

## A textual analysis of examiners' feedback on the literature review in Indonesian doctoral candidates' dissertation reports

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### Abstract

Doctoral candidates' ability to elaborate ideas and advance disciplinary scholarships is crucial in constructing well-grounded and comprehensive dissertation reports. To support the candidates, supervisors' and examiners' constructive feedback plays a pivotal role, as they are the gatekeepers of the quality of the dissertation reports. This paper reports on the investigation of two categories of feedback – content-focused and form-focused feedback examiners provided for several doctoral candidates' literature review section in their dissertation reports at an Indonesian university. Nine review results from the fields of language and arts were collected and qualitatively analysed. A synthesized rubrics was used to analyse the excerpts of both feedback categories. The analysis results revealed that the examiners' content-focused feedback emphasized the analytical aspect and relevance of a literature review. This was justified by the examiners' suggestions to present an in-depth and wide discussion of the research variables and to highlight the contribution of the research to the advancement of knowledge in the field of study. In addition, their form-focused feedback highlighted the clarity of expressions and the mechanics in formulating the sentences. This paper ends with a proposal of developing the rubrics to capture the quality of the doctoral candidates' literature review section more comprehensively.

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## INTRODUCTION

Academic investigations on the quality of dissertation reports have been initiated largely through a textual analysis. A dissertation report is a pivotal type of discipline-specific academic writing for doctoral students prior to the completion of their study. The importance of investigating such report is justified by a number of previous studies (Berkenkotter, Huckin, & Ackerman, 1991; Hyland, 2000; Swales, 1990), stating that discipline-specific academic writing requires a specialized literacy to convey the intended information with certain rhetorical and linguistic conventions. The use of these rhetorical and linguistic conventions with particular purposes and for designated audiences is associated with aspects of academic writing. This requires the doctoral candidates to have effective academic writing skills since the readers, in this case, their supervisors and examiners, may have certain expectations (Zhu, 2004).

Among all sections of a dissertation report, the literature review section is considered critical as it establishes the comprehensiveness of the report. Literature indicated that this section not only contains the elaboration of theories and concepts but also exhibits the urgency of the research through a critical discussion of what has been known about the topic from the previous literature (Emilia, 2009; Khoo, Na, & Jaidka, 2010; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). What it means by a critical discussion is that it addresses the consensus, debates, contradictions, and concerns being raised within the relevant body of literature. In other words, the review of the literature section in the dissertation report should be able to bring the writer's new insights to advance the body of existing knowledge to the surface.

Despite its importance, writing a dissertation, particularly the literature review section, is challenging (Lindsay, 2015; Walter & Stouck, 2020). Many candidates view dissertation writing as a formidable task since it has a certain threshold of word size as well as highly tight standards (Dong, 1998). The

standards are closely related to the characteristics of academic writing itself, including in the literature review section (Kwan, 2006). Additionally, most doctoral candidates start to approach dissertation writing not from the beginning of their doctoral program. A study conducted by Powers (1994) revealed that native and non-native graduate students encountered several main problems, associated with the writing elements: organization, clarity, criticality, conciseness, and accuracy. The difficulty in source-based academic writing has also been researched in the Indonesian context. Ansas & Sukyadi (2019) reported that many undergraduate students were discovered to use sources whose originality is still questionable. Another difficulty was spotted in the daunting process of finding suitable sources to develop their ideas in their papers. These difficulties may be influenced by the low level of English proficiency (Ansas & Sukyadi, 2019). Some other studies identified the struggle of Indonesian novice writers in writing the literature review section to complete their final assignments in a form of a proposal, thesis, or dissertation (Susetyo & Noerhamzah, 2020; Wangid & Sugiyanto, 2013). Another possible factor is that they are not familiar enough with the generic conventions of such writing. In the context of dissertation writing, the production stage requires the ability to not only manifest a good rhetorical structure but also have an awareness of the choices within the range of the textual organization suitable for composing the writing (Paltridge, 2002).

