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ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN COMPLETING MASTER'S FINAL PROJECTS AT UT PALANGKA RAYA

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Abstract: The Final Project of the Master Program (TAPM) is a required project for postgraduate students at the Open University. Based on the lecturer's experience, many students struggle to complete their studies on time due to challenges in completing TAPM. This study aims to analyze and describe the difficulties students face in finishing TAPM at the Open University of Palangka Raya. The research uses a qualitative case study approach, with 20 informants consisting of active students and alumni. Data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, with analysis using the Interactive Analysis technique. The study identified several difficulties: (1) identifying and describing "empirical problems" and presenting tables and images; (2) distinguishing between "theory" and "policy," explaining the "novelty" of research, and developing a framework; (3) creating research instruments and conducting trials; (4) presenting data systematically and discussing it coherently. Additionally, the analysis revealed that descriptive statistical results were not discussed, and only inferential statistical results were elaborated. There was limited mastery of theory, and the "Results" section was longer than the "Discussion" section.

Keywords: Difficulties; Completion; Project; Final; Program: Master

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INTRODUCTION

The Final Project of Master Program (TAPM) or also known as "Thesis" is a scientific work that is prepared based on the results of applied research on problem solving in certain fields of study, or a study of problems in an institution empirically based on relevant theories, or a system study or a model in various fields of scientific study, or model design development. (Proposal and Writing Guidelines for TAPM of Open University, 2017). The Final Project of Master Program (TAPM) is an obligatory task carried out by Postgraduate Program students at the Master's level degree at the Open University (UT). The statement explains that TAPM is a form of written work that is compiled based on the rules of scientific writing that apply. This statement is in accordance with a statement saying that writing theses and dissertations is an obligation that must carried out by students at the Master Program and Doctoral Program to complete their studies (Guidelines for Writing Theses and Dissertations for Postgraduate Program at UPR, 2020). The use of strict scientific writing rules is what distinguishes between



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scientific and non-scientific works (Sion, 2025). This statement is in accordance with the opinion of Totok and Bambang (2002) who say that scientific work is a series of writing activities based on research results that are systematically arranged following scientific methodology, which aims to obtain scientific answers to problems.

Scientific work can be interpreted as a form of writing made based on the results of observation or empirical experience carried out objectively, systematically, and using certain methods, so that the truth can be scientifically accounted for. This opinion is in accordance with the statement of Pinoza (2010) which says that scientific work is one of the essays or writings obtained according to its scientific nature and is based on the results of observation, monitoring, research in a particular field, compiled according to certain methods and writing systematics that are in accordance with language and its content can be accounted for its truth or scientificity. In terms of its usefulness, scientific work can be used to explain as well as an alternative in solving a problem. This statement is supported by Suhardjono (in Arikunto, 2013) and reinforced by Susilo (in Pinoza, 2010), who say that scientific work is a writing or essay that is obtained in accordance with its scientific nature and is based on various observations, research, and review of certain fields of science, which are compiled using certain methods by paying attention to good writing systematics, and can be accounted for scientifically to solve a problem.

Based on my experience as a supervisor, a seminar discussant and as an examiner of the TAPM trial examinations of the Open University of Palangka Raya students, it was found that there were several students who could not completed their studies on time. Through interviews and observations, information was obtained that one of the causes of the problem was the difficulties when completing the final project (TAPM). In connection with the difficulties experienced by students, the following will be presented empirical facts from the results of research. In the research of Slamet, et al. (2022), it is found that 64% of all respondents experienced difficulties in writing the final project. I Dewa Ayu and Made Diah (2021) find that 24.7% of the respondents said they experienced great difficulty in preparing the final project. Furthermore, Sion and Nyoto (2023) in a research report find that 27% of all respondents experienced difficulties in writing the thesis. This finding of difficulty is supported by the results of research by Jubba, et al (2023) which find as many as 43 informants out of 240 informants who had never sent their articles to be published in scientific journals. Difficulty means a difficult situation to complete or to conduct. Difficulty can also be interpreted as a person's inability to do something (Poerwadarminta, 2008). The difficulties in question generally lie in the Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methods, Results and Discussion, and making or writing Conclusions. This study aims to analyze and describe the difficulties in completing the Final Project of Master Program (TAPM) at the Open University of Palangka Raya.

METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative research approach with a case study method related to the students' difficulties in completing or writing the TAPM. This approach was chosen considering that the purpose of this research is to understand the phenomenon experienced by the research subject, for example, a behavior or habit, perception, motivation, action and so on as a whole with a description in the form of



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sentences and language, in a context that occurs naturally (Moleong (2017). This statement is supported by Bungin (2003) who says the main purpose of qualitative research is to understand social phenomena or symptoms by focusing more on a complete picture of the phenomenon being studied rather than detailing it into interrelated variables.

On the other hand, the case study model is used considering that in this way researcher can get information and data about events related to students' difficulties in making and writing TAPM at the Open University of Palangka Raya (Fathoni, 2006). The case study model is a research activity that examines events in a concrete life setting (Yin, 2002), which is carried out in a place or a subject or a unitary system such as programs, activities, events or groups of individuals in a certain space and time system that experiences a phenomenon Wekke, et al (2019). This statement is in accordance with the opinion (Ahmadi, 2020) which says that a case study is a detailed study of a setting, a subject person, a document storage place or a particular event. This statement is supported by (Helaluddin, 2019) who says that qualitative research is a research study that tries to understand phenomena in natural settings and contexts, so that it cannot manipulate the phenomena it observes. The research subject or informant was determined based on the researcher's consideration, which is usually called as the purposive technique (Sugiyono, 2018).

In other words, research informants were not selected randomly, but they have been determined or targeted by the researcher (Miles and Huberman, 2019). In connection with this, the informants of this study were the Master Program students at the Open University of Palangka Raya who were making and writing TAPM as many as 20 people. Research data collection was carried out using techniques: interviews, observation, and documentation. As a way to ensure the accuracy of research data, data validity tests were carried out, which include: credibility test, transferability test, dependability test, and confirmability test (Moleong, 2017). Furthermore, the research data were analyzed using the "interactive analysis" technique (Miles and Huberman, 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to the research data related to the difficulties of students in completing TAPM, the following can be explained.

Difficulties in Chapter I Introduction

Through interviews, observations, and documents with students (informants), several difficulties were found specifically in the background section, including (a) difficulty determining and describing real problems or empirical problems. This difficulty was experienced by 13 people, or 65% of all informants, and (b) difficulty in converting, interpreting statistical data, and describing it. This difficulty was experienced by 7 people, or 35% of all informants. This difficulty resulted in the data being presented directly in the form of tables or figures, where matters like this is not commonly written in the background section of the TAPM. This finding is supported by Siswanto and Sampurno (2015) who say that one of the obstacles for students working on the final thesis is the difficulty in finding real problems to research (empirical problems). The research findings



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support the research conclusions of Putri (2019) that stated that 90% of the informants made an initial revision of the thesis due to a shallow background, where there were 8 informants out of 16 informants who were unable to describe the problem situation in accordance with the facts and data in the field. The research conclusion is supported by the results of Sion and Nyoto's research (2023) which conclude that the highest difficulty in writing the introduction part of the thesis was in the background section, or 72.72% of all informants.

The research findings above should be a concern given the urgency of the research background. Burhan Bungin (2017) says it is an important part of a scientific work that explains the reasons or urgency why research needs to be done. The background basically functions as an introduction that describes the description or context of the problem to be studied, and provides limitations related to the research. The background is an important basis that is the reason why the problem is important to study. This opinion is in accordance with the opinion of Lexy J. Moleong (2021) who says that the research background is information that is systematically arranged regarding phenomena or problems that are of interest to research. One of the difficulties in writing the background was also stated by Hartati, et al (2024) who in her research states that there were still many informants who had difficulty in finding the right ideas to write about. This statement supports the opinion of Wibowo (2001) who says that writers must use ideas in determining topics to be interesting and understood. Rahmawati, et al. (2022), state that the difficulty of writing scientific papers includes the difficulty of ideas that are difficult to express and written in non-standard language. The above opinion supports the opinion of Achmad Abubakar, et al (2021) who define the background of the problem as information and ideas that are systematically arranged regarding phenomena and problematic issues that are of interest to research. So that in the background there are at least three elements that must be present, namely a description of the real conditions, ideal conditions and the importance of research.

