Determining the Basics of Strengthening Learning: How Students Overcome the Problem of New Testament Interpretation

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Abstract

This study aims to find the dominant reasons why students experience difficulties in conducting exegesis research in writing a thesis in determining the main points of strengthening learning for the New Testament Interpretation course of the Theological Department, Faculty of Theological Sciences Tarutung State Institute for Christian Studies in 2022. The primary data of this study was obtained from the answers to interview questions for 17 out of 20 student participants who this year are contracting a thesis course. The results of the analysis of the participants' answers showed that the dominant difficulty experienced by the participants was in the preparation of descriptions and analysis of apparatus text, which was at the level of 26%, which was at the level of 0-54% or at the level of difficulty 'unable to do'. Based on the results of the data analysis, in addition to other factors, the research team concluded that the participants had limited understanding in working on the detailed instructions presented in the teaching materials of the New Testament Interpretation course. Based on the results of this analysis, recommendations were given: [1] in order to eliminate difficulties in conducting exegesis research in thesis writing, participants must understand and follow technical instructions and examples in working on each analysis of exegesis data on the texts of the New Testament Bible and [2] the teaching lecturers emphasized the two dominant levels of abstraction research difficulties in the learning process of the New Testament Interpretation course.

Keywords: *learning; students; New Testament; interpretation*

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A. Introduction

Exegesis research is one of the research methods carried out at Theological Colleges or Christian Colleges (Gutierrez, 2021). In particular, exegetical research is a study that examines the sacred texts of the Bible both from the books of the Old Testament and from the New Testament whose researchers cannot avoid using an approach that aims to lift out (ex-) the full meaning of the text and its depth through the use of analyses as appropriate in the study of ancient texts resulting from the discovery of the field of general archaeology and biblical archaeology (Andrian, 2020; Ebojo, 2022).

Based on observations made by the research team so far in the last few years, not a few students of the Tarutung State Institute for Christian Studies Theological Department have experienced difficulties in conducting exegetical research in their thesis research. These difficulties are clearly seen in the process of guiding the writing of Research Proposals, it was the urgency of this study. One of them is that students experience confusion in understanding the Supervisor's explanation of the application of the exegetical research method. Not a few thesis supervisors also conveyed the same thing when conducting a Thesis Research Proposal Seminar about the exegetical method (Hoekema, 2017). This situation is strengthened by the large number of thesis research students with exegetical research methods that exceed the deadline (deadline, at the end of October last semester) of the collection of manuscripts (drafts) of research proposals, which should have been submitted in July every year.

The Research Team also observed the phenomenon of student confusion seen in the thesis research guidance process both from the things they presented in their thesis and also during meetings with supervisors in discussing things that had been written by the student. In addition, the Research Team also observed the phenomenon of the behavior of research students who use or cite the interpretation results that are already available in reference books or online sources without criticizing or without providing reasoning for these interpretations. In other words, the research students quote more raw interpretations that are already available without doing paraphrase. The same thing was found in a previous study conducted by Ariawan. The results of his research showed the weak potential of students in paraphrasing (Ariawan, 2020).

In addition to the above, the Research Team also observed that students had difficulty in collecting and conducting adequate and accurate analysis of exegetical data. Based on the problems mentioned above, it can be suspected and concluded

temporarily that the results of student thesis research with the exegetical method are still far from what was expected by the subject lecturers, supervisors and thesis examiners and also the Theological Department Organizing Unit (Department and Faculty of Theology). The gap analysis in this study lies in its focus on the New Testament which makes it different from other methods. Thus a novelty will be produced from the study

B. Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach in the form of written and spoken words of people and the observed behaviour in the form of data that is described in a detailed narrative manner. However, this does not mean that this study is absolutely not allowed to use numbers in the description and also in analysing the data. This research was conducted at the Theological Department of the Faculty of Theological Sciences Tarutung State Institute for Christian Studies and around the Tarutung State Institute for Christian Studies Higher Education area, which is the domicile location of Theological Department students who are conducting Thesis Research using the exegetical method. The implementation of this research was carried out from May to October 2022. However, it is possible that the implementation of this study can be completed earlier than the research team previously planned. The data of this study are the answers to the interviews of the participants through recording confessions about the research targets. The participants are 20 students of the Theological Department who are currently conducting Thesis Research with Exegetical Research Methods, as registered in the Tarutung State Institute for Christian Studies Rector's Decree Number 279.6 of 2021 dated September 22, 2021.