In light of this, feedback is required to assist in constructing the literature review in those forms of final assignments, specifically in the dissertation. It is central for the supervisors and examiners to maintain the quality of the dissertation reports. Supervisors of doctoral students have long been considered as the main gatekeepers who become one of the determinants of the students' success in accomplishing their degree (Dericks, et al., 2019; Lee, 2008; van Rooij, Fokkens-Bruinsma, & Jansen, 2021). Their expertise and supervisory approach or style can influence the outcome of

the supervision itself; whether it makes the doctoral candidates more prepared to take the examination or breaks them (Lee, 2008). Another contributing stakeholder in the students' process of finishing the dissertation reports is the examiners. The examiners in the context of the present study are the members of the university thesis committee whose role is to give feedback on the students' dissertation reports prior to the registration for the examination or oral defence. Once the students have revised their reports based on the examiners' comments or feedback, they can get approval to go through the examination stage. Hence, the examiners also serve as the second supervisors of the students since they are assigned to guide them in making their reports well-written, well-structured, and eligible to be examined.

Previous literature has particularly investigated the inputs given by the examiners to the doctoral students in the forms of either scrutinizing the examiners' expectations and possible objections when examining their theses (Bourke & Holbrook, 2013; Holbrook et al., 2007), revealing the assessment process which contains a written report and a recommendation (Dally, et al., 2019), delving into the examiners' feedback on the reports (Dally, et al., 2019; Holbrook et al., 2004), or synthesizing previous studies to generate a comprehensive framework in reviewing and preparing the reports from the examiners' points of view (Hodgson, 2020). The results generally uncover that the examiners' inputs are concerned largely with both content-related and language skills-related demands. The content-related demands comprise the ability of the students to use up-to-date sources, demonstrate theoretical mastery and contribution from the depth and breadth of the discussions (Hodgson, 2020), as well as demonstrate a clear connection between one section and another. Bourke and Holbrook (2013) specifically highlighted twelve indicators of a good report from the examiners' comments; among which five indicators are concerned with the quality of the review of literature section such as accuracy, contribution to advance

knowledge, coverage, application, and substantive aspects of the literature review. Meanwhile, the language-related demands address the expressions used, the consistency of terms used, the argument, criticality, and coherence, and the clarity/accuracy (Hodgson, 2020).

The present study aimed to investigate the examiners' feedback on the students' dissertation reports. Feedback has been considered as an indispensable component in the writing assessment realm (Lee, 2020) and the doctoral examination process in particular (Hodgson, 2020). The importance of giving feedback is associated with the improvement of the students' writing skills and the writing itself as well as the enhancement of understanding regarding their strengths and weaknesses (Lee, 2020). Another merit of feedback is related to the opportunity to pinpoint the gap between achievement and goal (Sadler, 1989). In the context of examining the doctoral students' reports, feedback is used to indicate how the reports can be improved (Holbrook, et al., 2014; Starfield, et al., 2017) so that the students have directions to enact the revision process. Although the examiner feedback has been investigated before (Dally, et al., 2019; Hodgson, 2020; Holbrook et al., 2004), little is still known about the types of feedback commonly provided by the examiners. The previous studies are mainly concerned with the investigation on the examiners' evaluative comments regarding the important aspects and elements in writing dissertation reports. What needs to be taken into further account is the coverage of content-focused and form-focused feedback reported in the review form as well as how each coverage of both feedback groups is articulated in the review form. Fan and Xu's (2020) explanation for the types of feedback were adopted in this study, namely content-focused, form-focused, and evaluation. This study focused on the first two types, resulting in the following research questions.

1. How do the examiners give feedback on the content in the students' dissertation reports?

2. How do the examiners give feedback on the language aspects in the students' dissertation reports?

### Theoretical Underpinnings

#### *The role and elements of a review of literature*

Review of literature serves as the grounds for the research. Its presence is essential as it provides a space to define ideas utilized in research. In defining the ideas, the researcher relies on the theories and findings of previous related studies (Mahanum, 2021; Surahman et al., 2020). Furthermore, review of literature delivers the context that shows the urge for the research (Emilia, 2009).

