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Natividad-Franco, Virginia

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Short Paper

Difficulties and Challenges of Library and Information Science Students in Thesis Writing During the Pandemic

Virginia Natividad-Franco
College of Information and Communications Technology
Bulacan State University, Philippines
ORCID: 0000-0003-1693-1232
(corresponding author)

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Abstract

The study aimed to determine the difficulties and challenges experienced by the Library and Information Science students from Bulacan State University, Philippines, during the Pandemic. The respondents of the study are 92 students from the first batch of graduates. The study was done in the 2nd Semester of S.Y. 2020-2021. The study utilized a mixed-methods type of research. A validated survey questionnaire was sent to the respective students via messenger, and a focus group discussion was implemented via google meet. Descriptive statistical tools like frequency, percentage, and weighted mean were utilized. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was applied. The study's results regarding the personal factors difficulties stated that all the respondents found difficulty in deciding the title of their thesis. Regarding socio-cultural, they are neutral; perhaps these students knew how to socialize with others. The linguistic indicators were found to have a low weighted mean. In terms of the challenges experienced by students, a lot of issues were raised. Furthermore, recommendations were submitted to the administrators to address further the problems.

Keywords – thesis writing, Library and Information Science, Pandemic, Online Learning



INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 was a worldwide public health emergency internationally and a pandemic by the World Health Organization (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). This recent outbreak increased the gaps in the education sector globally. Like many other aspects of day-to-day life, the Pandemic has severely impacted students, instructors, and educational organizations worldwide (Mailizar et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, particularly Luzon, the government enforces a life-threatening community quarantine all over the area. The movement of people is restricted, and work has been suspended (Pastor, 2020). The Pandemic caused schools, colleges, and universities worldwide to shut down their campuses so that students could follow social distancing measures (Toquero, 2020). These tremendous challenges and issues affect the education system in the Philippines. Thus, the higher education institutions in the country responded to this challenge through online learning. Bulacan State University (BulSU), located in Malolos, Province of Bulacan, Philippines, is one of the top-performing universities in the region and the country that adhered to these changes.

However, Crawford et al. (2020) stated that turning quickly from an environment of conventional education to distance and online learning is impossible to happen overnight. Numerous problems and challenges were linked to this. The Library and Information Science (LIS) students have transferred to the College of Information and Communications Technology in 2018. Unfortunately, this first batch of graduates experienced writing their thesis as culminating activity during the Pandemic.

In sustaining the excellent image of the college in giving quality education to students amidst pandemic, the newly transferred degree program is subjected to an assessment. Since the pandemic resulted in an outbreak, students were forced to learn from home, where they experienced difficulty adjusting. The worst-case scenario here is the fact that numerous children are not learning. (Lie, 2020). Since academic writing is difficult, according to Oshima and Hogue (1998, as mentioned in Lestari, 2020), the researcher wants to determine the difficulties and challenges encountered by the first batch of graduates in writing their academic papers during the pandemic. How do these aspiring librarians manage to write their thesis without the physical library, which seems to be their second home?

Academic writing or thesis writing is an application in conducting research and registering an account of that research activity (as cited in Puspita, 2019). Also, it is a testimony to years of enthusiasm, apprehension, terror, misunderstanding, and passion. It is much more than just an output of learning but a formative process through which a student acquires what it means to be a researcher (Weatherall, 2019).

According to Al Fadda (2012), one of the fundamentals of academic writing is the ability of students to acquire and analyze important references to combine disparate thoughts and perspectives to build their unique voice. That is, a writer student should be able to take other people's opinions and put them in their own words, then index where those ideas came from (Dehkordi & Allami, 2012). More so, Puspita (2019) cited difficulty factors in thesis writing, to wit, personality factors, socio-cultural factors, and linguistic factors. Furthermore, the implementation of online learning adds a burden to the difficulties in thesis writing of the LIS students.

The CHED has highlighted online learning and blended learning as a feasible mode of education in the new normal, according to Cuarto & Cuarto (2021). Some of the means of instruction that the country has adopted to cope with the new normal in the educational system include printed and online modules, virtual courses, recorded videos and podcasts, radio broadcasts, and television shows.

Online learning is any learning arrangement with substantial online education elements (Nguyen, 2015). However, online learning can be effective in digitally advanced countries (Basilaia & Kvavadze (2020), attending the online research class creates more problems in understanding writing a thesis.

More so, Sun and Chen (2016) found that one of the fundamental challenges in online learning is to develop an online setting with a sense of community. Being alone in the study area and not communicating appropriately with classmates and the instructor hinders thesis writing learning.

