



The Critical Inquiry of Indonesian Beginner Linguistic Researchers: A Longitudinal Study

Rohmani Nur Indah^(✉) and Lestari Kasih

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Malang, Indonesia
indah@bsi.uin-malang.ac.id

Abstract. Beginner linguistic researchers need to develop critical inquiry research skills. Inquiry is a stance toward learning where learners use various resources to develop their understanding of a topic that requires exploration and quest. This study reviews the challenges beginner linguistic researchers in the English Department face to be successful researchers. It investigates how the students construct their critical inquiry represented in their research proposal and the development made during the process of coaching clinic. This case study takes the data of 220 thesis proposals English department students of an Islamic State University in Indonesia submitted in the even semester of 2021. During this term, students relied on their autonomous learning skills during the pandemic break as they had limited access to face-to-face discussion to complete their linguistic research proposal. The finding shows some identified weaknesses reflecting the low skill of critical inquiry. The dominant adversities in the proposals cover developing research questions, establishing the context, presenting novelty of research direction, elaborating reasons of subject selection, and paraphrasing from sources. Meanwhile, the remaining limitations presented in the final period of proposal submission concern elaborating reasons of subject selection, establishing the context, and presenting the novelty of research direction. The finding results in the implication for the topics to include in the syllabus for the course of proposal writing clinic for beginner linguistic researchers.

Keywords: Critical inquiry · Beginner researcher · Research adversities

1 Introduction

Presenting ideas in the form of a research proposal in English as a foreign language is a challenge in itself. For beginner researchers who are more dominant in using the first language in writing scientific papers, a more complex strategy is needed to present information in a rhetorical structure and style that is suitable for academic readers in the target language, namely English. When the author as a beginner researcher faces these difficulties, it is necessary to support a discussion forum in the mother tongue which can then strengthen understanding in the research community to use a more systematic argument flow [1].

The difficulties encountered by beginner linguistic researchers occur in the English department of a state Islamic universities in Indonesia. Based on the results of preliminary research, it showed that the students still encounter many challenges that arise in the process of writing a thesis proposal that requires critical inquiry. Moreover, in that process, students work autonomously during the pandemic. The limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction to discuss the elements of a thesis proposal make it difficult to prepare a thesis proposal that meets the requirements and is feasible. Even though the critical inquiry needed involves an understanding of linguistic, methodological, conceptual, and ontological challenges [2]. These challenges will be difficult to overcome by beginner researchers independently to prepare a qualified proposal.

For this reason, the English department held a coaching clinic program for students who submit research proposals. This program is a realization of support for beginner researchers to develop core research skills through targeted guidance [3]. Students are given the opportunity to get written feedback in the thesis proposal selection process. Those who do not meet the qualifications are included in the coaching clinic program to get oral feedback. Both written and oral feedback is not only given in English but also in Indonesian. This is because writing scientific papers in English is a big linguistic challenge, especially for beginner researchers who are not native English speakers. Beginner writers certainly need to struggle in the process of publishing their research papers [4].

Barriers to representing critical inquiry in English indirectly also affect scientific productivity because it raises the anxiety of writers, especially beginner researchers [5]. These weaknesses can be identified in the structure of the introduction in the thesis proposal [6]. This can be understood considering the tendency that the linguistic aspect is an influential factor in considering the acceptance of manuscripts as qualified or not [7].

Several studies regarding the weaknesses in writing a thesis proposal state that the writing process is strongly influenced by external factors such as communication and discussion, completion time management and commitment factors [8]. In addition, other difficulties are supported by a lack of mastery of research methods [9]. Writing a thesis proposal becomes very difficult due to problems with topic choice, linguistic difficulties, and lack of writing practice [10].

Specifically, the process of writing a thesis proposal is an implementation of critical inquiry that needs to be honed through involvement in various scientific forums. Scientific forums are an effective way to develop critical inquiry [11]. In this study, the scientific forum observed was the coaching clinic for the thesis proposal. Therefore, this research departs from the assumption that the development of critical inquiry of beginner linguistic research can be observed from the implementation of the thesis proposal preparation process which is directed by a coaching clinic.

