Abstract

This study aimed to reveal characteristics of good EFL thesis advisors in the forms of students' opinions in association with two research variables namely adequacy of English proficiency and adequacy of content knowledge. The study employs qualitative approach which is intended to develop and build a theory about EFL thesis advisor effectiveness by means of grounded theory method. The data were obtained from 15 EFL graduate students through in-depth interview. The obtained data were analyzed by using three techniques namely open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. From the respondents' accounts, the results showed that good thesis advisors should have good technical knowledge consisting of two main qualities namely adequacy of English proficiency and adequacy of content knowledge. To conclude, good EFL thesis advisors must be at advanced level of English language skills and have good ability of appropriate content knowledge covering English grammar, syntax, linguistic, phonology, language and culture, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, error analysis and discourse analysis.

Keywords: EFL thesis advisors, English proficiency, content knowledge.
The presence of thesis advisors is very critical to solve the students’ problems and difficulties in thesis writing as mentioned above. It is an undeniable fact that all thesis writer students expect that they would have scientifically qualified and good thesis advisors as they are very important persons in students’ academic experience. Good thesis advisors play a leading role in the success of thesis writing of graduate students. It implies that the completion of thesis writing is the final goal of all of graduate students. Several researchers (Barrat & Huba 1994; Yang & Clum, 1994) argue that English language ability, including writing skill, is the most important determinant of students’ academic success.

Based on preliminary research I conducted, all respondents being interviewed argued that qualities of good EFL thesis advisors refer to supportiveness, accessibility, clear feedback, encouragement and criticism, motivation, helping students solve problems, regular weekly meeting, moral support, good relationship, and assessment of students’ needs. However, none of the respondents stated that adequacy level of English and knowledge of English are important qualities of good EFL thesis advisors as well. Therefore, this study tried to fill the gap. So, the study aimed to reveal characteristics of good thesis advisors in terms of adequacy level of English proficiency and knowledge of English in association with two research questions as follows.

1. What is the appropriate level English proficiency to allow EFL thesis advisors to advise effectively?
2. To what extent can knowledge of English subject-matters be beneficial for EFL thesis advisors to advise effectively?

**Characteristics of Good EFL Thesis Advisors**

Concepts of effective EFL thesis advisors derived from both the literature and the research findings will inspire the advisory of students’ thesis writing in a more effective way. Consequently, EFL thesis advisors are challenged and motivated, and at the same time they are provided with sufficient confidence to operate in their professional practice.

James and Baldwin (1999) propose eleven concepts of effective advisors. Good thesis advisors ensure the partnership is right for the research project; get to know students and carefully assess their needs; establish reasonably, agreed expectations; work with students to establish a strong conceptual structure and research plan; encourage students to write early and often; initiate regular contact and provide high quality feedback; get students involved in the life of the department; inspire and motivate; help is academic and personal crisis crop up; take active interest in the students’ future careers; and carefully monitor the final production and presentation of the research.

The main characteristics of good thesis advisors adapted from Kumar & Huat, 2011; Kritsonis, 2008; Olibie, Agu, Uzoechina, 2015; Wade, Keane, Dietz & Hay, 2010; are addressed below.

- Openness to discussion
- Availability
- Ability to offer support
- Ability to provide continuous feedback
- Expertise
- Flexibility
- Empathy
- Ability to use a wide variety of advisory techniques
- Ability maintain high ethical and moral standards
- Adequacy of language proficiency
- Adequacy of content knowledge
• Ability to perceive students’ linguistic needs
• Ability to maintain good relationship with students
• Ability to value students’ opinions
• etc.

Those above items provide EFL thesis advisors with good deal of information that can be useful for determining certain areas for continued professional growth.

Research Method
The study aims to explore the characteristics of good EFL thesis advisors perceived by graduate (masters) students of English Department of State University of Malang. This study by nature can be classified as a type of qualitative research. It is a kind of research that does not use statistical procedures or other means of quantifications to arrive at findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). There are many types of qualitative research. Some of which are ethnography, phenomenological approach, life histories, conversational analysis, and grounded theory. This study will be concerned with the last type of qualitative research, grounded theory.

The Grounded Theory Method (GTM) is the discovery of theory from data. For this, Creswell (2012) & Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain that grounded theory is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory should stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with a theory, and then prove it. Rather one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge.

Research Instrument: In-Depth Interview
With regards to its design much of the data gathering method was done through open-ended interviewing. The purpose of interview in this study was to obtain information about the criteria of a good EFL thesis advisor perceived by students that covers both a factual and meaning level. Kvale (1996) argues that the qualitative research interview seeks to describe and the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say. In addition, Patton (1987) states that the main purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind. He further explains that we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe.

