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Introduction Sections in Creative Arts Thesis

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ABSTRACT

The content structuring of creative arts thesis is still evolving and has been mainly based on the social science thesis structure. However, the diversity of creative works encompassing music compositions, novels, art works, dance, and painting makes it difficult for the thesis to fit into the conventional content structure. There is also the description of intellectual property and the final product validation which are distinctly different components of creative arts research which need to be documented. In addition, the impetus for the creative arts research may not arise from a gap of knowledge in the field but from ergonomical problems of certain products or designs. The present study examined how the introduction section is written in creative arts thesis. Eleven creative arts theses written by undergraduate and postgraduate students in two Malaysian universities were analysed to identify the impetus or entry point for the research. The results indicate that the research problem in creative arts thesis is inclined towards researcher observation of ergonomic problems with existing products or designs although some students strengthen their case by citing related research findings on the weaknesses of existing products or design to carve a niche for their study. The study suggests that patent search offers useful information that can be used to justify the novelty of innovations and inventions.

Key words: research problem, creative arts, thesis, ergonomics, product design

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, creative arts was given recognition as a discipline by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (2011) a decade ago, and industrial design was categorised as a sub-discipline within the creative arts discipline. In the larger context, creative arts research falls into the soft sciences, along with the social sciences, and arts and humanities research. Applications for research grants in creative arts offered by the Ministry of Higher Education are usually in the Arts and Applied Arts (*Sastera dan Sastera Ikhtisas*) research domain but certain research proposals may fall into the Natural and Cultural Heritage (*Warisan Alam dan Budaya*) research domain (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2021). In this paper, the term "social science" will be used to refer to the soft sciences, as opposed to the hard sciences (e.g., engineering, information technology, biological sciences).

Generally, a research is deemed significant if the research problem is pertinent and still not well understood due to the lack of research in the area. In other words, the value of the research is argued based on the existing knowledge in the research area, and researchers need to demonstrate familarity with available findings and theories in the research area to carve a niche for their study. Based on their empirical results, researchers show the

significance of their study in terms of the practical applications and knowledge generated. However, the value of creative arts research may not depend on carving a niche for the study by identifying a gap of knowledge in the literature. The value of creative arts research may arise from practical problems and, in the sub-discipline of industrial design, problems with existing designs of products are grounds for a study. The bulk of the creative arts thesis may not be the analysis and reporting of empirical results. For example, industrial design research reports place value on visual and creative approaches such as visualisation, photography, video, sketching and three-dimensional modelling (Gray & Malins, 2004). Nevertheless, experimental research is considered an important way of assessing practical skills of creative arts students in the "The Programme Standards: Creative Multimedia" for the Creative Arts and Design curriculum (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2011), and the programme standards also requires students to demonstrate theoretical knowledge of the discipline by conducting a research project.

Researchers differ in their views on how the research problem should be written in creative arts studies. On the one hand, there are researchers (e.g., Jones, 1992; Rahman & Majid, 2017) who believe that the design process should start from available research findings on societal issues and problems that give rise to a research problem, and the output is a new product which can solve these societal issues and problems. Jones (1992) stated that ideas for a new product design are formed from the researcher's imagination, readings and observation. Jones (1992) places value on readings, which would establish the gap of knowledge for the study. In effect, these researchers consider creative arts research to be like any other research. On the other hand, other researchers believe that ergonomic problems of certain products or designs should be the starting point of research in creative arts. For instance, Hamilton and Jaaniste (2010) emphasise the context for the product creation. This can be seen in the recommended thesis structure as follows: Introduction, Situation Concept, Practical Context, Researcher's Creation, and Conclusion. The situation concept and practical context emphasise the practical starting point of the research.

A search of literature on thesis writing showed that there is inadequate research on creative arts thesis (e.g., Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Paltridge et al., 2011) although the writing of thesis in other disciplines have been extensively studied (e.g., Dong, 1998; Mahfudurido, Tallapessy, & Kusumayanti, 2021; Ting, 2006). In other disciplines, the inclination may be more towards basic research, where the theoretical significance of the study needs to be established based on past research. The introduction section in a thesis then carries the important function of showing the research niche, that is, the knowledge gap based on what is already currently known from past studies on the research phenomenon. The coherence of thought is vital to present a convincing argument on the research problem, relying not only on grammatical cohesion but also lexical cohesion (Rochma & Triyono, 2019). However, the emphasis in creative arts thesis may be more inclined towards applied research where the introduction presents a description of ergonomic problems leading to the need for research to solve the problem. Considering the likely difference in the impetus for research in creative arts and the soft sciences, it is vital to find out how the research problem in the creative arts discipline is conceptualised, that is, whether it is argued based on inadequate

research in the area or the need to solve practical problems. Such findings will be relevant to graduate students and lecturers involved in teaching academic writing, so that they can tailor-make the teaching focus to suit the creative arts students instead of using a one-size-fits-all template.