By seeing that the critical inquiry represented in the writing of a thesis proposal is a development process that needs to be observed more deeply, this research aims at two things. First, to obtain a description of the area of research adversities that is a challenge in the critical inquiry development process, which is represented in the form of a thesis proposal. The second is to get an analytical explanation regarding the extent to which

discussion forums such as the coaching clinic of thesis proposal writing can bridge the emerging research adversities.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Critical Inquiry and Research Skills

Critical inquiry is one of the critical thinking competencies that is increasingly emerging in the research era. To hone critical inquiry, the principles of validity, practicality, and effectiveness are needed. If the validity aspect is applied in critical thinking learning, the focus group discussion (FGD) mechanism can be applied. In addition, skills are needed to critically make analytical observations as the implementation of practicality aspects. As well as implementing an effective model by assessing critical thinking abilities [11].

Research skills cannot be separated from the application of critical inquiry theory. More specifically, in learning design, the critical inquiry development process is very significant for developing critical thinking skills, finding answers and formulating a research focus which is the main competency of research skills [12]. Thus, the addition of critical thinking skills development activities using critical inquiry techniques is the most important element in instructional activities to improve students' research skills. In this study, the integration between critical inquiry and research skills occurs in the coaching clinic program.

Academic strengthening developed through mentoring programs for thesis proposal writing such as a coaching clinic is an important step that is closely related to research skill development. This kind of research skill development framework has become a conceptual framework for the development of research skills for academic and educational needs [13]. Furthermore, the framework of research skill development will provide direct benefits for students who are useful in working on projects that require skills in analyzing problems to find answers. This is the essence of inquiry-based learning. Thus, it is clear that research skills and critical inquiry have a close relationship.

2.2 Current Issues of Linguistic Research

Talking about the dynamics of linguistic research cannot be separated from the term "garden and bush" which was introduced by Bresnan. The object of linguistic research was initially called "garden" because it was more concerned with generative grammars, where researchers studied linguistic phenomena which then qualitatively generalized the application of linguistic theory, for example by using linguistic symbols like syntax trees. Over time, linguistic research has penetrated into "bush" where the study is broader because it raises daily communication and examines in-depth and comprehensively about language in the field. This case, of course, requires a more diverse and integrated theory with various disciplines [14].

Current issues in linguistic research are closely related to the language context, which is very diverse in the world. In Nigeria, for example, there are several complexities affect the development of linguistic research. The first concern is the dominance of English as a formal language in research while linguists do not receive adequate training to develop

research in Nigerian as L1. In addition, because Nigerian literacy from print media is very low, the linguist's interest in developing mother tongue linguistic research is also lower. In fact, in Nigeria, there are 515 kinds of languages that are spoken by users to remote areas, but it is not known exactly how the development and preservation of each of these languages is.

Moreover, there is no clear separation between language and language variations such as dialects. For political reasons, different dialects have been referred to as different languages. The result is the extinction of the language. Several languages in Nigeria have been suspected of being extinct because they are not studied, so they are increasingly unknown and are no longer widely used [15].

In recent years, the trend of linguistic research studies has applied an interdisciplinary research approach. Therefore, researchers need to synergize special methods to conclude what linguistic phenomena are like in the significant data era. However, interdisciplinary linguistic development is still needed to reach broader issues [16]. From this view, it is necessary to follow up on multidimensional linguistic research, which does not only involve interdisciplinary aspects but also performs comparisons between languages. This is in view of the diversity of languages and linguistic challenges in the technological era which increasingly require in-depth and comprehensive studies.

3 Method

This study uses a case study design [17] to understand more comprehensively about how the critical inquiry development process appears in adversities in writing a thesis proposal. The data source is the thesis research proposal of the students of the English study program at UIN Malang, submitted from January to April 2022. A total of 220 proposals in the field of linguistics.

