

**BOUND TO HAPPEN: THE INSIGHTS OF FRESH GRADUATES DURING  
UNDERGRADUATE THESIS WRITING PROCESS**

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**Abstract**

*This study was intended to describe the viewpoint of new graduates majoring in English Education while writing their undergraduate thesis. By employing a quantitative survey research design, this study used a Google form questionnaire. The seek objectives were gathered from five new graduates of the English Education Major of Tadris Bahasa Inggris study program in one Islamic university in Kabupaten Mempawah. The data were presented in frequencies and percentages and summarized in six categories representing the subjects' viewpoints. They are process-related, personal-related, language skills-related, family-related, supervisor-related, and classmates/friends-related, with the first three categories have appeared as the dominant category. Moreover, all subjects had tremendous support both from the family side and also from classmates' side. In addition, the results indicated that they had no difficulty during the consultation process with the supervisors; they could focus better in a quiet ambiance or atmosphere to write their undergraduate thesis. To conclude, all categories share a fair role in helping or obstacle the participants in writing the thesis. These results become great additional information for involved parties to reflect on and improvise ways to prepare following students to conduct research and write an undergraduate thesis of better quality.*

**Keywords:** *undergraduate thesis, academic writing, educational research, Islamic higher education*

**A. Introduction**

They say there will be some exciting moments when we become a college student, and many expectations in our minds run along while we step forward to that next journey. Learning new knowledge, strengthening our ways of thinking, and also increasing our comprehension of the field we have taken into are general ideas of sitting in college classes. Despite its long clinical process, like it or not, it is bound to happen for college students in their final year to become a pre-researcher and then must report it in written form, namely undergraduate thesis or *Skripsi*, to be claimed that they have passed the journey and get the degree (Pravita and Kuswando 2022, 2). By writing *Skripsi*, students put their theoretical knowledge into practice; it gives them a more efficient way to solve the phenomenon in their major field while searching for sources, reading them, comprehending them, and critically transferring those processes into words of the topic they are working on (Samad and Adnan 2018, 54). However, in

the case of non-English speakers, Indonesian college students have additional concerns, such as the linguistics factor and access to sources (Sukandi 2019, 57). Therefore, the issue of the English department students' thesis involves some crucial aspects that scholars believe affect their know-how of doing research and reporting it in a written *Skripsi*.

Regarding the thesis mentioned above, the foremost aspect involved is language proficiency, which often goes alongside the concept of language competence (North 1997, 93). Proficiency refers to an individual's knowledge of four skills that cover organizational and sociocultural aspects of a second language (Xiao 2015, 58-59). This concept is essential since it is a critical tool for students to have good second language mastery in the global era ("Pentingnya Skill Bahasa Arab Dan Inggris Bagi Mahasiswa Pada Era Globalisasi 17" 2022). Furthermore, many studies have reported that students with higher L2 proficiency tend to perform the language better than those with a low proficiency level (Xie 2018, 2). Therefore, those with low proficiency in L2 often feel fear and are unmotivated in their English classes. This statement supports a report that says, "As a consequence, students' anxiety is the result of the difficulties they encounter while learning a foreign language." (Rodríguez-Sabiote et al., 2017, 263).

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) has also gotten a spotlight as one of many issues in English learning (EL). Horwitz (2001) in Amini & Yaqubi asserted that FLA alluded to the state of fear and distress that something will not work out or the emotion of low self-esteem when learning a language (Amini and Yaqubi 2020, 11). Aligning with the prior claim, Woodrow (2006) in Jin, De Bot, and Keijzer (2015, 42), affirmed that FLA mostly tend to interfere students' language learning process. FLA widely falls into four English skills, which are speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Some factors are in charge of this anxiety, e.g., low self-esteem, especially for foreign language students in ASEAN, including Indonesia. Associated with the topic of discussion in this paper, the vulnerability of the ability and quality of students in research is also an additional issue that needs attention. This triggers a phenomenon known as anxiety in research (Kracker 2002, 282).

Research anxiety refers to the uncertainty feeling of students when working on their research papers (Kracker 2002, 282-283). "Student anxiety arises from the assumption that students feel unable and worried that they will fail in writing a thesis which causes low self-assessment. A student who has high anxiety, the learning process is hampered, not enthusiastic and there is no desire to learn (Widagdo, Islamarida, and Dewi 2022, 37). Papanastasiou (2014, 247) has unveiled that the students who have minor understanding of research methods were more likely to have higher anxiety in research. Moreover, Papanastasiou and Zembylas (2008, 161) added that the attitude toward research scale indicates that the students have negative attitude toward research.