In constructing a review of literature, there are several important elements that should be conveyed (Emilia, 2009; Mahanum, 2021; Marzali, 2017; Paul & Criado, 2020; Randolph, 2009; Shahsavar & Kourepaz, 2020; Surahman, et al., 2020). A good review of literature needs to cover both a comprehensive database of primary and prominent theories as well as an analytical summary and evaluation of previous related studies (Cooper, 1988; Shahsavar & Kourepaz, 2020). The researcher has to emphasize the valid background that raises the topic of the research (Emilia, 2009; Hamdiyanti, 2008). The knowledge that the researcher acquired previously can also be added to the topic showcase which triggers the significance of the research (Emilia, 2009; Marzali, 2017; Randolph, 2009).

A good review of the literature also shows the differences of the reviewed literature. The differences might refer to its weaknesses (Emilia, 2009). The weaknesses could act as a gap (Paul and Criado, 2020) that could be filled in which helps the researcher distinguish the upcoming research from previous ones (Hamdiyanti, 2008; Mahanum, 2021). Yet, the upcoming research should clearly define the scope of the research in order to present an in-depth comprehension of the selected topic (Cooper et al., 2006; Mahanum 2021; Shahsavar & Kourepaz, 2020; Surahman, 2020).

#### *The concept and types of feedback*

Feedback has a significant role in helping the construction of a good literature review. The feedback itself has been defined as "information provided by an agent regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 81). It becomes an important strategy for writing as it enhances writing skills and sustains motivation (Lee, 2015). There are certain types of feedback defined as follows:

- Teacher, peer, and self-feedback (Yu & Lee, 2016)

From the lens of the agent, teacher feedback means that the feedback provider is merely the teacher. The students act as a passive learner where the revisions are dependently based on the teacher's comments. Peer feedback means that the students serve as the learning plan executor and the constructive peers where development can be realized through interaction and collaboration. Self-feedback represents the comments initiated by the authors themselves or students in this case. They identify own strengths and weaknesses on their works.

- Content, form, and evaluation (Fan & Xu, 2020)

As viewed from the content of the feedback being addressed, content-focused feedback deals with the ideas, coherence, and clarity of information. Form-focused feedback addresses the comments related to the linguistic or language issues. Evaluation feedback is concerned with the overall quality of the works, realized in the form of either compliments or admonitions.

- Direct vs Indirect, Focus vs Unfocus and Written vs Oral (Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Lee, 2020)

Regarding the mode of feedback delivery or the coverage of the feedback, directness of feedback deals with the explicitness of the correct answers (directness) or forms if the errors have already been identified. Meanwhile, the specific coverage of the comments might lead to focused feedback so that the students can understand clearly the demands of the teachers when revising the works. This specific coverage typically deals with the repeated errors.

Comprehensiveness, on the other hand, is concerned with the unfocused feedback since the comments are addressed not only to the repeated errors but also to the general or less problematic issues. The mode of feedback delivery also covers how the feedback is informed to the recipient. While oral feedback is typically manifested in the speaking-related or real-time activities or tasks, written feedback is typically manifested in the writing-related activities or tasks. The feedback contains specific clues to help the recipient revise the writing.

This research specifically classified the feedback points focusing on categories regarding their focus and functional type, which are form-focused and content-focused feedback. As claimed by Fan and Xu, 2020, in form-focused feedback, learners' mechanical, lexical, and grammatical errors are being concerned. Besides, comments on multiple sentence-level issues, including adding or improving a title, supplying an ending paragraph, shortening long paragraphs, and improving argument development (e.g., supporting details and coherence), are covered by content-focused feedback.

In a study conducted by Fan and Xu (2020), students' peer feedback were collected from a class of 21 non-English majors who participated in the study. The results showed students' revision of form-focused feedback could be attributed to their understanding of errors (such as sentence patterns, word choice, or verb form). Moreover, students' responses to content-focused feedback could help them understand the importance of structure and idea development for writing.