On the other hand, the background should be written systematically and logically about the problems obtained should come from real experience (empirical problem). This writing is also useful for explaining the usefulness and currentness of the problem under study. In connection with the above statement, it is said that the background of the research problem is an explanation of why research is being carried out and why it should be carried out. On the other hand, the background should be written systematically and logically about the problems obtained, which should come from real experience (empirical problems). This paper is also useful for explaining the usefulness and currentness of the problem under study. In connection with the above statement, it is said that the background of the research problem is an explanation of why research is carried out and what is to be achieved or known from the implementation of the research (Dermawan Wibisono, 2000).

In addition to the difficulties described in the background section, it was also found that some informants had difficulty in interpreting and describing data derived from tables and figures/charts. As a result, in the background, the tables or figures/charts were presented as they were (original), not interpreted and not described in words and sentences. This fact indicates that the informants' abilities are still lacking in statistics



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and the meaning of the data contained in the tables, figures/charts. This statement is in accordance with Sugiyono's opinion (2018) that says that statistical methods are used to describe the data that has been collected without intending to make conclusions that apply generally. According to Dajan (2024), the definition of statistics is quantitative data, both those that are still not arranged and those that have been arranged in tabular form. According to Croxton and Cowden (2017), statistics is a method for collecting, managing, presenting and interpreting data in the form of numbers. Through the description above, the point can be drawn that if the statistical skills are inadequate, it will affect the informant's ability to interpret the data contained in a table or picture/chart. Interpretation of research data refers to the process of giving meaning and interpretation to the data that has been collected and analyzed. This process involves connecting research findings with existing literature, drawing conclusions, and providing explanations for the results obtained (Sugiyono, 2018).

This opinion supports the opinion of Arikunto (2013) who says interpretation is the process of interpreting or giving meaning to data or research results. In connection with this understanding, interpretation can be interpreted as a way for researchers to provide explanations, opinions, and analysis of the facts contained in tables, figures/charts (Arikunto, 2013)). The lack of ability in question can be one of the reasons why informants cannot properly describe the empirical data contained in tables or figures/charts. This fact makes some informants only able to take and describe tables, figures/charts as they were as in their original form in TAPM, without being interpreted.

Difficulties in Chapter II Theoretical Studies /Literature Review

Through interviews, observations, documents with students (informants), several difficulties were found, including (a) difficulty in distinguishing between things that are "theoretical" and things that are "policies" or "regulations/decisions/legislation". This difficulty was experienced by 14 people, or 70% of all informants. (b) difficulty in describing the "novelty" of the research. This difficulty was experienced by 15 people, or 75% of all informants (c) difficulty in creating a framework. This difficulty was experienced by 16 people, or 80% of all informants. Based on the research findings, it appears that there were still many informants who had difficulty interpreting between something theoretical and policy. As a result, there were still informants who considered these two things to be the same, even though they actually have different meanings.

In addition, there were some informants who considered that it was sufficient or correct when the policies, laws or regulations are described in the theoretical studies / literature review section. Especially if what was studied was the implementation or evaluation of a policy. In social research, a theory is a basic assumption or postulate that is the source of formulating hypotheses, which have other scientific purposes (Jamil, 2008). This statement is in accordance with the opinion of Kerlinger and Lee (2000), who define theory as a set of interrelated constructions, definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of the phenomenon by determining the relationship between variables, with the aim of explaining or predicting the phenomenon. This difficulty is an important thing to fix considering that some opinions say that in fact most research, especially quantitative research, is carried out to test theories, although some are carried out to



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develop and discover new theories (Sion, 2025). Meanwhile, policy can be interpreted as a program of achieving goals, values and directed actions. Furthermore, it is said that policy is a set of decisions taken by individuals and political groups in an effort to choose the objectives and ways used to achieve a goal Lasswell and Kaplan (2014).

