International Joint Supervision: A Breakthrough To Promote Effective Master Thesis Writing

R.A.Noer Doddy Irmawati, Kasiyarno, Akmal

Abstract: During the last fifteen years, there have been so many researches on joint supervision. Nevertheless, no previous studies were recorded on joint-master thesis supervisor. The study is aimed at assessing the implementation of the Joint Thesis Writing Supervision Program between Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD), Indonesia and University of Saint Anthony (USANT), Philippines. The study is descriptive-qualitative that uses triangulation technique in analysing the data. The subjects were 23 master students from the English Graduate Program who participated in the Joint Thesis supervision during the academic year of 2014-2016. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and documents from UAD and USANT. The results explain about the students' profile as to their prior writing skill, their obstacles, and difficulties in writing a thesis during their stay at USANT, the level of students' satisfaction, and the strengths and weaknesses of the program. All findings are discussed in detail.

Index Terms: Breakthrough, Effective, International Joint Supervision, Thesis Writing.

1 Introduction

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD) Yogyakarta collaborative partnership with more than 124 universities abroad has provided its master students with joint degree or joint supervisor without leaving Yogyakarta for such a long time (two/three years) and it is very meaningful for master students who for reasons of work, finance, time or other constraints cannot attend regular master program abroad. Joint supervision of thesis writing enables them to conduct their research under the supervision of two master thesis guides: main supervisor at UAD and co-supervisor at its partners' university or vice versa. A study conducted by Cullen, Pearson, Saha, & Spear [1] examining the roles, responsibilities and expectations of supervisors and postgraduates suggested that co-supervision/joint supervisor was more effective than working with one supervisor. It is supported by the research findings that only 71 percent of students with a single supervisor felt satisfied by their supervision whereas 92 percent of students supervised by multiple supervisors, and advisors were much happier. Another study, conducted by Sidhu, Kaur, & Fook [2] to 60 Malaysian students who had supervisors from the UK, indicate that the students looked for a people-oriented supervisor who plays a role as motivator and confidence booster as well, meanwhile 33 respondents from the UK stressed the need for Malaysian supervisors who are expert in their specific field of study. It means that respondents from Malaysia were more dependent and had higher expectations from their supervisors, especially in term of writing and research methodology when compared to their counterparts in the UK.

- *R.A.Noer Doddy Irmawati, Kasiyarno, Akmal*
- *Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Magister of English Language Education Yogyakarta, Indonesia.*
  E-mail: noer_doddyirmawati@yahoo.com
- *Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Magister of English Language Education Yogyakarta, Indonesia.*
  E-mail: ykasiyarno@gmail.com
- *Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Magister of English Language Education Yogyakarta, Indonesia.*
  E-mail: akmal@mpbi.uad.ac.id

A central issue of joint supervision in higher education, therefore, Bommarito [3] said that the relationship between student and the professor/supervisor. Although master/doctoral students, for example, are moving toward independence as researchers, ongoing consultation with the mentors is a key step toward such independence. Moreover, Kandlbinder & Peseta [4] highlight three key elements of successful research supervision that facilitate the establishment of a cooperative and co-learning relationship: establishing clear goals, developing partnerships, and managing the research process. In joint supervisor that has been conducted by UAD and University of Saint Anthony, the Philippines since 2014, the students have to stay in USANT for about three months to finish their thesis writing under the supervision of USANT professors. The program is conducted annually and is now entering the third year but no formal evaluation has been made. This article has a significant contribution to International Cooperation among higher educations in Southeast Asia particularly in Joint Thesis Writing program.

2 UAD and USANT Collaboration

By referring to European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education /ESG [5], three main quality assurances such as internal quality, external quality, and quality assurance agencies, become the priority areas of Magister Program of English Language Education, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD), Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Since quality assurance generates quality-related information of an education and degrees, it is easier for UAD to convince its national and international partners and the quality of its education and at the same time attract more students. Since some students at Magister Program of English Language Education has difficulties in finishing their theses writing within the curriculum's time frame, the graduate school of UAD conceived the idea of sending its students to one of its partner universities in the Philippines--University of Saint Anthony (USANT), Iriga City. During the pre-departure program, the students were guided in writing proposal and they had to defend their proposals in front of internal and external examiners. The nominated students then have to revise their proposals based on suggestions and recommendations given by the proposal examiners. Upon completing the procedures, they were sent to USANT to pursue further research and thesis writing.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Joint Supervision