Reminiscent of the initial point on the topic of this paper is that the aspects involved are important to support students' abilities to conduct research and write it in the form of a thesis. The first aspect that has been mentioned is the phenomenon of low student language proficiency, which this problem spreads to learning difficulties and ultimately causes anxiety in the process of mastering and using language both in writing and orally. The previous paragraph also mentioned the English skills that received great attention in students' research anxiety are Reading and Writing. Academic writing attempts to be accurate and formal compared to any other writing type, which aims to report on a piece of research, answer questions, and discuss a subject of common interest (Bailey 2011, 3-4). Another skill is reading, which Harmer (2007, 99) claims reading affects students in a good way for it can increase their vocabulary knowledge, spelling, and also writing. Thus, in the research process, reading plays a role in understanding literature to assist thinking, argumentation, and critical processes, as well as writing, where this language ability is a real form of understanding from the reading process. These signs of anxiety were found in the context of this study.

As one of the educators of the group of subjects, it has been found over time that most of them have slightly strong anxiety toward their skills in English that this issue affects their performance in research subjects' series (it is about three semesters) including their academic writing performance. Moreover, as the first batch of English Education majors in the research site, they have neither literature nor previous works in the university library available that can give them

some impressions or clues of how to conduct research and also how to write it in the form of *skripsi*. Despite these shortcomings, they are able to graduate in October 2022. For this reason, the writer is interested in identifying, knowing, and explaining their experiences during working on *skripsi*.

Some studies from various settings on this topic have been increasing in the past few years, focusing on the EFL undergraduate thesis. The published studies are such as Irwandi & Arisanti (2019); Savitri, Azisah, & An Nur (2021); Fitria (2022); Azmat & Ahmad (2022); Pravita & Kuswando (2022); Rizwan & Naas (2022). These studies have highlighted that most students face various difficulties during thesis writing, such as low self-esteem, fear of thesis defense, low academic skills in terms of writing a scientific paper and research methodology, difficulty in choosing a research topic, and unsupportive behavior of the supervisors (Irwandi and Arisanti 2019) (Safitri, Azisah, and Annur 2021) (Fitria 2022) (Azmat and Ahmad 2022) (Pravita and Kuswando 2022) (Rizwan and Naas 2022) Furthermore, it has also been reported, "Based on the research result, it is found that the students encounter challenge related to this issue and the students mostly did not know what they are going to do first and how to do it. This made the delay of the students' progress in their thesis writing process." (Safitri, Azisah, and Annur 2021, 45) In line with this, Fitria (2022, 301) has reported that Islamic higher education students are struggling in correctly writing sentences and paragraph.

From those prior published studies mentioned above, this study has identified some gaps; they are 1. Outdated participants were taken from the 2014-2020 academic year (Safitri, Azisah, and Annur 2021); 2. Limited amount documented studies in the context of West Kalimantan (Azmat and Ahmad 2022); 3. Some previous studies focused on thesis proposals, not a finished thesis. Hence, this study focuses on new undergraduate Islamic EFL students in the Mempawah district, West Kalimantan province. Overall, to fill in the gaps, this study aims to answer these questions as follows:

1. What are the insights of participants towards their *skripsi* writing?
2. Which category of those insights belongs to?
3. What are the respondents' suggestions for the next batches?

This study hopefully can contribute to the field in general and also specifically as a reflection to the lecturers. Furthermore, this study can also be taken as a reference to the decision-makers of the research site to help students be more prepared to become novice researchers.

## **B. Method**

### ***Design***

In order to address the aims of this study, a quantitative descriptive inquiry assisted the writer in capturing the participants' impressions during the process of writing their undergraduate thesis. As Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012, 7) have defined that quantitative research aims to describe or explain numerical data about a phenomenon of interest; thus, this concept is compatible to the study goal. Furthermore, this study also employed a survey design since this design allowed the writer to grasp and explain specific experiences (whether it is present or past) of the groups of subjects (Creswell 2012, 376). In this case, the new graduates of English Education students' experiences during conducting research and writing it in their *skripsi*.

