CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Research

In today's globalized academic environment, the ability to produce good quality academic writing is a needed skill for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, particularly in contexts where English serves as the medium of instruction. It is essential for students in English education programs, where the final thesis proposal is a significant milestone in their academic journey.

A proposal plays in the early stages of postgraduate academic writing. A thesis proposal is a foundational document that outlines the research framework, methodology, and academic objectives of a student's project (Abhinav, 2023). Focusing on thesis proposals is more relevant than studying abstracts or introductions because a thesis proposal serves as the foundation for the entire thesis. It outlines the research objectives, methodology, and theoretical framework, which are critical elements that shape the final thesis. Additionally, investigating students' writing challenges during the proposal provides valuable insights into the difficulties they encounter at the beginning of their research academic journey.

The ability to write academic papers is essential for university students to complete their studies. Academic writing is distinguished by its formal style and objective tone, which set it apart from colloquial language and many other sorts of writing that students perform in secondary school (Bui, 2018). Academic writing is becoming increasingly informal. According to Hyland and Jiang (2017), there is a "gradual shift away from standard detached and impersonal writing styles to those that allow for more personal comment, narration, and stylistic variation." Students are more likely to utilize informal

features or make errors as a result of their use of social and digital media. A shift from formality to informality can also be observed in academic papers. Academic writing is meant to be formal in nature.

Academic writing, especially for postgraduate students, is essential not only for articulating ideas but also for engaging with existing scholarly literature, constructing arguments, and presenting research findings (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). Unlike informal writing, academic writing necessitates a high level of formality and clarity. Students must master complex abilities such as critical thinking, critical assessment, language use, writing style, structure, and argument construction (Elander et al., 2006). Writing proficiency is a crucial measure of a student's language competency, essential for academic achievement and contributions to their field of study (Hyland, 2008).

Writing proficiency is often regarded as a crucial component of academic success. In the context of EFL, writing skills indicate not only language mastery but also critical thinking and the efficient communication of ideas (Suteja & Setiawan, 2022). Writing requires not only technical proficiency, but also creativity and critical thinking, which must be fostered through good instruction. Writing serves as both a learning tool and a medium for self-expression, acting as a bridge between knowledge and communication (Pandya & Saiyad, 2025).

Academic writing proficiency comprises not only grammar but also the ability to express complicated ideas convincingly. The writing proficiency of postgraduate students, when preparing thesis proposals, can have a significant impact on the quality of their research. Academic writing, especially thesis proposals, requires students to communicate their research questions, aims, and techniques in a clear, structured, and formal manner (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014). Furthermore, academic research is systematic, debatable, and subject to challenge. Since the research gaps revealed in the relevant literature need to be addressed, the research problems that require attention must be identified. Data

will be analyzed using appropriate data analysis techniques, and findings and relevant recommendations will be provided. Thus, conducting research is a methodical procedure that entails meeting milestones and delivering results (Abdulai & Owusu-Ansah, 2014). However, EFL students face numerous challenges in academic writing, which are frequently worsened by the demands of their research.

Common challenges include mastering advanced grammar rules, such as tense usage, subject-verb agreement, sentence structures, and grammatical accuracy (Solikhah, 2017). Furthermore, choosing acceptable academic terminology remains a significant challenge, as students must convey complex concepts in a formal, academic tone (Solikhah, 2017). Another problem is preserving coherence, developing thesis statements, and incorporating personal experiences into lengthy academic works where ideas must flow logically from one section to the next (Nenotek et al., 2022). Furthermore, academic dishonesty, particularly plagiarism, is a continuing problem in higher education institutions worldwide (Wamuziri, 2023). EFL students frequently struggle to effectively organize their writing and maintain consistency of arguments throughout different sections of their proposals.

Another significant challenge in their academic writing is a lack of exposure to academic registers, lexical resources, and cohesive structures (Gungor & Uysal, 2016). These problems hinder their ability to convey research ideas and engage in scholarly discourse effectively. Furthermore, EFL students struggle to employ formal academic language efficiently because they do not understand the academic register, which includes the proper usage of lexical bundles. Lexical bundles are described as repeating combinations of three or more words that appear often in academic literature (Biber, 2015). These bundles serve as important units of meaning, helping writers structure their texts properly.