By definition, thesis supervision is one-to-one form of teaching or face-to-face or by email or other forms of interaction between a supervisor and a student in the process of writing a Masters or Ph.D thesis [6, 7]. According to Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth [8], supervision is a formal process based on the relationship between supervisor and supervisee, where the supervisor's role is to help the supervisee acquires appropriate professional behavior and competence of professional activities. Supervision is also a fluid, active process; the needs and competencies of students and supervisors will change as the relationship progresses. In another word, Pole said supervision can be defined as a two-way interactional process that requires both the student and the supervisor to consciously engage each other within the spirit of professionalism, respect, collegiality, and open-mindedness in completing thesis or dissertation writing. Thus, although joint thesis supervision offers many advantages, it is not a panacea for all supervision problems. Indeed, it poses many risks as well as benefits [9]. Joint supervision is usually carried out in accordance with a joint supervision agreement concluded by and between the two institutions concerned within the second year of the master programme. Among the reasons for conducting join supervisor are; enhancing students' learning [6], savings resources and increasing time completions [10], individualization [11], countering dropout rates caused by feelings of isolation and loneliness among students [12]. Other reasons are to improve students' collaborative skills [13], and contribute to a minimization of the distance between knowledge creation within research and supervision. Joint supervisor is also conducted for internal and external purposes or to overcome the scarcity of the experts that are not available at the host university [14]. Sometimes, the university decided to have joint supervisor with professor in different discipline from another university if the research project of a student is favored. In this program, master student will be jointly supervised by a thesis supervisor at each institution and attend the two universities alternately. The student needs to take a single comprehensive examination, and work on a thesis to be defended only once in front of a jury chosen by the two partner universities. It means the students should have good commitment to finish his/her thesis right on the schedule and the supervisors should thoroughly guide the student.

3.2 Joint Supervision Models

Joint supervision may take a number of different models. The first one is called subject expert model [15]. The use of two subject experts is generally recommended when the research project is highly interdisciplinary or brings together methodologies from different areas. In these circumstances, the supervisory team is often comprised of two (or more) joint supervisors, each with equal weight. In this model, the supervisors read the student's writing then they talk and give feedback. For example, both supervisors might have good knowledge of the subject area of the thesis and contribute equally to the supervision. One supervisor might have good knowledge of the main subject area, and the second might have expertise in using a particular methodology that is relevant to the thesis. In this case, the second supervisor would play an equal role in the project. The second supervisor might not have good knowledge of the main subject area but would be appointed on the basis of his or her supervisory experience. For joint supervision to be most effective, therefore, it is also important for clarity on the roles of the respective supervisors. At the program of joint supervisor between Durham University, UK and Fudan University, Shanghai, in Business Administration, there are two more models of joint supervisor: subject expert and subject generalist and subject expert and experience supervisors [16]. The subject expert and one or more subject generalist supervisors may have expertise in closely related areas, but perhaps a less specialized in understanding of the topic. This model ensures that there is a subject expert to lead on the research project, and further supervisors who can provide both cover for the subject expert during periods of absence or leave, and more general advice on the broader topic. In the University of Edinburg's Code of Practice for supervisor [17] the expert supervisor is called lead supervisor while generalist supervisor is called assistant supervisor. The Principal Supervisor (or Lead Supervisor if the student is co-supervised) must be appointed prior to the student's registration. The Principal or Lead Supervisor has the primary responsibility for supervision and if the student is co-supervised, the Principal Supervisor will also deal with the administrative aspects of supervision. The role of the Assistant Supervisor entails less responsibility than the Principal Supervisor, but in some cases may require closer day-to-day involvement in the student's research. The next model is supervisory team. It is composed of one or more subject experts, supported by one (or more) experienced supervisors. This model is typically used in research areas where student's demand is high in narrow or very specialist areas, and where the subject expert(s) may have relatively limited supervisory experience. Typically, the subject expert will be the 'lead' supervisor, with the experienced supervisor providing more generic support - for instance, on methodology, progress, the nature of research or presentation and publication. Referring to the standard of joint supervisor issued by Council for the Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), USA [18], there is a triadic supervision model in which one supervisor meets simultaneously with two supervisees / students. This model, however, is commonly practiced in counsellor training program. Main differences among the models lie on number of students, number of supervisors and treatment to the students/supervisees. The summary can be seen in Table 1.