### Research context

This research focuses on the doctoral education context in Indonesia. In the Indonesian context, doctoral education is mostly coursework. However, there are some Indonesian universities offering a by-research path. Like in other countries, all Indonesian universities, regardless of the path, require all students to accomplish a dissertation or doctoral thesis to obtain the degree. Each doctoral

candidate will be assigned to two promoters once they pass the dissertation proposal exam. The promoters play a role as the supervisor of the doctoral candidate, so the supervision process typically takes place for five to six months per semester. The supervisors typically ensure that the content and language of the dissertation are eligible for the oral defence. Regarding the language of the dissertation, the university where this research took place requires the candidate to use the formal and academic Indonesian language. Certain language-based study programs such as English language education may require the candidates to use the language of the program.

Then, prior to the oral defence, all dissertation reports should go through the thesis committee to be checked for its eligibility. Each report will be reviewed by two examiners, using a review form provided by the school of postgraduate studies. The review form contains feedback for the candidates to improve the quality of their dissertation reports prior to submission for oral defence. The examiners become another gatekeeper of the quality of the reports, not only the supervisors. Therefore, the present study seeks to analyse the feedback given by the examiners as the thesis committee in the Indonesian doctoral students' dissertation reports so that the results can be a reference for evaluating the assessment rubric used by the examiners as well as generating a closer portrait of the quality of the candidates' dissertation reports, as referred to the examiners' feedback.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design

This research employed a qualitative approach, using a textual analysis method (Smith, 2017). The textual analysis method is used in accordance with the main objective of this research, which is to generate a closer portrait of the quality of the Indonesian doctoral candidates' dissertation reports. Although the results of this study are in the form of percentages, the researchers intend to highlight

the explanation for the percentages, followed by the interpretation of the results.

### **Background of the researchers**

In the context of the present study, we were lecturers with different backgrounds. The first, second, and fourth researchers were lecturers at a state university in Bandung where the data were collected. Meanwhile, the third researcher was a lecturer at a state university in Medan. We did a joint research to investigate the typical and less typical feedback given by the dissertation examiners during the pre-oral defense with the examiners from the university thesis committee. Additionally, we seek to interpret from the examiners' feedback that reflects the quality of the PhD students' dissertation reports. Hence, we did a preliminary reading of the university academic writing guidelines, enriched by scrutinizing the review form used by the examiner to give the feedback so that we had background information and knowledge of how the examiners inform their feedback to the students.

### **Research Data and Data Collection Techniques**

Nine review forms (two examiners in each review form) in the fields of Language and Arts were collected under permission from the thesis and dissertation committee. In total, there were eighteen review results. Since the research topics of the dissertation reports varied across both fields of study, we did not aim to investigate the examiners' feedback, influenced by the topics and disciplines. The reasons for this are twofold: (1) the variation of research topics will make the process of aligning the results to understand the commonalities and differences of feedback across research topics challenging and time-consuming; and (2) the university has set the standards of writing the dissertation reports for all students in all disciplines, including the review form used by the examiners. Then, all review forms were compiled in one GDrive folder to ease the researchers in doing a cross-checking process during the data analysis stage later. All examiners' feedback is informed using

Indonesian language. Hence, we translated them into English for the sake of this research.

### **Research Instrument and Data Analysis Techniques**

As mentioned earlier, the review form has been provided by the university thesis committee. It comprises several parts: personal information of the student author, personal information of the promoters and co-promoters, instructions (including the recommendation whether it is eligible to be proceeded to the oral defense), and the review table. The table contains several aspects of assessment: (1) the criticality of the analysis and the originality of ideas offered in the dissertation reports; (2) the comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the relevant theories and literature in the area of research; (3) the appropriateness of methodology used in the field of study; (4) the original contribution of the research; and (5) the quality of the dissertation report presentation.

However, the aspects of assessment regarding the review of literature section in the form are too general so that the examiners may give general comments or feedback to the students' reports as well. We decided to formulate a synthesis of the analysis guideline to ease us in classifying the examiners' feedback into either content- or form-focused category. The synthesis process began with collecting the relevant articles and reading the articles together to highlight the main information regarding the specific elements of review of literature. The reading process resulted in the formulation of specific aspects of content-focused domain i.e., definition, characteristics, and elements of the review of literature section (Cronin et al., 2008; Hart, 1998; Khoo et al., 2010; Kwan, 2006). While the characteristics aspect deals with the comprehensive, analytical, and relevant qualities of the lit. review, the elements aspect is concerned with the moves manifested in the students' reports (Move 1 Establishing a territory, Move 2 Establishing a niche, Move 3 Occupying the niche), the form-focused domain was specified into several aspects, i.e., clarity, coherence, accuracy, consistency, mechanics,

and citing/referencing styles (APA, 2019). The synthesized analysis guideline was then cross-checked to ensure that it can address important specific issues related to the writing of review of literature sections.