The present study examined how the introduction section is written in creative arts thesis written by undergraduate and postgraduate students. The specific objectives of the study were to: (1) identify the impetus for the study, and (2) describe how the research problem is justified.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study was taken from Swales (2014), Creating a Research Space [CARS] Model to offer a conventional structure on the organisation of the introduction section of research articles. The CARS model is based on his research in many disciplines, the structure of introductions to problematise the research. The description of the three moves in research introductions is based on Swales's (2014) CARS Model. The analysis framework in the present study was formulated for Move 1 and Move 2, as shown in Table 2.

Move 1 : Establishing a territory
Step 1 : Claiming centrality of the research area
Step 2 : Making topic generalisations (showing current state of knowledge)
Step 3 : Reviewing previous items of research (based on existing findings)
Move 2 : Establishing a niche (through refuting earlier research, indicating a gap and raising questions about previous research and suggesting need for additional research)
Step 1A : Indicating a gap
Step 1B : Adding to what is known
Step 2 : Presenting positive justification (optional)
Move 3 : Occupying a niche
Step 1A : Outlining purposes
Step 1B : Announcing present research
Step 2 : Announcing principal findings
Step 3 : Indicating the structure of the research article

It needs to be noted that Swales's (2014) CARS model is for an Introduction section which argues that there is a research gap, and the phenomenon is still not well-understood and therefore needs to be further investigated. If the creative arts thesis introductions mostly do not follow this structure, then it can be concluded that the target purpose is not justifying the theoretical significance of the research problem, but rather than practical solution of problems.

METHOD

The study involved the content analysis of the research problem in 11 creative arts theses written by students from two Malaysian universities, amounting to 1,281 pages. *Table 1* shows the thesis titles, which included recreational park chairs, wooden bridge, ablution place in mosques, school chairs, speed bumps, camper vans, furniture, and lip synchronisation animation for translation of movies into other languages.

The instrument that guided the analysis of the research problem focused on impetus for the study, and support for the research problem as shown in *Table 2*. As there were no existing frameworks, the first researcher formulated the analysis framework on how the introduction section is written in creative

arts thesis through inductive-oriented thematic analysis by rereading the relevant sections in the thesis (introduction, background, problem statement). Chapter 1 contains the research problems although students may write this under different headings and it can sometimes be spread across two sections.

Table 1: Information on Creative Arts Theses Analysed

Thesis	Title	Language	Number of Pages
T1	*Study on Ergonomic Aspect that Can Assist Secondary School Student in Placing Their Schoolbag in Classroom*	English	40
T2	*Eco-friendly Speed Bump with Kinetic Energy in Urban Area*	English	48
T3	*An Investigation of the Potential of Three-wheeled Commercial Vehicle Using the Electric Technology*	English	47
T4	Reka Bentuk Jelatung bagi Penduduk di Kawasan Persisir Sungai Sarawak *(Jelatung Design for Residents in the Coastal Area of Sungai Sarawak)*	Malay	91
T5	Reka Bentuk Kerusi Taman Berkonsepkan Cantuman Tembok Penahan *(Garden Chair Design with the Concept of Retaining Wall Joints)*	Malay	69
T6	Reka Bentuk Tempat Wudhu Inovasi untuk Orang Kurang Upaya *(Innovative Ablution Place Design for the Disabled)*	Malay	43
T7	*The Study of Automobile Interior Space for the Development of Family Vacation*	English	153
T8	*The Attributes of* Asmaa' al-Husnaa *as a Conceptual Model of Islamic Furniture Design Assessment*	English	231
T9	*Performance of Real Time Lip Sync Animation on Viseme Based Human Speech*	English	237
T10	Kajian Identiti Rekaan Perabot Berdasarkan Nilai Semantik dan Metafora Masyarakat Tempatan di Sarawak *(Furniture Design Identity Study Based on Semantic Values and Metaphors of the Local Community in Sarawak)*	Malay	201
T11	Hampas Sagu Sebagai Sumber Alternatif dalam Reka Bentuk Model Automotif *(Sago Waste as An Alternative Source in Automotive Model Design)*	Malay	121

Note: T1-T6 were undergraduate work while T7-T11 were postgraduate work.