### ***Subject or Participant***

As it has been mentioned above, this study was conducted in one of the private Islamic Universities in Mempawah, West Kalimantan. Five new graduate students majoring in English Education took part in this study. The participants were the first batch of English Education majors in the university. Therefore, they were chosen purposively for the writer believes they are knowledgeable of the information being investigated (Cohen, Lawrence, and Morrison 2018, 218)

### ***Instrument***

Data were collected using a questionnaire in *Google form*. The questionnaire consisted of 17 closed-ended items and 11 open-ended items. The combination between closed-ended items and open-ended items are beneficial to gain elaborated answer and might provide new insights of the topics being discussed. In the same way, this kind of item has been recommended that they bring forth the room for any detailed information (Cohen, Lawrence, and Morrison 2018, 276). In terms of the close-ended items, it was designed in Yes/No questions with a "neutral" option in between. These items were intended

to identify the participants' difficulties, support, and the preferred environment when they worked on their thesis writing. On the other hand, 10 out of 11 open-ended questions of the questionnaire were provided to further asked participants' detailed explanations of their previous answers to the prior closed-ended question. In addition, one open-ended question was given to ask the participants to list some suggestions or tips for their juniors to have better preparations in research or *skripsi* writing. Additionally, the items of the questionnaire were adapted from the works of (Yeh 2010), (Cetinkaya and Yilmaz 2017), and (Fitria 2022). Therefore, the items of the questionnaire were categorized into six categories, as listed in the table below.

**Table 1. Categories of Students' Challenges during their writing process**

No	Category	Item number
1.	Process-related	1,2,3,16,17
2.	Personal-related	6,9,12, 13,14
3.	Family-related	7
4.	Language skills-related	4,5,10,11
5.	Supervisor-related	15
6.	Classmate or friends-related	8
7.	Suggestions for the next batches	18

#### ***Data Collecting Technique***

Data collection in this study was done by the following steps: 1) Contacted and informed the participants about the topic being discussed; 2) ask for their consent; and 3) Sent the web-based questionnaire through a group chat via *Whatsapp*. Four out of five participants were able to complete the questionnaire within a few hours after the questionnaire was sent to them, while

one participant completed the questionnaire a few days later due to some circumstances.

***Data Analysis Technique***

The data gathered was analyzed numerically with closed-ended percentages prior to presenting to summarize the challenges and experiences of the participants. It is in line that the percentage or frequency of nominal data can be calculated. Furthermore, both closed-ended and open-ended items data were narratively described, interpreted, and concluded link to the knowledge of the field and previous studies.

**C. Result And Discussion**

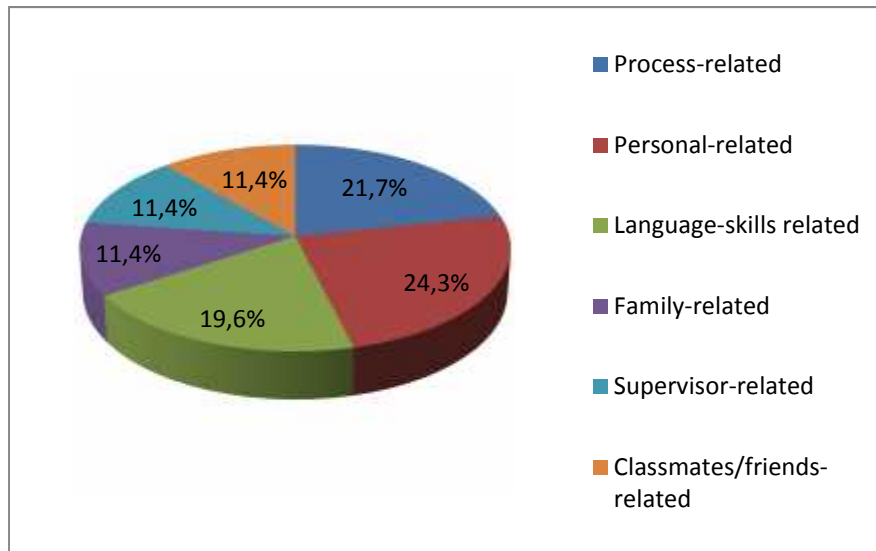
***Results or Findings***

The seventeen close-ended item questionnaires were counted and presented in simple statistics, which consists of the item's frequency and percentages. Table 1 below is the visualization of the data of each close-ended item.