This opinion is supported by N. Marbun, B.N (2003) who states that policy is a series of concepts and hopes that become the outline and basis for plans in carrying out a job, leadership in an organization or government, a statement of ideals, principles, goals, or intentions as a guideline to achieve these targets. In the theoretical studies/literature review section, it was also found that moderately a number of informants had difficulty in finding new things or novelty in the research conducted. The novelty in question is an aspect that does not exist in relevant previous research. This statement is supported by Munawar Noor (2021) who defines novelty as an element of originality that is new in a study. Novelty is important in research because it shows that the research has added value and is different from previous research. The statement above supports Nur Zeina Maya Sari's (2018) statement that novelty is a finding that is new, original, and has never existed before, and in the context of research, novelty is an important element that distinguishes new research from previous research. Based on the research findings, information was obtained that moderately number of informants had difficulty in making and writing a framework in the research. The framework according to Winarno Suracmad (2018) is a framework that describes the relationship between various variables or concepts in a study, based on theory, facts, and observations. This framework serves as a rationale for explaining the phenomena under study and formulating hypotheses. According to Sugiyono (2018), framework is a synthesis that describes the relationship between variables in a study, and serves as a guide to solving research problems and helping to formulate hypotheses.

This opinion is supported by Arikunto (2013), who says the framework in research is a line of thought designed based on the activities carried out by researchers, and this is a rationale that includes a combination of theory, facts, observations, and literature review, which will later be used as a basis for conducting research. Based on the above statement, it can be interpreted that the framework is an abstraction of the relationship including the influence between research variables which can also be used as a way to predict changes that occur as a cause-and-effect law. Understanding some of the difficulties experienced by informants in the theoretical studies/literature review section, we can underline that these difficulties tend to be more due to literacy problems. This means that it is more due to interest in reading the literature or theoretical sources that can be the basis that supports the research. This statement is supported by the results of research by I Dewa Ayu Made and Made Diah (2021) which states that the difficulties faced are very diverse, ranging from lack of understanding of the problems to be studied, limited references, and lack of mastering the theory. Furthermore, it was explained that there were 24.1% of informants who had difficulty finding sources of theory, causing knowledge and insight to be very lacking (Ria, 2022).

This statement is supported by the research conclusions of Arif Widodo, et al (2021) and supported by Heriyudanta, (2021) who say that the lack of references as literature for writing scientific papers can affect writing in the theoretical studies / literature review



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section. The same statement was said by Tampani (2023), who in his research says that one of the difficulties in writing scientific papers is the existence and mastery of relevant references. Furthermore, it is concluded that reading is the most basic element of language, so the main capital as a writer is reading, without reading someone will have difficulty in finding ideas and not having an overview of previous research that has been done. In Ardianto's research (2007: 5), it was found that the habit of reading is very lacking and the difficulty of getting reference material is a difficulty that is quite common among writers. Another difficulty that occurs in the theoretical studies / literature study section is due to the lack of the author's ability to express abstract thinking (Antika, 2023). Mina, et al (2019) in the conclusion of the study find that the lack of interest in reading was the main cause of difficulties in writing scientific papers. Furthermore, it is said that reading information, especially from up-to-date sources, is proven to improve the ability to write scientific papers. Based on the descriptions above, it can be underlined that the difficulties of writing scientific papers in general and especially TAPM can be minimized by increasing motivation or interest in reading coupled with easy access to appropriate

Difficulties in Chapter III Research Methods

and quality sources (references).

Through interviews, observations, documents with students (informants) several difficulties were found, including (a) difficulties in making the research instrument grids and conducting trials. This difficulty was experienced by 13 people, or 65% of all informants. (b) difficulties in conducting and interpreting the "classical assumption test" and "data validity test". This difficulty was experienced by 9 people, or 45% of all informants. Those two difficulties were supported by the results of research by Sion and Nyoto (2023) that say that most informants have not been able to describe research variables into indicators and carry out classical assumption test or data validity test. So that when calculated, only about 34% of informants can make instrument grids and carry out classical assumption test or data validity test. According to the informants, these difficulties are in addition to the demands of the work environment, which very rarely conducts research activities. Another cause is the very low interest and motivation to explore matters related to research methods. This fact can be understood because most informants have professions that are not in the academic field (non-lecturers/ nonfaculty). This statement is in accordance with the opinion of Laila Qadaria (2023) who says that difficulties in writing scientific papers can be caused by low interest and motivation.