The next stage was analysing the main data using the synthesized guideline. The unit of analysis was sentences in which each paragraph may have different types of feedback. The data analysis process was done iteratively. First, we gathered online via Zoom meeting to practice classifying the examiner's feedback in the first review form so that we have a similar understanding to classify each feedback into the

elements of each type of feedback mentioned earlier. Second, all review forms were analysed, using the first classification results as the reference to classify the rest of the feedback. Then, the number of occurrences of each element was tallied and counted to generate its frequency of occurrences among all data gathered. The term occurrence in this research context represents the number of each type of feedback that can be identified in the entire texts. To this end, we identified 120 feedbacks with content-focused feedback 91 times and form-focused feedback 29 times. Table 1 below exhibits the sample of the analysis results.

**Table 1** The sample analysis results of examiners' feedback

| Reviewer Form No. | No. / | Comments   | Type of feedback | Element of feedback | of Total number of occurrences and its percentage |
|-------------------|-------|--|------------------|---------------------|---|
| Reviewer Form 1   | A /   | <i>[[The results] need to be elaborated from the cited studies and their relevance to this research; the similarities and differences]</i> | Content-focused  | Relevance           | 22 times (24.17%)                                 |

Lastly, the analysis results were cross-checked to triangulate the data analysis procedure. It is intended to alleviate the subjectivity in classifying the feedback. The number of occurrences along with the percentages was also cross-checked to minimize errors in presenting the results in the next section. All review results are originally Indonesian. The English version is used for the purpose of this research dissemination.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study cantered around a mapping exercise investigating examiners' feedback on doctoral candidates' dissertation reports at a university in Indonesia. It particularly focused on classifying the feedback provided for the

literature review section written in the review forms. Findings from textual analysis demonstrated that the feedback largely fell under two main types, namely content-focused and form-focused feedback. However, the examiners were more concerned with the content of the literature review (91 occurrences) than the linguistic aspects (29 occurrences). The findings were further examined to provide information on emphases prevalent in each type of feedback. Such information would provide a useful insight into examiners' expectations of their doctoral candidates' capacity and readiness to succeed in constructing a comprehensive literature review section.

**RQ 1: The Examiners’ Feedback on the Content Aspects of the Students’ Literature Review**

This section answers the first research question, i.e., the elements of content-focused feedback that the examiners were mostly concerned with as evidenced in the review forms. Content-focused feedback relates to providing comments on multiple sentence-level

problems, such as title improvement, paragraph editing, and argument development (Fan & Xu, 2020). The percentage of occurrence of each indicator was obtained by dividing the number of occurrences of the indicator by the total number of occurrences of all indicators under the category. Table 2 depicts the overall results of content-focused feedback.

**Table 2** Occurrences of Content-Focused Feedback

| Category of content in the LR | Indicator(s)   | Total number of occurrences | % (of the total number of feedback=91) |
|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|
| Definition                    | The reviewer puts comments on the basic concept of Literature Review in the review form. | 13                          | 14.28%                                 |
| Characteristics               | Comprehensiveness  | 16                          | 17.58%                                 |
|                               | Analytical aspect  | 22                          | 24.17%                                 |
|                               | Relevance  | 22                          | 24.17%                                 |
| Elements                      | Move 1 Establishing a territory  | 10                          | 11%                                    |
|                               | Move 2 Establishing a niche  | 3                           | 3.3%                                   |
|                               | Move 3 Occupying the niche   | 5                           | 5.5%                                   |

The textual analysis of the content-focused feedback on the literature review sections indicated that the examiners to a large extent targeted their feedback at the characteristics of the candidates’ dissertation reports on the literature review section. This was particularly reflected in their feedback addressed to the candidates in that they should have provided a more analytical discussion with the inclusion of more relevant literature in that section. Table 2 shows the proportion of each

element of the examiners’ feedback with a focus on the content of the reports.