**Table 1. The Questionnaire's Frequency and Percentage of Each Closed-ended Item**

No	Category	Item Number	Frequency (%)					
			Iya	%	Neutral	%	Tidak	%
1.	Process-Related (21.17%)	1	1	20%	4	80%	0	0%
		2	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%
		3	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%
		16	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%
		17	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%
2.	Personal-Related (24.3%)	6	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%
		9	5	100%	0	0%	0	0%
		12	2	40%	2	40%	1	20%
		13	2	40%	1	20%	2	40%
		14	2	40%	1	20%	2	40%
3.	Language-skills Related (19.6%)	4	3	60%	1	20%	1	20%
		5	4	80%	1	20%	0	0%
		10	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%
		11	1	20%	4	80%	0	0%
4.	Family-related	7	5	100%	0	0%	0	0%
5.	Supervisor-related	15	0	0%	0	0%	5	100%
6.	Classmates-related	8	5	100%	0	0%	0	0%

Furthermore, the writer also lays out figure 1 below to better display the recapitulation data in a categories manner.



**Figure 1 The Category Percentage of Students' Experience during Writing Their Undergraduate Thesis**

What stands out the most in table 1 above is four items that got a perfect score (100%); it means that all of the subjects chose the options which best represented them. The items are: item 7 “*Saya mendapat dukungan moril yang baik dari pihak keluarga (orangtua, saudara, etc)*”; item 8 “*Saya mendapat dukungan yang baik dari teman sejawat*”; item 9 “*Saya lebih dapat fokus menulis skripsi saya disituasi yang jauh dari kebisingan*”; and item 15 “*Saya mengalami kesulitan berkomunikasi dengan dosen pembimbing*”. In detail, for item 15, the scoring was reversed in which option “*Tidak*” has the highest score. Turning to the data presented in the category, figure 1 above reveals that the personal-related category gains the highest percentage while it has exact total items compared to the process-related category. Meanwhile, the language-skills-related category has come into as third highest percentage, slightly lower compared to the personal-related and process-related categories. Further elaboration of these results will be extended in the discussion section below.



### *Discussion*

This part is presented based on the three questions of this study.

*Question 1. What are the insights of the participants toward their experience during Skripsi writing?*

The participants had a stronger burden and confusion since they were the first batch of English majors on the campus; thus, the results indicate that some of them were struggling to find the references or sources relevant to their research topic. It is because of limited available references in the campus library. It can be seen from *Item 2 Saya kesulitan mendapatkan referensi terkait penelitian*, with 3 of them answering absolutely yes, and the rest 2 of them answered as neutral, which means that there were some references they could find, and there are some they could not. This result then becomes additional knowledge of the field that prior studies mostly have reported similar results. For instance, studies such as Irwandi and Arisanti (2019, 37), Fitria (2022, 295) and Rizwan and Naas (2022, 244) found that students had admitted that they had a hard time finding apposite references. Furthermore, in regards to *Item 2*, the open-ended follow-up question has unveiled that their hardship comes from their low information literacy skills while locating references on internet databases. References itself is essential since it guides the researcher in thesis writing completion. This additional fact is important because information literacy is related to a higher level of students' academic motivation (Ross, Perkins, and Bodey 2016, 1).

Another insight of the participants is that the result of *Item 1* indicates that most of the respondents also had a hard time choosing their research topic. In accordance with this finding, Azmat and Ahmad (2022, 297) have proclaimed that 20 out of 37 students were found to be taking a long time to choose their research topic. In qualitative results, the researchers noted, "Students take a very long time to choose their topics as they are either waiting for someone to help them choose a topic or asking their supervisors to assign a research topic to them." Similarly, taken from 29 nine universities and higher institutions in the national context, it is found that 75% or 31 out of 40 students faced the compatible challenge; that is, most of them were strenuous in choosing their research title (Fitria 2022, 305). Choosing a topic or choosing a research project is a fundamental stage in doing

research (Creswell, J.W; Creswell, 2018). As the starting point, choosing a topic comprises three major sources: theory, experience, and related works of literature (Donald, A; Jacobs.L.C; Sorensen, C; Razavieh 2010, 44-47). Therefore, both lecturer and students respectively need to inform and restudied this stage.

It is also found that 2 out of 5 respondents have admitted to having an obstacle in paraphrasing (Item 3) the reading English text for their thesis writing, while the rest three respondents indicate not having many struggles on this part. It means that there are some references that they could confidently understand, and there were some that they could not say the same. This finding was not found in (Safitri, Azisah, and Annur 2021) study which they do not include this essential part. This phenomenon also incorporates the stage of literature review in their research process that most beginners of educational researchers, especially graduate students find much more challenging (Chen, Wang, and Lee 2016, 1). In addition, it is also compatible with the claim, "One of the daunting challenges L2 students face in their college academic writing is successfully incorporating source information into their own writing." (Regala-Flores and Lopez 2019, 286). Hence, this is where reading and writing skills play a significant role in telling and transforming knowledge in the forms of paraphrasing and summarizing.