TABLE 1.
DIFFERENT TYPES OF THESIS SUPERVISION

	Individual Supervision	Join /Triadic Supervision	Team Supervision	Collective /Cohort Supervision	Project Family Supervision
Number of student	One	One	More than one	In group	In group
Number of supervisors	One	Two	More than one	More than one	More than one
Advantages	Supervision	Supervisors have	*Can discuss with	*Collective learning	*Started by standard

	becomes more in-depth	different task and responsibilities Student learn a lot	fellow supervisors *Student gain most from giving and receiving feedback	*Save time for consulting *Experience of multi-voiced settings	test and ended by poster *Receive feedback from other groups session *Fixed and same timetable
Disadvantages	*Student's feeling of loneliness *High attrition rate	More time consuming	Students overwhelm with different views or experiences of supervisors	*Difficult to fix the consultation schedule *student lacks expectation	Re-design materials with new properties

4 Methodology

The research method used in this study is descriptive qualitative. The subjects were 23 master students (English Graduate Program) who participated in the program from batch 1-5 during the academic year of 2014-2016. The data were collected using questionnaires, interviews and field observation at USANT. The data were analyzed by using conventional content analysis approach. Among the research questions are:

1. What are the students' profile as to their prior writing skill?
2. What are their obstacles and difficulties in writing thesis during their stay at USANT?
3. What are the level of students' satisfactions?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program?

5 Results and Discussion

5.1 Result: Students' Profile

There were 32 master students from UAD (batch 1- 5) who joined the program since 2014. The students were at the third semester. There were 20 students (62.5%) with the profession as English Teacher at High and Junior Schools and 12 students without teaching professions. All of them had never been studying abroad. The English Language Proficiency of the participants (pre-departure to USANT), given by UAD Language Training Centre, were at the level of Advance as indicated by their TOEFL means score of 500-550. Based on proposal writing test conducted before their departure, it is found that background of the research was presented in inductive reasoning. One research question sometimes is not the continuation of the previous one. In making quotation of theoretical and previous research, the students still connect quoted paragraphs without paraphrasing. The students still do know how to differentiate between subject of the research, population, sample, and sampling technique. In term of English grammar used in writing good essay, it is found that only 5 students (15.6%) had no error in mechanics or 27 students (84.4 %) had problem in punctuation, capitalization, and part of speech. There were 16 students (50%) had problem in choice of word, and 30 students (93.75 %) got confused on grammar (Subject +modifier +Verb, the use of "such", and parallel structure. Upon completion their thesis writing at USANT, the UAD evaluation team from quality control division found that there is a lack of implication of the student findings to the ELT pedagogy (to the students, teachers, school management, or curriculum makers). The results findings are supported by several researches that talks about how to make a good supervision between lecturer and students [19, 20]

5.2 Obstacles and Difficulties in Writing Thesis during their Stay at USANT

While experiencing the nature of research supervision process, faculties and the students faced some complexities and challenges in the research supervision process [21]. The obstacles and difficulties were categorized under registrar's office personnel/staff, admission, and other services. It was so amazing that the students had no serious problem with the categories above and they rated these aspects as excellent, with a weighted mean of 4.4. In the accounting department, two indicators were considered: personnel/staff and payment of dormitory fees with a weighted mean of 4.67, excellent and 4.13, very satisfactory. In line with library, other rated excellent the personnel/staff, theses/dissertations, and physical atmosphere with a weighted mean of 4.27, 4.27 and 4.73 respectively. While references got a weighted mean of 4.14, very satisfactory and books/journals got 3.07, satisfactory. On the part of the guidance office, personnel/staff, services and consultation services were rated excellent, with a weighted mean of 4.67 and 4.33. The supervision aspect also indicated a very satisfactory level as they have reasonable knowledge of and are able to advise the students on the availability of the USANT's academic services and facilities. The supervisors have kept under review with the student on the facilities which they require in order to carry out their research and make these needs known to the head of department. Dormitory is one of the most important aspects in this joint research writing activity. The following were rated excellent: safety and security both got 4.6 or excellent; electricity and personnel/staff, with a weighted mean of 4.4; and electricity and conduciveness both received a weighted mean of 4.27. While sanitation and water availability were rated very satisfactory with a weighted mean of 4.0 and 3.6; then rated satisfactory is Wi-Fi facility with a weighted mean of 3.2. The result shows that the students had a positive impact to the university considering the excellent assessment. However, administrators, supervisors and thesis advisers have the responsibility to inform or orient the students of the available facilities in the university, which is regularly done in USANT. By orienting them to the available facilities in the university, they will learn to maximize the available resources and the use of facilities [22]. Being aware of what the university has, they will no longer look into it and the students are already aware of the things and services they need to buy or hire. It is expected from the students that they will be responsible of whatever they need which are vital in the completion of their thesis [20].

