The Benefits and Drawbacks of Writing a B.A Thesis as an English Major
Mejreme Ymeri¹ and MA.Arta Sejdiu²

Abstract
Students across universities research so they become competent professionals in their field. In most of the universities, English Majors must write a research paper, or else known a diploma paper, in order to graduate. However, students studying English Language find many benefits and drawbacks while writing a diploma paper. Using a mixed approach, the aim of this paper is to identify the benefits and drawbacks of writing a Bachelor of Arts paper. 51 students from “Fehmi Agani” University, Kosovo, were asked to fill a questionnaire, and 8 others to participate in a focus group, as a part of this study. The results show that the benefits of writing a thesis are continuous feedback from the mentor, a well-written paper to add in one’s portfolio as it is reviewed by the committee members, and you get to pursue your own interests. Nevertheless, there are also some drawbacks that students face while writing a paper, such as managing information, the use of generalization, and not having enough time to write it. Finally, this study suggests that having a course which prepares students to write a thesis in the end of their studies is beneficial to students as it mentors them and teaches a step-by-step writing thesis.

Keywords: Diploma Paper, B.A, English Majors, Benefits, Drawbacks.

INTRODUCTION
Students in Kosovo practice academic writing very little or not-at-all while in high school. This is one of the main reasons why they have problems when they shift to college with writing, as they don’t have prior knowledge on writing to transfer. However, English Majors are obliged in a way to do lots of writing, including a Bachelor Paper in the end of their studies (Xueyun, 2004), as it reflects their academic knowledge (Xuewen, 2009). While English Majors study English, the academic writing process they get involved can be knowledge-telling and also knowledge-transforming process (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2013; Csizér & Tankó, 2017). All of the skills that students get from these years has a lot to do with self-regulation. Czizer and Tanko highlight the importance of self-regulation in their paper, as it is increasingly seen as a key variable in L2 learning in many foreign language learning contexts because students may not receive enough input from classroom-centered instructional language training.

Many studies also discuss whether English Majors should write B.A papers or use portfolios as a vehicle to offer a way of minimizing the pile of papers students have to read to compose a research paper (Baume, 2001; Bookshelf, 1979; McMullan et al., 2003). On the other hand, studies show that a teaching experience as a pre-service teacher, is more important (Gerrish, 1993; Sharma et al., 2006), and students do not need either of them. This study will closely listen to students of “Fehmi Agani” University, as they will be participating in one of the focus groups, about their beliefs on writing a B.A research paper.

With all that being said, for this study, research questions will fall under two distinct categories:
How do composition classes help English Majors to write academically?
Do students prefer the traditional research or the modern portfolios, and why?

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METHODOLOGY

Participants

8 students of “Fehmi Agani” University (1 male, 7 females) from different regions of Kosovo were invited to a focus group and have voluntarily agreed to partake on the study. Students were aged between 20 to 25 years old, and 51 other students filled an online questionnaire.

Materials

For this study, we have devised a 11-item questionnaire which does not take more than 5-7 minutes to complete. We have chosen a mixed-methods approach, including both quantititative method as an instrument, as it is easier to analyze data, and also a qualitative method as an instrument as students will freely talk about their experiences through the focus groups. Focus groups have an origin in social sciences (Twinn, 1998) which utilize open-ended questioning with inductive probing of responses (Namey et al., 2016), and are generally described in the literature as being more appropriate for gathering information on group norms, dynamics, or processes and for brainstorming activities (Knodel, 1993; Krueger & Casey, 2015). In the other hand, questionnaires have many advantages, as they are efficient use of time (Munn & Drever, 1990), and they offer anonymity for the respondent (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research papers take a lot of time to write, from the starting point of identifying the main problems or research questions, to the last step, publication, or defending of the thesis. Žindžiuvienė (2009) points out that there are two important points that students should keep in mind while writing their B.A thesis: validity and reliability. Two main aspects are particularly important in research: validity and reliability. Furthermore, Žindžiuvienė (2009) clarifies that in testing, validity refers to statements about the reliability or trustworthiness of qualitative or quantitative data obtained for the purpose of making judgments or inferring conclusions. Studies show that student’s accountability for validity is very high. Similarly, Cho et al. study in 2006 suggest that the aggregate ratings of at least 4 peers on a piece of writing are both highly reliable and as valid as instructor ratings.