The data analysis technique of this study is semantic content analysis, which is to classify participant signs or narratives according to their meaning (Corcoran & Cecchi, 2020). In this case, the research team will present an exposition of the participants' answers to the research questions (Al-Ansi et al., 2021). After the participants' answers are collected and grouped according to their categories, the research team will provide a presentation or explanation of the participants' answers to direct them in compiling the answers to these research questions. According to Milles and Huberman, qualitative research data analysis activities are descriptive by following the following three paths: (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation (data display), (3) conclusion drawing/verification (Horst, 2022). The data analysis technique used in this study is a simple descriptive analysis technique (Blomberg, 2020; Slamet et al., 2021):

$$P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100\,\%$$

Information:

P   = Percentage

f   = Number of scores obtained

N   = Maximum number of scores

Table 1. Range of K Level Scores Student Thesis Writing Exegesis Research

Percentage Range	Difficulty Level
90 – 100 %	Can work on it
75 – 89 %	Know / understand, but not yet used to training yourself
65 – 74 %	Know/understand, but hesitate
55 – 64 %	Not knowing enough / not understanding enough / confused
0 – 54 %	Unable to work

Table 2. Grid of Interview Questions Difficulties of Student Thesis Writing Exegesis Research

No.	Indicators	Interview Question Items
1	Text research (*textual criticism*)	1. Why are you having trouble including text?
		2. How do you include text ?
		3. Why do you have trouble listing *apparatus texts* ?
		4. How do you list *apparatus texts* ?
		5. Why are you having trouble composing text words?
		6. How do you structure the description of the words of the text?
		7. Why do you have difficulty compiling an analysis description of *apparatus texts* ?
		8. How do you compile the description of *the analysis of apparatus texts* ?

		9.	Why are you having trouble composing a text translation?
		10.	How do you structure the text translation?
		11.	Why do you have difficulty analyzing text translation comparisons?
		12.	How do you analyze the comparison of text translations?
2	Lexical facts (*lexical data*)	13.	Why are you having trouble determining keywords?
		14.	How do you define key words?
		15.	Why are you having trouble determining the context in which keywords are used?
		16.	How do you determine the context in which keywords are used?
3	*Grammatical facts (gramatical data)*	17.	Why do you have difficulty analyzing the literature (*genre*) of the text ?
		18.	How do you analyze the literature (*genre*) of the text ?
		19.	Why do you have difficulty analyzing sentence structure?
		20.	How do you analyze sentence structure?
		21.	Why do you have difficulty analyzing the indensation and subordination of sentences ?
		22.	How do you analyze the indensation and subordination of sentences ?
		23.	Why do you have trouble analyzing the grammatics and syntax of the text ?
		24.	How do you analyze the grammatics and syntax of the text?
		25.	Why do you find it difficult to understand the sacred and classical nature of texts based on grammatical facts ?
		26.	How do you understand the sacred and classical nature of texts based on grammatical facts?
		27.	Why do you have difficulty finding the historical (historical) context of the cultural text ?

4	*Historical-cultural background*	28. How do you find the historical (historical) context of the cultural text?
		29. Why do you have difficulty analyzing the historical (historical) context of the culture of the text ?
		30. How do you analyze the historical (historical) context of the culture of the text ?
		31. Why is it difficult for you to use other literary sources as a comparison to the findings of exegesis data ?
		32. How do you use other literary sources as a comparison to the findings of exegesis data?
5	Bringing it all together Interpretation steps	33. Why is it difficult for you to compile (write) the findings of exegesis data?
		34. How do you compile (write) the findings of exegesis data?
		35. Why do you find it difficult to bring up the sub-focus of the results of the exegesis data analysis?
		36. How do you bring up the sub-focus of the results of the exegesis data analysis?
		37. Why is it difficult for you to compose (write) exegesis works when the pattern already exists?
		38. How do you compose (write) exegesis works?