Hence, the present endeavor aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors of difficulties in thesis writing among the Library and Information Science students?
2. How may the challenges experienced by LIS thesis writers during the Pandemic be described?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Difficulties in Thesis Writing

Several undergraduate students have various factors of the difficulties they face. The ideas, structure, lack of vocabulary, and rewrite or paraphrasing are examples of the problems in writing a thesis that the students commonly face. The difficulties in writing usually are found in academic writing (Dwihandini et al., 2013). The challenges in writing a thesis could be due to various factors, including the research's goal, the data used in the study, the study's findings, and the fundamental analysis is founded on a proven ratio (Turmudi, 2019).

Likewise, Oshima and Hogue (1999:3) agreed that academic writing is not easy. Moreover, they explain that writing academic papers needs a lot of study and practice to develop learners' writing skills. Academic anxiety among adolescents is conventional among adolescents (Gohain,2012). The thesis writers' works reveal the phenomena, facts, and issues even analyzed to conclude from the result of the analysis (Puspita, 2019). Furthermore, she cited difficulty factors in thesis writing, personality factors, socio-cultural factors, and linguistic factors.

The personality factors refer to the writers' internal factors identified from the students' affective factors. The socio-cultural aspects are the culture that establishes cognitive and affective behavior for each person. The last one is the linguistic factors capture the transfer of vocabulary and grammatical rules from the native language.

Since it is an academic result of the research written in a scientific method, the students should prepare themselves in writing a thesis because there are many problems found in writing a thesis. The students are confused about determining a topic, constructing the background, and getting references. Likewise, Abidden and Hassan (2011, as cited in Ekpoh 2016) noted that students experience challenges during their research. Some of the difficulties identified include unfamiliarity with the research process, challenges in topic selection, and lack of knowledge about research methodology. Sometimes, students' problems could be personal or family difficulties, financial pressure, and problems associated with employment.

One of the key reasons causing difficulty in writing a thesis, according to Ameen et al. (2018), is their lack of conceptual clarity about the necessary learning. The participants stated that they lacked critical thinking abilities, applied theory skills, and had failed to define the parameters of a research problem while selecting research problems. They also struggled to choose the right research strategy, method, and data gathering tools. The respondents stated they could generate study subject ideas from foreign literature, but due to a lack of conceptual clarity, they were unable to apply them exactly in the local context.

The problems students faced in thesis writing were mentioned in the Puspita (2019) study. Affective factors were referred regarded as personality factors. These elements influence a learner's decision to construct a research objective. It also has an impact on the study's data. The investigation's conclusions, as well as the fundamental analysis, are founded on the proven ratio. On the other hand, the socio-cultural components refer to culture as a way of life.

Similarly, Mullen (2020) developed three themes that emerged from her data analysis: (1) mentoring tactics were used; (2) the pandemic's actuality was unsettled; and (3) personal, professional growth opportunities were visible. Even though the pandemic made life more complicated, the online doctoral mentoring intervention fulfilled

dissertation-related needs and aided academic achievement in a Doctorate in Education program.

Also, Jain et al. (2021) concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic had had a severe influence on healthcare delivery and directly impacted medical students. The Post Graduates encounter numerous hurdles in completing their thesis work within the time limits set by their program. They have proposed strategies to address the difficulties faced by PGs in completing their master's thesis.

Online Learning

Even though schools' closure order, classes are still held. Meanwhile, face-to-face lessons are more likely to spread the virus, teaching and learning online is the most effective option. This podium poses a challenge to both teachers and students because it exposes them to something different (Abante et al., 2021).

Online learning can be a tool that can make the teaching-learning process more student-centered, more innovative, and even more flexible. Online learning is a learning experience in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices like mobile phones, laptops, etc., with internet access. Students can be anywhere (independent) to learn and interact with instructors and other students (Singh & Thurman, 2019).

Online learning is a flexible learning system that has been present in the Philippine Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for several years now. The student's belief that they would be academically successful despite changes in learning context is fundamental to progressive migration to an online learning environment (Panergayo & Mansujeto, 2020).

However, Pastor (2020) found that aside from internet connectivity, some of the problems that may be encountered by the students based on their statement are background noises, fairness in grading, expensive mobile loads, limited connectivity in the area, and financial problems.

Hence, online learning faces many challenges, from learners, educators, and content issues. It is a challenge for institutions to engage students and participate in education (Kebritchi et al., 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Mixed-methods research was used in this study. Mixed-methods research combines quantitative and qualitative data (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). To create an integrated, comprehensive understanding of the topic under inquiry, mixed methods take

advantage of the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches while improving on their weaknesses (Scammon et al., 2013).

The subject of the study was all the graduating students from the Bachelor of Library and Information Science (BLIS) degree program. A total of 92 students (58 females and 34 males) who were enrolled in the 2nd semester of S.Y. 2020-2021 at the College of Information and Communications Technology Bulacan State University, Philippines, comprised the respondents.

