Preferences in Choosing Thesis Topics and Advisors Sociology Students, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Riau

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ABSTRACT

One of the requirements for graduation is writing a thesis. Choosing the right topic and advisers is crucial for producing high-quality research. This study analyzes the factors influencing students' choice of thesis topic and supervisor using a qualitative approach. The participants involved in this study consisted of 11 students from the 2022 cohort, without distinguishing gender and other social backgrounds, and were selected purposively, with the criterion of having completed a proposal seminar. The data collection process was conducted through semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to provide in-depth answers and explain their perspectives on the selection of thesis topics and supervisors. Data analysis used thematic analysis to identify patterns that emerged from the participants' responses. The results of this study found that the preferences for selecting thesis topics and supervisors among Sociology students at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Riau University, were greatly influenced by various factors, including the relevance of social issues, the background of the supervisor, and a good supervisory approach. Students tend to choose topics that are trendy in line with current developments and want support from lecturers who have an emotional connection with students and are experienced in their chosen field.
Keywords: Thesis, Advisors, Sociology Students

ABSTRAK

Salah satu syarat kelulusan mahasiswa adalah menulis skripsi. Pemilihan tema dan pembimbing yang tepat sangat penting untuk hasil penelitian yang berkualitas. Penelitian ini menganalisis faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi pemilihan topik dan pembimbing skripsi mahasiswa dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Partisipan yang terlibat dalam penelitian ini terdiri dari 11 mahasiswa angkatan 2022 tanpa membedakan gender dan latar belakang sosial lainnya dan dipilih secara purposive, dengan kriteria telah selesai seminar proposal. Proses pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur yang memungkinkan partisipan untuk memberikan jawaban yang mendalam serta menjelaskan perspektif mereka mengenai pemilihan topik dan pemilihan pembimbing skripsi. Analisis data menggunakan analisis tematik yang bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola yang muncul dari respon partisipan. Hasil penelitian ini, menemukan bahwa preferensi pemilihan topik dan pembimbing skripsi mahasiswa Sosiologi FISIP Universitas Riau sangat dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor, termasuk relevansi isu sosial, latar belakang pembimbing, dan pendekatan bimbingan yang baik. Mahasiswa cenderung memilih topik-topik yang sedang trendy sesuai dengan perkembangan terkini, serta menginginkan dukungan dari dosen yang memiliki kedekatan emosional dengan mahasiswa selain itu yang berpengalaman di bidang yang mereka pilih.
Kata kunci: : *Skripsi, Mahasiswa, Sosiologi*

1. Introduction

The selection of thesis topics trand advisors is a crucial and strategic aspect that directly influences the quality of students' research outcomes, particularly in the field of sociology. The Sociology Department of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Riau University, through its 2021 curriculum revision known as

the MBKM curriculum, has changed several case method and project-based learning courses, totaling 67% of its 54 courses. The MBKM curriculum not only emphasizes mastery of foundational theories but also requires students to conduct relevant and contextual research on social issues in their surroundings.

Through the 2021 MBKM curriculum, the graduate profile (PL) and graduate learning outcomes (CPL) strongly emphasize understanding society and social interactions to achieve the following graduate profiles: (1) Social Consultant, (2) Researcher, (3) Social Analyst, and (4) Community Empowerer. This curriculum is designed to create the intended graduate profiles by integrating practical skills with theoretical knowledge. As a result, students are better prepared to tackle real-world social challenges and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

The MBKM curriculum also emphasizes students' learning experiences outside the campus through entrepreneurship programs, internships, independent studies, teaching at campuses, and student exchanges. These various preparations are designed to equip students with a wide range of skills beyond the classroom. With these enhanced skills, students are expected to have the capability to write scientific papers and adapt to life outside the campus after graduation. One of the graduation requirements for students is the ability to write and articulate their ideas in an academic paper known as a thesis. Therefore, the theme and ability to write a thesis are crucial, and selecting the right topic and having a competent supervisor are essential for achieving high-quality research outcomes.

Based on an initial survey conducted by the research team, it was found that the majority of Sociology students exhibit diverse preferences in selecting their research topics. These preferences are influenced by various factors, such as students' personal interest in an issue, the relevance of current social issues that are being widely discussed, and the availability of accessible research sources. These factors play a significant role in shaping students' perspectives and motivations in selecting research topics to explore further. Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the factors that influence students' preferences in selecting thesis topics and advisors. Using a qualitative approach, the authors hope to gain deeper insights into the reasons behind students' choices, including how their social background, personal experiences, and views on social issues contribute to their decisions.