The data collection process was carried out in several stages namely documenting all proposals submitted online and selecting proposals that raised linguistic topics. After that, written feedback is taken, which is given by the reviewer of each proposal. Then the feedback is confirmed with the contents of the proposal to see the suitability of each other. The next step is to conduct interviews with reviewers regarding oral feedback discussed in the coaching clinic, to find out areas of adversities faced by students. As the last step, the data display.

In the data analysis process, the first step is to identify the pattern of research adversities found in the data of the written feedback by adapting to the research framework of Suryatiningsih [19], then look for the percentage of their occurrence. The next step of analysis was to identify the area of research adversities based on the interview result or the data of oral feedback. Furthermore, the analysis was carried out to see to what extent there was a similar pattern between the written feedback and areas of research adversities that appeared in the oral feedback. After that, conclusions are drawn about how critical inquiry develops during the process of improving the proposals submitted from the beginning to the end of the thesis proposal submission period.

4 Findings

In the proposal collection process, findings regarding the category of linguistic area are summarized in Table 1. The number of proposals is calculated based on the proposal collection period, namely during the first period in January to the fourth period in April 2022.

Table 1 shows that the dominance of the proposals received was in the Pragmatics area (33%) namely on topics such as turn-taking strategies, verbal humour, implicature and explicature. In the area of Critical Discourse Analysis (20%) the accepted topics are, for example, ideological representation, power and ideology, social actor representation. In the Semantics area (18%) the accepted topics for example are social and affective meaning, conceptual metaphors and others. As for Sociolinguistics (18%) the topics include registers, sarcasm, colloquialism analysis. Meanwhile, topics in Psycholinguistics (4%) that were accepted included dysathria speech disorder, Schizophrenia speech abnormality, etc.

From the beginning of the proposal period, it appears that Pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis are excellent but no longer dominate at the end of the period. The topics that are less attractive to the proponents of the proposal include Phonology, Morphology and Syntax. Besides that, Translation and Cultural Studies are also not attracting the attention of beginner researchers. At the end of the period a title appeared on Semiotics.

From Table 2, it can be seen that most of the rejected proposals from the Pragmatics area (39%) were on topics such as deixis, flouting and hedging maxims, and politeness or impoliteness strategies. In the area of Sociolinguistics (19%) topics that were not accepted were, for example, language style, speech act, code switching, euphemism

Table 1. Linguistic area of the accepted proposals

Linguistic area	Accepted				Σ <i>Accepted</i>
	I	II	III	IV	
Phonology	1	1	-	-	2
Morphology	-	1	-	-	1
Syntax	2	-	-	-	2
Semantics	6	9	4	1	20
Semiotics	-	-	-	1	1
Pragmatics	16	10	8	3	37
CDA	13	7	2	-	22
Sociolinguistics	6	10	4	-	20
Psycholinguistics	1	4	-	-	5
Translation	1	-	-	-	1
Cultural studies	-	1	-	-	1
<i>N</i>	46	43	18	5	112

Table 2. Linguistic area of the rejected proposals

Linguistic area	Rejected				Σ <i>Rejected</i>
	I	II	III	IV	
Phonology	3	1	-	2	6
Morphology	1	1	-	-	2
Syntax	1	1	-	-	2
Semantics	5	3	-	-	8
Semiotics	-	-	-	-	-
Pragmatics	31	10	1	-	42
CDA	7	2	2	-	11
Sociolinguistics	13	5	1	2	21
Psycholinguistics	11	2	1	1	15
Translation	1	-	-	-	1
Cultural studies	-	-	-	-	-
<i>N</i>	74	24	5	5	108

and dysphemism. In the area of Psycholinguistics (18%) topics that were rejected, for example, were expressive aphasia, slips of tongue, and language disorder. As for Critical Discourse Analysis (10%) the topics include CDA on speech and on advertising. Meanwhile, topics in Semantics (7%) that were rejected included lexical and contextual meaning, etc.