Lexical bundles, such as "the purpose of this study" or "in conclusion," are word combinations that are used to organize arguments, signal transitions, and preserve coherence across the text. According to Biber et al. (1999), these bundles are prevalent in scholarly writing and are necessary for improving the fluidity and clarity of academic literature. Unfortunately, EFL students tend to underuse these important language elements, which has a negative impact on their writing ability (Hyland, 2008).

Successful academic writers are known for their ability to use precise vocabulary, logically connect concepts, and explain thoughts coherently. Writing challenges include creating coherent paragraphs, using proper lexical expressions, and employing academic language logically and effectively (Dan et al., 2024). Hyland (2008) emphasizes the importance of lexical bundles in written academic discourse. Producing legitimate academic papers necessitates expertise in the standard lexical bundles of a writer's field. Using lexical bundles enables writers to make smoother transitions between sentences and paragraphs, making their writing more straightforward to read and more logically organized.

Lexical bundles function as building blocks for arranging thoughts, ensuring that the language flows smoothly from one point to the next. They help improve sentence cohesiveness by tying concepts and arguments together. Mastering lexical bundles is needed for EFL students, as it enables them to write more fluently and clearly, which can be challenging when writing in a second language (Hyland, 2008). These problems can hinder their ability to present their research ideas clearly and professionally, which is essential for effective academic writing.

To enhance graduates' foreign language skills, including in writing, many nations have implemented internationally standardized learning frameworks. Global benchmarks, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), provide a consistent method for assessing language ability (Dwinalida & Maulia, 2024). The Council of Europe developed the

CEFR, which provides a standardized system for measuring language ability across various skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The framework includes six proficiency levels, ranging from A1 (beginning) to C2 (proficient). These levels provide a clear and consistent method for measuring and comparing language proficiency, which is particularly valuable in educational settings (Nagai et al., 2020). Understanding and implementing the CEFR levels can help EFL students track their progress and identify areas for development.

The CEFR framework was meant to perform two functions. It is a framework for ACTION that provides a standard foundation for the development of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, tests, textbooks, and other materials throughout Europe. The framework for reflection allows educational administrators, course designers, teachers, teacher trainers, examining bodies, and others to reflect on their current practice, situating and coordinating their efforts to ensure that they meet the real needs of the learners for whom they are responsible (Little, 2011). Furthermore, as stated in the document Graduate Competency Standards and Learning Outcomes for Bachelor's Level Graduates of the English Language Teaching Study Program, section 3.c.2.53. c. 2.5, graduates of the English Teaching Study Program (TBI) must "excel in conveying concepts effectively, persuasively, and courteously using the target language, both verbally and orally". The CEFR defines the program's graduating competences as equivalent to level C1, ensuring graduates have advanced communication skills (Dwinalida & Maulia, 2024).

The CEFR framework is integral in assessing academic writing proficiency in EFL students. The CEFR framework helps determine whether students can produce coherent academic texts that meet the expected standards of clarity, complexity, and formal structure. At lower proficiency levels (A1 and A2), students may produce simple, straightforward sentences with limited vocabulary and little ability to elaborate on ideas. As students advance to B1 and B2 levels, they develop the ability to produce more detailed and structured

texts. However, their writing may still lack complexity in terms of vocabulary and sentence structure (Nagai et al., 2020). By the time students reach C1 and C2 levels, their writing is expected to be not only accurate but also sophisticated, displaying control over complex sentence structures, nuanced vocabulary, and academic conventions

The use of lexical bundles is one of important indicator of academic writing proficiency, according to the CEFR paradigm. At lower competence levels, such as A1 and B1, students tend to use simpler lexical bundles, which are commonly composed of fundamental, often-used terms like "in the case of" or "on the other hand." These bundles help individuals order their ideas in simple ways, yet the writing may lack subtlety or depth. As students progress through the B2, C1, and C2 levels, they are required to use more complex and varied lexical bundles, including lengthier and more nuanced expressions that contribute to the clarity and sophistication of their academic writing. For example, students at these higher levels would employ bundles such as "it is important to note that" or "the implications of this are significant," which not only improve the flow of the writing but also boost the formal tone required for academic situations (Hyland, 2008).