A validated survey questionnaire was adopted from Puspita (2019). The questionnaire was sent via messenger, and a focus group discussion with all the thesis group leaders was done via google meet. Descriptive statistics like frequency, percentage, and weighted mean were used to analyze the data gathered. As regards the qualitative part, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher takes all the themes from the focus group discussion that arise from the participants' responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 presents the difficulties in thesis writing in terms of Personality Factors. Table 1 indicates that most of the students agreed that they experienced difficulties in personality factors. The highest indicator that got a mean of 3.79 is finding the topic or thesis title. In any kind of researches, finding the topic is the hardest part. Most of the students agreed that they found it the most challenging part in writing their thesis. As cited in Ekpoh (2016), students' difficulties identified include the challenges in topic selection.

Also, Ameen et al. (2018) stated that one of the significant factors affecting difficulties in writing a thesis is selecting research problems. They lacked critical thinking skills, skills in applying theory in practice and experienced failure in defining the parameters of a research problem. How can they start working on their paper if they can't think critically justifying their topic? This difficulty has caused late presentations of their topic research, resulting in a chain reaction of late data gathering, data analysis, and aiming the target date of the final presentation.

Furthermore, the item "I have difficulty in identifying the thesis purposes" got the lowest mean of 3.40. It means that after they placed their thesis title, they were able to write down their literature review, which helps them understand what they are writing all about, which made it the least difficult from their experiences in writing the thesis.

Table 1. Students Difficulties in Personality Factors

| | Indicators | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|----|---|-------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | I have difficulty in deciding the topic of my thesis | 3.77 | Agree |
| 2 | I have difficulty in deciding the title of my thesis | 3.79 | Agree |
| 3 | I have difficulty in having prior knowledge due to the thesis topic | 3.57 | Agree |
| 4 | I have difficulty in identifying and formulating the thesis problem | 3.55 | Agree |
| 5 | I have difficulty in identifying the thesis purposes | 3.40 | Neutral |
| 6 | I have difficulty in writing a proper literature review | 3.52 | Agree |
| 7 | I have difficulty in deciding the method I would like to use in my thesis writing | 3.65 | Agree |
| 8 | I have difficulty in gaining the data of my thesis | 3.70 | Agree |
| 9 | I have difficulty in writing the findings of my thesis | 3.47 | Agree |
| 10 | I have difficulty writing a good thesis. | 3.70 | Agree |
| 11 | I have difficulty in thought due to a lot of ideas in writing my thesis | 3.54 | Agree |
| 12 | I have difficulty in financial during the thesis writing | 3.59 | Agree |
| 13 | I have difficulty in trying or to presentiment to write a thesis | 3.58 | Agree |
| 14 | I have difficulty being anxious in writing a thesis | 3.57 | Agree |
| 15 | I have difficulty in being aware of the current issues toward my thesis writing | 3.55 | Agree |
| 16 | I have difficulty in identifying some issues related to the thesis writing | 3.66 | Agree |
| 17 | I have difficulty being critical about some issues regarding the thesis writing | 3.70 | Agree |
| 18 | I have difficulty having intrinsic motivation toward the thesis writing | 3.57 | Agree |
| 19 | I have difficulty having extrinsic motivation in writing a thesis | 3.52 | Agree |
| | Weighted Mean | 3.60 | Agree |

As can be gleaned from Table 2, the highest indicator of difficulties in terms of socio-cultural factors are the statements: I have difficulty discussing the thesis writing with other students, and I have difficulty understanding the culture in the university standard format in thesis writing. The given statements both got a mean of 3.60 with a verbal interpretation of agree. The absence of face-to-face discussion with the teacher and classmates made it difficult for the thesis writers.

Table 2. Difficulties in Socio-Cultural Factors

| | Indicators | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|----|---|-------------|------------------------------|
| 20 | I have difficulty discussing the thesis writing with other students | 3.60 | Agree |
| 21 | I have difficulty in discussing the thesis writing with my thesis coordinator | 3.43 | Neutral |
| 22 | I have difficulty in understanding the culture in the university standard format in thesis writing | 3.60 | Agree |
| 23 | I have difficulty in knowing proper lexical items and linguistic units on the thesis writing | 3.44 | Neutral |
| 24 | I have difficulty connecting each sentence and forming it into a meaningful thesis | 3.43 | Neutral |
| 25 | I have difficulty in knowing the roles of the social context related to the study of thesis writing | 3.52 | Agree |
| 26 | I have difficulty in sustaining communication through speech styles on the thesis writing | 3.51 | Agree |
| | Weighted Mean | 3.50 | Neutral |

Similar to Sun and Chen (2016), who discovered that developing a feeling of community in an online environment is one of the key obstacles in online learning. It's difficult for each member of the thesis class to debate something they don't comprehend on the internet. Explaining oneself and one's opinions on the issue have been a strain for these students during the thesis writing process.

