

**STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FINAL REPORT ADVISORY
SERVICES IN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLYTECHNIC
OF SRIWIJAYA**

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Abstract: This study was aimed at finding out the students' perceptions of final report advisory services in English Department of State polytechnic of Sriwijaya. This would expectedly give insights on how well the tasks of providing services in terms of assisting students with their final report writing had been performed. Questionnaires were self-made, and therefore the validity and reliability test were conducted in which 19 students were involved. The results of this piloting project were analyzed by using the Pearson Product Moment Coefficient. To get the data, 77 students were requested to fill out the questionnaires. Through the use of statistic descriptive analysis, the data were processed and then described in words and numbers. The conclusion was that the lecturers of The English Department had performed their task properly in providing final report advisory services to their students.

Keywords: final report, advisory services, task, properly

It is compulsory that every student should make a final report in the last semester of his/her study in State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya. These scientific reports they write should also go through assessment to see their worth both through oral presentation and through the way the writing itself has been accomplished. This task requires understanding towards writing techniques and English writing skills. With all that being a fact, students might expect some sense of impending disaster that could endanger their study achievement if this particular task is not properly attended to or prepared for in advance.

Unlike other students of the other majors in State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya, the English department students have been entrusted or basically required to write their final paper project entirely in English. For those whose English skills are on top level, this challenge may not be so much of a problem

to begin with. However, those who still have troubles in writing, especially academic writing in English, with all its complication of grammatical rules, diction, spelling, development of ideas, etc., may need someone to turn to for help during the process of completing the task. According to Fadda (2011:1) Academic writing in English at advanced levels is a challenge even for most native English speakers. However, it is particularly difficult for English as a second language (ESL) graduate students, who come from non-Anglicized linguistic and cultural backgrounds, particularly Asian graduate students.

In other words, academic writing of which final report should take its form is anything but easy. Even doctoral students may have difficulties to go through this. Cennetkuşu (2018:1) indicates that writing a research paper in English as a foreign language for the first time is a challenging task for many international doctoral students. With that being stated as a fact, it is obvious that lecturers, who are assigned to assist, should come in handy. The students may have high hopes for the lecturers to be able to lead and guide them all along the way to the completion of their task of writing the final report. These hopes and expectations do not seem to miss Copland's attention (2015:1) as she indicates that academic writing holds great significance and therefore needs much attention and support from the academic fraternity. By leveraging multiples practical approaches to enhance quality practical writing, academic institutions have the opportunity to harness effective frameworks to assist students in the academic advancement.

As for the research methodology itself, it may very well contribute to the increase of stress to some students in the course of doing their work as student-researchers. Some on-line academic writers refer to it in the titles of their essays that academic research is a painful process for students (ARClog, 2009:1) while EssayChat.com (2016:1) mentions more or less the similar thing that research is the most difficult part of the academic writing process. There are a lot of terms used in the methods in which each has its specific explanation on how things ought to be done or described in one or another way. A thorough observation should be set to work on these particular terms of research methodology in an effort to execute the methods in line with its particular forethought patterns. Still within the area of conducting research, data-processing may not be quite familiar to the students that they find themselves in trouble of how to calculate numbers and turn them into something explicit, declarative and conclusive. Once again, the presence of a lecturer in this time of need like this will ultimately be necessary.

This research was, therefore, conducted in order to find out students' perceptions and expectations on their lecturers' roles related to their research

work completion. The results are of necessity for lecturers to relate their methods of advisory that they have been utilizing so far to meet these expectations and make some adjustments if deemed necessary. This will hopefully yield a synchronized technique of guidance which both students and lectures will find beneficial in producing a good piece of research paper report.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception

Perception is the noun form of the verb 'perceive' which means to become aware of (sb/sth); notice, observe. Perception itself can be interpreted as the ability to see, hear, or understand. It can also be referred to as a way of seeing or understanding something (Hornby, 1989:917). In line with this, Study.com (2018:1) defines perception as our recognition and interpretation of sensory information. Perception also includes how we respond to the information. We can think of perception as a process where we take in sensory information from our environment and use that information in order to interact with our environment. Perception allows us to take the sensory information in and make it into something meaningful.

From the definition above it is clear that the process of learning at school or anywhere, whether it is formal or informal, will not be possible without the involvement of perception. We are not robots that move around without the capability to think because that is what differentiates us from other creatures in the world. With perception, we interact, find some problems or comfort, and make an effort to make them disappear or last. The ability to make innovations in technology or whatever it is to make human life easier or more comfortable is due to perception playing its role. Perception coexists with human being and its death will very possibly put an end to human life. Suffice it to say that perception is an indispensable part of our lives.

