

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE****Social Science Graduating Students' Problems of Writing Senior Essays: The Case of Three Public Universities****Jeilan Mohammed<sup>1</sup> and Tadele Aseffa<sup>2</sup>**

Recommended citation:

Jeilan Mohammed & Tadele Aseffa (2017). Social science graduating students' problems of writing senior essays: The case of Jimma University. *Ethiop.j.soc.lang.stud.* 4(2), 49-80. eISSN: 2408-9532; pISSN: 2412-5180. ISBN:978-99944-70-78-5. Web:Address: <http://www.ju.edu.et/cssljournal/>

**Abstract**

This study assessed social science graduating learners' problems of writing senior essays in public universities in Ethiopia. In effect, data was gathered from a sample of 216 students and 35 teachers in Civics, English and Sociology fields through questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire data were analyzed with descriptive statistics; the interviews were analyzed qualitatively. The results show that the improper time use, little commitment, less motivation, low experience, poor academic background, and limited reading materials affected the write up of students' theses. It was also felt that insufficient and unproductive research methods training and lack of short-term intensive trainings might have worsened the existing challenges. Moreover, advisor-advisee interactions were less. Consequently, theses writing found to be a compilation of plagiarized texts, with no/little reflections of the student as a researcher. As any studies, the shortfalls are likely in our research, yet the findings could highlight the factors facing learners in writing senior essays, so awareness raising and intervention strategies can be designed and offered. Future work of the present researchers will investigate Social Science and Humanities graduates' problems of doing undergraduate theses.

**Key terminologies:** /Graduating students/Senior essay writing problem/Social science/

**1. Introduction****1.1. Background of the Study**

Quite often people talk about research both in and outside of academic institutions today (Kothari, 2008). Hall (2012) and Nersessian (2008) cited in Eldman, Divoll and Rogan-Klyve (2013) say that research is an integral activity that guides the researcher to be a scientist and join research-based jobs these days. Yet, it is an obligation on the road to a degree (Thomas and Robinson, 1994). Even so, research benefits the student

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personally through awarding good grade and achieving experience, and may ensure unending benefits of the field that induces it (Thomas & Robinson, 1994). As to Eldman, Divoll and Rogan-Klyve (2013), the research studies geared towards purposeful targets are scarce. In particular, students appear to view thesis writing as an unpleasant work (Thomas & Robinson, 1994).

Hall (2012) sees that undergraduate thesis abides by scientific procedures leading to findings. Importantly, the findings need to be communicated with the readership through writing because the “most important reasons for writing a thesis is to *communicate* [italics is not ours] its outcomes (Chandrasekhar, 2002, p.46). Of the core procedures of research, the write up of research is the final phase at which the results are shared with the audience (Kothari, 2008). Many scholars even tend to equate the writing up of a research with the results of the research itself in the sense that research would fail unless its findings are written in organized and presentable documents (e.g., Chandrasekhar, 2002).

Globally, scholars and countries vary over the use of names for documents that graduating students write to qualify themselves with university degrees. The disparities are visible even in advanced countries of the West. In western countries, Paltridge (2002) had shown that the term ‘thesis’ and ‘dissertation’ contained an overlapping, distinct, or opposite meanings in referring to Masters and PhD graduation documents. In Ethiopia, ‘dissertation’, ‘thesis’, and ‘senior essay’ respectively denote papers that doctoral, mastrate and undergraduate students write for fulfilling the requirements to graduate from higher education institutions. ‘Thesis’ in Chandrasekhar (2002) work represents both the bachelor and mastrate degree papers. It is also common to find the term ‘thesis’ alone or plus the name of degree (BA thesis, Bsc thesis, etc) or ‘undergraduate thesis’ being used interchangeably with ‘Senior Essay’. In this study, these terms: BA thesis’, ‘undergraduate thesis’, thesis or simply ‘essay’ will be utilized in exchange for ‘Senior essay’ for the sake of variety.

That said, Chandrasekhar (2002, p.46) gives etymological definition of thesis which goes, “thesis is an (obligatory) offering placed at the desk of the examiner by a candidate who wishes to get a degree”. This had been the most typical, and the sole objective of writing a thesis. ‘A thesis is a work that a candidate undertakes and presents the written record of it. In Hall (2012)’s explanation, a thesis is written by a senior-year student in estimate total pages of 60-100, within a time span of 7 to 10 months. The thesis writer should demonstrate the quality, contributions of expected outcomes and style of the thesis that satisfies academic readers and academic writing demands (Torrance, Thomas and Robinson, 1994; Honours Working Party 1999, in Chandrasekhar, 2002).

For several undergraduate students, Torrance, Thomas and Robinson (1994), however, admit that composing research is their newer experience than any of their undergraduate writing activities. Kothari (2008) agrees that writing up requires ‘a set of skills’ unlike the rest stages of a research. Although considerable numbers of researches are done and finished annually, Kothari maintains that they have overlooked the role of research methods. As such, “Much of research, particularly in social sciences, contains endless word-spinning and too many quotations. Thus a great deal of research tends to be futile” (Kothari, 2008: in Preface). Wenkang (2004) complains that the quality of the undergraduate theses, as well as, the knowledge expected of the candidates were less than satisfactory.

Locally, a past study by Teshome showed that higher education institutions in Ethiopia have problems linked with the “quality and relevance of programs of studies and research...” (2003, p.1). The contributions of universities in producing adequate human resources that undertake quality research are insignificant (Teshome, 2003). None was done in the area connected with students’ problems of writing senior essays as well. Admittedly, our literature search engines are primarily delimited to the published materials, and research works accessible on websites and libraries. Of course, Torrance, Thomas and Robinson (1994) witnessed that lots of university libraries have many handbooks and references than only few students’ graduation works. All considered, little is known as to why the graduates from social sciences fields in public universities in Ethiopia experience problems in the write up of senior essays. This is why the current study was mainly set out to investigate.

## 1.2. Statement of the Problem

Besides the benefits of the theses stated above, the uses attached to undergraduate researches in Ethiopian government universities are very significant. One of the ultimate objectives is to enable the would-be graduates of social sciences disciplines to fit for the demands of first degree qualification requirements and to equip them with skills and knowledge necessary to be good problem-solvers in their career lives at large. As with the rest of their theses procedures, they have to be competent enough in writing up, to meet the requirements of the disciplines to which they claim affiliations, or at least to their advisors and examiners expectations, so that they would be awarded desirable grades. Failing to do this would have direct consequences on their final grade which in turn affects their future successes or failures in the competitive job markets.

That said, the write up of senior essays of final-year social sciences learners’ appear to be quite worse. Experiences as an instructor, advisor and/or examiner show that the qualities of the papers were below the expected standard of a finished written work of an undergraduate candidate. Firstly, most senior essay writers, to whom the present researchers were advisors, seemed to have bad time management habits. They submitted the final versions of theses after it was too late to revise the papers and return back to them. Many of them show up to request for approval signature on a day or two days before deadline of their papers to be handed in to their respective departments. Consequently, the time for revising the papers would run out although the papers may contain serious flaws in the major aspects (e.g., content, organization, structure) of senior essays, not to mention the topographic errors (e.g., spelling, punctuation).

Still undergraduate theses writers appeared to have low commitment, less motivation and high frustration. It looked that they treat theses writing up not so much more than they would care for writing class term-papers or essays. The information and ideas are mechanically written and arbitrarily presented in their senior essays mostly. However, Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008) assert that a researcher’s commitment is the most decisive factor to determine success/failure of the thesis more than anything. According to some researchers, students become frustrated and de-motivated due to limited research writing experiences (Torrance, Thomas & Robinson 1994; Wenkang, 2004; Hall, 2012). The majority of research project writing and writing activities experiences students had in their undergraduate writing classes were shorter, less complex or less demanding

stylistically than writing thesis (Torrance, Thomas and Robinson, 1994).

The role of the theses advisors could also be one of the main factors for students' poor quality of BA theses write up. In university environments, it is customary for instructors to display their names and contact hours on their office doors, so that advisees can consult with their theses advisors physically. Despite of these facts, it has been learnt that some advisors do not respect their schedules. This may also affect the level of support required of the advisor, because the advisor have to contact the advisees directly and regularly (Wengkang, 2004; Harvard University manual, 2009; Mah, 2013).