Furthermore, students are able to bring evidence in their papers as an interaction between an audience, a claim, and other facts in general (Altheide & Johnson, 1998). Porter (2011) in his paper makes a great point on how many institutional databases have limits, hence, college student surveys have become one of our largest and most often used data sources. Furthermore, he says that college student surveys are becoming increasingly significant in assessing the performance of college and university programs and regulations. On the other hand, Chen’s study in 2012 implies the fact that in order for English Majors in China to finish their research in the final year, they have to be monitored all the time, so reliability and validity are present in their paper.

Moving further, Bell’s study in 1997 reconfirms that student’s research can and is reliable. However, students should be careful with data collection, for example questionnaires, interviews, diaries, or other methods, as they are not important until they are analyzed. When analyzing data, students should be really careful with the risk of generalization, which is one of the drawbacks of our study. Studies as Bell (1997), Payne and Williams (2005), Bassey (1981) and others, pay very much attention to generalization in student's research. Payne and Williams (2005) give a terminology of the word generalize as it follows “to generalize means to assert that what is true in one place or at one time will be true in another place or at another period (p.296). Their study shows that words like “suggest”, “tend”, “illustrate”, and “some of” are mostly used in a way that rendered claims unclear. Žindžiuvienė (2009) also highlights that in small research papers, generalization may be unlikely, but relatibility may be entirely possible.

Moreover, some of the difficulties that students mostly face as shown in our study is the challenge to get started with the research and find a good title. Bogdan and Biklen’s study in 2003 advice students to adopt the principle of “writing-as-you-go” throughout the study, as students will already have some drafts; and, even if they are rough, it is always preferable to confront a blank page or screen than a badly written and incomplete manuscript. Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) say that they have learned the hard way that preserving notes, transcripts, references, and rough drafts is essential, or as they call it “alpine collection of information”.

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RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The Benefits of Writing a Thesis

Continuous Feedback from the Mentor

During our focus groups, all of the students said that one of the benefits of writing a thesis is that you cannot do it wrong, as it is being continuously reviewed by the mentor, who wants the thesis to be perfect. Apart from mentoring, teachers also help students facilitate personal development, encourage them to make wise choices (Zachary, 2002, 2005), and help them transfer these skills into career (Zeeb, 1998). By using praise, students’ motivation can change for good, as shown in many studies (Ames, 1992; Koestner et al., 1987).

Fitore, one of the focus group students, asserted the necessity to empower learners:

If it wasn’t for my mentor, who helped me understand thesis better, but at the same time, didn’t let me stress out, but motivated me throughout the process, I wouldn’t have finished my thesis on time. I was overwhelmed by the name thesis, and I never thought that a little support and motivation from my mentor will make things this easy.

Similarly, Shi’s study on empowering motivation also shows that a little motivation can go a long way, and even lead students to take responsibility for their own learning (2005). As we can see, the mentors in this case used the Achievement Goal Theory (Skaalvik, 2004) to motivate students in order to graduate on time. Similarly, Simpson (2008) thinks that for teachers, in order to enhance the motivation of their students, they will be to use an eclectic mix of other theories, not only the Achievement Goal Theory. He further suggests that depending on the personality and learning style of the student, different theories can be used within classroom.

A Well-Written Research to Add to the Portfolio

Students in this study listed portfolio as a part of the thesis, as they thought it is a way to see your own progress, it allows you to come back and improve your own work, and it offers the possibility for the potential hiring committee different spheres and interests of your work. Aroma, one of the participants in the focus group said:

Portfolio gives us a chance to list our best work, including thesis, to places that we are looking forward to applying for job. Furthermore, the employees have a chance to see our best interests, not only in one paper as thesis, but numerous other projects showed in different multimodalities.

