



P-ISSN 2355-2794
E-ISSN 2461-0275

Strategies Employed by EFL Doctoral Candidates in Dissertation Completion

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Abstract

This research study aimed at revealing the strategies employed by successful English as a Foreign Language (EFL) doctoral candidates in accomplishing their dissertation writing and their perspectives in association with the stages of research report writing. This is a narrative qualitative inquiry, and the data were collected through an in-depth interview with ten successful EFL fresh graduates who had completed their dissertation writing within 6 and 7 semesters. Using a retrospective technique, the respondents were asked to recall their experiences and activities during the process of writing their dissertation. The results

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Citation in APA style: Marhaban, S., Puspitasari, Y., Mukminatien, N., Widiati, U., Sulisty, T., Suhastyanang, W. D., & Muslem, A. (2021). Strategies employed by EFL Doctoral candidates in dissertation completion. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 8(2), 546-560.

Received November 8, 2020; Revised February 27, 2021; Accepted March 5, 2021; **Published Online May ..., 2021**

<http://1234/123/4/siele/.1.4...>

reveal that the successful doctoral candidates used 4 main strategies of dissertation writing: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. In completing each of the dissertation stages, the doctoral candidates spent much time reading a huge collection of research articles, writing their dissertation on a daily basis, and having intensive consultation with their advisors. This study would be useful for EFL doctoral students to avoid delay in completing their studies and to meet their academic timeline. So that EFL doctoral candidates can face their challenging dissertation writing to complete their study on time.

Keywords: Dissertation completion strategies, EFL doctoral candidates, academic timeline, stages of a research report.

1. INTRODUCTION

The doctoral dissertation is a final year academic project required for the doctoral degree students to accomplish their program. Those who pursue doctoral degree programs have to conduct research and write their research reports in the form of a dissertation. A dissertation can be defined as the written report of a research study on a particular subject undertaken as partial fulfilment of a graduate doctoral degree that must meet academic standards for such scholarly research (Clark, 2006; Thomas & Brubaker, 2000). Clark (2006) further states that the goal of writing a dissertation for EFL learners is to use English to convince a committee or other members of the academic community covering three important components: the problem, situation, and significant issue which has not been commonly treated adequately. The authors are required to create or discover a credible strategy or direction for addressing the problem, situational context, or current issues on ELT systematically and adequately.

Writing a dissertation for EFL students is difficult and very challenging as it is the genre of high academic performance in a very sophisticated research project, especially when it should be written in English. Many students find it difficult to write a dissertation as they have to engage critically with complex texts, discovering ideas, writing a compelling proposal, developing and revising drafts, constructing the review of the literature, working with tables and graphs, and using various cueing and organizational strategies to maintain manageability and coherence (Çetinkaya & Yılmaz, 2017; Clark, 2006; Joyner et al., 2013; Komba, 2015; Peng, 2018). Similarly, Roberts (2004) and Emilia (2012) state that graduate students find difficulties in writing their dissertation as it is a unique genre of academic writing. It implies that writing a dissertation is different from writing assignments of courses assigned by their lecturers or papers in seminars.

In relation to dissertation writing, the existing literature presents a lot of research focusing on challenges that doctoral students face in writing in the EFL context. However, not much attention has been devoted to investigating how EFL students go through the stages of dissertation writing. Komba (2015) investigated challenges of writing dissertation among postgraduate students and found that the majority (more than 50%) of the candidates whose dissertation were reviewed, faced many problems in writing their dissertation as shown by inappropriateness in

presenting different chapters of the reports and indicated lack of academic writing skill. In addition, [Çetinkaya and Yılmaz \(2017\)](#) conducted a research study on how BA students perceived the graduation thesis writing process and the possible challenges they faced. This study found that graduate students were confronted with difficulties related to language, writing style, research topic, research methodology, and personal matters. Furthermore, [Peng \(2018\)](#) conducted a research study to explore the generic difficulties in thesis/dissertation writing perceived by graduate supervisors. The results of the study showed that the thesis/dissertation writing generic difficulties demonstrated by the research students were related to the narrative literature review and lack of conceptual framework. Other previous research studies revealed that students used a variety of strategies to cope with the process of writing covering cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies ([Graham, 2008](#); [Mohite, 2014](#); [Peñuelas, 2012](#)).