The statements “I have difficulty discussing the thesis writing with my thesis coordinator” and “I have difficulty connecting each sentence and forming it into a meaningful thesis.”, both with a mean of 3.43 and a verbal interpretation of neutral or precisely uncertain, are the lowest indicators of difficulties in terms of socio-cultural factors. The students find it very least because even in the absence of the face-to-face discussion of topics, they can reach their thesis coordinator through the different platforms to converse with each other. Likewise, with the other most minor difficulty of connecting each sentence and forming it into a meaningful thesis, students learned the art of browsing and the art of asking. Writing a thesis is an application in carrying out research and registering an account of that research activity (Puspita, 2019).

The last difficulty is the linguistic factors. Most of the students answered were neutral or uncertain. The highest indicator got a mean of 3.54 is I have difficulty deciding which set of linguistic units have to be deleted, replaced, supplied, and reordered on my thesis writing. It is hard to understand when the writers lack the knowledge or idea on the concept being discussed. It also captures the transfer of vocabulary and grammatical rules from the native language, as Puspita (2019) stated. It is also true with the lowest

indicator; I have difficulty paraphrasing sentences from the sources to my thesis writing which got a mean of 3.41 and verbal interpretation of neutral. It is indeed hard to paraphrase sentences when you lack knowledge about the topic.

Table 3. Difficulties in Linguistic Factors

| | Indicators | Mean | Verbal Interpretation |
|----|--|-------------|------------------------------|
| 27 | I have difficulty in minimalizing the error of the grammar on my thesis writing | 3.47 | Neutral |
| 28 | I have difficulty in paraphrasing sentences from the sources to my thesis writing | 3.41 | Neutral |
| 29 | I have difficulty in knowing which grammar use that supposed to be deleted replaced, supplied, and reordered on my thesis writing | 3.43 | Neutral |
| 30 | I have difficulty in deciding which set of linguistic units have to be deleted, replaced, supplied, and reordered on my thesis writing | 3.54 | Agree |
| | Weighted Mean | 3.46 | Neutral |

Table 4. Challenges Experienced by Thesis Writers During the Pandemic

| | Theme(s) |
|---|--|
| 1 | Financial (purchase mobile data attend the class) |
| 2 | Limited Resources (no library) |
| 3 | Laptop, gadget |
| 4 | Communication among members |
| 5 | Hard to convey ideas through online |
| 6 | No statistics subject (difficulty in research methodology) |

The researcher used Google Meet to have a focus group discussion with the thesis group leaders. The study's purpose and objectives were presented by the researcher. They are also told that their anonymity is confidential and that the information will only be used for research reasons. During the conversation, the most common issue raised by thesis writers is a financial issue. They have to buy a load every time they have a lesson because their thesis classes are online. Similarly, they will need to purchase mobile data services to meet with their group mates to discuss their thesis. This was a problem for almost all of them. The lack of resources was the second obstacle they faced when writing their idea. They claim that finding books and studies online is difficult for them. Because they are not allowed to go to the library, they do not have the opportunity to peruse tangible thesis books and hardbound copies, even though it is their first time writing a thesis.

In addition, a lack of electronic devices such as laptops, desktop computers, and tablets is an issue. Only a few of them have access to a computer. Once their papers have

been evaluated by their advisers and thesis coordinators, writers tend to revise and revise the content of their papers. The majority of respondents also stated that communication among members is difficult. Perhaps the most common mode of communication nowadays is on the internet, which also entails purchasing large quantities. Also, unlike face-to-face, when anyone can propose or comment on the paper, explaining matters about the issue is difficult online. There's also the difficulty of communicating ideas. Finally, the existing curriculum does not include a Statistics course, making it difficult for students to identify statistical tools to employ in their research.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Library and Information Science (LIS) students had difficulties writing their thesis during the Pandemic. The personality factors got the highest weighted mean compared to socio-cultural and linguistic factors. The personality factors are the writers' internal factors which can be identified from the affective aspects of the students.

When it comes to the difficulties faced by thesis writers, money plays an important role in practically all attempts. Communication, limited resources, and presenting ideas are all frequent financial issues.

The following are recommended based on the study's findings: (1) The addition of a Statistics course to the curriculum to reduce the complexity of preparing a thesis to assist students in understanding the tools they will need to produce their scholarly papers; (2) create a research handbook to assist thesis authors in their analysis; and (3) host a research symposium to educate students while the study is being conducted.

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