

DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES OF LIS STUDENTS IN THESIS WRITING DURING THE PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to determine the difficulties and challenges experienced by the first batch of Library and Information Science graduates in the College of Information and Communications Technology at Bulacan State University during the Pandemic. The respondents of the study are 92 students of 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. The study results regarding the difficulties regarding personal factors stated that they agreed and found a problem in this aspect. 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 and the students. 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 stated a worldwide public health emergency of international 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 had a severe impact on students, instructors, and educational organizations around the world (Mailizar et al., 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) 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 not possible happen overnight. In fact, numerous problems and challenges were linked to this. The Bachelor in Library of Information and Science was transferred to the College of Information and Communications Technology just a few years ago. Unfortunately, their first batch of graduates first experiences writing their thesis as culminating activity during the Pandemic.

As cited in Rahma (2020), writing is a complex, cognitively demanding activity. Also, Nunan (2003) states that writing is a work of the mind to invent ideas, think about expressing, and organizing them into statements and paragraphs that will be clear to a reader. A thesis is a piece of writing that offers information about a particular topic that you have researched. It is a form of academic writing and a partial requirement for students who will graduate from university.

Writing a thesis is an application in carrying out 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). Thesis work is done to 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 that can be identified from the students' affective factors. The socio-cultural aspects are the culture that establishes for each person in cognitive and affective behavior. 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, difficulties getting references, etc. 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.

Ameen et al. (2018) stated that one of the significant factors affecting difficulties in writing a thesis is their lack of conceptual clarity about the relevant learning. The participants mentioned that while 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. They also had difficulties in selecting an appropriate research design, method, and data collection techniques. The respondents believed that they could conceive research topic ideas from international literature; however, due to a lack of conceptual clarity, they were unable to use those precisely in the local context.

Moreso, the study of Puspita (2019) mentioned the factors of difficulties encountered by students in thesis writing. The personality factors which was referred to as affective factors. These will affect the decision of a learner to create the objective of the research, the data for the study, findings of the investigation, and the fundamental analysis based on the proved ratio. The next one is the socio-cultural factors which referred to culture as a way of life. There's an active system of rules, explicit and implicit, established by groups in order to ensure their survival. It involves attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors shared by a group but harbored differently by each specific unit within the group, communicating across generations, relatively stable but with the potential to change across time. The last one is the linguistic factors. This factor will first consider contrasts between native and target language and the effect of the first language on a second. Then see how the era of contrastive analysis gave way to a period of error analysis, its guiding concept of interlanguage, or what is also called learner language. It also captures the transfer of vocabulary and grammatical rules from the native language

Furthermore, the implementation of online learning adds a burden to the difficulties in thesis writing of the LIS students. One form of distance education is the so-called online learning. This learning occurs wholly or partly over the Internet. Online learning is claimed to be any learning arrangement with substantial elements of online education that is considered as online learning (Nguyen, 2015). Nowadays, online learning offers many educational means in numerous media. It can maintain real-time and asynchronous communication between instructors and learners and among different learners (Means et al., 2009).

Online learning can mean a learning experience entirely online (such as a course delivered or a degree obtained at a distance). It also combines online engagement with some face-to-face activity (often referred to as blended learning); it can be synchronous, asynchronous, or combining both. Likewise, Bates (2005) viewed online learning as an increasingly prevalent method used by organizations in several countries to

deliver chances and meet a growing and increasingly diverse student population (Rumble & Latchem, 2004). Attending the research class online creates more problems in understanding the concept of writing a thesis. Sun and Chen (2016) found that one of the fundamental challenges in online learning is to develop a sense of community in the online environment. 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 objectives:

1. Determine the factors of difficulties in thesis writing among the Library of Information and Science students; and
2. Identify the challenges experienced by LIS thesis writers during the Pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the mixed-methods type of research. Mixed-methods research integrates quantitative and qualitative data within a single study (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). Mixed methods take advantage of the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative procedures while improving on their flaws to provide an integrated, comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation (Scammon et al., 2013). The subject of the study is the 92 graduating BLIS (Bachelor of Library and Information Science) students enrolled in the 2nd semester of S.Y. 2020-2021. A validated survey questionnaire was adopted from Puspita (2019). The questionnaire was sent via messenger, and a focus group to all the thesis group leaders was done via google meet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The difficulties in thesis writing in terms of Personality Factors are shown in Table 1. The table indicates that the majority of the students agreed that they experienced difficulties in personality factors. The highest indicator that got a mean of 3.97 is finding the topic or thesis title. Perhaps this is the most common problem experienced by many writers. Contrary to the indicator which got the lowest mean of 3.40 is the difficulty in finding their purpose. Like Ekpoh (2016) cited work where she noted that students experience challenges during their research due to unfamiliarity with the research process and difficulties in topic selection.

As can be glean from the table, 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. Similar to the result of Sun and Chen (2016) where they found that one of the fundamental challenges in online learning is to develop a sense of community in the online environment. Each member in the thesis class finds it hard to discuss something they don't understand online. Explaining oneself and their thoughts about the topic is a burden these students have experienced during the writing of the thesis. The lowest indicators of difficulties in terms of socio-cultural factors are the statements *I have difficulty in discussing the thesis writing with my thesis coordinator*, and *I have difficulty connecting each sentence and forming it into a meaningful thesis* which both got a mean of 3.43 and a verbal interpretation of neutral or precisely uncertain. The hardship in dealing with the thesis coordinator is hindered by the absence of face-to-face discussion of topics. The process of connecting ideas as well as a real burden in writing a paper. Similar

Table 1. Students Difficulties in Personality Factors.

No	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	3.61	Agree

Table 2. Difficulties in Socio-Cultural Factors.

No	Indicators	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
20	I have difficulty in 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

to the study of Ameen et al. (2018), when they stated that one of the significant factors affecting difficulties in writing a thesis is their lack of conceptual clarity about the relevant learning. When writers lack conceptual clarity or the ideas about the topic, how can they connect each sentence to form a meaningful thesis? For sue, no concrete idea is formed.

The last difficulty is the linguistic factors. Most of the students answered are 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.

No	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 suppose 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	
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)

A focus group discussion with the thesis group leaders was done via google meet. The researcher explained the purpose and aims of the study. They are further informed about the confidentiality of their anonymity, and the information is solely for research purposes. During the discussion, the most cited problem among the thesis writers is about a financial matter. Since they have their thesis classes online, they have to buy a load every time they have their lessons. Likewise, meeting with their group mates to discuss their thesis needs them to purchase mobile data services. Almost all of them suffered from this issue. The second challenge they experienced in writing their thesis is the lack of resources. According to them, it is tough for them to look for literature and studies online. Thinking that it is their first time to write a thesis, they don't even have the chance to browse physical thesis books and hardbound copies because they are not allowed to go to the library.

Furthermore, the lack of gadgets like laptops, desktops, and tablets is also a problem. Very few of them own a computer. In thesis writing, writers tend to revise and revise the content of their papers once read by their advisers and thesis coordinators. Most of the respondents also answered that communication among members is quite hard. Perhaps the means of communication now is online, which also means buying loads. Another thing, explaining matter about the topic is rugged online, unlike face-to-face, where everyone can suggest or comment about the paper. In addition to this is the hardship in conveying ideas. Lastly, the current curriculum is not offering a Statistics subject; hence the students find it hard to identify statistical tools to be used in their study.

CONCLUSION

The study is a mixed-method type of research that determined the difficulties in thesis writing among the Library and Information Science students during the Pandemic. Among the given factors, the personality factors got a bit high weighted mean. Individuality speaks to this issue. People are unique with one another regarding the challenges experienced by students during the Pandemic. Writing a thesis can lessen the difficulty

if students are taught that each person is special and that people need to accept and embrace this reality. This truth will help almost everyone to do a job easier and successfully.

Regarding the challenges experienced by thesis writers, financial matters count a lot in almost all endeavors. Communication, limited resources, conveying ideas are common problems that root with financial. The inclusion of the Statistics subject in the curriculum can lessen the difficulty of thesis writing. It will help the students understand the tools they will be needing in writing their scholarly papers.

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