The connection between lexical bundle usage and CEFR competence levels highlights the significance of lexical bundles in developing academic writing skills. The student's capacity to use a range of lexical bundles to connect concepts and convey complex arguments improves with their competence level (Sanosi, 2024). Understanding the relationship between lexical bundles and the CEFR framework is crucial for educators and academics aiming to enhance the academic writing skills of EFL students.

In recent analyses, EFL students have shown a tendency to rely on general-purpose lexical bundles such as "this study" or "the purpose of," especially at lower proficiency levels (Biber et al., 1999). Laia et al. (2023) and Li and Lei (2025) emphasized the use of lexical bundles as a sign of academic proficiency

in the structural context of writing. While Li and Lei (2025) discovered that L2 writers employed more but less diversified lexical bundles than native speakers and had a lack of awareness of the academic register. Parveen and Nawaz (2024) demonstrated a correlation between the frequency and complexity of lexical bundle usage and an increase in CEFR level. Moreover, Sanosi (2024) identified that students at the B1 and B2 CEFR levels struggle to use more specialized and advanced lexical bundles, which are expected at higher proficiency levels. These limitations hinder students' ability to fully participate in the global academic community.

Academic writing serves as the primary means through which students communicate their research in higher education. As academic vocabulary and writing proficiency are essential for academic success, profiling these features in thesis proposals can provide valuable insights into students' preparedness for the academic challenges they will face in their careers (Indriyani & Sudimantara, 2023). By examining lexical bundles in thesis proposals and comparing the usage across different CEFR levels, the study offers a perspective on how students' language proficiency influences their academic writing.

Chen and Baker (2016) argue that examining lexical bundles and their frequency at different CEFR levels can significantly inform writing instruction. They emphasize that EFL students at lower proficiency levels often rely on simple, formulaic phrases, which limit their writing complexity. Conversely, students at higher levels are able to employ a broader range of advanced lexical bundles, which are crucial for academic writing.

The role of lexical bundles in academic writing has been explored by several scholars, emphasizing their importance in constructing coherent academic texts. Biber et al. (1999) and Hyland (2008) laid the groundwork for understanding the significance of lexical bundles in academic writing. According to Biber et al. (1999), these bundles help to structure academic

7

arguments, maintain coherence, and signal discourse functions such as explanation, evaluation, and conclusion. Shin and Kim (2017) have focused on the challenges EFL students face when attempting to use lexical bundles effectively. Their studies revealed that advanced learners tend to use a broader range of lexical bundles. At the same time, EFL learners at lower proficiency levels tend to overuse a limited set of general-purpose bundles.

Saputra dan Hakim (2020) found that EFL learners struggle with structuring argumentative essays and research proposals, primarily due to their limited use of lexical bundles and cohesive devices. This results in texts that lack fluency, coherence, and the depth required for scholarly writing. Hyland (2008) also noted that many EFL students struggle with using more complex bundles and maintaining an academic register in their writing.

While the role of lexical bundles in academic writing has been well-documented, corpus-based studies focusing on thesis proposals and their relationship with CEFR levels are limited. Moreover, although previous research has highlighted that EFL students often fail to use a variety of lexical bundles, these studies have primarily focused on shorter academic texts such as essays or exam responses. There is a need for a more comprehensive investigation of how lexical bundles function within longer, more complex texts, such as thesis proposals.

Although lexical bundles are essential tools for producing fluent academic writing, existing research indicates that EFL students often lack awareness of these structures in their written texts. Studies have shown that students at different levels of proficiency, as indicated by frameworks such as the CEFR, employ lexical bundles to varying degrees, often relying heavily on simple, general-purpose phrases rather than more specialized academic expressions (Hyland, 2008; Sanosi, 2024). However, there is a gap in the literature regarding how lexical bundles function across different CEFR levels in specific genres, notably in thesis proposals.

This study focuses on analyzing the vocabulary and lexical bundles in the thesis proposals, specifically examining how these elements relate to their CEFR proficiency level. The decision to focus solely on CEFR vocabulary and number of lexical bundles was driven by the need to analyze measurable linguistic features of writing. Focusing on lexical bundles allows for a targeted approach to understanding writing competence, which has a direct influence on writing fluency and coherence (Biber, 2015).