Based on the analysis, the examiners substantially addressed the candidates’ analytical thinking in reviewing the literature and their use of rather irrelevant literature. Both characteristics, the analytical and the relevant aspects of the literature review reports, contributed to a little over 24 % of each of the total feedback. In this excerpt ‘The theoretical foundation has been presented systematically



and completely with regard to the research focus, for instance, the examiner specified the candidate’s analytical thinking in the review. In terms of the relevance of the literature, the following comment best represented it. ‘All studies mentioned have to be elaborated and relevant to this research’. This comment evidently demonstrated that there was still room for improvement that the candidate had to do in incorporating more relevant studies with ample elaboration.

The comprehensiveness of the review of the literature was also highlighted as another characteristic that needed to be improved. Although slightly lower, a significant proportion of the feedback, 17.58 %, was directed to this aspect. One examiner’s feedback ‘The multiple citations from various sources have not yet been followed by a critical review and an effective synthesis’ emphasized this element. This comment pointed out the lack of comprehensiveness in the literature review section, as the candidate did not provide a critical review albeit the inclusion of numerous citations.

Aside from the need to refine the literature review characteristics, the examiners also addressed their feedback to several other aspects. These aspects were related to the use of basic concepts and moves elements. Feedback on basic concept definitions were notably foregrounded in the review forms with approximately 14.28%. The following excerpt was the original copy of an examiner’s feedback: ‘This is one of the many ways to classify a research report. In addition to research topics, research report classification can be based on the research methodology.’ This feedback represented the fact that a significant number of

examiners expected the doctoral candidates to be able to elaborate and define every concept referred to and included in their literature review section. The other aspect being addressed in the review forms consisted of establishing a territory, constructing a niche, and occupying the niche as moves 1, 2 and 3. Of the three element moves, establishing a territory received the most attention from the examiners with almost 11 %, while the other two moves acquired 3.3 % and 5.5 % respectively. The territory establishment element was indicated in the following excerpt: *Penjelasan definitif kajian model literasi perlu ditambah supaya memberikan gambaran mekanisme, alur atau sintak perbedaan dari berbagai model literasi yang dibahas.* In this excerpt, the examiner expected the candidate to set up the parameter of the research with the provision of additional definitive explanation of a literacy model study. This would clearly situate the research within the current body of knowledge.

**RQ 2: The Examiners’ Feedback on the Linguistic Aspects of the Students’ Literature Review**

This section answers the second research question, i.e. the elements of form-focused feedback that the examiners highlighted on the review forms for the doctoral candidates’ dissertation reports. Form-focused feedback deals with providing comments on the candidates’ errors in mechanics, word choices, and grammar (Fan & Xu, 2020), which require minor adaptations and/ or revisions (Ferris, 2006). Table 3 stipulates the proportion of each category of the examiners’ form-focused feedback.

**Table 3** Proportions of Form-Focused Feedback

| Category of linguistic features in the LR | Total number of occurrences | % (of the total number of feedback=29) |
|---|-----------------------------|--|
| Clarity                                   | 10                          | 34.48%                                 |
| Coherence                                 | 7                           | 24.13%                                 |
| Accuracy                                  | 0                           | 0%                                     |
| Consistency                               | 2                           | 6.90%                                  |

|                             |   |        |
|-----------------------------|---|--------|
| Mechanics                   | 8 | 27.60% |
| Citing / referencing styles | 2 | 6.90%  |

Results from the textual analysis (see Table 3) revealed that the examiners directed their attention largely to the doctoral candidates' clarity of expressions, mechanics in formulating their sentences, and coherence. Of all categories of linguistic features, many of the examiners' form-focused feedback, reaching 34.48 %, put the emphasis on improving the clarity of the expressions found in the literature review section. Their feedback, such as 'Preferably, there should be a classification explained at the beginning of the paragraph before finally discussing the research one by one', confirmed the importance of being intelligible in the candidates' writing. The candidates were expected to provide more information, further explanation or even some classification regarding any notion discussed in this section. Such a provision could have been deployed within the paragraph in which the notion was mentioned or in a particular paragraph prior to the discussion of the notion. In this way, the reader would have a clearer understanding of the literature review.