Respondents
The data for this study were collected by employing in-depth interview. 15 graduate students majoring in English Language Department of State University of Malang were treated as the subjects of the study. The sample subjects were studying and writing their research-based theses in the State University of Malang. The first 4 subjects of each university were selected by means of purposive sampling and the others will be taken through snowball sampling. On the basis of purposive sampling, the 4 subjects, as the first interviewee, were recruited through recommendations from trustees such as their lecturers, their thesis advisors, and the heads of English Departments who know well the students. On the other hand, the process of snowball sampling is much like asking the first 4 subjects to nominate their classmates or friends who were writing their theses when this study was being conducted. The type of sampling technique works like a chain of referrals. After interviewing the initial subjects, the researcher asked for help from the subjects to help identify other students with the same properties of interest.
**Data Analysis**

The first phase of data analysis is coding. Coding is central to grounded theory building research. Strauss and Corbin (2008) and Creswell (2012) explain that coding represents the operation by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put together in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data. Data analysis will be immediately done after data are collected and ordered. In the study, data collection, data ordering, and data analysis are interrelated as shown in the figure below:

![Diagram of data analysis process](image)

**Figure 1.** The interrelated process of data collection, ordering, and data analysis to build grounded theory.

**Results and Discussion**

**Results**

The following findings answer research question 1. There is a growing acceptance within the respondents that the requirement does demonstrate a thorough proficiency in spoken and written is the ideal qualification for EFL thesis advisors. From the interview it becomes clear that there is an urgent need to redefine the concept of English proficiency into a theory that suits to any kind of advisory context. Many useful concepts have been initiated by the respondents either on the basis of theoretical or empirical as shown in the following conceptual map.

**Summary of Findings**

RQ1. “What is the appropriate level English proficiency to allow EFL thesis advisors to advice effectively?”

- Proficiency level appropriate for all advisory contexts
- High proficiency level of oral production
- High proficiency level of writing skill
- Necessarily to code-switch
- Necessarily to use Indonesian Language
- Ability in using specific speech acts and functions such as requesting, asking for clarification, giving instruction, warning, giving advice, and explaining new things

**Figure 2.** Categories of adequacy proficiency level of English.

In relation to research question 2, the findings of the study revealed that EFL thesis advisors should know about English language and its related disciplines. In addition,
although there is a certain priority English proficiency, EFL thesis advisors need to be equipped with knowledge and awareness pertaining to concepts, theories, and principles that constitute the theoretical basis for the field of foreign language teaching (Richards, 1997).

From the respondents’ accounts, it was revealed that it was compulsory for EFL thesis advisors to know what to teach (content knowledge) besides knowing about advisory itself (EFL advisory principles). Appropriate content knowledge includes English grammar, syntax, phonology, language and culture, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse analysis. EFL thesis advisors with adequate content knowledge would be able to explain difficult items, solve students’ problems and explain interrelatedness of language components. The following is a map of useful concepts that had been initiated by the respondents in order to be effective thesis advisors.

Summary of Findings

RQ2. “To what extent can knowledge of English subject-matters be beneficial for EFL thesis advisors to advise effectively?”

- English grammar, syntax, linguistics, phonology, language and culture, sociolinguistics, error analysis, psycholinguistics
- Ability to solve language problems
- Ability to explain interconnectedness of language components

Figure 3. Categories of adequacy of English content knowledge.

Discussions

Adequacy of English Proficiency

In relation to research question 1, English proficiency is understood by respondents as how well EFL thesis advisors can speak, read, write and understand English. This includes a considerable knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation as well as an awareness of related cultural aspects of English. In addition, the adequacy of proficiency refers to EFL thesis advisor who can advise at any type of advising context with ease.

EFL thesis advisors possess adequate level of English proficiency, so that they can advise effectively at any assigned advising context. With regard to minimum level of proficiency, there is not any standard set of guidelines. Nevertheless, a certain sense of relativity must always be taken into account (Brown, 2001). It is generally agreed that if the advising context shows a level of “Master’s thesis”, then in order for the advisors to advice effectively they should have “advance” level English proficiency. This quality is supported by Sinclair (2001) who conducted research on the pedagogy of good Ph.D. supervision found that high level of speaking skill and writing ability are ingredients of a good thesis advisor.