Not much different from the proposals received, the rejected topics also included Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics at the beginning of the proposal submission period. Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics topics from the whole period show a rejection of the topic. Meanwhile, the topic of Semiotics and Cultural Studies does not attract beginner researchers. Students whose proposals are rejected are given the opportunity to attend a coaching clinic and resubmit their proposals in the next period.

The following analysis regarding the area of research adversities obtained from written feedback data which has been confirmed with a proposal script and then strengthened from data from interviews with coaching clinic instructors. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 3.

In the initial period of proposing proposals, it appears that the highest feedback is related to critical inquiry in formulating research questions that can be understood by readers (40%) followed by weak critical inquiry in compiling an introduction that shows establishing context or introducing to the linguistic issues being the concern (39%). In the third place, namely the inability to review the research distinction, namely synthesizing the results of previous studies to show the research gap (29%).

In the second period, a different pattern occurred in which the beginner researcher had difficulty in compiling an introduction that establishes the context of research (55%)

Table 3. Linguistic research adversities in the proposals

Research Adversities	I	II	III	IV
Context	47	37	13	6
Subject selection	25	21	8	7
Distinction	35	35	9	6
Position	13	19	5	5
Essential concepts	10	4	4	1
Paraphrasing	18	11	2	4
Significance	11	4	3	1
Title	9	9	8	4
Procedures	11	18	7	5
Questions	48	25	7	3
<i>N</i>	120	67	23	10
<i>Acceptance level</i>	46 (40%)	43 (64%)	18 (78%)	5 (50%)

followed by difficulties in showing a research gap compared to current relevant previous studies (52%). Only then did the inaccuracy in formulating the research question which showed the feasibility of the research (35%). The third period, the composition of adversities did not differ from the second period.

In the last period, the number of proposals submitted was less because many had passed. In the last period, the ability to formulate research questions is no longer a major research adversity. Establishing context (60%) and presenting research distinction (60%) are still challenges for critical inquiry. Another challenge that seems no less important is in synthesizing several resources because it turns out that there is a tendency not to paraphrase so that the similarity index still doesn't meet the requirements. Adversity of paraphrasing from various sources is a challenge (40%).

The next analysis regarding the area of research adversities was obtained from oral feedback data which was confirmed through interviews with the instructor of the coaching clinic in each period. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 4. In the following analysis, T1 means teacher or instructor in the first coaching clinic, and so on.

Based on the interview results, several reasons emerged regarding the remaining adversities, which showed the slow development of critical inquiry on the ability to establish research context. According to the instructor in the last period, the ability to explain context has not yet shown introducing issues. Instead, it describes the definition of clichés which generally begins with understanding language, communication, or understanding the field of science being studied (T4).

The reasons mentioned related to subject selection also have not shown adequate development of critical inquiry. This is because students tend to write down definitions of the topics instead of emphasizing why the subject is selected. Therefore, it cannot explain the peculiarities of the subject in question (T1). In addition, students have not

Table 4. The remaining adversities in the proposals

Research Adversities	I	II	III	IV
Context	-	-	-	✓
Subject selection	✓	-	✓	-
Distinction	✓	✓	✓	✓
Questions	✓	✓	✓	✓

been able to distinguish between personal and research interest. For example, in the proposal it is stated that: because it is interesting, because it likes it, because it is good. They do not know how to explain the linguistic uniqueness of the chosen subject. Finally, this obstacle affects the research gap and research question formulation (T3).

In this case, all instructors have the same view regarding the difficulties in presenting the novelty of the research. It was stated that students wrote a lot of previous studies and tended to show similarities from the results of previous studies by looking at the differences in terms of the object being studied, not reaching the actual gap (T1). Students tend to be confused in determining the distinction, not knowing how to find new topics from already saturated topics. The previous studies that appeared were even those whose objects were not related. For example, the target of speech acts in the movies, in previous studies which included speech acts in songs, in talk shows and in class, to make it seem that there are gaps, even though there are already much speech acts in movies (T2). In addition, this difficulty is a result from the inability to formulate reasons for seeking excess research subjects (T3). In general, students think that by distinguishing objects, a distinction will automatically appear. They do not understand that determining the distinction cannot be done by simply replicating other studies (T4).