Although extensive research has been carried out on the writing process and writing strategies used by students in scientific writing, a study focussing on dissertation writing strategies employed by EFL Doctoral candidates has not been found yet. As a matter of fact, only a few doctoral students of Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia, are able to complete their studies in a short of time, within 6 or 7 semesters, or on time as scheduled in their academic timeline. Most of the students delay their studies as they cannot complete their challenging dissertation writing. The main aim of this research study is to investigate the strategies of dissertation writing employed by EFL doctoral students of Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia who had successfully completed their study within 6 or 7 semesters. The dissertation writing strategies would be beneficial to enable students to take control of their writing process which in turn would lead to an increase in students' writing performance and confidence as independent writers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Writing Strategies

Writing is the most difficult language skill competence to most foreign language learners as it is not only a task of selecting and producing language but rather of the way how to generate and develop coherent ideas by using appropriate written language ([Adas & Bakir 2013](#); [Brown, 2002](#); [Marashi & Mirghafari, 2019](#); [Nur & Sofi, 2019](#); [Rahmawati et al., 2019](#)). To solve problems in completing academic writing, learners have to read a lot as reading is a key skill for mastering other language skills including writing ([Ahmed et al., 2018](#)). In addition, language learners have to use effective writing strategies in completing their writing tasks. Writing strategies, under the umbrella of language learning strategies, have actually been used widely for thousands of years. [Oxford \(1990\)](#) defines learning strategies as the specific actions taken by the student to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. From the definition, it can be concluded that the learning strategies are very important as they are steps taken by students to maximize their own learning. [Oxford \(1990\)](#) states that appropriate strategies are essential for language learning because they result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence. Thus, to

write successfully, effective writing strategies have to be carefully considered. According to [Sulistyo and Heriyawati \(2017\)](#), effective writers apply more suitable strategies than ineffective ones.

In relation to writing strategies, [Oxford \(1990\)](#) classifies strategies of writing into cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies, and affective strategies. Cognitive strategies refer to the use of specific techniques to accomplish a particular task of writing, such as a dissertation. As a direct strategy, cognitive strategy refers to variations of self-consistent modes among individuals in the preferred way of perceiving, organizing, or recalling information and experience ([Olson & Land, 2007](#)). Thus, cognitive writing strategies, which mean the use of the mind (cognition) to solve a problem of a complete task, are very crucial in EFL writing. [Oxford \(1990\)](#) states that cognitive strategies are typically found to be the most popular strategies with language learners. Three techniques constituting cognitive strategies are in the forms of receiving messages (information), and creating a structure for input and practicing what they have learned.

The second strategy, called metacognitive strategy, is defined as the student's action which goes beyond purely cognitive devices and provides a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process ([Oxford, 1990](#)). It is believed that metacognitive strategies are essential for successful writing tasks as they help a writer understand and control his or her cognitive performance. Metacognition is basically "thinking about thinking". To put it simply, metacognitive strategies are skills, approaches, and thinking and actions learners use to control their cognition and learning process ([Fitrisia et al., 2015](#); [Zhang & Seepho, 2013](#)). Metacognitive strategies are closely related to the writing process such as organizing, planning, and monitoring, or evaluating. [Sulistyo et al. \(2019\)](#) claim that writing activities are not only a matter of how learners produce a text but also how they experience some steps of the process of writing. Thus, metacognitive strategies, as self-regulatory strategies in which students are aware of their own writing performance, are very crucial to the completion of dissertation writing. [Oxford \(1990\)](#) divides metacognitive strategies into three strategy sets: planning, practicing, and evaluating, which refer to planning what to do, practicing what they know, and evaluating what they have done.