5.3 Level of Satisfaction of the Students in Joining the Program

The students' satisfaction level regarding several aspects provided by USANT are indicated in the Table 2. Six aspects were rated excellent which include the following: thesis supervision /advising; facilities; orientation; thesis defense procedures; administrative support and student services. While three indicators are rated very satisfactory and these are: program requirements; library and program of activities.

TABLE 2
STUDENTS' LEVEL OF SATISFACTION

Indicators	WM	VI	Rank
Thesis Supervision/Advising	4.38	Excellent	1
Facilities	4.20	Excellent	7
Program Requirements	4.18	Very Satisfactory	8.5
Library	4.19	Very satisfactory	6
Orientation	4.25	Excellent	5
Program of Activities	4.18	Very Satisfactory	8.5
Thesis Defense Procedures	4.36	Excellent	2
Administrative Support	4.33	Excellent	4
Student's Services	4.34	Excellent	3
Average Weighted Mean	**4.27**	**Excellent**	

From the Table 2, it can be deduced that the students are very much satisfied with their experiences and learning they gained during their stay. When they are asked why they considered the program requirements as very satisfactory, they revealed that they got no difficulties at all and don't have enough patience in securing and preparing their requirements. The above result is a proof that the students are excellently satisfied with what they have received and therefore it gives USANT a positive feedback. However, the university still would consider the looking into what else are needed for library, program requirements and program activities to come up with measures that will address the students' needs.

5.4 The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Joint Thesis Supervisor Program

The strengths and weaknesses of the program were identified based on the perceptions of the student respondents on the different variables and indicators appeared in the questionnaire [20, 22]. The researchers failed to identify weaknesses of the program, because the result shows excellent and very satisfactory assessment. In this regard, the researchers decided to consider those indicators rated very satisfactory and satisfactory as the weaknesses.

TABLE 3
STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE PROGRAM

Strengths	Weaknesses
VMG	Program Duration
Processes and procedure of Admission in USANT and UAD	Payment of Dorm Fees
Faculty/Thesis Advisers	Availability of books/Journals
Registrar's Office	References
Library Staff	Food Service
Physical Atmosphere	Food Safety
Cost of Food	Water Availability
Dormitory personnel	Wi-Fi Facility
Safety and Security	Sanitation
Socialization	Special Study Permit Processing
Welcoming Program	Exposure trips and local tours
Attendance to Seminars	Booking of plane tickets
Writing Activities (pre-requisites, advising, defense)	Technical Support (use of printer and computer)
Consultation Services (to advisers)	Class observation
Ventilation	

As previously mentioned, the result of survey would manifest a positive effect to the University of Saint Anthony Graduate School Department (see in Table 3). However, the graduate school department will try to address the identified weaknesses in order to attain excellent evaluation. These indicators will be the bases of the department in improving the program and will serve as the baseline of all the activities that the department will undertake.

6 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

From the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that the students' prior knowledge on English and thesis structure are very necessary before leaving for USANT. The respondents perceived the joint thesis supervision program as fully implemented and excellently done. The students are fully satisfied with the learning, the experiences and all the activities that they had in USANT. They can finish their thesis within 2 months with good results. The weaknesses are negligible since that they are not actually weaknesses but were considered by the researches as one. In line with the conclusions, the followings are recommended: the students should have good knowledge and skill in English language structure for a better writing results as well as good knowledge on the thesis writing; the USANT Graduate School and the UAD may consider looking for other linkages to benchmark on their best practices which can be adapted by both USANT and UAD; both UAD and USANT may conduct a benchmark with other colleges and universities to consider the best practices of other schools. The adaption of the thesis supervision model is highly recommended.

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