In this study, the second and third researchers collected 11 theses by contacting lecturers from 10 universities and art academies offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in creative arts in Malaysia. However, lecturers from only two public universities responded. The problem of getting access to the thesis and also in securing consent for the thesis to be analysed made it difficult for the researchers to specify a specific category of thesis to analyse (e.g., thesis with A grade, applied research or fundamental

research). The theses analysed were those that were willingly supplied by lecturers, and all of them were applied research.

The data analysis was conducted based on the analysis framework described in *Table 2*. After the preliminary analysis, reasoning based on personal observations was added to the framework on how the introduction section is written in creative arts thesis. Generally personal observations was not used as a basis for a study, but since it was found in two of the theses analysed, this was added to the analysis framework. Based on the information on the content and sub-categories of the content, the theses were analysed. The examples were referred to when the sub-categories could not be easily decided.

Table 2: Analysis Framework on How the Introduction Section is Written in Creative Arts Thesis

Content	Subcategories	Example
Impetus for the study	Lack of research on situation	The lack of information and the limited number of publications on modern furniture from the Islamic perspective provide an opportunity to explore in depth the Islamic requirements for industrial design and furniture design inspired by the attributes of the Asmaa' al-Husnaa. (T8)
	Problems with existing products or situation	However, there are still no environment-friendly light commercial vehicles introduced to the market. (T3)
Support for research problem	Citation of past findings on topic	Zulkifli's (2015) study on X showed that ... (Example is not from the data because there were no citations of past findings)
	Citation of facts for explanation	It is for these reasons that 'public health concerns over the effects of bad posture need to be attentive on the design of classroom furniture' (Parcells et al., 1999). (T1)
	Justification of benefits of proposed solution	This product is a green product that can generate energy without using gas. (T2)
	Reasoning based on personal observations	*Daripada pemerhatian yang dijalankan sering kali didengari rungutan yang menyatakan tempat wudhu sedia ada tidak mempunyai ciri-ciri ergonomik yang diperlukan oleh Orang Kurang Upaya (OKU) dan boleh mengundang kecederaan kepada mereka.* (T6) (Based on the observations that were carried out, there were often complaints that there are no places with ergonomical features, where the disabled could collect water for prayer, and this can cause them injuries.)

RESULTS

In this section, the results are described to address the three objectives of the study. The theses are referred to as T1 to T11.

Impetus for the Study

Table 3 shows the results of the analysis of the impetus for the study in the research problem, showing that creative arts research was justified on the

grounds of practical problems with existing products or situations. In the context of Swales's (2014) CARS model, to establish a territory for the research (Move 1), the centrality of the research area is justified using practical problems (Step 1). Only two theses attempted to show lack of research on the situation and this is reflective of Move 2, Step 1A (Establishing a niche by indicating a gap) but this was not satisfactorily achieved, as will be explained later.

Table 3: Reasons Used as Impetus for Study in Creative Arts Thesis

Reasons Used as Impetus for Study	Thesis	Total Number of Theses
Problems with existing products or situation	T1 to T11	11
Lack of research on situation	T7, T8	2

All the 11 students highlighted problems with the existing products of situation in order to show the importance of embarking on the research. For example, T3 emphasized the current dependence of fossil fuels to power commercial vehicles to justify the need to study the potential of three-wheeled commercial vehicle using the electric technology as shown in Excerpt (1):

  (1) However, there are still no environment-friendly light commercial vehicles introduced to the market. (T3)

T3 also described the thriving commercial sector in Malaysia which resulted in many such vehicles being used, worsening the carbon dioxide emission and pollution of the environment. However, T3 mentioned lack of research on electric-powered three-wheeled commercial vehicle, leaving readers wondering if this is a situation in Malaysia or throughout the world.

In fact, only two students explicitly used lack of research on the situation as a justification for the study (T7 and T8). As an example, T8 cited Zulkifli (2015) as an authority to show that there is lack of research on Islamic design, whether it is for furniture or other products (Excerpt 2):

  (2) According to Zulkifli (2015), principles in producing design products reflecting Islamic values are still unexplored. … The lack of information and the limited number of publications on modern furniture from the Islamic perspective provide an opportunity to explore in depth the Islamic requirements for industrial design and furniture design inspired by the attributes of the Asmaa' al-Husnaa. (T8)

Islamic design in architecture (e.g., Babangida & Katsina, 2018) and interior design (e.g., Hui & Zhe, 2016) has existed for some time, though not in products. A study on Islamic art element in modern furniture design has been carried out by Abidin et al. (2018) but this was after T8's thesis was written. Hence, it was correct for T8 to state that principles in producing design products reflecting Islamic values were still under-researched at that point in time.