Good thesis advisors always maintain their English proficiency at the level of appropriateness so that they can become models for their writer students. In addition, good EFL thesis advisors demonstrate the ability to use appropriate components of the language functions in the advisory process. This includes specific speech acts such as greetings, asking and answering questions, giving instructions, asking for students’ attention, warning and giving advice, and explaining new content.
If new content is difficult either for the advisors to explain in English or for the students to understand, the advisors are always flexible to code switch or to use Indonesian language. However, interaction between language proficiency and the ability to present a new and difficult content remain as a crucial issue especially when it is related with the adequacy of the oral skill of EFL thesis advisors (Freeman and Long, 1991). For this purpose, flexibility to code switch and ability to improvise through language-switch (e.g. by using Indonesian language) may enable thesis advisors to advice effectively. Since the use of the students’ native language is an option (as required in most advisory process), it is important for the thesis advisors not to let the advisory process be excessively occupied by Indonesian language. But at a certain advisory context where the students’ proficiency is heterogeneous the use of Indonesian language can be advantages such as establishing good relationship with the students as well as brief explanation of vocabulary usage and grammar points. So, the roles and functions of code-switching are not new at all because these had been reported in a variety of literature of bilingualism especially those specializing in code-switch in classroom lesson such as Azlan & Narasuman (2013), Huerta-Marcias & Quintero (1992) and Mogkwathi (2011).

If the advisors’ speaking and writing ability is poorer or lower than students, then they will not feel freer or securer in advising their students. This evidence is supported by Nell & Muller (2010) who conducted research on the impact of teachers’ limited English proficiency on English second learners in South African schools. Their study revealed that teachers who were not proficient in English skills felt lack of confidence to teach in English. Therefore, thesis advisors can only feel freer or securer if their speaking ability and writing skill are above their students’ level, and hence, writing skill is the most important of all.

**Adequacy of English Content Knowledge**

Related to research question 2, the domain of content knowledge refers to what EFL thesis advisors need to know about their roles and functions as thesis advisors, i.e. the specialized concepts, theories, and disciplinary knowledge that constitutes theoretical basis for the skills of second language teaching (Richrads, 1997). Good EFL advisors always demonstrate that they comprehend critically a set of ideas to be advised. They understand not only what they advise but also understand it in several ways. An additional dimension of the content knowledge is that they are able to handle any kind of language problems faced by their writer students.

Good content knowledge allows the thesis advisors to explain about how words are formed and related to construct a sentence (grammar), what components are involved in word formation such as prefixes, roots, verbs, noun, etc. (morphology), how sentences are related to form a discourse (syntax), how words create meanings (semantics), how meaning is understood in a given context such as who speaks whom-when and where (pragmatics and sociolinguistics), and how a word is pronounced (phonology). In short, thesis advisors comprehend the interconnectedness of all language components in an organized framework within which communication operates.

Similarly, good thesis advisors take good advantage of their knowledge and awareness of the principles of foreign language writing to make meaningful advice by employing useful and critical ideas both during the planning phases of advisory as well as during the advisory itself. Thesis advisors need to study the area of their students’ research interest closely and then think through a series of questions before taking useful actions. They think about students’ research goals to achieve, what specific language that could be used, what next to steps to suggest and what writing tasks will be assigned. So, in thinking through questions, they can quickly imagine the kind of writing plan suitable for the students’ research report.
Conclusions
This study has shed a significant amount light on the question “what is like to be good EFL thesis advisors in terms of English language proficiency and content knowledge of English?” The conclusion was done on the basis of the invented categories containing the principles of good EFL thesis advisors.

A good EFL thesis advisors possessed adequate proficiency level of English (advance level). A study on EFL teachers’ language proficiency by Smadi (2013) found that there was a significant relationship between higher level of language proficiency and higher quality of instruction. This statement was supported by Seghayer (2017) who states that successful EFL teachers show a high level of English language competence. Since English was used in thesis writing, the use of English in the process of advisory was a prerequisite to EFL thesis advisors. Since English was used in writing theses, the use of English during the process of advisory was a prerequisite to EFL thesis advisors. It does not mean that the thesis advisors use English all the time without considering whether the students are following them or not. If content is difficult, flexibility to improvise by means of language switch could be an effective option. In any case, it might not happen that the thesis advisors’ proficiency level was lower or worse than their students. On the whole, being superior in communicative performance and written production was necessary for good EFL thesis advisors.

Besides having adequate proficiency level of English, EFL thesis advisors were expected by most students, to have good English content knowledge as good EFL thesis advisors needed to know and understand what to advice. Seghayer (2017) argues that successful EFL teachers possess good knowledge of English language content such as grammar, syntax, phonology, social and cultural rules, etc. So, good knowledge of language content would allow the advisors to explain aspects of grammar, vocabulary, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, etc. clearly.

Acknowledgements
I would like to express my deepest and sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education of Indonesia and the Center for Research and Community Services of Syiah Kuala University (LPPM Syiah), Banda Aceh Indonesia, for fully granting me the research funding with contract grant number 110/UN11.2/PP/SP3/2017

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