Reasonably, the teacher who guides and tutors the advisee sufficiently can help him/her to improve the quality of theses (Wengkang, 2004). Moreover, many senior essay writers lacked the basic characteristics of academic theses writing demands such as organization, structure and completeness of contents, especially in the body of their senior essays. In particular, they get their sentences and paragraphs unnecessarily longer or shorter. Writing in very long paragraphs is amongst the most common problems. Their papers often contain contents that are irrelevant to the purpose of their topics. Others write their senior essays supplying no or little evidences for their claims. Worrying still, significant numbers of senior essays are filled with sources taken from former researcher(s) without acknowledging the source.

Apart from these, the current researchers were hesitant that the trainings offered to help the students write thesis, especially the teaching of Research Method courses were not productive. For example, the research course instructor should show the students in classroom how they can apply in their real environment, by making students read related studies in the area of field and criticize the papers (Wenkang, 2004; Booth, Colombo and Williams, 2008). As a result, they would be informed well about the shape that their own final paper will take (Wenkang, 2004). If not, Booth, Colombo and Williams contend that teaching research methods result in the fact that "doing research and writing it up become merely make-work-for you [a research teacher] as much as for them [students]" (2008, p. 278).

Apart from the regular research methodology and formal learning experience, short-term extra trainings are vital to upgrade students' ability and improve their senior essay writing (Torrance, Thomas and Robinson, 1994; Park, 2005; Kothari, 2008). Partly because, knowledge and skills obtained from the formal trainings in undergraduate classes are inadequate for students to write good thesis (Torrance, Thomas & Robinson, 1994; Wengkang, 2004; Kothari, 2008). These and other observed problems have always triggered the mind of the writer of this research. Lastly, a study that investigated such problems/factors in English as Foreign Language classes in public universities was non-existent so far. It is, therefore, in this assertion that the following objectives and research questions are designed taking the case of three universities.

### 1.3. Research Questions

Based on the statement and/or the objectives, this study will try to answer these questions:

1. What are the major factors affecting Ambo, Adama and Wellega Universities' Social Science graduates (third year) of 2012/13 class writing effective senior essays?
2. What solutions and/or recommendations could be made to alleviate the problems?

#### a. Objectives of the study

#### 1.4.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study is to assess public universities undergraduate social science candidates' problems of writing senior essays.

#### 1.4.2. Specific Objectives

This study hopes to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To find out the major factors which impede Ambo, Adama and Wellega Universities social science graduates (third year) of 2012/13 class writing effective senior essays
2. To suggest some likely solutions and/or recommendations.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

### 2.1. Writing Undergraduate Thesis

Scholars do not seem to agree on what counts undergraduate research and whether it differs from the other formal writings/projects offered in undergraduate level. Hall (2012) draws dissimilarity between undergraduate thesis and undergraduate research projects, but Rambo (2006a) sees no wider differences. For Rambo (2006), thesis and the rest writing activities like essays are alike, though thesis employs varied sources and is a bit longer paper. Hall (2012) and Dwihandini, Marhaeni and Suarnajaya (2013) give a more comprehensive meaning to thesis writing, referring both to the process (doing research) and the product (the write up) of the research activity. Hardling (2004) views thesis writing as producing research outcomes in the form of writing.

Kothari (2008) argues that the write up is the last phase, and it requires 'a set of skills' somewhat different from the rest stages of research. Whereas an institution

encouraging research obtains sustainable benefits, the candidate students graduates with good grade and get experience. Moreover, thesis should conform to the standards of academic discipline requirements (Torrance, Thomas and Robinson, 1994). In this paper, writing thesis is viewed from the write up, connecting with the basic problems of students' writing Senior Essay.

## **2.2. Time Management Problem**

When a research is conducted, budgeting time is among the most taxing problems that affects the originality of the research (Hall, 2012). Rambo (2006) justifies that writing good theses demands long time. According to Saunders et al. (2000), most people can write about 2000 words in a day, even so their experience, confidence and the complexity of the subject matters.

Many students spend so much time gathering their research (Frankel and McHale, 2002) whereas some students procrastinate as a source of motivation to get them working (Head and Eisenberg, 2009). When work and research commitments compete, weak schedule of time management causes the biggest problems (Gray, 2004). As such, a large number of people delay their writing up to final minutes until shortly before the thesis is due (Gray, 2004; Hall, 2012). It follows that, they use up the revisions time (Gray, 2004) and get confused when the advisers inform them to improve the papers, and time expires (Hall, 2012). The result is that final thesis becomes less than the level it deserves and of potential or maximum effort of the advisees and advisors (Hall, 2012; Frankel and McHale, 2002).

Besides the above, some researchers cite the effect of lack of time management training in the undergraduate class for the students' improper use of time. Booth, Colombo and Williams, feel that it is valueless to rush students along the research process activities step by step rigidly. When students are given writing assignments, they must be well-informed of fixed timetable to do the assigned task, as well as timetable as to when working on the in-between writing tasks expires, which help them monitor their own progress (Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008, pp.281-279). Finally, Kothari (2008) perceives that obtaining prompt and sufficient service of secretary is hard, and it leads to undue delays for thesis completion.

As the final thesis determines the students' grade, Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2006) and Hall (2012) advise researchers to start writing it early, using skills acquired through education and experiences so far, to contact their advisers regularly and to achieve certain progress weekly, and to allocate plenty of time to write a finished quality paper. To manage time, Rambo (2006) and Hall (2012, p.1) suggest strategies for prioritizing writing sections of research based on ease of writing. For example, it includes writing literature review first and the introduction last (Rambo, 2006) or introduction and literature review followed by the methods part as data gathering tools are designed (Hall, 2012).

## **2.3. Commitment**

The authors point out that research consists of many tasks that compete with the writer's efforts frequently (Booth, Colombo & Williams 2008). Hall (2012) states that

students who write a thesis need to have the commitment and desire to really devote themselves to the thesis. Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008) assert that a researcher's commitment to the thesis contributes to its success more than anything else. Showman et al. (2013) argue that students should create, judge, communicate and organize information to be knowledgeable about others' findings and discover their autonomously. Mah (2013) writes that it is a mistake to assume that an undergraduate researcher becomes solely successful on his/her initiative, hard work, and dedication. Wengkang (2004) and Hall (2012) even disagree to making all learners write theses. Students that are overloaded with team work commitments, coursework requirements fail to dedicate their time to the research procedures (Hall, 2012), yet others had score below average (Wengkang, 2004), so the scholars prefer making thesis writing optional to mandating it to each student. This shows that the students' interest, level of personal commitments, and academic achievements should be considered before assigning thesis work to the undergraduates, including English majors.

#### **2.4. Motivation and Frustration**

For the majority students, writing research is the hardest activity, but also amongst the most memorable and rewarding for others (Litmoren, 2015). Students' frustration can be associated with personal and physical factors (Wenkang, 2004). Physical factors such as library facilities (in print forms or on databases) may not meet with the users sizes. For instance, still many students do not have easy access to the Internet (Wenkang, 2004). When learners are confronted with information overload, unable to find materials they desired, or unsure whether such materials exist, they may be challenged, confused and frustrated (Head & Eisenberg, 2009).

Similarly, Jones (n.d.) realizes that some students are afraid of writing thesis unless they obtain the information they think are the quality ones. In *How to Write a Great Research Paper*; Jones, however, informs writers to begin writing a paper if they have some ideas to start with, no matter how insignificant it may seem to them. Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008) and Hall (2012) understand that research may look frustrating for novice writers, but it will be more enjoyable when the writer can manage its sections, classifying the paper in to shorter writing projects, in ways that they were used to in formal classes, and then approach the writing confidently.

Besides the external and personal inhibitive factors, another most trying challenge to writing a senior essay is keeping internal motivation to go ahead (Litmoren, 2015). Students who hate writing major aspects of thesis: autonomous research, process writing, and critical analyses might not enjoy writing theses (Hall, 2012). Low motivation maybe closely related to bad objectives for writing the thesis (among others, Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008; Hall, 2012). When students write theses to meet requirements only, it would be a meaningless activity (Booth, Colombo and Williams, 2008). Hence, Hall continues to say that learners should be initiated to do their works responsibly and to contribute content to shape the thesis direction significantly.