However, to be able to compile research data and present this in the form of a table, the research team must first make a grouping of assessment scales of the participants' answers as follows (and described in the form of a table) (Reiter-Palmon et al., 2019):

Table 3. Participant Answer Score Category

Score	Information
4	Can work on it

3	Know/understand, but not yet used to training yourself
2	Know/understand but hesitate
1	Not knowing enough/not understanding enough/confused
0	Unable to work

C. Discussion

Exegesis research is one of the research methods carried out at Theological Colleges or Christian Colleges (Gutierrez, 2021). In particular, exegetical research is a study that examines the sacred texts of the Bible both from the books of the Old Testament and from the New Testament whose researchers cannot avoid using an approach that aims to lift out (ex-) the full meaning of the text and its depth through the use of analyses as appropriate in the study of ancient texts resulting from the discovery of the field of general archaeology and biblical archaeology (Andrian, 2020; Ebojo, 2022).

In order to get a meaning that is very close to the text, it takes a precise formula in interpreting passages in the Bible. The formula needs to be structured in such a way that it can demonstrate some general principles and the type of approach that will allow us to peel the text until it comes to an understanding of it (Van Der Merwe, 2016). In general, this is problematic for hermeneutics, which is to understand whatever others write or say. This makes many of the things mentioned above applicable to other material that requires interpretation, especially to similar texts from the time of the apostles. A very distinctive characteristic of the New Testament text is not only as a literary work but also as the Word of God. To understand these characteristics, it may be helpful to examine all parts of the New Testament. The starting point is undoubtedly to establish the correct wording of this passage with textual criticism. Passages in the New Testament use different Greek words according to the era of each writer with relative reliability of the early manuscripts. Thus it can be assumed that almost all of the New Testament writers gave the text with great accuracy. The next stage consists of understanding the vocabulary, grammar and syntax of the passage to provide a good translation. It is feared that many of us start from the English text, and, to be sure, one does not need to know Greek to understand the New Testament (Gutierrez, 2021).

Based on the results of data collection, the highest score of the answer to each research participant's question individually in this study does not necessarily

indicate that the participant can easily do exegesis research in writing a thesis in 2022 at the Tarutung State Institute for Christian Studies Theology Department. The score situation can be known by looking at the score of 4 in the interview question item answered by the participant.

Participant number 17 had a score of 4 answers in interview items number 4 and number 10, namely about two areas of analysis of exegesis data (interpretation field) that can be done, namely: compiling keyword analysis and the context of its use and compiling an analysis of the use of additional literature.

The second point of the two areas of exegesis analysis is not directly data obtained from the data source, namely the New Testament biblical text. But the data is sourced from other additional literary sources used as comparative material or an explanatory introduction to the subject of exegesis (Blomberg, 2020).

The first of the two areas of exegesis analysis is the use of the most suitable keyword with the context in which it is used. This action can be done using the Bible Works 10th Version application by looking at the tendencies of its use by the author of the New Testament Bible text and confronting it with the situation or context of its use on the subject matter of the text or exegesis research questions.

Dotted with the steps of interpretation (exegesis) in thesis research, it can be concluded that the adequate ability of exegesis research is indicated by the competence of exegesis in collecting and analyzing primary data on exegesis, namely data sourced from scriptures, in this case the New Testament Bible. And the use of additional literary sources is complementary in nature (Horst, 2022).

The average percentage value of the participants' difficulty in writing a thesis with the exegesis research method based on the 12 items of Participant Answer Coding was at 58.1%. From the situation and reality in the research field, the research team concluded that the difficulties of the participants of this study in conducting thesis research with the exegesis method are directly proportional to their competence, because basically the competence of the participants in conducting thesis research with the exegesis method is also the competence of meek a in solving difficulties or overcoming the research difficulties of exegesis thesis writing (Andrian, 2020). According to the research team, this means that these difficult situations and difficulties directly show the objectivity of the results of their thesis research with the exegesis method (Gutierrez, 2021).

The consequences of this theory led to the conclusion that the average percentage value of the participants' difficulty in writing a thesis with the exegesis

research method based on the 12 items of Participant Answer Coding showed that the competence and objectivity of their thesis research results were at 58.1%. And if faced with Table 3, the number is at level 2 of the K Level Score Range due to the difficulty of Student Thesis Writing Exegesis Research, namely that the participants have a tendency to not know enough or do not understand enough or are still confused in carrying out some or several steps and compiling the results of thesis research data analysis with the exegesis method (Caneday, 2013).