This study aims to fill this gap by profiling the usage of lexical bundles in EFL thesis proposals and examining their relationship with CEFR levels. Moreover, this research incorporates learner feedback through open-ended questionnaires to investigate how individual learner factors, such as motivation and exposure, influence the use of lexical bundles and overall academic writing proficiency. By combining corpus analysis with learner insights, this study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of EFL writing proficiency and effective pedagogical strategies for enhancing academic writing skills.

B. Research Problems

The problem to be addressed in this study is that while lexical bundles are crucial for effective academic writing, there is a lack of understanding of how they are used in thesis proposals across different CEFR levels. This research is significant as it contributes to both theoretical and practical aspects of academic writing pedagogy for EFL learners. By profiling the use of lexical bundles and comparing it across CEFR levels, this study provides insights that can guide educators in designing more effective writing interventions for students' proficiency levels. Additionally, it provides valuable insights into how learner factors, such as motivation, writing experience, and instructional support, influence lexical bundle usage and, by extension, students' ability to produce coherent and well-structured academic text.

C. Research Questions

1. What are the CEFR levels and lexical bundles identified in students' EFL thesis proposals?

2. What are the students' perceptions of EFL thesis proposals writing challenges and difficulties that influence the level of CEFR framework and the use of lexical bundles?

D. Purposes of the Study

1. To investigate the CEFR levels and lexical bundles present in students' EFL thesis proposals.

2. To identify the students' perceptions of EFL thesis proposals writing challenges and difficulties that influence the level of CEFR framework and the use of lexical bundles

E. Significance of the Research

This research has significant implications for EFL writing. The significance is theoretical, empirical, and practical, providing insights into how lexical bundles contribute to academic writing skills across CEFR levels.

1. Theoretical Significance

The theoretical value of this work stems from its novel application of Corpus Linguistics to investigate the use of lexical bundles in academic writing. Using the CEFR framework, this study provides a better understanding of how lexical bundles function at various skill levels in

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) situations. It offers a comprehensive examination of how the usage of repeating word combinations affects the consistency and flow of academic writing. This study adds to our theoretical understanding of academic language by putting light on how students' use of academic terminology increases as their writing competence grows.

2. Empirical Significance

Empirically, this study is important since it gives data-driven insights into the use of lexical bundles in EFL thesis proposals. The empirical contribution is the use of a corpus-based analysis to investigate how lexical bundles are employed at various competence levels, particularly in a genre that is frequently overlooked in corpus-based research. By analyzing thesis proposals from students in an English education program, this study fills a gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence on the difficulties students face in mastering academic writing, particularly in terms of lexical coherence, academic vocabulary, and grammatical structures.

3. Practical Significance

On a practical level, the research is essential for educators and curriculum developers. The study's findings can directly inform teaching strategies for developing academic writing skills in EFL students. The study identifies distinct linguistic needs at various stages of language competency by profiling the most commonly used lexical bundles and examining their relationship to students' CEFR levels. Educators can utilize these insights to create tailored lessons that address areas in which pupils struggle, such as academic vocabulary, coherence, and concept structure.

F. Contributions of the Study

This study has several significant contributions to the field of EFL writing research, academic vocabulary studies, and pedagogical strategies for English education.

1. Theoretical Contribution

   This research offers a theoretical contribution by applying Corpus Linguistics to examine the role of lexical bundles in academic writing. It applies the CEFR framework to the study of lexical bundle usage, offering a theoretical perspective on how these linguistic structures correlate with students' academic writing proficiency.

2. Empirical Contribution

   The empirical contribution of this study lies in its systematic, data-driven approach to analyzing lexical bundle usage across different CEFR levels in EFL thesis proposals. The corpus-based analysis of 19 thesis proposals contributes novel insights into how EFL students use lexical bundles at various stages of language proficiency. It fills a gap in the literature by providing empirical evidence on how these language features are employed in the genre of thesis proposals, a text type that has not been extensively studied in previous corpus-based research. The study's findings are of particular value for identifying specific linguistic challenges faced by EFL students in academic writing.

3. Practical Contribution

   The practical contribution of this study lies in its potential to inform teaching strategies and curriculum development for EFL writing programs. The findings can help EFL educators better understand the linguistic needs of their students at different proficiency levels to enhance academic writing skills. Moreover, the study's integration of learner factors into the analysis

provides practical recommendations for developing pedagogical approaches that address students' individual challenges, such as their vocabulary knowledge, writing strategies, and motivation.