An Analysis of Research Backgrounds of EFL Students' Research Proposal

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Article Info	Abstract
  *Correspondence Address: miftahulmaulidil@gmail.com	This research analyzed research backgrounds, namely research territory (claim centrality, problems, a review literature) and research niche (gaps) of EFL students' research proposals. The research design was qualitative research employing text analysis. The researchers used a random sampling technique to select two research proposals' backgrounds. Moreover, the contents of the research proposals' backgrounds analyzed using the CARS model (Swales & Feak, 2012). The research findings showed that the students tend to find it difficult in addressing the research territory (problems) and establishing a niche (gap). First, the students apparently find it difficult to develop their ideas as a result of the students apparently find it difficult to establish a niche (gaps). Second, the students tend to find it difficult to compose their ideas started from the general views to the specific thoughts. Last, the students lack consistency in using tenses.

INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, there are two types of proposals to be deemed. They are a thesis proposal and a grant proposal. This article focuses on a thesis proposal. A thesis proposal is one of students' requirements to complete their study in the tertiary level of education, and of course it is the key element of successful thesis (N. Attard, 2018) as it is a comprehensive and detailed plan for the research (Sudheesh, K., Duggappa, D. R., & Nethra, 2016). Based on this, the need of supervisors to give advice when designing a research proposal is crucial.

According to (Paltridge, B., & Starfield, 2007, p. 58) that it is important for students to listen the suggestion of supervisors when it comes to the very beginning of their research journey. This really concerns on students who are

undertaking research, but English is not their first language may not only need assistance and guidance, but also, they need assistance and guidance to present their research in order to be acceptable (Allison et al., 1998). Brown (1994) point out that the supervisors are responsible to "deliberately manage" students' research. Not only that but also the supervisors are responsible to encourage student to complete their research.

In line with the supervisors assistance in doing research,(Bell, M., & Albu, 1999; Nunan, 1992)highlight at least there are four constructive inputs that may be from supervisors for students who want to write a research proposal: (1) the students draw up the shortlist of topics; (2) the students select the research topic; (3) the students formulate the research questions; and (4) the students focus on the research questions. These supervisors' inputs may help students to convince four categories of audience namely academic colleagues, policy-makers, practitioners, and lay audience (Sudheesh et al., 2016). To convince these audiences, a student and a supervisor should work in partner and address all components of the research proposal. One of the research proposal components is the introduction of the research located in chapter one (Creswell, 2012)

In the introductory chapter, the researchers are assigned to find the problems, gap, and research questions. This view is in line with (Swales and Feak, 2012) who point out that the introduction purposes are: (1) to build a research territory; (2) to identify the research gap or niche; and (3) to give signal in questions in order that the researcher can signal the value of the research. This idea was used to analyze the data. Not only that but also, (Paltridge, B., & Starfield, 2007) state that the introduction is able to draw up the relationship between the specific topic and the field of work. In addition, (Sudheesh, K., Duggappa, D. R., & Nethra, 2016) highlight that introduction is "the initial pitch of an idea that sets and puts the research in context." Therefore, the introductory chapter is designed to attract readers to read the topics. In spite of the growing number of research in conjunction with a research proposal in graduate level, the researchers have overlooked to focus on the introductory chapter instead of the discussion of result section (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Emilia, 2010).

Some previous related studies have been conducted in terms of the

discussion of result section. Research conducted by (Emilia, 2010) shows that the university students find it difficult to systematically arrange their idea in the discussion section as they do not fully link to the previous chapter. In addition, research carried out by (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006) find out three important results of study. They are: (1) the ability of students to understand the discussion of result sections (DRS) is limited; (2) the ability of students and supervisors to have a common understanding is restricted; and (3) the ability of students to explain the data is limited proficiency as a default mode of explanation. These studies proved how challenging writing a research proposal. Consequently, writing a research proposal is skillfully needed. Not only that but also, it is challenging task for the novice researchers as it merely concerns on the subject of the studies and arranging a research plan (Nikolai Attard, 2018).