#### **2.5. Advisor-advisee Communication**

In the Harvard University (2009)'s manual, an adviser is defined as a person that

has the “final word” on the undergraduate research paper in “approving your [student’s thesis] topic, methods, and the final product and is involved in reading drafts and meeting with you [graduate student] frequently.” Mah (2013) strongly argues that it is a ‘must’ for the advisor to avail him/her self, to coach and guide the graduating students ‘directly’. Other authors maintain that students may seek the guidance and assistance of the advisors’ to achieve her/his purpose (e.g., Kothari, 2008), or get experiences and resources (e.g., Wenzel, 2003). Not only advisor-advisee communication, Mah (2013) believes that student-mentor relationship fosters an undergraduate research write up. But Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008) see that some students think as if research is a private scholarly activity, and want to accomplish it on their own efforts.

While Kothari (2008) agrees that non-native students may know grammar and usage better, culture related factors, and critical writing skills of theses present greater challenges to them. For this reason, a Murray (2011) support that more aid and follow up is required from the supervisor. The students’ role, according to Hall (2012) is to be informed of and stick to their advisers’ reading preferences and time available and suitable to read and comment. Normally, Murray (2011) thinks that a research advisor desires to see his/her student finish theses timely, and they avoid being a hindrance once the student’s paper meets a standard. Frankel and McHale (2002) feel that the teachers are curious to help on bigger theses aspects: organization, format, development, documentation, and grammar, except smaller activities like proofreading the paper. Murray (2011), however, finds advisors’ role to be ‘complex and implicit’ for years. The researcher contends that some advisors may have advised on many theses writing, yet they differed widely in their academic writing knowledge levels. Strangely, Murray observes that some advisors have even forgotten what their own research was about and their past training on writing (Murray, 2011).

## **2.6. Background Knowledge and Skills**

Unlike the rest of research steps, Kothari (2008) and Head and Eisenberg (2009) assert that the write up phase demand possessing multiple skills to perform the tasks, somehow. Nonetheless, several undergraduate research writers have many problems. Scholars ascribe the problems to students’ lack of awareness (Park, 2005), the difficulty of academic writing (Dwihandini, Marhaeni, Suarnajaya, 2013) and shortage of research or scientific training methodology (Park, 2005; Kothari, 2008).

In the first place, learners have limited or no awareness about their readers’ expectations, writing requirements or educational experience requirements (Park, 2005). In particular, many students reported to have little or no idea how to write the topic for their senior essays (Head & Eisenberg, 2009). Others write unsound research that duplicates the sources, lacking in any reflections on them (Booth, Colombo and Williams, 2008). These seemed to indicate that they possess poor skills and knowledge of theses writing. For one thing, many scholars argue that research writing training must be based upon sound principles (Gray, 2004; Wenkang, 2004; Booth, Colombo and Williams, 2008; Wallwork, 2011). For example, in Britain, writing good titles and writing the whole article are given almost equal weights, 50%. That means, the “gurus of research writing tend to dedicate more pages to discussing the importance of the title than they do to any section in the paper itself” (Wallwork, 2011, p.114).

For the other thing, the scholars say that the principles of writing thesis should give the students opportunities to apply them to realistic writing. According to Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008, p. 278), teaching research methods without demonstrating to students in class meaningfully and making them use the methods in their assignments productively result in the fact that “doing research and writing it up become merely make-work-for you [a research teacher] as much as for them [students].”

When students fail to see any value for composing, and requirements for writing, they would treat it as ‘mechanical drill’ (Wengkang, 2004; Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008). Consequently, they question, “...my teacher knows all about my topic. What do I gain from writing up my research, other than proving I can do it?” (Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008, p.278). However, Wengkang (2004) advocates that a researcher who trains his/her advisee through posing more questions could lead the learner to more research, more analysis, and more critical thinking in this active pursuit of knowledge.

All the same, report writing is a skill that must be acquired through practice (Gray, 2004). Perhaps, Head and Eisenberg (2009) correctly write that writing a research needs understanding multiple sides of an argument. This needs practice in critical thinking which students have developed through learning experience in higher educational institutions (Head & Eisenberg, 2009). Even so, the learning experiences obtained in higher educational institutions are inadequate to write good theses without short-term trainings (Torrance, Thomas and Robinson, 1994; Park, 2005; Kothari, 2008; Wengkang, 2009). Wengkang (2009, p. 46) argues, “Students’ limited knowledge acquired from basic English writing courses or from just a few hours of lecture is far from enough to complete a decent thesis”. Consolidating the idea of Wengkang (2009), Park (2005) thinks that to some extent formal training is customary in such systems, but the author worries that the practice of giving extra training to students is missing in the programmes of higher educations. Referring to Golding and Mascaro (1986) findings, Torrance, Thomas and Robinson also say that methodologies focusing on undergraduate students’ writing are much more common. Torrance, Thomas and Robinson discontended that attempts to introduce effective writing training are likely to be hindered by the lack of knowledge about the efficacy of different forms of instruction (1994). Moreover, Kothari (2008) shares Park (2005)’s concern and encourages offering “*short duration intensive courses*” to equip students with research methods effectively. Likewise, Torrance, Thomas and Robinson (1994) advocate the effectiveness of short-term trainings, but they argue that the trainer should be knowledgeable about the areas of students’ thesis writing to be addressed through such trainings.

In their study, the researchers designed courses and trained 104 graduating students (classified in to three groups) for a couple of days. Of the three groups of trainees, those who were exposed to the areas deemed good for research writing such as grammar and stylistics, and unintended draft writing followed by extensive revisions showed marked differences. Inversely, the group that received a course on generating and organizing content revealed less improvement in their writings. Based on the findings, Torrance, Thomas and Robinson suggested that short-term writing courses do facilitate the undergraduate students’ writing of research; however, such training should target not to generate and organize data and thoughts before writing theses, but to enable the students immediately produce texts, instead.

Before students are expected to write their papers either in the undergraduate class

writing projects or the final graduation theses, authors (among others, Weisberg & Buker, 1990; Wenkang, 2004; Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008) contend that students acquire skills for research writing best in a real environment, where they can familiarize themselves with related literatures in their disciplines. To do this, Wenkang (2004) writes that the research teacher/advisor should instruct the learners to search for the past research work and to criticize the research in writing, in such a way that they would be informed better about the shape that their own final paper will take.

In the eyes of Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008), the assigned works should not be restricted to writing the critique. Instead, they must help students develop social skills, especially about their readers, and anticipate their reactions. But Torrance, Thomas and Robinson (1994) discovered that few of existing works do present on how to analyze undergraduate theses texts. On top these, for they have found research proposals is effective for writing research, Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009) make their students prepare proposals in research methods classes.

### **2.7. Thesis Qualities Requirements**

The thesis writer should demonstrate the quality, contributions of results and style of his/her thesis (Torrance, Thomas and Robinson, 1994; Honours Working Party 1999, in Chandrasekhar, 2002). Wenkang (2004) enumerates the use of coherent language, logical organization, writing substantial content, and maintain some originality as requirements of thesis quality. Torrance, Thomas and Robinson (1994) elaborate that quality paper should satisfy the academic readers and academic writing demands. Since composing research is the newer experience than any of their undergraduate writing activities, meeting such requirements is a challenging task for several undergraduate students (Torrance, Thomas & Robinson, 1994), or for an average undergraduates (Wenkang, 2004). Lack of meaningful training seemed to have made most students to substitute quantity for quality. According to Phillips and Pugh (1994), the thesis is original work if the writer:

- Does empirical study that has not been done previously.
- Use already known material but with a new interpretation.
- Replicate a study that has been done in another country or context.
- Bring new evidence to bear on an old issue.

### **2.8. Structuring and Stylistic Problems**

To shape a research structure, Kutuphanes (2009) informs writers to bring related materials together corresponding to the structures in the paper, starting from the main sections (e.g., chapters) and moving to the smallest structures (sentences/words), so that all proceed logically from the previous or connects to the next. In this section, first highlights the structure and/or style elements, followed by further details on what counts bad structure and/or style. Structuring a paper identifies the key issues such as using optimum/appropriate length, breaking ideas, showing flow of ideas (Gray, 2004; Kutuphanes, 2009; Wallwork 2011; Ellman, 2014).