In conjunction with the answers of the study participants on item 4 (82%) and item 10 (use of additional literature, 100%) Coding the Participants' Answers, although they can compile a keyword analysis and the context in which they are used, the participants tend to actively use additional literature. It can also be presumed that participants also tended to cite additional literature in the situation of making people's work their own interpretation. As a result, these actions tend to be nuanced plagiarism and cite raw with minimal paraphrasing actions (Zuiddam, 2016).

However, the average percentage value of the participants' difficulty in writing a thesis with the exegesis research method based on each individual participant reached 76.7%. This means that of all the difficulties faced by the participants individually, they tend to know, understand, but are not yet accustomed to training themselves in the face of the difficulties of exegesis research in writing a thesis (Beech, 2015). This may be due to their lack of seriousness in understanding and following technical instructions, examples of how or technical examples of compiling descriptions and analyzing each Participant's Answer Coding Item contained in the teaching material book (Pieter et al., 2020).

D. Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis of research data obtained in the collection process and have been compiled and presented in explanatory descriptions (explanatory sentences) on an ongoing basis, the research team directed it to draw the following objective conclusions: First, ss many as 26% of the 68 total answer scores of the study participants did not know enough, did not understand enough or experienced confusion in compiling descriptions and analysis of apparatus text. This section occupies the lowest position of student competence in solving difficulties or overcoming research difficulties exegesis student thesis writing; Second, the part that occupies the second lowest position of student competence in solving difficulties or overcoming research difficulties exegesis

student thesis writing is knowing, understanding but hesitating in the preparation of text sentence structure analysis, preparation of biblical/theological context or the sacred nature of the text and the preparation of exegesis works with a general pattern that is at 50% of the 68 total answer scores of research participants; Third, the answers of the participants who reached the highest percentage range were by providing answers to interview questions: being able to do it (score 4) and knowing/understanding, but not yet accustomed to training themselves (score 3) was in the area: the preparation of keyword analysis and the context of its use (82%, item 4 Coding Participant Answers) and the use of additional literature (100% item 10 Coding Participant Answers); Fourth, the average percentage value of the participants' difficulty in writing a thesis with the exegesis research method based on the 12 items of Coding Participants' Answers was at 58.1%, which means that the participants experienced a tendency to not know enough or not understand enough or were still confused in carrying out some or several steps and compiling the results of thesis research data analysis with the exegesis method; Fifth, however, the average percentage value of the participants' difficulty in writing a thesis with the exegesis research method based on each participant's individual answer score was at 76.7%, which means that individually each participant tends to know, understand, but is not used to training themselves in facing the difficulties of exegesis research in writing a thesis. This may be due to their lack of seriousness in understanding and following technical instructions or technical examples of compiling descriptions and analyzing each Participant's Answer Coding Item contained in the teaching material book.

Based on the conclusions of the study above, the research team provided the following suggestions or recommendations: First, item 4 Coding Answers Interviews about the preparation of keyword analysis and the context in which they are used are adequately carried out by the participants and need to be maintained in the learning process of the Tafsir course, specifically the texts of the New Testament; Second, item 10 Coding Item Coding Answers Interviews about the use of additional literature are adequately conducted by the participants but need reinforcement in terms of paraphrasing. With the strengthening of this section, participants and or students will be greatly helped in avoiding the element of plagiarism and raw citation or compilation of other people's exegesis works; Third, other points that require learning the New Testament Bible Interpretation course at the Theological Department, Faculty of Theology, Tarutung State Institute for Christian Studies in 2022 are: preparation of descriptions and analysis of apparatus text, preparation of text sentence structure analysis, compiling text translation,

compiling comparative analysis of text translation, compile analysis of words, grammars and syntax of texts, compile literary analysis of texts, build sub-sub-sub-focuses of discussion, compile the historical, social and cultural context of the text. Students who contract the New Testament Interpretation course and who are interested in thesis research with the exegesis method should seriously follow the technical instructions and technical examples of compiling exegesis data and analysis presented in the textbook. The lecturer of the New Testament Interpretation course and the thesis supervisor with the New Testament exegesis method intensely collect and evaluate the exegesis data collected by students and also follow closely the development of each exegesis analysis, in this study as stated in the Interview Answer Coding item.

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