The reasons mentioned related to subject selection also have not shown sufficient development of critical inquiry. The research questions that were made turned out to be asking more types of questions and usually the second question was not much different from the first question (T1). Students do not understand how to analyze research questions with the “how” formulation, their tendency to make “what” (T2). The difficulty in formulating research questions is the impact of the lack of clarity in explaining the research gap (T3). The formulation of the proposal’s research question does not appear to be linear with the title and is not easy to understand because it has not yet presented an image of what the answer will look like (T4).

5 Discussion

5.1 Research Adversities in the Proposals

The research data in Tables 1 and 2 shows that the variation in the linguistic area that is the choice of the beginner researcher is not too diverse and there is still dominance in specific fields of study, such as Pragmatics, Critical Discourse Analysis and Sociolinguistics. Meanwhile, in the area of pure linguistics, it is less desirable. It turns out that this is

in accordance with the assumption that the more people learn “bush” than “garden” as the term introduced by Bresnan that research is concerned with understanding linguistic phenomena in the field [14].

In proposing proposals for four periods, it appears that the topics raised by undergraduate students are related to the courses taken in the previous semester. Students have not penetrated into the area of comparative linguistics. This is understandable due to considerations of research feasibility, and practicality in terms of the time for completing the thesis. Time management is one of the main difficulties in completing an English thesis not only for students in Indonesia but also in other countries where English is a foreign language [8]. The choice of topics is generally based on interests and mastery of the linguistic area, this is because the challenges of preparing a thesis are quite complex. These challenges include linguistic, methodological, conceptual, and ontological challenges [2].

Beginner linguistic researchers observed in this study showed a tendency to have difficulty determining the research objectives formulated in research questions. Even though determining this question is the first step of critical inquiry which shows the extent to which the beginner researcher understands the nature of his research proposal [12]. This difficulty is suspected from the lack of mastery of the relevant material and the lack of deep conceptual understanding needed to review the object of research [18].

In addition to the weakness of the formulation of research questions, students showed critical inquiry weaknesses in preparing an introduction that shows establishing context or introducing to the linguistic issues being the concern. Weaknesses in the preparation of the introduction to the proposal were also revealed in another study at one of the universities in Indonesia [19], which stated that the ability of students to compose an introduction to proposals was in the sufficient category [6].

Presenting novelty of research direction as shown in Table 3 is also essential adversity. Beginner researchers have many difficulties in conveying the distinction of research, because there is an erroneous assumption that different objects of study automatically offer research novelty. As reinforced by the coaching clinic instructor’s statement, so as shown in Table 4, apart from compiling research questions, finding research distinctions became adversities that persisted throughout the entire thesis submission period. Therefore, it is clear that the development of critical inquiry in these two aspects (research question and research distinction) still requires follow-up in order to complete it. One of them is through research assistance so that the development of research skills is more focused [13].

Presenting reasons for research subject selection is also an important indicator of how beginner linguistic researchers develop their critical inquiry. This type of research skill is suspected to be related to student mastery of various research methods. Because the selection of subjects is also included in the details of the research design which is also a concern that is discussed at the coaching clinic. Here, it appears that the role of the coaching clinic is to direct students to reasoning, which is strengthened by an understanding of research methodologies, to be one of the determinants of the progress of students’ research skills [3]. Especially if they are later required to develop research with an interdisciplinary approach and apply mixed methods [9].

Furthermore, the area of research adversities that is no less important is skills in paraphrasing from sources. Many students who are in the screening process show an unfeasible similarity index, this is because their ability to express themselves in English is still not satisfactory, and they are not confident in conveying written ideas in English. The manuscript is still challenging to understand because of the difficulty in relating the ideas in the introduction or paragraph organization [20]. Or in other words, still have high anxiety when writing scientific papers in English [10]. If this anxiety is not resolved, it will complicate the productivity of scientific work [5]. In fact, these difficulties can still be overcome with a language translation strategy. Strategies for overcoming language barriers in research to ensure that non-English researchers can contribute scientifically with the help of accurate translation. This is to facilitate the research process so that it remains within the corridor of the research framework whose results are strict, reliable, and valid [21].