As far as length is concerned, the typically elements of a senior thesis length

listed in (Harvard,--2009) manual are Introduction, 5-10 pages; Literature Review, 10-20 pages; Methods and Analyses, 10-15 pages; Results, 2-3 chapters to answer the key sub-questions, and Discussion and Conclusion: 5-15 pages. Some students separate the last two sections into two separate chapters, but many combine them into one chapter.

Regarding paragraph length, Wallwork (2011) suggests 15 lines or less for most paragraphs lengths in 'a well-written research paper'. Gray (2004) says that a first-rate quality in social science research is shorter paragraphs. Just one long paragraph or too long paragraphs, and a range of short paragraphs, with only one or two short sentences are bad. While using too many short paragraphs would sound strange, unusually long paragraphs would lead to disjointed thoughts ('rambling' ideas) (Wallwork, 2011; Elman, 2014). For example, Review Literature could be broken into paragraphs at various stages which discuss the development of the present research, or each time the reviewer begin to incorporate the idea(s) of another writer (Wallwork, 2011). Using short summary, going directly to the main points, or using transition sentence would help establish connections of ideas between the major sections (e.g., Wallwork, 2011). In doing so, the writer should do consistently without boring the audiences.

According to Wallwork, the experiences of several writers are just ending the introduction with a brief summary. Moreover, Wallwork (2011) adds that logical writing: arranging information from most logical to simplest form, writing old information (context, background) first, followed by new one consistently would allow clear and smooth flow of ideas throughout the writing. Yet, effective writing depends as much on accuracy, diction, objectivity and readability, or style of writing a paper (Frankel and McHale, 2002; Gray, 2004; Booth, Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008; Kutuphanes, 2009). Style includes the writer's use of 'voice' and verb tense for communicating to audiences in an understandable language (Weisberg and Buker, 1990; Ellman 2014). Satisfying readers with the appropriate language (e.g., right word through to paragraphs) in writing precisely and clearly is challenging (Kutuphanes, 2009). Style is not formally taught, but acquired through reading (Ellman, 2014).

Put broadly, Gray (2004) expresses that social science papers use more passive voice style than other disciplines. Grossly, Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008) observe that researchers use active verbs at the first part of research papers, to "describe how *they* [original italics] discovered their problem "and at the last part to "describe how *they* [original italics] solved it." In the middle, they use the passive forms to 'describe processes' any person can perform (2008). For Weisberg and Buker (1990), whether to use passive to write procedures in methods determined by the style required (impersonal /personal styles, and the way information is organized (placing the old ideas 'near' beginning, and the new at end). In general, some common bad style and structure of writing texts enumerated in Wallwork (2011) and Ellman (2014, pp. 105-9) are:

- overly long/'loose' sentences (e.g., a single one but occupies whole paragraph) or too many short sentences,
- Uses too many short or lengthy sentences,
- Too long paragraphs (e.g., a whole page of text without a paragraph, or even  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page). Use logical connectors, (placing at start) to make arguments smoothly flow from one paragraph to another.
- Repeating a quote in the same text, or even a chapter. As they are so unique, quotation

make reader feel 'I've seen it somewhere'.

- Using ambiguous text like 'it', 'the former', 'and the latter' where the reference is unclear.
- Assuming the reader has deeper knowledge as the thesis writer, and avoiding explaining a concept.
- unnecessarily repeating keywords in a sentence/a paragraph
- referring back to a section/a chapter with 'as mentioned above', 'earlier', etc without providing a cross-reference (e.g., See Section 3.1), as otherwise the reader will be irritated by having to search back until the section concerned is found.
- lack academic writing tone/use colloquial, slang (e.g., 'At the end of the day' instead of 'shortly')

Murray (2011, p.25) provides useful tips for analyzing thesis as under:

- Scan the contents page. What type of structure is used? Experimental/narrative/other form of logical progression?
- What are the approximate relative lengths of chapters?
- Is the structure reflected in the abstract?
- Read the introductory paragraphs of each chapter. How progression is from chapter to chapter established?
- What are the main differences between chapters?
- Look at structure and style: long/short sentences and paragraphs.
- Look at the language used: what are the key words?
- Types of verbs used: definitive, past tense or propositional?

## 2.9. Difficulties with Thesis Organization and Development

Organizing information and ideas in to research body parts is basic to the quality of a thesis (Frankel and McHale, 2002; Litmoren, 2015) though it is the most taxing section to write, too (Frankel & McHale, 2002). The most careful plan and skilful application of research study will fail unless the target audiences access its findings coherently (Gray, 2004). Neither do the amounts of information gathered (2016), nor would the processes followed in writing the paper warrant its quality or a high grade (2002). The University of Adelaide article of 2014 compels careful presentation of data (e.g., reviews) chronologically or thematically. Either way, the paper writer should state to which format the current research belong.

Among other things, the incomplete/undeveloped ideas and information in theses are featured by their length, evidences, organization (e.g., Halpenny, 1976 in Rambo, 2006; Frankel & McHale, 2002; Wenkang, 2004; Gray, 2004; Rambo, 2006; Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008; Kutuphanes, 2009; UTS, 2013; Litmoren, 2015). Poor support and development of ideas is closely related to weak organization (Rambo, 2006). A well-organized thesis presents 'all [writer's italics] relevant' data on the topic/problem' first, followed by evidences for each supporting data and arguments consistently, so the mode of organization is highly predictable (Halpenny, 1976) cited in (Gray, 2004). It is also difficult to develop ideas successfully without the use of effective topic sentences. On the other hand, a poorly organized paper contains disconnected thoughts and unclear

ideas, and contrived writing (Frankel and McHale, 2002).

Excessively short or long paragraphs' are another signs of poor development (Rambo, 2006). Students' produce lengthy writing for they were perhaps unclear about the objectives for lengths which may emanates from the absence of opportunities that enable the students translate in to usable objectives (Wenkang, 2004). Substantial content or evidences is still another cause of immature/weak development of writing papers. For example, Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008) and Litmoren (2015) express that evidences are sources (quotes, paraphrases, summaries, taken from other authors, or personal experience) which are essential to support and to develop claims. Accessibility, accuracy, sufficiency and representativeness of the evidence are deemed measure of the quality and/or quantity of data used to complete the final research product. According to Litmoren (2015), obtaining evidence to support a research paper is one of challenges majority students' experience in writing a research paper. As a result, they provide very immature evidence (one quotation, one number, one personal experience) inaccurate evidence, and/or contradictory evidence that weaken the effectiveness of the paper contents (Frankel & McHale, 2002; Gray 2004; Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008; Kutuphanes, 2009). Sometimes, however, failing to revise the paper critically is believed to aggravate the problems.

But the times students leave the problems aside advertently, they find it tempting to delete all the (less) irrelevant information (Kutuphanes, 2009). To better organize paper, Rambo (2006)'s advice is deleting any ideas that are obviously irrelevant to it. Unless the evidences suffer from immaturity, Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008) recommend tolerating with an inexperienced writer and whose warranty for relevance of claim satisfies his/her advisor's or other student-researchers. Even so, (UTS, 2013) still emphasizes the need for rechecking of the accuracy, sufficiency and representativeness of the evidence before, during, and after senior essay writing, or the writer must demonstrate that the new knowledge is relevant, significant and developed logically from current work in the field.

## **2.10. Advisee's Competence of Integrating Sources**

### **2.10.1. Competence of Incorporating Reflections**

While writing senior essays, writers should integrate secondary data from sources in their areas of study and at times they should write their reflections. Writing research differs from other writing assignments because the writer is expected to deeply criticize and evaluate past literatures to respond to the readers' reactions, questions and objections. By contrast, he/she should not regard writing thesis as a text full of his/her own information and thoughts. The writer should incorporate other researchers' ideas in to his/her ongoing paper, whilst reflecting on the ideas and/reactions judiciously, but not categorically (Frankel & McHale, 2002; Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008; Wallwork, 2011). Nevertheless, students (especially, inexperienced ones) appear to commit two major flaws in writing their research products. Either they miss to integrate their own thoughts, or state them openly with absolute language, or fill in the paper with the compilations of their ideas only or those of other writers.