Related to this study, the researcher will focus to investigate on the introductory chapter. This is because the researcher experienced when supervising the students that they tend to struggle in writing a research proposal especially in addressing the research problems, gaps, and questions. However, the two elements in the introductory chapter, namely research problems and gaps are the major concerns on this research. Regarding this issue, the researcher draws the research question, as follow.

- How do the last year students write the research territory (problems)?
- How do the last year students establish niche (gaps)?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to analyze research backgrounds particularly the research territory (problems) and the research niche (gaps) of EFL students' research proposals. To find scientific results of the study, this research applied qualitative case study research employing text analysis (Travers, 2001).The data sources were gathered from a research proposal of students who will finish their study in 2020. Two research proposals were randomly selected and analyzed using thematic analysis technique. Each research proposal represented the level of students' achievement based on the GPA score of students. Despite the fact that, the GPA score did not reflect the quality of the students' research proposals. In addition, the two research

proposals were analyzed in line with the element of the introductory chapter using the idea of (Starfield & Paltridge, 2019; Swales & Feak, 2012). The elements of the introductory chapter that were concerned on this study were the research territory(problems) and research niche (gaps).

The following figure is the rhetorical pattern, known as the create a research space (CARS), proposed by (Swales & Feak, 2012).
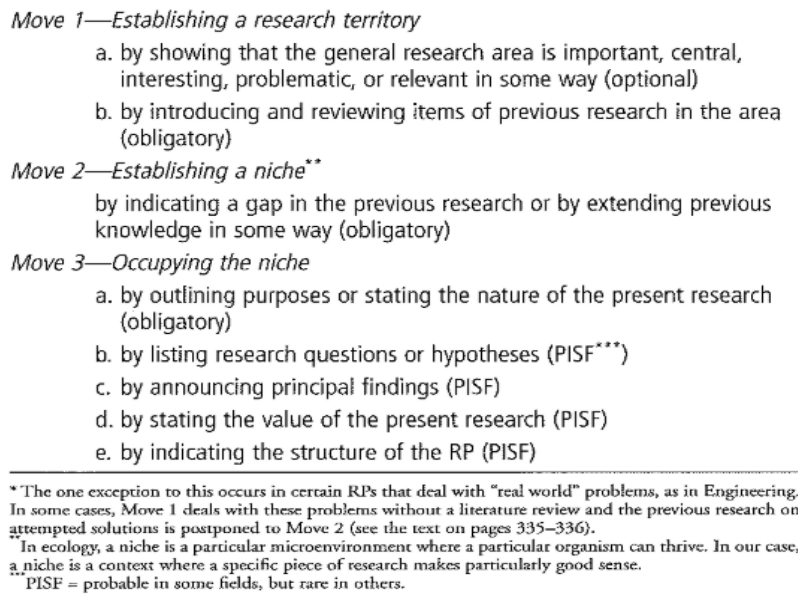
The Create a Research Space (CARS)

Move 1—Establishing a research territory

    a. by showing that the general research area is important, central, interesting, problematic, or relevant in some way (optional)

    b. by introducing and reviewing items of previous research in the area (obligatory)

Move 2—Establishing a niche**

    by indicating a gap in the previous research or by extending previous knowledge in some way (obligatory)

Move 3—Occupying the niche

    a. by outlining purposes or stating the nature of the present research (obligatory)

    b. by listing research questions or hypotheses (PISF***)

    c. by announcing principal findings (PISF)

    d. by stating the value of the present research (PISF)

    e. by indicating the structure of the RP (PISF)

* The one exception to this occurs in certain RPs that deal with "real world" problems, as in Engineering. In some cases, Move 1 deals with these problems without a literature review and the previous research on attempted solutions is postponed to Move 2 (see the text on pages 335–336).

** In ecology, a niche is a particular microenvironment where a particular organism can thrive. In our case, a niche is a context where a specific piece of research makes particularly good sense.

*** PISF = probable in some fields, but rare in others.

Figure 1

The following table displayed the list of data sources of this research including the words' accounts of each data.