This is in line with the opinion of Alaslan et al. (2023), who stated that qualitative research methods are very effective for understanding social phenomena in complex contexts, where numbers and statistics may not be sufficient to capture the nuances and dynamics involved. Additionally, this study aims to provide data-driven recommendations for the Sociology Department of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Riau University regarding the selection of thesis topics and advisors that better align with the needs and expectations of students. With a better understanding of student preferences, it is hoped that the Department and faculty can provide more optimal support and guidance in the thesis research process. This will undoubtedly have a positive impact not only on the quality of the research produced but also on the academic development and expertise of the students themselves.

Within the framework of this study, various sociological theories are used as references to understand the dynamics at play in topic selection and advisor choice. These theories will help analyze how social, cultural, and educational institutional constructs interact in guiding students' choices. Thus, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of academic policies at the faculty and provide new perspectives on higher education practices in the field of sociology.

2. Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative method involving in-depth interviews with Sociology students at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Riau. The participants in this study consist of 11 students from the 2022 cohort, without distinction of gender or other social backgrounds, and were selected purposively based on the criterion of having completed their thesis proposal seminar. The data collection process was conducted through semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to provide in-depth

answers and explain their perspectives on the selection of topics and thesis advisors.

In data processing, the researcher used thematic analysis to identify patterns that emerged from the participants' responses. With this approach, the researcher can categorize the factors influencing topic selection and thesis advisor choice based on relevant categories, such as motivation, experience, and student expectations. Hidir (2002) and Winarno (2015) emphasize that thematic analysis is highly useful for uncovering broader themes from qualitative data.

The principle of triangulation is carried out by collecting secondary data from academic documents and surveys previously conducted by the Department and Faculty Quality Assurance Team (GPM). This secondary data will enrich the perspectives generated from the interviews. The availability of this data will also make it easier for researchers to reference research findings with real conditions in the field, as well as provide a more comprehensive context for the preferences in selecting topics and advisors.
This method can clearly describe students' preferences for thesis topics and advisors, as well as provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence them.

3. Result and Discussion

The small number of informants does not allow for comprehensive general conclusions to be drawn. However, at the very least, the results of this study have revealed a number of significant findings regarding the preferences for thesis topics and advisors among sociology students at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Riau.

Table 1. General Themes of Sociology Student Theses

No	Issue/theme	Reason	Source of inspiration
1	Gender, health, and the elderly	Interesting issue and easily accessible data	Previous studies, guidance from course lecturers, online sources
2	Poverty, empowerment, and social deviance	Field observations in the surrounding area and issues that never go out of date	Materials and reference sources are easily available
3	Politics, development, social change, and the environment	Issues that are never resolved and continue to evolve	Guidance from course instructors and/or academic advisors, friends, and seniors who have conducted similar research
4	Education, children, and juvenile delinquency	Data is easy to find and reference sources are widely available	Materials and reference sources are easily accessible

Source : processed data, 2024

Through interviews and essays given to 11 informants from diverse backgrounds, the data obtained revealed that students chose to focus on topics related to contemporary social issues. This choice demonstrates a high level of awareness of the relevance of these topics to current issues in society, such as the impact of health, juvenile delinquency, social deviance, and social conflicts that often characterize community life. For example, many of them were interested in exploring how poverty, education, and social change have altered social structures and interactions between individuals, as well as their impact on the local economy and the mental health of the community.

This, as stated by Batubara & Hidir (2014), shows that students are eager to contribute to understanding and finding solutions to social problems that are currently of public concern. This reflects students' awareness of the importance of community concern for the real needs of society. Although they (students) realize that what they write is far from perfect and that they lack confidence in their ability to contribute meaningfully through their work.

Nevertheless, this aligns with modern sociological theories emphasizing the active role of society in public decision-making processes (Campbell, 1994), even if their voices are not widely heard. As Gramsci stated,

"this awareness is important to develop among students" (Tami *et al*., 2021). Students' interest in gender and equality themes is also quite high. This topic is a global issue that continues to evolve and is currently a focus of attention in Indonesia. The existence of the feminist movement and the increasing awareness of the importance of gender equality have encouraged students to explore and examine this dynamic in a more local social context. Many students are trying to see how gender equality practices can be applied in various aspects of life, such as education, work, and daily life.