Although analyzing the scholars' literatures critically is essential, the writer

should be careful not to use arrogant or 100% certain statements; in particular, when the thesis writer express personal or subjective opinions open to interpretations, Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008) and Wallwork (2011) encourage 'hedging', which involves stating ideas modestly in a way that the audiences agree with the writer's interpretations instead of opposing them. Whereas too many hedging are regarded sounding shy or unsure, some novice researchers mistakenly assume that claims stated forcefully are most credible (Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008).

Here are examples:

- S1. Although many authors have investigated how PhD students write papers, *this is the first attempt* to systematically analyze all the written output (papers, reports, grant proposals, CVs etc.) of such students.
- S2. *Our results demonstrate that* students from humanistic fields produce longer written texts than students from the pure sciences and *this is due to the fact* humanists are more verbose than pure scientists.

The writers that use the italicized words/phrases above may be accused of using blatant language. In example one, they cannot certain that their study 'is the *first*' trial. Did they exhaust sources in the world? In example two, the writers rely solely on the results drawn from their own data to discuss theirs and others', as though other researchers interpret or conclude in the same way. Again, there might be alternative personal interpretations for '*this is due to the fact*' (Booth, Colombo & Williams, 2008:135). Finally, Wallwork (2011:149) outlines some actions deemed useful for modest research writing:

- *Try to judge authors' work positively.*
- *Use impersonal forms when interpreting results.*
- *Tone down verbs, adjectives, adverbs and general level of certainty.*
- *If possible, try to support of a native user on how to write claims with hedging.*

## **2.11. Advisees Competence of Integrating others Sources**

### ***2.11.1. Documentation versus Plagiarism***

Frankel and McHale define documentation as the process of crediting sources used in writing the paper (2002). The inability to document appropriate sources lead to unethical writing/plagiarism, committed knowingly or unknowingly (Wallwork, 2011; Roig, 2013; Kolin; 2002, in Roig, 2013), Litermoren, 2015). Scholars feel that the concept of plagiarism has been modeled on western philosophy/cultures. As such, what counts plagiarism is not quite clear. To take an example, Roig (2013) identifies two forms of plagiarisms: ideas and text. Wholly or partly borrowing a data with improper modifications and lacking acknowledgement owner is plagiarism of ideas. Copying part of a text without mentioning its source and with no quotes around the text is plagiarism of text (Roig, 2013, p.6). Except the differences in wordings, Hu and Lei (2012) used the phrases 'inter-textuality (i.e., unacknowledged copying and paraphrasing) plagiarism,

overlapping meaning with Roig's. The results obtained from Chinese university students study showed that discipline, self-reported competence in referencing, and knowledge of subtle plagiarism were consistently significant predictors of successful plagiarism detection (Roig, 2013).

In either case, Roig explains that the writer commits two major unethical writing practices: high crimes and misdemeanors. Plagiarism becomes high crime when (e.g., ideas taken without attribution), while the misdemeanor occurs as the writer (e.g., paraphrase the data inadequately). Instances of misdemeanors include carelessly citing sources and wrongly exploiting references. For example, documenting references that are favorable to our position only, and ignoring others that may contradict our own angle. In Roig's explanation, it appears that copying the original information without citing its author and/or without placing the data in quotation marks is a major crime, but failing to paraphrase and summarize a data completely, while citing the authorship is assumed as minor crimes/ misdemeanors. In turn, this may mean that high crimes should be taken seriously and the misdemeanors may be tolerated.

Like the forms of plagiarism, authors put blames on things such as the Internet (Wenkang, 2004) and students' negligence (Litermoren, 2016) as the causes of plagiarism. Wenkang (2004) reacts that it is rather impossible to identify plagiarism in students' final theses unless students are monitored in the processes of their writing. For Wallwork (2011), plagiarism is very easy to identify, particularly in papers written by non-native speakers. Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008) necessitate crediting the source when (1) the idea is associated with a specific person and (2) it is new enough not to be part of a field's common knowledge (2008).

General knowledge (e.g., the world is round), and copying generic phrases do not need citation because it is a good way to learn useful phrases in English that you can then use in your own work. However, such phrases must be 100% generic in the sense that they hold absolutely no hard information. Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008) write that writers must use up-to-date sources, but what counts as current depends on the field. In computer science, a journal article can be out- of- date in months; in the social sciences, ten years pushes the limit.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

The present researchers employed a descriptive survey approach (quantitative and qualitative methods) to secure the data relevant for this study. This method is well supported by McDonough and Shaw (1997) and Robson (2007) for it allows a researcher to study people and activities in their environment deeply. Most of the data used for the research was, however, is quantitative.

#### **3.2. Population of the Study**

For this study, the 2012/13 social science graduating students in three universities, research methodology instructors lecturing to the sample classes, BA theses advisors, and examiners were the target population. The respondents belonged to English language,

Civics and Sociology departments. Gender, educational status, and teaching service years were among the background data collected regarding the study participants. The choice of the universities was due to their relative proximity, intended collegial support and convenience to the workplace of the present researchers. The level [third year] was selected for the researcher's contended that the learners were exposed to senior essay writing in the same year as the period of the study and convenient for collecting the data. Our [preliminary] survey showed that all student-respondents took research methods course and wrote senior essays. It was also assumed that, because of their background knowledge and/or experience about research, the respondents could provide accurate and reliable information to the data collection tools. Instructors, most of which were qualified in Masters Degrees had participated in the study and completed the questionnaires.

### **3.3. Sampling Techniques and Sample Size**

By purposeful available sampling technique, all research instructors lecturing to third year students were selected. The simple random sampling was applied to select the representative sample of departments from a total of ten of them. Based on the information obtained from College of Social and Law (by then, but renamed College of Social and Humanities in Jimma University) there was a total of 1050 graduating students in 2012/2013 in the three universities. Thus, according to sample size selection criteria (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.104) representative sample size of 216 student-researchers were chosen for the study. The profile data of students were taken from each university's college registrars. The research course teaching background, serving as an examiner and advisor were adopted as a strategy for including and/or excluding the instructor-respondents. The researchers did this by asking them orally (prior to administering the tools) whether the instructors had such experiences or not. Finally, from about 98 instructors, 35 of them were picked randomly.

### **3.4. Data Collection Tools**

#### **3.4.1. Questionnaire**

Two sets of questionnaires were prepared: one for the instructors and the other for the students. Both sets had open and close ended questions. The lecturers' set had five parts. Part One contained data about their background information connected with age, sex, qualifications, (career) experiences and the like. Part Two to Four consisted close-ended questions which required the respondents to complete discrete items with alternatives. The last part demands them of their opinions and perceptions about the students' research works, and the items categorized under Likert-Scale. For the most part, questionnaires for students were similar with that of the instructors'. The internal reliability in this research was estimated by using Cronbach Alpha criteria. The reliability of item-to-item and each item to entire items relations in the questionnaires were determined. The Cronbach Alpha value equal to and above 0.60 was taken as acceptable and reliable. In this research, reliability coefficients as measured by Cronbach Alpha value of questionnaires were 0.76 for students and 0.67 for the instructors, and the tools were proved reliable.

### **3.4.2. Interview**

Based on the nature of this study and the degree of control, semi-structured interview, which is highly favored for its flexibility was employed. The interview allowed the researcher to encourage the interviewees, to suggest more and to follow and probe on core points. Ten teachers and 15 students (three from each sample department) were interviewed after they had filled the questionnaire. A tape recorder was employed to record the audios which lasted for 90 minutes. The interview with the students took place in the sample classes, whereas those with the instructors in their offices.

### **3.5. Procedures of the Study**

Before the data was collected, the researchers visited the selected sites to explain the purpose and significance of the study. Besides, official letters which were obtained from Research and Postgraduate Program's Office of the College of Social Sciences and Law, Jimma University, were handed over to the respective personnel to seek cooperation. After permission was secured, questionnaires and interviews were trialed in the pilot study for their reliability and validity before their use in the main study. Three instructors and 15 students from the sample classes filled in the questionnaires. Then, some questions were modified and reconstructed for clarity. One instructor and three students were interviewed to handle the inherent problems of interviewers' effects and language problems. Those who participated in the piloting were not used for the main research. After the instruments were administered in the second period/phase, the main data was gathered.