The List of Data Sources

Table 1

Participant	Gender	Proposal Title	Words' Accounts
Fatimah	Female	EFL Learners' Perception toward Whatsapp Group as Assisted of Learning in Papua Context	2151 words
Riza	Female	Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Grammatical Errors Analysis in The Third-Semester Students'	807 words

		Descriptive Essay of English Education Study Program at IAIN Fattahul Muluk Papua)	

FINDINGS

This study found several issues in terms of the research problems, territories and gaps.

1. Establish a Research Territory

Based on the result of analysis, the researcher found unstructured writing pattern in the introductory chapter particularly in establishing a research territory. To analyze this, the researcher used the rhetorical pattern, known as CARS, propose by (Swales & Feak, 2012). It can be seen in the figure 1 that the research problem is of a part of the "establishing a research territory". This research territory encompasses the general research area, namely the important, central, interesting, and problem of the research, and it introduced and review previous research. The following issues that researcher found from the data are:

Extract 1 (Data 1)

Referring to the CARS by Swales & Feak, 2012), the research problem is stated from the first to the third paragraph.

First Paragraph

"Technology is the one branch …………. The fact is technology innovation in education ………….would prove to have a profound impact on teaching, however "ignoring" is the reaction of that day. The ignorance happened……….... They did not realize that the existence of technology ………….. It is in accordance ………. "Distance Education……………. is using various learning resources ……… other media".

Second Paragraph

"The Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture above ………. Especially in the current situation ……………. This virus attack ……………... Covid-19 can …………... Touching or shaking hands …………. Making contact ……………... Some animal coronaviruses……….. with feces. However, it is unclear ………. People who live in ………... It caused …………..."

Third Paragraph

"The Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Anwar Makarim gives a .... done from school by online. Theonline learning process ....through information and communication technology."

It can be seen from the extract above how the students compose the research problem. In the first and second sentences of the first paragraph, the student tried to make claiming centrality by stressing the sentence using the words "profound impact". Moving to the second paragraph, the students tried to present the review of literature, even though the presented literature was the current policy of minister of education and culture of Indonesia. This is a nice try to call the evidence, but the provided evidence was unrelated with the idea. In the third paragraph, the student should be presented some issues regarding his/her research topic, but she/he did not provide it.

Extract 2 (Data 2)

Referring to the CARS by Swales & Feak, 2012), the research problem is stated from the first to the third paragraph.

First Paragraph

"According to Brown (as cited in Huzna 2011), writing is ……………….... This means that writing is…………….. The author can communicate ………….. The ability to write is considered to be Allah's greatest pleasure, as Allah says in the Qur'an Surah Al-Qalam verse 1."

Second Paragraph

"Nowadays as a modern world, writing is also a communicative activity because of interactions in the most technologically sophisticated form of electronic mail. So knowledge and information are shared throughout the world using English. Based on the importance of writing described above, teaching how to write is important for students so they can get information and forms of knowledge every where. Writing is usually considered the most difficult skill to learn. Sholihah (2017), said that writing is an important component in learning English which requires a complex set of skills in English. Writing skills involve the production of languages that are considered productive skills so that writing requires more aspects. Writing is a complicated skill because it requires not only knowledge of vocabulary but also knowledge

of how to combine vocabulary into sentences that match the rules of grammar. So, communication and contact between writer and reader can work well."

Third Paragraph

"On the other hand, especially in Indonesia because English is a foreign language. English and Indonesian are grammatically different, and they have their own rules. The difference proves that the rules of grammar and the application of grammar rules are difficult problems faced by students in writing English. Based on previous preliminary research, this research found that many students in third Semester of the English Education Study Program had problems using grammar when writing. This is supported by the results of unstructured interviews by researcher against students."

The extract above presented some issues regarding the pattern of CARS model. In the first paragraph, the student tends to struggle providing claim centrality. This can be seen from the move from the first sentence to the next sentence occurred a redundant idea. Moving to the second paragraph, the student should provide some issues related to the topic. However, the student continues to discuss the idea of writing. After presenting some issues related to the topic, the student should provide a review literature. Based on the extract above, the student provided a review literature, but it was not really connected with the previous idea.