The third type, affective strategies, are those which are non-academic in nature, but very important factors in writing a dissertation as they are related to managing motivation and emotion that can help students write their dissertation successfully. [Oxford \(1990\)](#) states that the term affective refers to motivations, emotions, attitudes, anxiety, self-esteem, values, and risk-taking. In addition, [Achmad and Yusuf \(2016\)](#) and [Pratolo \(2019\)](#) state that motivation and learners' beliefs play important roles in foreign language learning as they affect the ways how the learners approach language learning, and the learners' achievement in language learning highly depends on the learners' motivation and self-belief. [Pinkman \(2005\)](#) says that motivation in L2 acquisition is very important in influencing the outcomes of learning. [Alizadeh \(2016\)](#) states that motivation has a very crucial impact in learning English as ESL or EFL. She further explains that there are three main keys to motivation: (1) positive attitudes towards the L2 community, (2) the enjoyment of learning, and (3) external pressures. [Babae \(2012\)](#) claims that motivation increases students' L2 competence and performance. Thus, good writers are often those who know how to encourage their motivation and control their emotions and attitudes

about writing. It means that high motivation, positive emotion, self-beliefs, and attitude can make dissertation writing far more effective and enjoyable.

The last type, social strategies, refers to a form of social communication that involves other people, which play important roles in the process of a dissertation completion. There are two main social strategies of dissertation writing: asking questions and cooperating with other people. Asking questions, as one of the basic social interactions in the dissertation writing process, is an action in which writers gain a great benefit. Asking questions help student writers get closer to the intended goal, and thus aid their understanding (Oxford, 1990). Another important social strategy is that students need is to build good relationships and cooperation with peers, with more proficient users of English, and most importantly, with their dissertation advisors as the advisors are in charge of providing useful feedback on their advisees' drafts.

2.2 Stages of Dissertation Writing

There are three main stages of dissertation writing that most writers experience: the initial stage of writing a dissertation, the stage of conducting research, and the stage of writing a report in the form of a dissertation. Somehow, procedures of dissertation writing are different from one university to another, but most universities set up specific directions for their student writers (Oxford, 1990). Accordingly, becoming familiar with the procedures required by a university as early as possible is beneficial to the completion of dissertation writing.

At the initial stage, a doctoral candidate has to select potential topics, consult with dissertation advisors, determine one interesting topic for both parties (student and advisors), write a research proposal, defend the research proposal in front of the board of examiners, and revise the research proposal based on feedback provided (Academic Guidelines in *Pedoman Akademik Universitas Negeri Malang*, 2018). Choosing a topic is the first stage of a dissertation writing project as a student needs to be able to find the gap in the body of knowledge or space of academic issues for his or her future research. It is considered as one of the biggest challenging steps encountered by doctoral EFL students. Roberts (2004) and Clark (2006) propose some criteria for choosing a dissertation topic: the students must be genuinely interested in a topic; it must be manageable in scope; it must have the potentials to make an original and significant contribution to the body of knowledge; it should be feasible in the time frame and budget; it must be on obtainable data, and it should be of interest to dissertation advisors. On the other hand, Joyner et al. (2013) state that dissertation advisors are responsible for giving their students the direction and assistance the advisee needs to accomplish. It means that by consulting the research topic with advisors, the student will get more advice, comments, or feedback for his or her research. Although universities across the globe vary in their proposal requirements, almost all research proposals contain three major components: introduction to the study, theoretical framework (review of the related literature), and research methodology (Clark, 2006; Emilia, 2012; Joyner et al., 2013; Roberts, 2004).

The second stage to go through is conducting research. After going through the research proposal seminar and getting approval from the research proposal seminar board, in this stage, the student needs to revise and refine his or her research

instrument based on the feedback from the advisors and continue collecting, analysing, and interpreting the obtained data.