Another student (T7) mentioned recent research vaguely, raising concerns on whether the student had read related journal papers. Excerpt (3) shows the vague reference to past research:

  (3) According to previous research, travel is often known as a get away from stressful situation, a way for relaxation and education. The *recent*

research that caught the researcher interest was that several benefits in strengthening the social between individual may be gain from travelling. This study will examine the *previous research* on the beneficial of travel among families, working adults. (T7)

T7 should have cited the recent studies and the previous studies instead of making a vague reference. Nevertheless, T7 shows an attempt at describing the research problem as one that resides in the field of knowledge, and the proposed research of campervan design will benefit families and working adults who like to vacation this way instead of staying in hotels. To sum up, in creative arts thesis, it is more common to position the research problem as a response to practical problems in the society rather than theoretical gap of knowledge.

Justification for Research Problem

The analysis showed that most of the creative arts theses analysed contained justification of benefits of the proposed solution to the problems identified (9 out of 11 theses). An example is found in T2's thesis on a better design for a speed bump in shopping mall car parks (Excerpt 4):

(4) This product is a green product that can generate energy without using gas. (T2)

T2 explained that the number of vehicles on the road in Malaysia had increased over the years, and so has the use of non-renewable energy sources. T2 went on to explain the purpose and problems of the existing speed bumps before justifying the benefits of an eco-friendly speed bump which does not only prevent accidents but conserves energy. However, T2 did not include any citations in the description of the research problem but relied on reasoning.

Table 4: Justifications for Supporting the Significance of the Research Problem in Creative Arts Theses

Justification	Thesis	Total Number of Theses
Justification of benefits of proposed solution	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T8, T9, T10, T11	9
Citation of facts for explanation	T1, T8, T9, T11	4
Citation of past findings on topic	T7*, T10, T11*	3
Reasoning based on personal observations	T6, T7	2

Note: Mention of past studies but not accompanied by names of authors

Next, four students included a handful of citations to assist their explanation of the research problem (T1, T8, T9, T11) as follows:

(5) It is for these reasons that "public health concerns over the effects of bad posture need to be attentive on the design of classroom furniture" (Parcells et al., 1999). (T1)

Instead of relying on her own reasoning, T1 cited a researcher to strengthen her point on the effects of badly-designed school furniture on the posture of students. This is a correct move by students to anchor their description of the research problem in the literature.

However, few students were able to cite past findings in order to justify the significance of the research problem on the grounds that there are inadequate research and hence the problem has not been properly

investigated or understood. Table 4 shows that three students attempted to cite past findings. T7 and T11 mentioned past studies but did not cite the names of authors, raising questions on whether these students had specific past studies in mind. T10 had one citation in the research problem section as follows:

(6) *Selain itu juga, nilai semantik ini akan memberikan signifikasi yang tersendiri dalam identiti budaya dalam negeri Sarawak. Menurut Abdullah et al. (2013), pengkaji-pengkaji ini menjelaskan bahawa selain daripada perabot ubahsuai sendiri, penghasilan reka bentuk perabot yang beridentitikan tempatan adalah kurang. Oleh itu, kajian ini akan memberikan fokus kepada pengolah identiti tempatan sebagai inspirasi dalam reka bentuk perabot.* (T10)

(In addition, this semantic value will give its own significance in the cultural identity in the state of Sarawak. According to Abdullah et al. (2013), these researchers explained that apart from self-renovated furniture, the production of locally identifiable furniture designs is lacking. Therefore, this study will focus on local identity processes as inspiration in furniture design.)

T10 highlighted the near-absence of furniture designs that reflect local identity, and cited a researcher who made a statement to this effect. This strengthens his claim of novelty. These citations were used to show that there is a gap of knowledge in the field of industrial design which makes the proposed study significant. T10 was arguing for the use of local wood material with the semantic value of Sarawak in the furniture design. However, the students were not able to incorporate references to studies that investigated local identity in furniture design elsewhere, for example, Ahmad et al. (2015) studied incorporation of the national identity into an office chair design. If students are able to do this, they can justify the need for furniture to reflect the local identity of various regions in Malaysia. This is because each place has its uniqueness, and there are other types of furniture which remains to be studied, other than the office chair.