Mechanics received a significantly lower attention from the examiners with 27.60% compared to the clarity category. This was particularly evidenced in the following feedback: 'There are still grammatical errors, for example spelling errors, consistency of page inclusion for referenced references, use of terms'. The examiners' form-focused feedback underlined the importance of the conventions that govern the technicalities of writing. In particular, the feedback referred to the occurrences of grammar mistakes, citation errors, and several issues related to uses of incorrect terminology. Firmly adhering to these conventions would result in clearer documentation of the key sources on the topic that the doctoral candidates wrote, enabling the discussion of those sources in conversation with each other. In this way, the reader would achieve a better understanding of the content with utmost clarity.

In addition to clarity and mechanics, a notable proportion of the examiners' form-focused feedback was aimed at the candidates' coherence in writing the literature review. Many of the candidates' writing lacked connection between ideas within sentences and across paragraphs due to the absence of cohesive devices or discourse markers, and somewhat illogical order of ideas. One representative feedback emphasized the lack of connection among subchapters in this section: 'The relationship between one subchapter and other subchapters is not visible so that the literature appears less comprehensive and less coherent'. This feedback indicated that the candidate failed to employ the required discourse markers, particularly across paragraphs. This made understanding the connection between the subchapters difficult for the examiner, as there were no clear transitions or consistency. As a result, the examiner faintly comprehended the logical relations of the ideas written in the literature review.

#### **Problems faced by doctoral students in writing dissertation literature reviews**

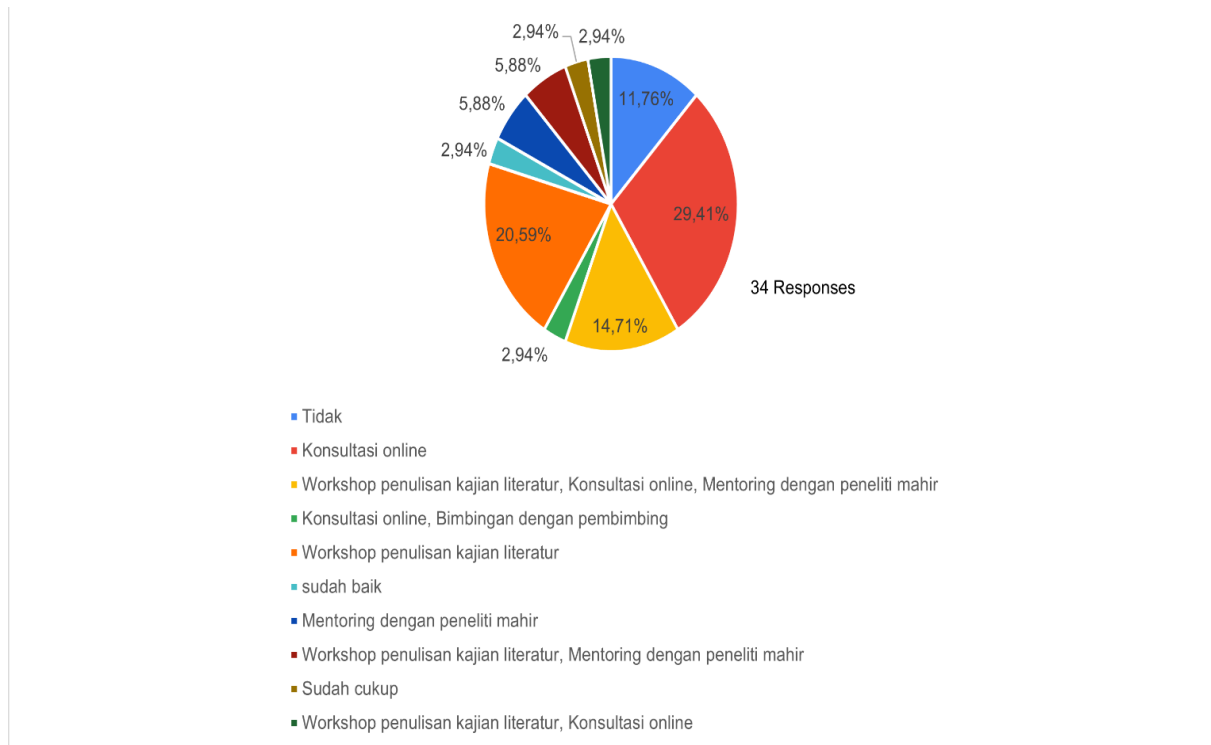
The analysis of the examiners' feedback of the doctoral candidates' literature review show several points that reflect the problems faced by the candidates in writing their literature review. The first point is that in general the candidates tend not to present an analytical literature review even though the theories and previous research presented have been systematically arranged. However, they mostly report the results of previous research without examining in more depth the opportunities and obstacles. The second point is that the elaboration of all the research that has been presented has not shown coherence and relevance to one another. Thus, these problems represent a lack of the candidates' competency in comparing and evaluating previous research and linking it to their research to bring out novelty and contribution to knowledge. The third point is