The last stage is writing a research report. After conducting research, the researcher then has to write a research report in the form of a complete dissertation which includes more chapters to add to those in the research proposal: findings, discussions, conclusions, etc. Writing a dissertation is still problematic to many EFL students as they have to be able to express ideas logically, clearly, and accurately and precisely. The dissertation requires a high level of scholarly writing skill and many graduate students seem uncertain about what a dissertation is supposed to accomplish and have only a vague idea about how to write (Clark, 2006; Emilia, 2012; Joyner et al., 2013; Roberts, 2004). Then, the researcher has to defend what he or she has written and reported in front of the board of examiners for oral defence in the dissertation examination.

This current study aims to investigate how doctoral candidates complete their dissertations successfully in due time. Hence, it is of great necessity to listen to the experience narratives and stories of the EFL doctoral candidates' who have successfully written their dissertations and completed their doctoral program on time. This study, then, tries to build research-based concepts of effective strategies employed by EFL doctoral students in dissertation writing completion.

3. METHOD

This is a descriptive qualitative study with a narrative inquiry designed to describe the strategies employed by EFL doctoral candidates during the process of dissertation writing. The data were collected by interviewing 10 EFL graduates of Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia majoring in ELT to explore their experiences in accomplishing their dissertation by organizing them into the initial stage of dissertation writing, the stage of conducting research, and the stage of writing a research report in the form of a doctoral dissertation. The interview questions were constructed based on the theory and practices of dissertation writing by Roberts (2004), Clark (2006), and Joyner et al. (2013). The steps of data collection and data analysis, as suggested by Creswell (2014), can be seen in Figure 1.

The respondents were selected by means of purposive sampling. All the respondents were recruited through a recommendation from trustees: EFL lecturers as dissertation advisors who had known the respondents well as they had a professional, advisors, and advisees, who have an academic relationship with the student writer during the process of dissertation writing. The respondents were considered typical as they had experienced a situation that made them complete their study on time, within 6 and 7 semesters in length. In other words, the respondents were the source of data who could share the rich and meaningful experiences and effective strategies in completing a dissertation in due time. The ten respondents are described in Table 1.

The respondents had completed their dissertation in 6 and 7 semesters, respectively. They had initially started their Doctoral program by taking courses for 3 semesters and the remaining 3 to 4 semesters were for conducting research and writing their dissertation.

To validate the accuracy of the narratives, we kept working and collaborating with the research respondents throughout the process of data collection. Several validation practices, such as respondent checking, triangulating among data sources, and searching for disconfirming evidence were useful to determine the accuracy and credibility of this narrative account (Creswell, 2014).