In connection with this difficulty, it is necessary to provide experience through training in the form of practical activities for writing scientific papers (Abdan, 2018). One of the causes of these two difficulties is the informants' lack of knowledge and insight into the research methodology that can be used in writing TAPM. In connection with this, one of the effective efforts is to familiarize yourself with reading information sources related to how to compile instrument grids and how to test classical assumptions or test the validity of the data itself. This statement is supported by the results of research by Devitasari, et al. (2023), Febriyanti, et al (2024), and also Septafi (2021) that conclude that the difficulty of writing scientific papers has a significant relationship with how often or habitually one reads. In addition, it would be even better if the knowledge gained through reading is



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practiced through direct experience. This statement is supported by Anah, et al (2025) who in their research conclude that mistakes and difficulties in writing scientific papers, including TAPM, were due to low interest in reading for learning and very low writing practice experience.

The existence of a reading relationship with the ability to write scientific papers is supported by Febriyanti, et al (2024) and supported by Alfizein, et al (2024) who say reading is an activity of learning about something to be known and understood, so that it does not become a difficulty. In addition to reading in the sense of learning, the practice of writing scientific papers has provided evidence of improving the ability to carry out research and community service. In community service activities, Rahmah (2024), concludes that presentation activities varied with questions and answers, then complemented by discussions, self-review, self-healing, self-reflection, consultation with experts and direct practice showed a large and significant contribution to the skills in writing and communicating scientific papers. Based on the overall description above, a common thread can be drawn, namely that the difficulty of writing scientific papers can be minimized by motivating oneself to read more (learn) and accompanied by doing intensive scientific writing exercises.

Difficulties in Chapter IV Results and Discussion

Through interviews, observations, documents with students (informants) several difficulties were found, including (a) difficulties in presenting data systematically and discussing coherently. This difficulty was experienced by 5 people, or 25% of all informants. (b) specifically for the results of analysis using descriptive statistical techniques were not discussed, only the results of inferential statistical analysis were discussed. This difficulty was experienced by 15 people, or 75% of all informants. (c) the mastery of relevant theories was still limited, this difficulty was experienced by 13 people, or 65% of all informants. (d) in quantity, there were more "results" sections than "discussion" sections. This difficulty was experienced by 14 people, or 70% of all informants. This difficulty was found in the presentation of research results that were less organized, so that there were research results that should have been presented first, but instead were presented in the middle or at the end. Conversely, there were also research results that were supposed to be presented in the middle or at the end, but instead were presented at the front. This resulted in the TAPM research results and discussion becoming incoherent.

This means that both the research results and the discussion lack a logical connection between the elements or as if they are separated from one another. As a result, the research results and discussion are difficult to understand. Another difficulty found in the results and discussion section, one of which is that there were still informants who did not make a discussion for the results of data analysis using descriptive statistics, even though the results of descriptive analysis (mean, median, mode, and standard deviation) have been calculated/found. Based on the results of the interviews, most informants had wrong perception that the research results that need to be discussed in TAPM are only carried out for the results of data analysis using inferential statistical techniques, and are related to hypothesis testing.



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The lack of mastery of the theories used is also a difficulty for most informants to develop or enrich the discussion section, as a result in quantity and quality, the discussion section of the research results is less in proportion, compared to the research results section. This difficulty is evident in the fact that very few theories are used as a comparison for the results of the research that has been carried out. Apart from being a comparison of research findings, theories also function as a way to convince readers that the research findings can be scientifically justified, because they are supported by many opinions from experts. The results of this study are supported by Nugroho, et al. (2018), who in the conclusion of their research emphasize that the results and discussion of the research results are still lacking.

The point is that there are still many informants who are less able to develop ideas into writing. In addition, the writing of the results and discussion is still less organized and does not seem to have a high level of coherence. These difficulties support the results of Syazali's research (2022) which find that 31.31% of all informants experienced difficulties in interpreting the results of data analysis. Findings about difficulties in the results and discussion section of TAPM, this is in accordance with the results of research by Syazali, et al (2024) which conclude that one of the most difficult parts according to informants in compiling scientific papers is writing results and discussions. In the results of research by Nugroho, et al. (2018) related to the results and discussion section, it is said that the difficulties found include writing results and discussions that are less systematic and inappropriate ways of developing ideas and writing coherence problems.