Similarly, students from the online questionnaire showed that the majority of them would write a B.A paper, rather than just present a portfolio at the end of their studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Preferences of students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B.A thesis</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
<td>29</td>
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In the other hand, teachers also agree that it’s easier to assess students through portfolios as it keeps them engaged throughout the course (Hirvela & Pierson, 2000; Murphy, 1994), and as Belanoff (1994) pointed out, “We are forced to face the writer, not just the writing (p.23).

Pursuing Your Own Interests

The University “Fehmi Agani” allows student to choose the topic they want to research as it shows students’ interest. It is known that students use writing to engage with a range of different communities often by producing many different texts for diverse purposes (McMullan, 2019), to acknowledge other scholar (Hyland, 2003), or sometimes just to follow their interest.

Jon, one of the students in our focus study, said:
My thesis topic was something I wanted to research a long time ago, but I just couldn’t find the time for it. Now that I’m finished with it, I’m happy as I have worked on something that really shows my own interests, my viewpoints, and my suggestions in the future.

By this, we understood that, giving students freedom to choose their topics, their work will be much better as they are working with passion.

**The Benefit of Composition Classes**

All of the students in our focus group and from the data in our questionnaire showed how the composition class named “Thesis” in the last semester helped them to work academically better, be able to find the right articles, use the right methodology, etc.; in other words, 96% of the students who filled out the questionnaire showed that the course Thesis helped them do better in their final draft.

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<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have an opinion on this</td>
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**The Drawbacks of Writing a Thesis**

**Stress**

Many studies show how writing a thesis is a lot of stress. Stress and anxiety can be found while not being able to find a good title, not having enough time to write your thesis, not being able to find articles for the literature review, etc. Many scholars think similarly, as Bazraflkan et al., study in 2016. Their study shows that stress was one of the major results that was found in students while writing the thesis. Furthermore, they highlight how students were overwhelmed with finding a good title as it would determine his or her future research approaches.

**Generalization of Ideas**

Generalization can be understood as a “cognitive process involving classification and categorization, an element of macroprocessing through which the reader abstracts gist.” (Friend, 2001, p.6). Many students misunderstand the idea of generalization while writing a thesis. Students in our focus group discussed how generalization was a problem in their thesis. By not having enough time to research and find what other scholars think in different topics, they would generalize the data, thinking they are doing a summary (Dole et al., 1991).

**Managing Information**

Vesa, one of the participants in the focus group, said:

I had lots of articles in my hand and sometimes it would get messy, and I wouldn’t know how to manage this information. I found it hard to combine author’s ideas in one or two sentences, or sometimes, if I didn’t write where I read something, I would forget the author and publication. What helped me was to keep track of what I was reading and applied the principle of “writing-as-you-go”.

Bazraflkan’s et al., highlights that writing a thesis requires both short-term and long-term time management skills because it is a lengthy project that should be done without artificial deadlines (2016). Furthermore, students’ answers from the online questionnaire showed that they had a hard time finding the right literature for their research, as shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>Finding a good thesis</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding the right literature</th>
<th>67.7</th>
</tr>
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<td>Analyzing the data</td>
<td>12.9</td>
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CONCLUSION

Many studies confirm that students feel more academic when they have a portfolio in the end of their Bachelor studies, however, they also think that composition classes and a research paper helps them if they want to join the academia later in their lives. Similarly, students from Fehmi Agani "University", take a composition class in their last semester to prepare them to write academically and majority of the students in our focus group and from the data in our questionnaire showed that the course Thesis helped them do better in their final draft (see the table 2 above).

To sum it up, students prefer writing a B.A thesis over a portfolio as they get continuous support from their mentor, prepare themselves for academia, and they further pursue their own interest by researching the topic they want. There are also drawbacks listed from students as they were writing a thesis, such as not being able to find the right material, not having access to some journals, the idea of generalizing information, stress, etc.

As a recommendation from this study, we recommend Higher Education in Kosovo and abroad to add classes, such as Thesis, in the last semester or even before which would help and prepare students to write better.

REFERENCES