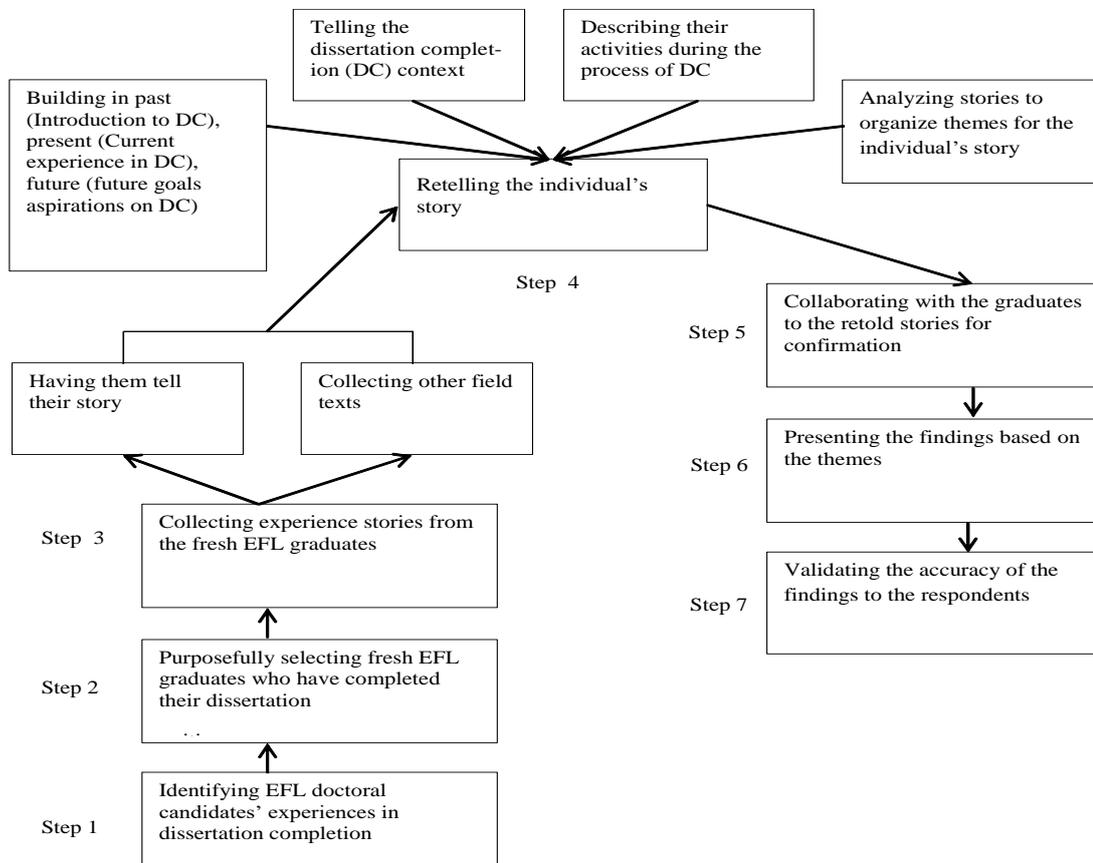


Figure 1. Steps in conducting the present narrative research.

Table 1. The respondents' profile.

Respondents	Gender	Length of study
Respondent 1 (R1)	Female	6 semesters
Respondent 2 (R2)	Male	6 semesters
Respondent 3 (R3)	Female	7 semesters
Respondent 4 (R4)	Female	7 semesters
Respondent 5 (R5)	Male	7 semesters
Respondent 6 (R6)	Male	7 semesters
Respondent 7 (R7)	Female	7 semesters
Respondent 8 (R8)	Female	7 semesters
Respondent 9 (R9)	Female	7 semesters
Respondent 10 (R10)	Male	7 semesters

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that there were four main strategies used by the respondents in completing their dissertation writing: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and

social strategies. The respondents, however, had different experiences in going through the dissertation stages during the process of dissertation writing; yet, there were some crucial similarities. The followings are three main stages of dissertation stages.

4.1 Initial Stage of Dissertation Writing

The respondents maximized the first stage of dissertation writing as early as possible in the first semester to select potential topics by reading a lot of related research articles in order to find the gaps in the previous research studies, took a position to fill in the gap of their new research and built their theoretical framework. They made a decision to choose their research topic after reading a lot of references and having discussions with their fellow learners. However, they got their topic settled at different times because they needed to come to the final step of the topic decision. According to Roberts (2004), the most effective and efficient ways to select a topic may follow three possibilities: relevant literature and discussions with friends or scholars in the same field. Then, during the process of writing a research proposal, they also extensively read related articles published in reputable international journals and regularly met their advisors for conferences in order to develop a complete research proposal to ensure that their topic is significant in filling in the gap. After completing their research proposal, the respondents defended their research proposal in a research proposal seminar session in front of the board of examiners. The respondents revealed that they revised their proposal draft right away after the seminar based on the comments, suggestions, and feedback from their dissertation advisors and examiners. In addition, they asked the experts' help for checking and validating their research instruments before they started collecting data for their research.

Most importantly, for the sake of writing a comprehensive dissertation, reading is the primary step in obtaining topics for the dissertation. The respondents read many international journal articles. The following are the responses of each respondent (R), and D refers to data that are displayed in sequences in this article.