Difficulties in Chapter V Conclusion

Through interviews, observations, documents with students (informants) several difficulties were found, including difficulties in expressing thoughts systematically, briefly and clearly. This difficulty was experienced by 9 people, or 45% of all informants. This finding shows that almost half of the informants experienced difficulties in writing conclusions in writing TAPM. This means that there are still moderately a lot of students who have difficulty making a digest of the research results (Erwin Widiasworo, 2019) or difficulty in making a summary through thinking both deductively and inductively from an idea or discussion (Poerwadarminta, 2008). The findings of this study are supported by the results of Gesita Septafi's research (2019) which find that 25% of 30 informants still experienced difficulties and needed guidance, including difficulties in making systematic and logical or reasonable conclusions.

The results of the study above support the results of Oktaviandi, et al (2019) who find that only 35% of the 100 informants had a fairly good ability to write scientific papers. The conclusion of TAPM can also be interpreted as writing that provides answers to research questions, which include questions: what, how, and why. This statement explains that the conclusion of TAPM is an answer made to solve the problem formulation that has been made in the introduction of TAPM (Sion, 2025). This difficulty is supported by the results of research by Arifah, et al (2025) which find that 29.80% of the research informants were still incorrect in making systematic and logical conclusions in scientific writing. Based on the research data, it was found that there were still many informants who had difficulty in expressing the results of thoughts systematically, so that they were easily understood as a whole by the reader. In connection with these difficulties,



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according to (Erwin Widiasworo, 2019), writing conclusions must be arranged systematically or regularly and logically so that readers can understand the researcher's train of thought, and the information conveyed is relevant and easier to understand.

According to the results of Lubis's research (2019), there are difficulties in making conclusions, including unsystematic and unstructured writing. Besides the difficulty in making systematic conclusions, it was also found that there were still some informants who had difficulty in making brief but clear writing, in the conclusion section of the TAPM. This means that there are still moderately a number of informants who are unable to take the essence or main ideas from the results of their research, to be written briefly or concisely in the conclusion section. This difficulty causes some of the informants to repeat some of the exact same sentences (whole) from the research results contained in the results and discussion section of the TAPM. Some have indeed made concise writing, but there are some who summarize by cutting / deleting some words or parts of sentences that are actually important. As a result, the conclusions lose meaning, so that they cannot be properly understood by the readers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research data, it can be concluded: 1. In the introduction section of the TAPM, it was found: a. as many as 13 people (65%) out of 20 informants had difficulty in determining and describing real problems or empirical problems, and b. as many as 7 people (35%) out of 20 informants had difficulty interpreting statistical data and describing it. 2. In the literature review/theoretical studies review section of the TAPM, it was found that: a. as many as 14 people (70%) out of 20 informants had difficulty in distinguishing theoretical matters from policy matters, b. as many as 15 people (75%) out of 20 informants had difficulty in finding and describing the novelty of the research, c. as many as 16 people (80%) out of 20 informants had difficulty in making a framework. 3. In the research methods section of the TAPM, it was found: a. as many as 13 people (65%) out of 20 informants had difficulty in making instrument grids and conducting tests, b. as many as 9 people (45%) out of 20 informants had difficulty in conducting classical assumption tests or data validity tests. 4. In the research results and discussion section of the TAPM, it was found that: a. 5 people (25%) out of 20 informants had difficulty in presenting systematic and coherent data. b. 15 people (75%) out of 20 informants had difficulty in using statistical techniques and did not discuss the results of descriptive analysis. c. as many as 13 people (65%) out of 20 informants had limited mastery of theory. d. as many as 14 people (70%) out of 20 informants had difficulty in writing the discussion section, so proportionally the discussion section was less, compared to the research results section. 5. In conclusions section of the TAPM, it was found that: a. as many as 9 people (45%) out of 20 informants experienced difficulty in expressing the results of thoughts systematically, briefly and clearly.

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