The Importance of Perception

Perception is important owing to the following reasons (Quora, 2017:1):

- It is a process of psychology which enables the understanding and interpretation of everything in the world to occur.
- People's character and attitude are defined by the way they perceive things. Feelings such as kindness, hate, love, and all other emotions originate from one's perceptions about something.
- Happiness may come to a person through his natural innate instrument called perception. For some getting married is happiness, for others staying single is happiness.

- Human perception towards God is the main reason why are having so many religions today. It not just shows that perceptions are varied but also perceptions of a few have the ability to influence the mankind as a whole.
- A person's goal and his/her outlook on life are shaped up with the help of perceptions. Anyone shall find their purpose in life after he/she set his/her perception to work.

In addition, when dealing with human relationship, perception may create an atmosphere where two persons would feel comfortable to relate to each other, or, quite the opposite, there would be some kind of discomfort that intrude into it. Dhal (2014:1) mentions that in school environment, perceptions are important. Much conflict arises from the differences in perceptions of various parties. Such conflict can be between parents and their children, parents and teachers, teachers and students, parents and other parents and between students. In managing conflicts within schools and school communities, perceptions matter.

Therefore, it is important that lecturers get to know students' perceptions of how the counseling and advisory activities concerning their research paper should be conducted. Hopefully, this will bring about the better understanding towards students' expectations on the service they need to have to complete their final paper task. With the expectations laid out clear in the open, lectures will be able to see if the strategy they have been occupying so far requires some kind of adjustments, development or maintenance.

Students' Perceptions in Relation with Their Academic Achievements

Since it is believed that perceptions play a very influential role on human's outlook on life, the behaviors that come along with it will also be strongly affected. A student, who thinks audio visuals provide better insights into his/her depth of study, may prefer watching movies to sitting in class listening to his/her lecturer's speech. The preference may not straightforwardly lead him/her to skipping classes, but will possibly cause him/her to lack in enthusiasm for taking heed of the orally delivered lectures in classrooms.

On the same side of standpoint, Mapuranga et al (2015:1) declare that students' perceptions about what will enhance their chances of success at university are likely to have a strong influence on the behaviors of students regardless of the actual influence of other factors. If students believe that attending lectures contributes to success, they will probably attend regularly and thus increase their chances of being successful. However, if a student believes that success can be achieved without attending lectures that student will probably not attend lectures on a regular basis. This may diminish their chances of success.

Some students are eager to make appointments with their lecturers to discuss their research paper and they do come to keep their promises. Some other may just disappear from their lecturers' sight for a certain length of time and suddenly turn up with their academic paper in hand asking for their lecturer's signature of consent. This will be interesting to discover what has gotten through this type of students' minds. They may have some kind of perception about counseling that initiates the idea of consulting their lecturers in the least of time possible.

Final Report

Final report (*Laporan akhir*/or commonly referred to as *LA*) is an academic activity done by every student before finishing his/her study period in an effort to implement their already-gained knowledge and skills in the form of scientific writing. This writing activity is performed by the students as a proof of their academic/professional capability in applying the theories they have learned during study to solve the practical problems in the industries related to their study fields. (translated from Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya, (2008, pg. 3)

As for the English department, as it differs from all the other study programs in State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya, the paper is not written in Bahasa Indonesia, but it ought to be written in English. It goes in line with the actual purpose of the academic writing itself, which is to get the students utilizing all their source of English capacity to create a piece of academic writing paper as one form of the actualization of their English practical capabilities.

In general, after completing their task of writing the final report, the students are expected to be able to apply their knowledge and skills in a comprehensive and systematic way to scientifically and independently overcome problems occurring in the field during the research. In a more specific way, the aim of writing this final report is to lead the students to be able:

- To collect data and information to practically and systematically analyze a problem;
- To formulate a problem, do the analysis and synthesis and problem-solving based on the knowledge already gained in their course of study and draw a conclusion;
- To undertake a task in the field in accordance with the standard and qualification in effect;
- To make a report that complies with the rules of academic writing principles;
- To present their research paper and defend it an academic forum.

Source: Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya (2008:3-4)

Again, the English department students may have bigger challenges in comparison to those of the other study programs which make use of Bahasa Indonesia in presenting their paper. The English students are required to use English to explain and to defend their ideas, as well as to answer the questions about things they have discussed in their papers. As a consequence, the lecturers' tasks of advising and guiding their students during the writing of the paper may slightly be different from their co-workers from the other study programs in terms of the use of the language. However, in general, the guiding tasks the lecturers are supposed to perform are quite similar to one another's apart from the language being used.

Advisory Services

The word "advisory" comes from the verb "advise" which means "give advice to", "recommend", "inform", "notify", "consult", or "take counsel with" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 1987, pg. 14). Thus, the advisory services being discussed here refer to activities in which the lecturers give advice to their students, or recommend that their students take certain steps or utilize certain methods in accomplishing a good piece of academic writing paper. In quite the same line, the students seek academic advice from their lecturers for the betterment of their academic paper in the times both parties have agreed to meet.