- D1: "To select potential topics for my dissertation, I read a lot of references about the recent progress of the field, the gap or unanswered questions, the logic elaboration of the significance of the study, and the distinctive quality of the study compare with the previous studies." (R1)
- D2: "I read and review articles from both reputable international journals and accredited national journals a lot to see what the previous studies have done in relation to the research area. I spent my time reading and writing at least 5 hours a day to find a new researchable topic. In my research proposal background, I presented the results of the previous studies and my position based on the gap I found in the previous research." (R2)
- D3: "Before I selected a topic and wrote the background of the study, I read articles from reputable journals a lot. It was to find out the position of my research. The first important thing to be included in my background of the study was what other researchers had done in the related research area. The related research area I mean is the specific topic of research I conducted for my dissertation. By explaining the results of the previous studies, the position of my research could be determined. The second important thing – and probably the most important thing – was the gap to be fulfilled by the current research, the research for my dissertation." (R3)

D4: “The most crucial step to do is reading a lot. I believe that the more I read the better I write. Thus, I spent much time reading articles to get inspiration.” (R5)

R5, R6, and R7 told similar experiences that they spent much time reading and trying to find out an appropriate topic. Besides, they had attended research proposal seminars since the first semester, so they understood how to get a topic and generate ideas.

D5: “Besides reading a lot, I had many discussions with my classmates and scholars when deciding an appropriate topic since I got difficulties in the beginning how to find gaps to be further researched dealing with my topic.” (R8)

D6: “The most important thing was how to provide novelties in my dissertation, so I read a lot of articles in order to analyse the findings of the previous studies then I determined the gaps. I focused on how the articles presented the high-quality background of the study which attracted readers to enjoy reading the articles. For me, writing the background of the study was really hard, so reading was an important effort to do.” (R9)

D7: “I got difficulties in deciding the topic of my dissertation in the beginning. Then, my friends suggested that I need to read many international journal articles to enrich my background knowledge. It was true that reading activities gave me broader insights related to possible topics that I could select. Besides, I finally knew how to generate ideas when writing background of the study since I got a lot of models of good introduction or background of the study.” (R10)

The statements above indicate that reading plays a very important role in the journey of determining a research topic and writing their research background in their research proposal. Roberts (2004), Clark (2006), and Joyner et al. (2013) also urges students to proactively search the topics out by reading a lot. They provide some hints where to look for some potential research topics: consulting previous dissertations and see their recommendations; reading current theories and see whether the theories can be questioned; accessing the Internet as a variety of sources exist on the Internet. The current research findings in relation to selecting potential topics for the dissertation support the theory of how to choose a potential research topic proposed by Roberts (2004), Clark (2006), and Joyner et al. (2013).

Because the function of a research proposal is to argue the worth of the research, the strengths of the writer’s argument depend on the evidence he or she presents. In defending their research proposal, the respondents presented a convincing research gap that needs to be explored further. In addition, the respondents determined the position of their study among other previous studies of the same research area. After going through the research seminar proposal, the respondents did revisions on the draft of the proposal before starting collecting data for their research study. Moreover, the present research findings provide evidence of the theory proposed by Roberts (2004) which explains that defending the proposal is a major step to convince the board of examiners in the dissertation examination process. The main goal of presenting a research proposal is to obtain the committee’s approval to move ahead with the researcher’s study in accordance with agreements made in the meetings. In so doing, they would be confident in presenting both their research proposal and dissertation examination.

D8: “After I passed the proposal seminar, I did some revisions. The revisions were particularly on the background of the study to make sure that the gap was clearly stated. Then I directly prepared research instrument for data collection.” (R3)

In short, convincing the board of examiners that their proposals were significant enough in the research area was very crucial to pursue before collecting data.

4.2 Stage of Conducting Research

The second stage is conducting research in which the respondents collected data by using different research instruments depending on the data they needed to answer the research questions and valid instruments. [Kupzyk and Cohen \(2004\)](#) remind researchers of the importance of the instrument validity to guarantee that the data collected are those that they need to avoid errors. After collecting data, they presented and analysed the data based on the data analysis procedures that they had planned previously by regularly having consultations with their dissertation advisors. During this step, they got valuable feedback and suggestions from their advisors by applying a good relationship between them. In this stage, multimodal feedback provision could improve students' competence when it is integrated with content, interpersonal relationship, and management ([Yusuf et al., 2017](#)).