This preference shows that students recognize the importance of receiving guidance from lecturers who are experienced in fields relevant to their research interests. They believe that guidance from qualified lecturers can help them in developing and completing their research more effectively, including in terms of methodology, data analysis, and high-quality academic writing. On the other hand, some students choose advisors based on a more personal approach, meaning they tend to choose faculty members who are considered approachable and willing to provide intensive support and guidance. Good interpersonal relationships between students and faculty members, which are believed to have a positive impact on the learning process and thesis completion, are crucial in creating a supportive academic environment (Amanda, Y, 2024)**.**

Overall, these findings reflect the challenges and hopes faced by Sociology students at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Riau, in their academic process. This study also demonstrates the students' commitment to contributing to relevant social issues and addressing contemporary challenges with the knowledge and skills they have acquired during their studies. This confirms that students do not merely view education as a means to obtain a degree, but also as a tool to equip themselves to contribute to society, address challenges, and create positive change. Their desire to conduct impactful research, combined with the selection of appropriate supervisors, holds promise for positive outcomes in the future, not only for themselves but also for the broader community (Rosmah Tami, et.al 2021)**.** However, according to the research team's observations, this good intention is sometimes not supported by strong willpower from students during their studies, for example, they are more lazy in their studies and only attend lectures without adding other soft skills during their studies.

Based on in-depth research and careful analysis, it can be concluded that the selection of research topics by Sociology students at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Riau, is greatly influenced by current social issues developing in society. This study provides a clear picture that students are not only focused on the theories taught in class but also strive to apply social science knowledge to understand and address various issues in society. This indicates that Sociology students at FISIP, University of Riau, strive to bridge academic understanding with everyday realities and are committed to contributing innovative solutions to the social challenges faced by their communities (Asriwandari, et.al 2019)**.**

This finding is in line with Khoirunas (2017); (Rohmah, et.al, 2021) view, which emphasizes the importance of producing research based on relevant and actual social contexts. Thus, the relevance of the topics chosen by students is not only to fulfill academic requirements but also to serve as a bridge between knowledge and practical application in real life. This relevance becomes even more important when considering the ever-changing social dynamics in this modern era, where issues such as social injustice, social change, economic inequality, poverty, gender, education, and children/adolescents increasingly dominate public discourse.

In a broader context, student involvement in these issues demonstrates their awareness of social responsibility and the importance of playing an active role in society. Furthermore, the analysis shows that students majoring in Sociology at FISIP Riau University have a strong tendency to choose advisors based on their emotional closeness, interest in the topic and course material, and the theme they choose. This is also why Academic Advisors (PA) often become their advisors. Another reason is that the supervisors have relevant experience with the research topics. This reflects students' awareness of the importance of strong and effective academic guidance. They realize that competent supervisors with appropriate backgrounds are expected to provide in-depth insights, guidance, and support needed by students in facing various challenges that may arise during the research process.

A good relationship between students and advisors not only improves communication but also creates a conducive academic atmosphere. In this context, a positive academic atmosphere is key to encouraging

student creativity and productivity, enabling them to channel their ideas more effectively into their scientific work.

However, behind all this progress, there are challenges that need to be addressed, particularly in aligning students' research interests with the availability of suitable supervisors. Emotional closeness, such as being an Academic Advisor (PA), frequently participating in the same research team as the supervisor, or being from the same region, often becomes the primary factor in selecting a supervisor, sometimes overshadowing their competence as a supervisor in their field of expertise. The establishment of the Functional Position Group for Lecturers (KJFD) in the Sociology Department of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Riau, divided into five research clusters, was intended to develop lecturers' careers and facilitate the distribution of guidance. However, this sometimes complicates academic matters and students' preferences in choosing advisors, rendering the KJFD ineffective in determining the process of assigning student advisors.

The other hand, students sometimes have very specific interests, while the number of faculty members with expertise in those areas is limited, such as Malay culture, Batak culture, coastal communities, or more micro-level studies, as Sociology students have diverse social, cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, in recent years, the Sociology Department, through the faculty, has recruited several young faculty members with broader expertise to facilitate the distribution of faculty workload and offer more flexible supervision options.

4. Conclusion

The conclusion of this study found that the preference for selecting thesis topics and advisors among Sociology students at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Riau, is greatly influenced by various factors, including the relevance of social issues, the background of the advisor, and effective mentoring approaches. Students tend to choose topics that are currently trendy in line with the latest developments and want support from lecturers who have an emotional closeness to students as well as experience in their chosen field.

Recommendations for the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Riau in the future are to improve facilitation for students in choosing topics and supervisors, including providing data on lecturers' interests and relevant research. This will help students in determining the direction of their research and seeking optimal academic support. Further research in this field can be conducted by expanding the sample/informants and involving students from different cohorts, thereby obtaining a more comprehensive understanding of preferences in selecting thesis topics and advisors.

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