Turning to citation, quotation, and plagiarism, both in Item 4 and 5, respectively, the results suggest that the respondents mostly have encountered these elements. Overuse or unfamiliarity with those elements can cause plagiarism (Bailey, 2011, 50). This result is consistent with data obtained by Suyadi, Husnaini, and Elvina (2020, 842); they have affirmed that more than half of undergraduate students have endured paraphrase, citations, and quotations in writing their papers. In a similar case, Pontianak, Oktafiandi, Sofian, and Rezeki (2021, 53) have identified that the primary problems of students are: "improper way of writing the in-text citation, improper way of writing reference list, not including page information in direct quotation, citation style inconsistency, and an indication of plagiarism." To support the claims, another researcher has noted that plagiarism is an intellectual crime and that one of the major factors which can trigger this is a lack of quoting abilities (Muluk et al., 2021, 146).

In item 6, the respondents were identified as having anxiety in which they felt pessimistic and distressed that they could not finish their *Skripsi*. For Papanastasiou (2008, 156-157) this symptom is research anxiety when they acknowledge themselves to have a low understanding of research and its methodology. This result adds to the list as other previous studies have asserted that anxiety held the second high factor for students doing the thesis; they felt doubtful of themselves and fears (Rizwan and Naas 2022, 248). In Padang city, the researchers have informed that the students have cognitive anxiety, which means that they felt worried about their writing abilities (Khairah and Fatimah 2022, 282). Having this feeling is a big hindrance to thesis completion (Pravita and Kuswando 2022, 1); it is because of their self-consciousness about their English capability or their knowledge of the research process (Lestari 2020, 23-24).

Regarding the research process, both item 16 and 17 covers data analysis and discussion respectively. The findings indicate that more than half of the respondents confirm this challenge. Similarly, in Makassar, a study has revealed that the students are difficult to analyze the data, describe the data, and interpret the data (Safitri, Azisah, and Annur 2021, 46-47). Another study supports this finding that they also identified the primary problem of the students in completing the thesis; one of them is data analysis. In this current study, taken from the follow-up open-ended item 17, one respondent has revealed that there are a bunch of data for they were confused about which comes first to analyze, what is next, and so on. Another respondent noted that she could not comprehend and summarize the data they had to write in the discussion part; they were struggling to write the sentences. This suggests a strong link to linguistics competence.

Regarding the previous paragraph, this study's result of item 10 implies that the 3 out of them have sharp difficulty in mechanic parts such as using correct punctuation and conjunction. While in linguistic competence, they were struggling in writing correct sentence structure and correct grammar. This finding aligns with the study reported by Fitria. She has declared that EFL students tend to encounter similar problems, which are having a hard time writing proper sentences or paragraphs grammatically, using correct punctuation, and using

appropriate vocabulary (Fitria 2022, 298). Conversely, Safitri, Azisah, and Annur (2021, 44) have only found one student to admit to having difficulty in English grammar.

So far, the data were conveyed from unfavorable insights; in contrast, Item 7, item 8, and item 15 highlight favorable insights of the respondents on their thesis writing experience. In terms of support systems, all respondents have declared to have positive and strong support from both family and friends sides. Their parents kept checking on their thesis progress and motivated them not to give up and finish it. In the same vein, friends also play a significant role for they kept going to reach the finish line of the *skripsi* journey by reminding and helping out each other. In line with this, a study on Mahasaraswati University have revealed 55% of respondents agreed that psychological factors, including motivation from peers, affect them in completing their thesis; though, they also added that this factor did not play a big role in decreasing their will to finish their study (Dwihandini, Marhaeni, and Suarnajaya 2013, 10). In contrast, inconsistency between result and interpretation was found in a study that remarked students got support from family and peers while the statements were written in an unfavorable manner (Fitria 2022, 305-310).

Since writing thesis require long attention and a conducive environment to work on, it is challenging to write a thesis in Bahasa Indonesia, and it is even more for students to write them in the foreign language they are majoring in (Fitria 2022, 296). In response to this, the item 9 has appeared to support this assumption that all of the respondents agreed to prefer to work in a silent, noiseless and peaceful environment to focus better in writing their thesis. However, this result has not been previously described in Yeh (2010), Rizwan & Naas (2022), and Cetinkaya & Yilmaz (2017). Hence, this finding might possibly initiate a link between the perceived environmental preferences of students in thesis writing or even in writing class in general which can become potential point to be further investigated.