Respondent 1 (R1), for instance, felt that collecting data, presenting research findings, and analysing data was a long and difficult journey. It was not a one-try and successful step, but it was a series of writing, revising, changing, and re-writing. Based on feedback from her dissertation advisors, she re-wrote the findings, again and again, so the findings were presented meaningfully and aligned with the research problems. In contrast, Respondent 2 (R2) and Respondent 3 (R3) had mostly used research questions as the guide in presenting the research findings, discussion, and analysis.

On the stage of collecting data, they needed suggestions from experts to validate their instruments and data. In line with the instrument validity, the interview revealed that the respondents used experts to validate their research instruments. According to [Cohen et al. \(2017\)](#), data entry can result in errors causing analytic problems and delay in disseminating research. That is why, the instrument had to be valid before they wrote a report. R1 felt that presenting research findings was a long and difficult journey. It was not a one-try and successful step, but it was a series of writing, making changes, and re-writing. Based on feedback from her dissertation advisors, she revised the findings again and again, so the findings were presented meaningfully. In contrast, R2 and R10 had a better experience as they presented their research findings based on the research questions. They used the research question(s) as the guide in writing the findings section of their dissertations. Similar to R2 who used research questions as the guide in presenting the research findings, R3, R4, R5, and R6 also used the research questions as the guide in writing the research findings. Thus, they only wrote the relevant data from particular respondents which were relevant to the research questions. R7, R8, and R9 stated that the research questions led them to what to do next. This is in line with the suggestions of [Roberts \(2004\)](#) who mentions that organizing data by merely focusing on research questions is a good way to clearly discuss the findings and to maintain consistency among chapters. In short, these current research findings support the theory proposed by [Roberts \(2004\)](#).

4.3 Stage of Writing a Research Report

On the stage of writing a research report in the form of a complete dissertation, they still had regular consultations with their advisors and read more journal articles. In fact, reading journal articles helped them much to write their research reports. After they had written their research reports, they had to go through two phases of dissertation oral defence. In the first phase of the oral defence, the respondents presented their obtained data, data analysis, and conclusion. During the first phase of the oral defence, they got a lot of feedback, comments, and suggestions from the board of examiners. After the examination, the respondents immediately revised their dissertation drafts for the next phase of the dissertation examination, the final dissertation examination. At this stage, the respondents again got a lot of feedback from the board of examiners and revised their dissertation by involving their fellow learners to proofread their dissertation final draft.

Finally, the respondents felt relaxed when they had to defend through their dissertation exam as they had prepared themselves well for everything related to their research defence. This feeling probably arose from their self-efficacy in completing their task in finishing their dissertation. It is in harmony with the findings of a study by [Genc et al. \(2016\)](#) stating that students' perceptions about language learning are affected by their English self-efficacy. That is why, it is suggested that lecturers encourage their students to have more self-efficacy in language learning, so the outcomes of the teaching learning process will be achieved. It is also supported by [Raofi et al. \(2012\)](#) who state that self-efficacy is a valid predictor of students' performance in different language skills and tasks. Thus, the higher self-efficacy a student has the better achievement he/she gets ([Sulistyo et al., 2019](#)). This is also in connection to [Roberts \(2004\)](#) and [Emilia \(2012\)](#) who state that the oral defence is the ultimate step of one's doctoral journey. They had to work hard and hopefully produced a scholarly piece of work of which they can be proud of. Their advisors and the board of examiners also took the pride and pleasure in their accomplishments. It suggests that sufficient preparation helps them a lot in defending their dissertation and becoming successful learners to finish their doctoral program.