### **3.6. Methods of Data Analysis**

To answer the research questions, quantitative and qualitative data analysis were employed. The data from semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires were analyzed qualitatively. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) state, data analysis in qualitative study basically involves word argumentations than numerical explanations. On the other hand, the data that were collected from students through close-ended questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively by stating the frequency, percentage, standard deviations and mean value of each item and the whole items.

To analyze the interviews, the audios were transcribed. Then the transcribed data was organized and summary was written. The information gathered through the Five-Point Likert-Scales was weighed against the degree of agreements for the descriptive statistical analyses. The scaling are coded as strongly agree=5, agree=4, undecided =3, disagree=2, and strongly disagree=1. Depending on the coding, the mean values for each item were computed. Then, the data were organized into favorable, undecided and unfavorable categories. The categories "strongly agree" and "agree" summed up and analyzed as 'favorable', "undecided" as it were, and "disagree" and "strongly disagree" as unfavorable responses. To arrive at the result, the data were analyzed using the Statistical Package version 16 for Social Science (SPSS). The quantitative data were organized and presented in tables, for clarity. Finally, the data were analyzed and interpreted and findings were drawn in accordance with the research questions of this study.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Questionnaire Data Results and Discussion

#### 4.1.1. Descriptive Analyses of Students' views about senior essay write up

This sub section analyses and discusses data obtained from students through questionnaire.

**Table 1: Respondents' Time Management for Senior Essay Write up**

No	Descriptive statements	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>disagree</i>		Undecided		<i>agree</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1.	I started writing my senior essay as early as possible.	48	22.2	45	20.5	24	11.1	54	25.0	45	20.8
2	I think group work & home work given on the courses I take wasted much of my time for writing my thesis.	15	5.6	12	5.6	12	5.6	90	41.7	87	40.3
3	Collecting data for my thesis took most of my time than writing it.	9	4.2	21	9.7	39	18.1	84	38.9	63	29.2
4	Mostly, I give my final senior essay version to my advisor on time.	42	19.4	30	13.9	18	8.3	96	44.4	30	13.9

In Table 1, students accounting for 68.1% claimed that most of their times were spent on data gathering for their research (Item 3). Of the informants who thought they started writing their senior essay early were 45.8% while those who did not think doing so were 42.7% (Item 1). Eighty two percent (82%) of response rates indicate that group work and homework wasted much time of the write up of the students theses (responses to 'agree and strongly agree' combined, Item 2). Likewise, of the total students, 58% responded that their final senior essay versions to their advisors on time, but 41.7%, significant number of them, did not do that timely (Item 4). The results show that the respondents who were positive about submitting their theses timely accounted for two-thirds of the total. When the results are interpreted fairly, their proper use of time for writing their senior essay is, therefore, poor. It can be concluded that course works and homework have mainly contributed to their weak management of time, and thought to have the highest effect on quality of the students' final product of BA theses (Frankel and McHale, 2002 and Gray, 2004).

**Table 2: Respondents' Commitment, Motivation and Frustration during the Write up of their BA Research**

N o	Factors	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>disagree</i>		Undecided		<i>Agree</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
5	Mostly, I was highly motivated to write my senior essay.	45	20.8	48	22.2	21	9.7	69	31.9	33	15.3
6	To me, writing up thesis is the most frustrating since I could not get enough references on my topic.	30	13.9	12	5.6	21	9.7	99	45.8	54	25.0
7	I think I should not have written up my thesis if I were not required to do so.	9	4.2	21	9.7	39	18.1	84	38.9	63	29.2
8	Because I was mostly busy with class activities & group works, I could not devote myself to writing my research well.	21	9.7	39	18.1	9	4.2	84	38.9	63	29.2

Table 2 shows respondents' commitment, motivation and frustration during the Write up of their BA research. While 47.2% of the respondents were highly motivated to write their senior essays mostly, 43% responded that they were not mostly motivated to write their senior essays (Item 5). The inadequate motivation of the students to write theses may emanate from wrong purposes for thesis writing (among others, Booth, Colombo and Williams, 2008; Hall, 2012). Similarly, 70.8% of the total students found writing up thesis the most frustrating since they could not get enough references on their topics (Item 6). The shortage of resources could frustrate students as shared by Wenkang (2004) and Head and Eisenberg (2009).

Strikingly, 68.1% of the respondents reported that they should not have written their senior essays unless doing so were not required (Item 7). These reactions may be influenced mainly by low commitment. The other explanation could be that students were exposed to research methods classes devoid of purposes and requirements for writing tasks productively (Booth, Colombo and Williams (2008)'s and Gray (2004). When students write theses to meet requirements only, it becomes a meaningless activity (Booth, Colombo and Williams, 2008). To Item 8, 67.9% of respondents answered favorably. Impliedly, several BA theses writers devote most of their effort and time to routine course demands and group activities at the expense of composing their senior essays. This may be due to lack of dedication, or low academic potential of the students, the argument which Wengkang (2004) and Hall (2012) support.

**Table 3: Advisor-advisee Related Factors Affecting Respondents' Write up of Research**

No	Statements	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>disagree</i>		Undecided		<i>agree</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
9	My advisor was mostly available in his/her office during my research consultation times.	42	19.4	30	13.9	18	8.3	9	44.6	30	13.9
10	My advisor was very helpful and encouraging.	36	16.7	9	4.2	21	9.7	7	34.5	75	34.7
11	I could not meet with my advisor regularly.	30	13.9	12	5.6	21	9.7	9	45.9	54	25.0

Table 3 depicts advisor-advisee related factors affecting respondents' write up of research. Of the total respondents, 58.3% of responses of the informants favorably side the advisors presence in their offices during contact hours; yet 33.3% responses report otherwise (Item 9). This shows that the advisors presence during contact times was insufficient: it is imperative to give their students assistance face-to-face. This argument is in congruent with Mah (2013)'s finding. Further, 69.1% of the students responded favorably that their research advisors were very helpful and encouraging (Item 10). Above 70% of the overall respondents were unable to contact their thesis advisors regularly (Item 11). One speculation is that account for this may be the students' inability to plan and use their times wisely. Also, the advisors failure to avail themselves at scheduled hours could generate the negative responses of the students (Item 9 response, Table 3).

**Table 4: Respondents' Background Knowledge & Skill & Awareness of Writing Thesis**

		<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>disagree</i>		Undecided		<i>agree</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
12	Writing proposal enabled me to acquire skills for my Senior Essay writing.	21	9.7	39	18.1	9	4.2	84	38.9	63	29.2
13	In our research methods class, the instructor has made us find senior essays related to our field of study and evaluate them in writing.	66	30.6	57	26.4	21	9.7	45	20.8	27	12.5
14	Besides the research methodology course, I received short training (e.g., workshop) on how to write research.	51	23.6	105	48.6	6	2.8	30	13.9	24	11.1
15	I believe that the writing senior essay is not more complex and difficult than the any writing activities in my undergraduate class	27	12.5	69	31.6	18	8.3	66	30.6	36	16.7

In Table 4, the data for the contribution of proposal writing to senior essay writing experience and skills indicate an interesting result, 68.1% (Item 12). In responding to Item 13, the respondents who denied that their research methods made them find senior essays related to our field of study and evaluate them in writing comprised 57%, whereas those who felt their instructor made them find senior essays related to their field of study and evaluate them in writing numbered 33.3%. This indicates that students that responded favoring the instructor's performance in methodology classes were far less than those against: 57% versus 33.3% (Item 13). The results imply the students have missed the chances to familiarize themselves with related literatures in their fields. Most of the negative responses (72.2%) aligned with not taking any additional short duration training except the research methodology course (Item 14). This seems to have attributed to poor skills of graduating students writing BA theses. Other than formal trainings offered in universities, extra opportunities for practicing and improving the theses writing are limited. Kothari (2008) and Wengkang (2009) agree with the results.

While 47.3 % of the overall students believed that writing senior essays were not more complex and difficult than any writing activities they have done in their undergraduate classes, 44.1% thought otherwise (Item 15).