Another worth important finding is about the use of Google translate or a translator in writing a thesis. Item 11 has provided on this issue that most of the respondents claim to be "neutral." Of the open-ended follow-up question, the data

indicates that they did not rely on the translator in the whole thesis writing part. Furthermore, they used the machine because of uncertainty in writing their own sentences regarding structure, grammar, and spelling. Another note was that they admit to having low self-esteem in their own writing ability. This feeling of low self-esteem can also lead to anxiety that can interfere with thesis completion. In such a way, they need to be able to manage and increase their confidence to overcome this challenge (Widagdo, Islamarida, and Dewi 2022, 39). This result is rather disappointing in that it also adds to the list of previously reported results, such as Fitria's. She has concluded that 82.5% of students tend to write sentences in Bahasa and then translate them using a translator machine (Fitria 2022, 305):

The last findings are on the scope of the technical challenge, such as laptop and computer in item 12, time management in item 13, and financial constraints in item 14. Overall, despite having other roles as a part-time working student or off-campus activities, and as a wife, the respondents seem not to assume that these issues are a significant obstacle to completing their thesis writing. This assists a report from Fitria and is contradictory to Azmat & Ahmad. Azmat and Ahmad (2022, 297-298) described that students face financial problems, poor students with no gadgets or laptops, and a shortage of time to complete the task.

*Question 2. Which categories of those insights belong to?*

To the aforementioned findings above, the insight of respondents' experience while writing the thesis incorporates into six categories. A process-related category that consists of five items (item 1, item 2, item 3, item 16, and item 17) deals with the cycles of writing a thesis: choosing a topic, finding sources, reviewing the literature, analyzing data, and writing the discussion section. The results reveal that this category comes as the second most categories that 3 out of the respondents were frustrated with. The second category is personal-related. This category has five items (item 6, item 9, item 12, item 13, and item 14) that deal with the respondents' individual challenges they encountered while working on their thesis writing. With those five items, this category has come up as the most dominant category. This distinguishes the result from Yeh, which found process-related as the dominant one (Yeh 2010, 9). The next categories only have one favor statement; they are family-related, supervisor-

related, and classmates-related. The last category is language-skills related. This category has come as the third most challenging category by the respondents with four items: item 4, item 5, item 10, and item 11. (See appendix 1).

*Question 3. What are the respondents' suggestions for the next batches?*

The writer believes this part plays a significant and meaningful part in encouraging and motivating the next final-year students of TBI STAIM. From experience, the respondents, as the first batch of TBI STAIM, have suggested the following.

1. Read many references such as articles or books related to our field starting in the early semester;
2. It is better to start choosing your interest topic and learn it more thoroughly as time goes by for you can master it fully;
3. Familiarize yourselves with *Skripsi* format, starting from the proposal, full *Skripsi*, footnotes, citation, and quotation.
4. Obey, follow, and do the tasks or activities in the Research subjects' series, especially the Writing Research Proposal subject.

Besides these benefit suggestions, the writer also strongly suggests the students of TBI STAIM not overly depend on the translator machine, pay attention during class, follow the activities well, not ever give up, manage their time and their priorities as college students, a child, and as Muslim of our great Allah Subhanahu Wata'ala. He says, in Surah Al-Insyirah verse 6:

أ      يُسْرًا

Meaning: Verily, after hardship, there is ease.

#### **D. Conclusion**

It is an unavoidable requirement of final-year students to face *skripsi*. After having semesters and years coming into the class to learn the knowledge theoretically, the time has come to put all those theories into critical and academics practice. In this manner, as this current study's purposes are to investigate the first batch's insights on their experience of writing a thesis, and the suggestions from them have also been pointed out to the next batches, this study

draws some conclusion as follow. First, more than half of the first batch had difficulties in research methodology, including selecting a topic, data analysis, and writing discussion part; they also had difficulties in their academic writing in terms of mechanics and grammar. However, they had good communication with the supervisors, and this part was not a hindrance for them. Second in the category, the dominant experience was categorized as personal-related, and anxiety became the highlighted challenge. Third, the same patterns from the first batch of suggestions were: start earlier to choose a research topic, study them by searching and reading the relevant works of literature, and take the research series subjects seriously.

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