P6, technology helps him to supervise students synchronously or asynchronously. He expressed:

> *"I have a quite full schedule teaching English. I teach English on some university campuses. Therefore, I barely find an appropriate time for offline supervision. That's why, using an online supervision platform enables me to conduct supervision remotely, accommodating my time constraints"* (P6).

With a similar vein, P4 also takes the advantage of technology to supervise his supervisees remotely because of the considerable distance between the university and students' village. He uttered,

> *"I prefer to supervise my students offline. However, if they request online supervision because they are in their village. I don't have any problem. I find out online applications, such as Zoom or GMeet really help"* (P4).

The above transcriptions clearly indicate that Technology serves as an alternative solution for effective supervision, particularly when in-person meetings between supervisors and supervisees are not feasible. Some studies highlighted that technology in supervision is considerable helpful (Jaldemark & Lindberg, 2010; Maor & Currie, 2017). However, it is important to consider some drawbacks in online supervision, such as poor internet connection.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the challenges faced by lecturers in supervising their EFL students' undergraduate theses and their strategies to alleviate the challenges. Based on the data analysis, lecturers experienced expected and unexpected challenges in supervising the students. Some of the challenges include internal challenge (temporal limitations and lack of supervisors' area of expertise), and external challenge (students' disengagement, lack of students' writing skills, students' external problems, lack of students' progress and lack of students' motivation). The results of the study also revealed that participants employed some strategies to overcome their challenges in supervising EFL students' undergraduate theses, including self-management strategy (managing supervision schedule and studying a new field of study), giving assistance strategy (giving direction, giving motivation, and giving written corrective feedback), and communication and technological support strategy (maintaining communication with students, and employing technology).

The findings of the study provide several practical implications for both the university and supervisors in enhancing the undergraduate thesis supervision process for EFL students. The University should recognize the diverse challenges supervisors face when guiding EFL students through their theses. To address these challenges, university should develop training programs that equip supervisors with strategies for time management, enhancing expertise, and addressing students' academic writing difficulties and motivational issues. Additionally, university could allocate specialized supervisors based on students' research topics to ensure they receive the necessary guidance from experts. Offering counseling and support services to address external factors, such as personal issues or distractions, can help maintain academic focus. Furthermore, promoting the use of technology, such as online platforms for document sharing, video meetings, and progress tracking, can improve communication between students and supervisors, making the process more efficient and flexible.

As for the supervisors, it is important to foster student motivation and engagement through regular feedback and clear expectations. Supervisors should adopt motivational strategies, such as positive reinforcement and setting achievable milestones, to keep students motivated throughout the thesis process. To improve students' academic writing skills, supervisors should encourage the use of specialized writing courses or workshops that focus on research writing and thesis development. Lecturers should also consider taking a more collaborative approach to supervision, where students have access to multiple supervisors or participate in peer review processes. This not only helps alleviate the supervisory load but also improves the quality of students' research by incorporating diverse feedback and perspectives.

Despite the comprehensive exploration of the topic, this study has some limitations. First, this study exclusively focused on lecturers' points of views, and students were excluded. Further studies can explore both lecturer (supervisors) and students' (supervisees) views to obtain a comprehensive and explorative description on the issue. Second, the sample of this study was relatively small, exactly eight participants. Future research may involve larger samples and alternative methodologies, which could enable researchers to generalize the findings of the study.

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