**Table 5: Respondents' Problems of Achieving Good Qualities and Stylistics of Thesis Write up**

		<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>Disagree</i>		Undecided		<i>agree</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
16	Mostly, it was very challenging for me to incorporate information in to sections and subsections of the body of my thesis.	45	20.8	4	22.8	2	9.7	6	31.9	3	15.3
17	When I organize the other writers' ideas in to the body of my thesis, I also add my comments.	15	6.9	3	18.9	7	36.8	2	12.7	5	26.4
18	Usually, I found it very difficult to write ideas in short paragraphs in my thesis.	60	27.8	4	20.5	1	8.8	6	29.3	3	13.9
19	Usually, my biggest problem during writing thesis was difficulty of expressing ideas in English.	10	48.6	5	23.1	6	2.8	3	13.0	2	11.4
20	My knowledge of using correct grammar (e.g., tense, active & passive verbs) in writing my thesis is low.	60	27.8	5	25.4	2	12.7	3	16.6	3	18.1

As shown in Table 5, 93 (43%) student-respondents disagreed that organizing data in various sections of their papers was very challenging. On the other hand, a greater size, 102 (47.2%) of the overall respondents confirmed that they organize information in to the different parts of their theses (Item 16). This indicates that students did not generally think writing the body sections were easy to them. This result contrasts with Frankel and McHale (2002).

When they organize other authors' ideas in to their theses, 39.9% of respondents perceived that they also add their comments on the data, whereas 25% supposed that they did not do that either (Item 17). Notice that the respondents that replied to 'Undecided', 36.1%, is much closer to the sum of 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' (39.9%) (Table 5). Much of the responses to Item 17 did not support their responses to Item 16. Thus, there is no tangible evidence to believe that organizing ideas in to sections was simple to them. If it were, their positive responses would have been at least larger. Besides, the students' indecisive replies do not show that they did have such skills of thesis writing. Additionally, 43.2% of the students perceived that they found it very difficult to write their ideas in short paragraphs in their theses (Item 18). In contrast, nearly 50% of them rejected the statement.

When the style considered, 52.8% of the subjects' responses indicate that their

knowledge of using appropriate grammar such as tense and tone was not limited. Only few of the total responses, 34.8% concede to their limited knowledge of the grammar (Item 20). The findings accords the respondents claimed to have knowledge of using grammar when writing up undergraduate research regarding the areas exemplified. Again, most of them, 72.2% thought that expressing ideas in English were not their biggest problems (Item 19). All factors considered, (style, structure and organization and development), the experiences of respondents to providing reflections to works of other researchers stands out, with approximate mean score of 3.7%.

#### 4.1.2. Descriptive analyses of instructor views about students' senior essay write up

This sub section analyses and discusses data obtained from instructors through questionnaire and interview.

**Table 1: Instructor-respondents background experience on BA thesis**

1	Which of these duties have you performed as a faculty member of social science college/institute?	Yes		No	
		N	%	N	%
1	a) Advised students on senior essays?	33	94.3	2	5.7
	b) Served as an examiner of graduating students?	35	100	0	0
	c) Offered a research methodology course to undergraduate students?	15	42.86	20	57.1
2	As a research instructor, which activities did you frequently use to help learners write meaningful senior essays?	N	%	N	%
	d) Lecture research writing techniques?	35	100	0	0
	e) Give class tests?	35	100	0	0
	f) Made them write proposal?	8	22.9	27	77.1
	g) Have them read and analyze past related senior essays?	12	34.3	23	65.7
	h) Give intensive training on senior essays writing besides the formal research course?	6	17.1	29	82.86

As shown in this Table 1, all of the respondents have discharged research-related duties to undergraduate social science graduating learners; almost/all of them (94.3%) reported being advisors, 100% being examiners and a good number of them (42.86) claimed being methodology course instructors (Item 1 a,b,c). Yet, most of them (Item 2 f, g, h) did not frequently get students write proposal (77.1%), familiarize them with past related works (65.7%), and exposed the students to intensive trainings on how to write senior essays (82.86%). The results seem to imply that the instructors have imparted undergraduate students with knowledge of research writing. The findings do not

normally reflect that students have been trained in real environment, through purposeful requirements for effective writing, so that they would write effective senior essays. This would attribute to poor senior essay writing.

**Table 2: Instructors Responses about BA These Writers' Time Management**

		<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>disagree</i>		Undecided		<i>agree</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
3	Often, students started writing their senior essays too late.	2	5.7	3	8.6	5	14.3	11	31.4	16	45.7
4	BA paper writers waste much time on collecting data for their theses.	4	11.4	16	45.7	4	11.4	9	25.7	2	5.7
5	Many of students spend their times on classroom and assignments routines than working on their theses write up.	3	8.6	6	17.1	0	0	5	14.3	21	60
6	The majority of my advisees submit their final essays just hours or few days before the deadline.	1	2.9	4	11.4	4	11.4	7	20.0	19	54.3

Table 2 depicts students' inappropriate time use during their theses write ups. The data, 77.1%, shows that several students began writing up after the time was too late (Item 3). Again most or about three-fourth (74.3%) of the instructors believed that the majority of the students submitted their essays just hours before or when few days left for the deadlines (Item 6). The results suggest that there was a perceived failure of students to start theses composing as early as possible and submit at proper times. Fairly, it could be said that students had weak timelines, and spent much time that favors routine works. This is in consistent with Saunders et al. (2000), Gray (2004), and Rambo (2006). The results could also be interpreted that delay in the writing and submission of the papers can be ascribed to the difficulty to obtain adequate and timely secretarial services. Kothari (2008)'s finding support this evidence strongly.

Close to 75% of the instructors thought that most of the students passed high time on course work and group work routines than they did on writing their senior essays (Item 5). It implies that the students could not use their time properly to work on thesis as well as other routines. In this connection, Gray (2004) and Hall (2012) believed this

causes the biggest problems: under-utilization of advisors' and students' efforts and time to rework and improve quality of theses, and finally low grades for the student-researcher. In the same table, 20 (57.1%) of the instructors' responses revealed that data collection phase does not consume much of students times, though still higher number, 11(31.4%), of the total informants reported it does (Item 4). This suggests that data collection phase does take students' times of the write up theses, but not to the greater extent. The finding from more than 50% of the teacher respondents contrasts with Frankel and McHale (2002)'s finding.

**Table 3: Psychological Factors Affecting Respondents' Write up of Research**

		<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>disagree</i>		Undecided		<i>agree</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
7	Most graduating social science students are not motivated to write their senior essays.	7	20.	2	5.7	0	0	11	31.5	15	42.9
8	Mostly, my advisees/examinees are not committed to writing their research well.	2	5.7	4	11.4	1	2.9	16	45.7	12	34.3
9	I think essay writers should handle most of the write up activities on their own.	6	17.1	6	17.1	3	8.6	5	14.3	15	42.9

The data in Table 3 (responses from 26 instructors) , 74.4%, affirm that most graduating social science students were not motivated to write their senior essays, whereas the rest information (from 9 instructors' responses) reveals the opposite views (Item 7). The results show that motivation has affected students' writing of senior essays, and this finding is similar to Litmoren (2015)'s conclusion in this regard. Likewise, most participants (28 of the 35), 80%, indicated that the advisees were not devoted to writing their research well (Item 8). The result could be interpreted to say that the students dedicated their time to group work and course works requirements at the expense of writing their papers. Or it could be said that their poor academic background made them reluctant to write their senior essays. Wengkang (2004) and Hall (2012) share these assumptions. Concerning self-reliance, 20 instructors (the majority) perceived that essay writers should handle most of the write up activities on their own, but 12 out of the 35 instructors disagreed (Item 9). This means that above 50 % of respondents felt that research activity is mainly an independent work.