Finally, interestingly, two students used reasoning based on personal observations. T6 used his own observation while T7 cited inspiration from an interview (See Excerpt 7).

(7) *Daripada pemerhatian yang dijalankan sering kali didengari rungutan yang menyatakan tempat wudhu sediaada tidak mempunyai ciri-ciri ergonomik yang diperlukan oleh Orang Kurang Upaya (OKU) dan boleh mengundang kecederaan kepada mereka.* (T6)

(From the observations carried out, complaints often stated that the existing ablution place does not have ergonomic features needed by the disabled, and this can cause them injuries.)

Generally, personal observations are not used as a starting point of research (Ary et al., 1990) although it can give rise to ideas for the research. Usually what may happen is that the researcher then goes on to search the literature to find support on the significance of the research problem that he or she has in mind. However, T6 relied on her observation as the rationale for the study while other students had learnt to incorporate citations to lend authority to their arguments. Students who are inclined towards using

personal reasoning need to be alerted to the need to cite previous literature to justify the need for their study.

DISCUSSION   The analysis of how the introduction section is written in creative arts thesis showed that the impetus for their research was mainly problems with existing products or situations. Therefore, the justification of the significance of the research problem revolved around description of the problems of the existing products or situation and the potential benefits of proposed solution or design. For Masters and Ph.D theses, the students were better able to include citations to strengthen their description of the research problems whereas the undergraduate students often used their own reasoning and made vague references to past studies without citing specific studies. The study has filled in the gap of knowledge on how the introduction section is written in creative arts thesis. In the context of Swales's (2014) CARS model, the creative arts thesis are weak in establishing a territory (Move 1) and establishing a niche (Move 2) using findings from previous research. Instead the creative arts thesis establish a space for the study by using a pragmatic approach, that is, the problems experienced in daily life.

In comparison, other disciplines are more conventional in the writing of the introduction section than creative arts. Nevertheless, even though there are attempts to follow the conventions, there is still under-utilisation of Move 1 and Move 2 which makes the argument on the significance of the research less convincing. In the computer sciences, Move 1 and Move 2 are weaker in the articles produced by researchers in private universities compared to public universities (Suryani, Ahmad, Zubir, Ghazali, & Aclan 2018), and this may be linked to experience in research and publications. Rochma (2019) reported that the introduction of research articles written by English department students showed the use of Move 1 and Move 2. Afshar, Doosti, and Movassagh's (2018) analysis revealed that the chemistry articles are weak in claiming centrality of the research area (Move 1, Step 1) but establishing a niche (Move 2) was under-utilised in both chemistry and applied linguistics articles. Another perspective on the compliance with Swales's (2014) CARS model of writing introductions is weight given to different moves due to disciplinary differences. Samraj (2002) found that the introduction section in a wildlife behaviour journal (publishing theoretical papers) provides details of the species before justifying the need for the study in terms of research gaps whereas a conservation biology journal (publishing applied research) argues the importance of the research area by highlighting the potential loss of spesies and biodiversity.

Seen from the perspective of disciplinary variation, it may not be reasonable to expect the creative arts to fit into the conventional structure of introductions in research articles because the purpose driving the research is different. Jones (1992) states that the starting point of product design research should be societal issues, and researchers use their imagination and observation to justify the need for their study, augmented by previous research. Hamilton and Janniste (2010) refer to the societal issues giving rise to the research as the Situation Concept and Practical Context which should be highlighted in creative arts thesis. The creative arts research seek to improve ergonomical designs and the approach in justifying a need for the study is pragmatic, which is why in the Introduction sections of creative arts thesis, centrality of the research area is claimed on the basis of problems of

the existing products or situation (Move 1, Step 1) and presenting benefits of proposed solution or design is of paramount importance (Move 2, Step 2).

CONCLUSION The study has highlighted the uniqueness of the creative arts research. While we areaware that creative arts research cannot be made to fit into the mould of the soft sciences, there are other ways to justify the novelty of the proposed design other than citing related past findings in academic papers. Patent search is a viable avenue that can offer useful information for justifying the significance of innovations and inventions, and the focus is on the product design which is befitting of the industrial design field. A literature search is still performed but the focus is on products which dovetails with the focus of creative arts studies on applied research. Patent search reveals if similar inventions already exist and prevent researchers from reinventing the wheel. In addition, patent search enables creative arts researchers to confirm if their inventions are novel or to help them gain a competitive edge over existing competitor's products.

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