2. Establishing a Niche (Research Gaps)

Based on the result of the analysis, the researcher is not only focused on the research problem, but she/he also focuses on the research gap of the introductory chapter. To analyze this, the researcher established a niche by indicating a gap in the previous research, known as CARS, propose by (Swales & Feak, 2012). It can see in figure 1 that the research gap is of a part of the "establishing a niche." Establishing a niche by extending previous knowledge in some research. The following issues that researcher found form the data are:

Extract 3 (Data 1)

Fifteen Paragraph

"Much research has been done on the effectiveness of WhatsApp and its success in learning English. Like Ta'amneh's (2017) research on messenger use on English learning in control and experimental group students. In 2015,

Fattah, in his research, found that the WhatsApp technique had a significant effect on students' writing skills. The research above shows the effectiveness and efficiency of WhatsApp as a new phenomenon in learning that can be an alternative to the learning process. Due to the positive impact generated by WhatsApp. **A new phenomenon, some lecturers are still not interested in using WhatsApp in class."**

It can be seen from the extract above that the statement has become a marker of transition from the results of previous research to what is actually found in the field. This case means that something happens in a particular area, and experiences different conditions with the results of previous research. In simple terms, creating gaps requires the results of previous research as a basis and identifying existing gaps. Most researchers apply this in their writing.

Extract 4 (Data 2)

Third Paragraph

"…………..Based on previous preliminary research, this research found that many students in the Third-Semester of the English Education Study Program had problems using grammar when writing. This is supported by the results of unstructured interviews by researchers against students. When students write descriptive essays (descriptive essays are a kind of essay consisting of descriptions, characteristics, definitions of something, so students try to describe what students are describing) most of them still have difficulties and errors in using grammar rules."

In the extract 4 from the data 2, the writer should add the results of the previous research before the statement in bold as it shows the importance of the issue to be examined. Also, it shows the gap in the research that will be carried out. Like scientific writing that requires something unique that can make readers find interest. Apart from novelty, a significant gap position must exist in this paper. In simple terms, students in preparing the introduction of a study still need reasonable assistance. Understanding the gap position and presenting the results of previous research in complementing writing ideas must be clarified.

DISCUSSION

To begin this section, the researcher tried to remind the readers of the research questions of this study, as follows.

- How do the last year students write the research territory (problems)?
- How do the last year students establish niche (gaps)?

To answer these research questions, the researcher used CARS framework proposed by (Swales & Feak, 2012).

In general concept, a research territory and establishing a niche are located in the introductory chapter. Basically, the introductory chapter is one of the very least words numbers on thesis (Starfield & Paltridge, 2019). One of the studies investigated by (Burton, 2002)found that the thesis average pages especially in the introductory chapter were about 17.4 pages. In addition, the writing pattern of the introductory chapter tends to discuss general ideas, then move to specific ideas (Swales & Feak, 2012). This indicates that the introductory chapter should state concisely the territory research and a niche as the main concern on this study.

Based on the findings above, in general, the research found that the students tend to find it difficult in addressing a research territory (problems) and establishing a niche (gaps). It seems that the students lack attention to develop their ideas. Therefore, they tend to find it difficult to establish the research gaps. This phenomenon can be seen in the extract 3 and 4 from data 1 and 2. This is in line with the research findings found by (J. M. H. Lim, 2012) that the management students have inadequate attention on management aspects. Moreover, the tendency of students to use tenses for sentence transitions becomes a problematic aspect. It can be seen from the extract 1(data 1) and extract 2 (data 2) that the students tend to lack of consistency in using tenses. The use of the right tenses in the introductory chapter is crucial to draw claim centrality (Jason Miin Hwa Lim, 2012; Starfield & Paltridge, 2019; Swales & Feak, 2012).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that the students who were doing a thesis tends to find it difficult to address the research territory and establish a niche. There are some tendencies why students seem doubt for this. First, the students apparently find it difficult to develop their ideas. Second, the students tend to find it difficult to compose their ideas started from the general views to the specific

thoughts. Last, the students lack consistency in using tenses.

Apart from the findings above, this research is still far from the perfect study. This study is only a corner stone for the later study under this topic. Of course, this study needs comprehensive research covering from students or lecturer perceptions why this phenomenon occurred.

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