**Table 4: Advisor-advisee Related Factors Affecting Respondents' Write up of Research**

		<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>disagree</i>		Undecided		<i>agree</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
10	As an advisor, I was mostly available during research consultation hours.	3	8.6	4	11.4	4	11.4	21	60	4	11.4
11	Many of my advisees contact me at least once a week regularly.	8	22.9	16	45.7	2	5.7	7	20.	2	5.7
12	My advisee respects my reading preferences so that I could read and comment on their papers timely.	6	17.1	21	60	1	2.9	5	14.3	2	5.7
13	I have provided my advisees with relevant resources to help them write their theses.	1	2.9	6	17.1	2	5.7	9	25.7	17	48.6

In Table 4, the participants contended that they were mostly available during research consultation hours. This group accounts for the majority (71.4%) (Item 10). Although more than two-thirds (68.9%) of the instructors did not believe their advisees contact them at least once a week regularly (Item 11). The size of respondents that confessed to have provided their advisees with relevant resources was 74.3% (Item 13). Conversely, most of the instructors (77.1%) were unhappy with their advisees' adherence to the reading preferences (Item 12). All considered, the graduating students' degree of frequency of contact with their advisors were low. On the other hand, the advisors who did not avail themselves during consultation hours of students are significant (20%) (Item 10). Given that an advisor's contact with his/her advisee is a must and it should be frequently; its effect on students work could be high. Impliedly, these factors adversely affect the quality of the theses writing.

**Table 5: Respondents' Perceptions of Students' Skills & Knowledge of Writing Thesis**

		<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>disagree</i>		Undecided		<i>agree</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
14	Most graduating social science students can write good titles for their thesis.	4	11.4	21	60	3	8.6	4	11.4	4	11.4
15	In our college, students poor skills of research writing is the lack of short duration research trainings (e.g., workshop).	5	14.3	15	42.9	0	0	7	20.0	8	22.9
16	Many advisees do not consider writing research as serious work, but an activity assigned to make them busy.	1	2.9	5	14.3	6	17.1	11	31.4	12	34.3

As is depicted in Table 5, the teachers who criticized the graduating learners' ability of writing good titles accounts for 25 (71.4%) (Item 14). Similarly, the idea that the write up stage requires the deepest skills than the rest of research processes was declined by most of the instructors, 23(65.7%) (Item 16). Of the overall participants, those that related students' poor skills of research writing to the absence of short duration research trainings were lower than those who did not: 42.9% versus 57.1% (Item 15). In other words, the unfavorable responses exceed the favorable responses by a difference of 14.2%. Again, the target respondents that felt writing research was disregarded by many of the advisees comprised 65.7% of the total (Item 16). The finding is inconsistent with Wenkang, 2004 study. On the whole, the instructors seem to be knowledgeable about areas of weakness of students in producing good theses, but looked ignorant of the short term training help students write better papers. In short, the deficient research training background contributes to the problem.

**Table 6: Respondents' Perceptions about Problems of Students' Thesis Qualities**

	Statements	<i>Strongly disagree</i>		<i>disagree</i>		Undecided		<i>agree</i>		<i>Strongly agree</i>	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
17	Organizing data in to the various parts of body of thesis is the most challenging for many essay writers.	2	5.7	7	20	6	17.1	4	11.4	16	45.7
18	Students review literature had little/no comments of the students on the past authors' works.	4	11.4	9	26.7	2	5.7	12	34.3	8	22.9
19	I think the biggest problem of most BA theses writers is expressing ideas in English.	0	0	2	5.7	0	0	11	31.4	22	60.9
20	Many undergraduate research writers produce ideas in unnecessarily long paragraphs.	2	5.7	3	8.6	0	0	11	31.4	21	60
21	I believe that social science thesis writing require short paragraphs.	3	8.6	14	40.0	7	20.0	8	22.9	3	8.6
22	Majority of final year students in our college/institute can write in-text and reference citation correctly.	9	26.7	15	42.9	2	5.7	7	20.0	2	5.7

Table 6 depicts respondents' perceptions about problems of students' thesis qualities. Whether organizing data into parts of research papers was the most challenging to the graduates (Item 17, Table 6), nine (25.7) of the instructors replied unfavorably, six (17.1%) remained neutral while 20 (56.8%) of the whole respondents responded favorably. Here, many of the instructors felt that students have problems of organizing ideas in to various parts of theses. Whereas 13 (38.1%) of the responses of teachers observed that students integrated existing sources with reflections, 20 (57.2%) of the total denied that the senior essays had reflections of their writers (Item 18). Deficient background training on research could be reasons. Students were not trained by having

them to analyze and evaluate prior related works (see Table 1 for teachers' response above).

Similarly, almost all, 94.3 %, instructors noted that expressing ideas in English challenged most BA theses writers. This is in agreement with Kutuphane's (2009) result. Probably, the students possessed low stylistic and grammar knowledge. Undergraduate research writers produced ideas in very long paragraphs was disagreed by some of the 5 (14.3%) respondents; the same idea was supported by 33 (52.4%) of the participants (Item 20). Whether the instructors were aware of social science theses recommend writing information in short paragraphs, 17 (48.6%) of the instructors answered undesirably, and seven (20%) of them reacted indecisively, and only 11 (31.5%) of them responded desirably (Item 21). The replies of those who had no idea about social science field paragraph length are intriguing. May be their experiences of reading about academic writing practices and requirements differed. Regarding the students' citations competence, nearly 70% of the survey participants witnessed that the majority of social science college theses writers cite in-text as well as parenthetical citations incorrectly (Item 22). This result may mean that they violate rules of ethical writing, or commit plagiarisms. The learners' negligence and the [easily accessibility of data from] Internet can attribute to this act (Wenkang, 2004 study).

#### 4.2. Interview analysis and result

S=student; I=instructor

S1: *I like writing but writing senior is not good. It is heavy. We have not enough practice. My advisor helped me a few information.*

S2: *I have no confidence in my senior essay writing. My English background is not good. There is shortage of references in our library.*

S3: *I have language problem [English language]. I cannot find my advisor when I go to his office.*

S4: *The resources are not available in our library. I had no time to write. Many assignments are given by lecturers. There are block courses which make us busy.*

T1: *Students have very serious problems especially in writing senior essays. They do not even know how to take information from other sources. Plagiarism is common place. They download from Internet or take papers done in another university copy as it is.*

T2: *The problem of students in writing senior essay is many. A lot of them have no knowledge of writing even. They are not committed to write anything.*

T3: *The students have serious language deficiency or English language ability. They cannot write good sentences, let alone senior essay. I have been advisor and examiner for several years. I know this well.*

T4: *No, we do not offer short-term trainings, but research courses are given to all students.*

From the interview of the respondents, it can be understood that students had wide-ranging problems: limited knowledge of writing skill, inadequate endeavor, practice opportunities, weak background knowledge and skill of English and the like. According to the interview data, more than 85% of the informants reported that students exhibited high problems of writing senior essays.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, the major factors affecting the social science graduating students write up of senior essay were assessed using descriptive method. The findings showed that the candidates mismanage their time. The students failed to strike balance between their time spent on regular routines and theses writing. The advisor accessibility during office-hours was inadequate, and the students contact with the advisors was infrequent, too. Learners' dedication to writing theses was disappointingly negligible. Their weak academic potential, coupled with inadequate and unproductive training in the undergraduate classes might have led to this situation. Research trainings offered to students were not complemented by intensive short-lived trainings. From this research finding, the key elements impacting the senior essay writing of students could be noted. Although the size of the sample is small, the results of this study may influence planning policy. Of course, our study results will not be generalized to source population, but it is hoped to mirror the target population of the sample sites. Future work will entail investigating the problems facing students in doing senior essays, using large samples, and employing advanced methods.

## 6. Recommendation

From the conclusion above, these recommendations are drawn:

- Graduating students should be trained (possibly by their thesis advisors and/or research course instructors) on how to manage their time properly and effectively.
- English language departments (with Research Method teachers and other concerned parties) should arrange short-lived, intensive refreshment training(s) to enable undergraduate graduates to improve the writing up of senior essays.
- Respective Research Methods instructors of [Civics, Sociology and]<sup>3</sup> English major students need to revisit their method of instruction to make sure that the learners are lectured meaningfully in class and are given authentic assignments for practice.
- It is important that BA thesis advisors provide their advisees with adequate supports, and create means to contact with them as frequently as desired.
- [Civics, Sociology and] English majors' academic performance, interest and/or commitment should be taken in to consideration before making all of them write senior essays as a mandatory requirement.

## Acknowledgements

We thank College of Social Sciences and Law Research and Post Graduate Coordinating Office, Jimma University, for funding.

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<sup>3</sup> [ ] is Added by the editor

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