Regarding their experiences, the respondents' applied strategies can be categorized into four strategies involving cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. In cognitive strategies they applied some activities such as reading a lot of reputable international journal articles, making a summary in order to build a theoretical framework, and applying the process of writing covering pre-writing, drafting, revising, and writing the final dissertation. In other words, they applied a process-based approach in accomplishing their dissertation. This condition exists as the result of the fact that writing is fairly complex, so students do not ordinarily write a perfect composition in a single draft ([Gebhard, 2000](#)), but they have to do some steps before completing their composition. According to [Cahyono \(1999\)](#), this approach focuses on two things: what goes on when students write a text and what a teacher can do to help students go through the natural writing process. This approach allows students to do some activities in writing a composition by applying the awareness to plan, do, and monitor their own activities. The students, in this context, seemed aware of the importance to apply steps of writing in the dissertation accomplishment. In metacognitive strategies, they organized and planned their activities of writing the dissertation, including monitoring or evaluating their overall

activities since according to Ruan (2005) the students need to apply appropriate strategies in writing which will influence their writing quality. The reality shows, however, that most students do not develop self-reflective abilities on their own, but they need direct instruction, plenty of coaching, and frequent reminders (Joseph, 2006). Thus, encouraging students to apply steps of writing is meant to facilitate them to be confident writers (Sulisty et al., 2019). Metacognitive strategies should remain in the minds of the students in order to be able to produce better tasks in their academic settings.

In affective strategies, they really utilized their motivation, positive attitudes, and emotions by working hard and keeping writing. It is in line with the findings of Sulisty et al. (2019) claiming that motivation leads to students' effort to be able to produce quality texts, so they work hard in accomplishing their writing tasks. Furthermore, Ushida (2005) found that motivation and attitudes play a primary role in L2 learning. Also, the attitudes towards learning learners have inevitably influenced the outcomes (Bråten & Strømsø, 2006; Duarte, 2007). Thus, affective strategies might provide students with better readiness to accomplish their dissertation completion.

Last of all, social strategies were done by asking questions and having discussions not only with their advisors but also with their peers and scholars. By doing so, they tried to keep in touch with the advisors and peers to make it easier for them to complete their dissertations. It seemed that having good in touch with the advisors and peers played very crucial roles in the dissertation accomplishment, so they got good models or examples showing especially what they have to do linguistically (Kim, 2006). In addition, Brown (2001) suggests that teachers should facilitate students to understand what they have to do in accomplishing a written task since writing is more complex than spoken language. All in all, students need to develop and keep a good relationship with people surrounding them, specifically their teachers (Syhabuddin et al., 2020), advisors, peers, and scholars in the same field.

5. CONCLUSION

The data lead to the conclusion that the respondents used four main strategies in completing their dissertation: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Cognitive strategies mainly consist of reading, summarizing, and practicing writing. Metacognitive strategies cover organizing, planning, and monitoring the whole actions of accomplishing the processes of dissertation completion. In addition, affective strategies involve the acts of keeping high motivation, positive emotions, and attitudes to make them enjoy and continue writing. Lastly, social strategies cover asking questions and having discussions especially with the dissertation advisors, peers, and scholars. These strategies have been proved beneficial to the completion of dissertation writing and helped them devote much of the time to be engaged with the dissertation completion process. Every day, the respondents tried to do a lot of activities that could make them closer to the timeline of the completion of dissertation writing. They did some work on their dissertation on a daily basis. The study reveals that the respondents began to engage in the process that led them to complete their dissertations by devoting much of their

time reading references and writing their dissertation. It means that the more time they spent reading and writing, the sooner they could complete their dissertation. In addition, reading reputable international journal articles helped them a lot not only in obtaining the topic of their dissertation but also in the stages of elaborating the data, analysing the data, and synthesizing the data. Another important thing in the social strategies is a good relationship with their advisors who helped them much in providing suggestions and feedback as well as friends who acted as proof-readers. In short, their strategies helped them become effective dissertation writers.

Since the present study is limited to ten respondents, further research which provides a greater number of respondents coming from different cultural backgrounds would be recommended to be conducted. This is important for providing more complete and comprehensive results to provide better insights related to a better description of strategies, experience, and/or activities in dissertation writing completion. In doing so, their experiences may inspire other students to create more systematic procedures and effective strategies in accomplishing their challenging dissertation.

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