that the candidates do not provide a more detailed explanation of a concept and the flow of thought from the theory used in their dissertation literature review. The fourth and final point relates to the style of language used. The findings show that the use of clear and coherent language styles between paragraphs is still a problem in writing dissertation literature reviews among doctoral candidates.

Then, related to the form of dissemination that has been carried out by the candidates, some of them are more likely to disseminate their research results in the form of indexed journal articles Scopus Q3/Q4 or Sinta, as well

as proceedings of reputable international seminars (17.65% and 8.82% respectively). However, only a small number of them have disseminated their research results in the form of articles in reputable international journals indexed Scopus Q1/Q2. This shows that there is a particular problem among doctoral candidates in being able to pass the publication of articles in reputable journals Q1/Q2 based on the results of their dissertation reports.

The problems in writing an acceptable dissertation literature review are also supported by the survey results of 34 student responses.



**Figure 1** Proportions of Doctoral Candidates' Needs in Relation to Their Writing Problems

The diagram shows that online consultations (29.14%), workshops (20.59%), and mentoring with skilled researchers (14.71%) related to writing literature reviews are needed by students. In other words, students need guidance in making and developing good literature reviews that is in accordance with applicable academic writing rules.

## CONCLUSION

This study has addressed two research questions regarding the feedback on the content and language quality of the Indonesian doctoral students, given by their examiners. This study concludes that the reviewers' feedback on a

literature review section is expected to help doctoral candidates to write a comprehensive and analytical literature review since it represents the candidates' abilities to elaborate on theories and scrutinize previous studies as well as enliven the debates and issues within to make the dissertation reports well-grounded. Well-grounded dissertation reports will influence the clarity of the research contribution to the body of knowledge in the field. According to the data, the biggest percentage of feedback reviewers focused on how theories should be used more systematically and that there should be an analytical decision-making process regarding what references would be included. Moreover, the feedback reviewers also focused on the characteristics of a literature review that should be comprehensive, seen from the elements of communicative purposes marked by the feedback regarding establishing a territory that appeared the most. Following the reviewers' feedback, it is reflected that there are main points of problems faced by the candidates.

The findings and discussion promoted that there was still room for improvement the candidate had to do to incorporate more relevant studies with ample elaboration in order for the reports to be well-grounded. It was pointed out that the lack of comprehensiveness in the literature review section should have been filled by the candidate to provide a critical review albeit with the inclusion of numerous citations. Thus, we argue that the development of more comprehensive rubrics to capture the content and language-related quality of the doctoral candidates' literature review is necessary. In addition, to assist the doctoral candidates in relation to this matter, the survey conducted in this study on the candidates' responses of expected help could be online consultations, workshops, and mentoring with skilled researchers related to writing literature reviews. In other words, the candidates need guidance in making and developing good literature reviews in accordance with applicable academic writing rules. This calls for further research to explore and examine the role the

expected help has on the development of their writing skills.

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