5.2 Coaching Clinic and Critical Inquiry

From the explanation of five researches adversities found in the student proposals in the findings (developing research questions, establishing the context, presenting novelty of research direction, elaborating reasons of subject selection, and paraphrasing from sources), the next step is to look at the role of the coaching clinic to eliminate difficulties. The Based on the summary of the interview results in Table 4, it appears that three adversities still appear, namely elaborating reasons of subject selection, establishing the context, and presenting novelty of research direction. This shows that the coaching clinic contributes to help students developing a more established critical inquiry, especially in the area of developing research questions and paraphrasing from sources. One of the factors that contributed to the reduction of research adversities was that the coaching clinic process was delivered not only in English but also in Indonesian. This makes it easier to understand the research framework for each beginner researcher [21]. In addition, because the coaching clinic was delivered to a small group that received more intensive assistance in preparing research proposals, the results showed completeness [13]. Other studies have shown that the more intensive mentoring in thesis preparation, the more satisfactory results will be [18].

From the results of interviews with instructors of coaching clinics, it appears that the research adversities that hinder the development of critical inquiry have links between one another. For example, due to weak arguments in selecting research subjects and not exploring the linguistic uniqueness of the selected subjects, this obstacle ultimately affects finding research gaps and formulating research questions. In this case, one of the strategies needed is to provide guidelines for writing proposals that are equipped with detailed explanations of elements that must be explicitly mentioned to prevent the emergence of research adversities. This is because structured and systematic writing guidelines will encourage all beginner researchers to develop proposals using English that can be easily understood by a wide, heterogeneous, global, and multilingual audience [22].

Because this research is limited to data from case studies involving 220 proposals taken from January to April 2022, thus the results from observations regarding the area of research adversities and the role of coaching clinics cannot be generalized into wider

contexts. Especially on other language research issues such as literature, culture, teaching and learning, interculturality, and so on. Thus, follow-up research is still needed to verify the findings of this study.

6 Conclusion

This research is concerned with providing a thorough description of the areas of research adversities that represent the critical inquiry of undergraduate students in terms of the quality of their thesis proposals. In addition, this study explains the results of the evaluation of the extent to which the coaching clinic program that is run can play a role in reducing these research adversities. By using a case study framework at an Islamic state university in Malang, Indonesia, the results include a description of the two aspects that are the concern of this research.

Judging from the research adversities that appeared in the student thesis proposals, it was found that there were five main areas that needed the development of critical inquiry. Among them are developing research questions, establishing the context, presenting novelty of research direction, elaborating reasons of subject selection, and paraphrasing from sources. It is suspected that the root cause of the research adversities is the lack of maturity in facing research challenges which include linguistic, methodological, conceptual, and ontological challenges. The obstacles in preparing the introduction by using the right language and free from plagiarism due to the weak ability of paraphrasing from sources are suspected to be intertwined with language barriers. In this case, the translation strategy is seen as an alternative to facilitate the process of preparing research proposals so that they remain within the corridor of a qualified research framework.

In this study, the applied coaching clinic showed a positive contribution to reducing the number of research adversities. The coaching clinic is seen as contributing to helping students develop a more established critical inquiry in the area of developing research questions and paraphrasing from sources. As for the weaknesses that still persist, such as elaborating reasons of subject selection, establishing the context, and presenting novelty of research direction, it is hoped that they will remain on the main agenda in the syllabus for assisting in writing a thesis proposal. In addition, the elements in the introduction to the thesis proposal must be explained in detail in the guidelines for writing a thesis proposal. Since this research is limited to the results of case studies, further research is needed in other research areas, such as literature research, culture, teaching, etc. Thus, the implications of the research findings are to serve as a reference for enthusiasts of critical thinking skills studies and curriculum developers to use the results of this research as a reference in determining effective strategies to be used in coaching clinics for thesis proposal writing.

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