According to Petunjuk Penulisan Laporan Akhir POSRI 2008, pg. 4-5, there are two lecturers that function as the first advisor and the second advisor. Each of the lecturers is assigned the following tasks which can be specified as follows:

First advisor is assigned to:

- Give information and recommendation about final report (laporan akhir/LA), the proposal, writing system, and contents of the reports;
- Observe and give recommendations about data collection instrument, data analysis, and final report format to be used;
- Provide guidance during the process of preparation, execution, and the writing of the research paper;
- Give recommendations to join the final report examination if the student under his/her advisory is ready for that.

Second advisor is assigned to:

- Assist advisor 1 in providing final report services;
- Give consideration, direction, and suggestion about writing concept of the final report;
- Provide guidance during the process of preparation, execution, and the writing of the research paper;
- Give recommendations to join the final report examination if the student under his/her advisory is ready for that.

It can be concluded that both advisor 1 and advisor 2 have the same tasks and obligation to provide advisory services to their students.

METHODOLOGY

The data were collected through the distribution of questionnaire to all the sixth semester students of the English department who were writing their final report paper in State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya in 2018. There were 77 students involved in filling out the questionnaires. A try-out was conducted in advance to test the validity and reliability of the questions in which 19 students were asked to assist in the piloting project. The researchers analyzed the data based on the Pearson Product Moment Coefficient as instructed by Priyatno (2012:118). Through the use of statistic descriptive analysis as also suggested by Priyatno (2012:19), the data were processed and are now being described.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

When presented with the statement of their advisors being available for discussing the topic of their final report before the writing process began, 93.1% of the respondents had no doubt about being positive about it. In other words, they agreed or even more strongly agreed that it was the real fact. The advisors were not just taking it for granted that the titles proposed by the students, in this case the respondents, would just be as good or readily acceptable. They would have to go through detailed analysis before the advisors gave their approval for their students to proceed with their work. A possibility of the students having to change their titles was also strong if the topics or the titles were considered insufficient for further development and exploration. From this perspective, it was known that the lecturers were actually informative and being the source of great help for the students to begin their writing tasks with certainty and within the right direction.

Faced with the possibility of whether or not the advisors explained the research methodology before the writing process were conducted, 48.2% of the students responded in the affirmative. However, It did not mean that the majority or 51.8% of them revealed that their lecturers were never of any help when it came to being informative about research methodology. It was just that 32.8% of them were being undecided of whether or not their advisors gave such explanation. This uncertainty could be regarded as providing no significant percentage to add to the positive side or the negative side of the responses which, in this research, took the form of preferable answers such as agree or disagree. Thus, there left only 18.9% of the respondents who showed their disagreement. As 48.2 was the bigger number than 18.9, it could be ascertained that a lot more students had claimed that their advisors did their tasks of explaining the research methodology in advance of the writing process.

One of the tasks of the advisors was that they should provide guidance during the process of preparation, execution, and the writing of the research paper. Through the questionnaire it was found that the 88% of the respondents acknowledged that such assistance had been well provided. Suggestions were even given at the beginning when choosing the most appropriate title was in process. On the contrary, 6.9% of the respondents disapproved of such guidance having ever been offered and 5.2% of the respondents found themselves undecided about the preferable statement they needed to choose. However, it was still irrefutable and obvious from the percentage that the lecturers did their job properly in terms of providing guidance to the students under their advisory.

It was a common thing that the advisors and the students should plan on the schedule to meet and discuss the writing. What would be “not so very common” was that the students suddenly requested a meeting with their advisors out of the agreed time. The students might be in the middle of working on their paper in the library and at the same time his advisor happened to be in sight. Approaching his advisor for the purpose of getting information related to his scientific work out of the schedule, the student might run a risk of being refused for consultation. Fortunately, the research proved that there had been fewer students who had ever have to endure that kind of rejection from their advisors. This sort of reaction might be just as justifiable under such circumstances as it might also be quite unfavourable on the student’s side. Still, it was good news that, in the students’ experiences, the advisors would go out of his strict way to welcome his students for the unplanned consultation session. 53.5% of the respondents agreed on this, while the other 25.8% had

quite the opposite opinion. 20.7 of the respondents might never have experienced this as they chose to be undecided.

During the course of the consultation, the advisor did not use English as a means of communication. This was confirmed by 53.5% of the respondents. The language being used in this case could have been Bahasa Indonesia or even bahasa daerah. Only 3.4% of the respondents agreed that their advisors were actually speaking to them in English during the hours of consultation. In other words, very few lecturers had been found making use of English when communicating their thoughts to their students. However, since there had been no specific requirement for the lecturers to use a certain language on this occasion, no rule had either been broken or obeyed. As long as the students understood the instructions well enough, nothing else mattered.

