

EXEGESIS IN CREATIVE ARTS THESIS

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Abstract

Writing creative arts theses based on a social sciences model does not allow documentation of the creative process. The study examined content structuring of creative arts theses. The specific objectives were to examine creative arts lecturers' views on students' problems in thesis writing, analyse the content structuring of creative arts theses, and formulate a conceptual model of the content structure of the exegesis to accompany creative work. The study involved analysis of theses writing guidelines and the content of research methodology courses in two Malaysian universities offering creative arts academic programmes. The results showed recommendations on the conventional social science thesis structure with some space for the design processes. In addition, the analysis of 11 creative arts theses revealed confusion on the content structuring and student weaknesses in amassing research findings to contextualise the creative work. Based on the results, a conceptual model of creative arts exegesis with separate chapters for "Proposed final product and human factor issues" and "intellectual property documentation" was formulated and validated by creative arts lecturers. The exegesis model which builds in design processes and research processes would resolve issues on unclear expectations in creative arts students theses and elevate the significance of the creative work.

Keywords: *creative arts, exegesis, thesis, research higher degrees, intellectual property*

INTRODUCTION

Much of the research on academic writing has been on research articles because of the "publish or perish" culture. The research article is a genre with recognisable discourse features (content structuring and language). The extensively researched components of a research article are the abstract (Hartley & Sydes, 1995) and the introduction (e.g., Ankomah & Afful, 2019; Duenas, 2008; Kanoksilapatham, 2005; Swales, 2004; Ting, 2013). Research on the structure and rhetorical strategies of the Method (Lim, 2006), and the discussion/conclusion (Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Joseph & Lim, 2019; Ting, 2010, 2011; Yang & Allison, 2004) have shown differing levels of compliance with conventional structures. As various disciplines may have variations in the content structure of theses, academic writing and formatting (Azlan et al., 2018), it is important that students familiarise themselves with the academic writing guidelines that are in place. Ting's (2006) analysis of student research reports revealed frequent misfits between the content and section headings (Ting, 2006), revealing that it is difficult for novices to learn the conventions of the academic communities of practice. University students have difficulties produce good academic writing, particularly in project papers (Abdul Hamid, Hashim, Stapa, &

Mustafa, 2012).

The difficulty of creative arts students in writing their thesis is potentially greater. Examples of creative works are music compositions, novels, art works, dance, and painting. Berridge (2008), a creative arts postgraduate student, wrote about her difficulty of writing a PhD thesis without clear guidelines about expectations and having to adapt the guidelines of a traditional PhD thesis. The lack of clarity on creative arts thesis may adversely affect timely completion of the research higher degrees (Mann & Fletcher, 2004). The difficulty is compounded by the “diversity of naming practices for these relations [components of a thesis], institutional variation in guidelines and expectations, and fundamental functional roles for the respective components” (Paltridge et al., 2011: 242).

An exhaustive search of literature on thesis writing revealed a lack of studies on theses in the creative arts. The void may stem from the lack of recognition to “practice-led” or “practice-based” research in the performing arts and design discipline (Gray & Malins, 2004). The visual and creative approaches and methodology that are specific to industrial design research are visualisation, photography, video, sketching and three-dimensional modelling (Gray & Malins, 2004). Industrial design is classified as a sub-discipline of creative arts in Malaysia (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2011). The skills to produce sketches and illustrations, as well as the process of developing designs is sometimes regarded as research that is not concrete. Since the 1990s, there is an ongoing debate on the thesis in creative arts, particularly whether art or creative work can be recognised as research (Mann & Fletcher, 2004; Perry & Brophy, 2001). Evans et al.’s (2003) study was on the type of projects that could be classified as PhDs in the creative arts, defined as research that contribute to the field through the production of a creative work that makes a significant, original contribution to knowledge in a field. The perception that creative work does not count is so strong that the academic research is often considered as necessary to legitimise the creative work (Arnold, 2005).

Because of the absence of a framework specific to the creative arts thesis, social science and humanities frameworks have been used as the benchmark for theses (Rahman & Majid, 2017). Creative arts project reports written in the mould of science and even social science thesis models do not allow the distinctive nature of creative arts to be shown. For example, creative arts theses need to present descriptions of the proposed product and validation, human factor issues, and intellectual property documentation. The introduction of an exegesis to accompany the creative works and applied research of students in creative arts, design and media began in the mid-1990s (Hamilton & Jaaniste, 2010). An exegesis includes the cultural and personal ideas which inform the work, the practical constraints on the creative work, the physical context of the work, the function of the work and the relationship between form and function, and at a postgraduate level, an exegesis should add to the understanding of art, culture and humanity as a whole (Edith Cowan University, n.d.). Some universities have theses guidelines (e.g., Curtin University of Technology, 2010; Edith Cowan University, n.d.; Newcastle University, 2013; University of Technology Sydney, 2013). However, little is known about these translate into documentation of the creative process and the place of research in the creative process in creative art theses.

The exegesis has been a presence in some Australian universities for more than the last 15 years, even if it has been introduced in some institutions within the last 15 years. Considering that the content structure of creative arts theses is still evolving and there is lack of research into the exegesis, this area warrants investigation. Hence, it is vital to investigate the interrelations between the exegesis and the creative work. The aim of the study was to analyse content structuring of final year project reports and theses in creative arts. The specific objectives of the study were to examine creative arts lecturers’ views on students’ problems in thesis writing, analyse the content structuring of creative arts theses and formulate a conceptual model of the content structure of creative arts theses. In this paper, the final year project report and thesis will be referred to as “thesis” for ease of reference because the final year project reports resemble the postgraduate thesis in its content structure.