Proper utilization of research techniques and scientific analysis was inseparable from the success in conducting a research. However, the students involved here were all on the level of Diploma III whose depth of understanding towards research methodology was possibly not on the same degree of those of a S2 students'. The question raised here was whether or not the advisor had actually imposed too much of a burden on his students to apply a certain technique or scientific analysis which felt overwhelmingly troublesome for them. From the data collected, it was found that such a thing had never happened, at least not to 69% of the students. They were all fine with the techniques. Some other students, who comprised 15.5% out of the entire samples, seemed to have suffered the bitterness. However, their number was too insignificant to notify the lecturers of the possible anxieties they might have inflicted on their students through the choice of the research technique they had very little knowledge about.

Commonly, no lecturers would ever want to let their students' writing paper contain errors in terms of grammar, diction, spelling, or punctuations. When that happened, The most possible reactions would be that they would make sure that those errors should all disappear. Some lecturers were inclined to instruct their students to correct the mistakes themselves while some others might tend to take things to their own hands. This second type of lecturers fixed the mistakes themselves and the students would just receive their paper back fresh and clean with no more mistakes to be found. This would definitely lift up the burden from the students' shoulders; but at the same time, a question arose. Would this kind of action spoil the students in the long run? This matter was certainly open for discussion. However, questionnaires had been spread out and the results had been attained. According to the findings, 82.7% of the respondents confirmed that the advisors had helped to correct the mistakes

themselves. The students did nothing in the process except for retyping the paper with all the sentences readily well-built and well-managed. Only 3.4% of the respondents argued that such a thing did not happen to them. They were obliged to fix the errors themselves before they were entitled to their advisor's signature of approval. On the other side of the percentage table, 13.8% of the respondents chose to be undecided with the assumption that their advisors might have done both, asking the students to work on their own grammatical problems themselves at one time and making the problems theirs at the other.

Plagiarism was never a good thing. The advisor should always prevent this from happening and make sure that the students under his advisory would never conduct such a prohibited thing. The findings from this research indicated that the advisor had played by the rule by asking his student to change his writing when plagiarism was detected. This had been affirmed by 53.5% of the respondents. 25.9% of the respondents had no idea about that and decided to be undecided in this case. They had probably never plagiarized that they never had to face the criticisms to change their writing. Another possibility was that they did the plagiarism, but their act had so far never been found out, yet. However, since undecided respondents contributed nothing to the percentage of agreement or disagreement, their opinion did not matter much. There was something else that might demand our serious consideration. 20.7% of the respondents seemed to suggest that the advisors might have overlooked the possibility that their students had committed plagiarism. Or else, the students might have plagiarized but the advisors might have been unaware of it. Still, knowing that the majority of the respondents indicated advisors' strong disapproval towards plagiarism, it was quite an agreeable fact.

One of the statements in the questionnaire was quite intriguing despite it being not focusing on the advisors' services. It read "You would rather submit your final report paper at the last possible moment in hopes that your advisor would have no time to correct or fuss about your writing and would, therefore, just sign the approval sheet". Fortunately, the majority of the students, 63.8% of them, had never entertained such an idea which could lead them into a deep trouble of being disqualified from the final report seminar. Only 15.5% of the respondents had considered the possibility of using that ridiculous technique. 20.7% of them chose to be undecided. It was hoped that they would make up their minds to forget the idea and it seemed that they finally did.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Self-introspection is never wrong to be done especially when it is intended for the betterment of oneself. Lecturers, like all the other human beings, are not perfect. A mistake could at times be made here and there in the course of the implementation of teaching strategies. Therefore, a new insight from the outsiders can be quite a breath of fresh air towards the development of teaching strategy. The outsiders do not have to be only those of highly knowledgeable persons in the field of education. Students can also be the ones whose thoughts and opinions are worthy of consideration. They are the ones lecturers provide their service for, and their voices can reflect the competence of lecturers in performing their job, in this case, in assisting their students in the accomplishment of their scientific writing task, known as the final report.

With the data collected, the report of this research findings can be the instrument for self-introspection for those directly involved in providing final report advisory services in the English Department of State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya. By comparing the students' perceptions with the job specifications stated in *Petunjuk Penulisan Laporan Akhir POSRI*, it is obvious that the lecturers of the English department have performed their job well in providing the final report advisory services. The percentage of "agreement" to "disagreement" in comparison is shown through the numbers of (93.1:3.4); (48.2:18.9); (88:6.9), etc. This suggests that the majority of the respondents, as depicted by the number on the left in the brackets, agree on the advisors being effective in providing their advisory services.

Finally, the writers suggest that this achievement be maintained while at the same time, being open to those who disagree on the advisors' services may help to view things from quite a different perspective. The number of those who have disapproved may not be significant. However, it is still worth a try.

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