

Understanding Difficulties Faced by Graduate Students in Thesis Writing: Basis for Intervention

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Abstract

Pursuing a master's degree program is difficult as graduate students must hurdle thesis writing. This task is Herculean, and some factors that contribute to it need to be uncovered and understood to help graduate students overcome difficulties. This study sought to determine the difficulties experienced by graduate students in thesis writing to provide an intervention. Thirty-one (31) graduate students who had written their thesis participated in the study. The perceived level of difficulties encountered by students in thesis writing was assessed. Moreover, factors that hindered them from writing a research report were investigated. This descriptive research used a survey questionnaire and an unstructured interview to elicit responses from respondents. The results of the study showed that a lack of academic or technical writing skills and factors like heavy teaching loads and other work assignments, financial constraints or budgetary problems, personal problems, a lack of determination or commitment, a lack of interest and motivation to do research, and a low level of language proficiency caused the graduate students' struggles in doing their thesis. Suggested interventions for the students may be adopted to help them cope with thesis writing difficulties and enhance the teaching of research writing.

Keywords: Thesis writing, research writing difficulties, graduate students, descriptive research, research report, academic writing skills

Introduction

Thesis writing is the final ordeal for graduate students before they are allowed to graduate and obtain their master's degree. Writing a research report (thesis) is no joke because its "perplexity has become a worldwide phenomenon" (Lacaba, 2019). According to Campillan (2019), difficulties that arise in writing a thesis may either hinder or motivate students to finish their respective research. In most cases, graduate students at different universities are unable to finish their master's degree because of the difficulty of writing a research paper. By definition, research is a critical and challenging task that necessitates extensive subject knowledge, planning, care, and hard work (Qasem & Zayid, 2019). In the Philippines, for teachers to get promoted, they must have advanced education, i.e., enroll in graduate studies and obtain a master's degree. This is not easy, however, because after completing the academic requirements of a given graduate program, they need to write a thesis. Thesis writing is now a strict requirement in graduate programs, as mandated by Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order 15, s. of 2019.

CMO 15, s. 2019 focuses on the role of graduate programs that provide for "higher competencies in knowledge production (research), knowledge sharing and exchange (teaching), and knowledge application and utilization. This specific role makes writing a research report an indispensable requirement for those taking up a master's degree, particularly teachers.

Several studies have pointed out the difficulty of writing a research report or thesis, where students truly do struggle (Turmudi, 2020 and Steinke, 2011). For instance, Tiwari (2019) concludes by stating that writing an academic paper is not an easy task because students face numerous challenges, beginning with identifying their research interests, progressing to the collection and analysis of findings, and finally attempting to discuss them and develop implications and recommendations. The current situation of graduate students at ISU Ilagan is germane to the situations of respondents in previous studies reviewed by the proponent. After completing 36 units of academic requirements in the Master of Arts in Industrial Education (MAIE) program, graduate students have to enroll in a six-unit thesis writing subject. Here, their struggles begin. As someone who has taught Methods of Research at the graduate level participated in thesis defense panels, and advised numerous graduate students, the researcher has observed the significant challenges students face when it comes to writing their theses. These challenges span from the initial stages of conceptualizing a research topic to the completion of the entire thesis, including literature review, data collection and interpretation, and the formulation of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. For many students, thesis writing can seem like an insurmountable task, leading some to drop out of their programs altogether. Others persevere but find their time in graduate school prolonged until they finally complete their thesis. This is because thesis writing demands a high level of research skill, organization, time management, and critical analytical thinking.

Although some of the problems have already been identified, this study aimed to gather more detailed information on these problems and document them so that a proper solution or intervention could be made. Teachers who enroll in MAIE majors in Technology and Home Economics (THE) and Educational Management (EM) are in hopes of advancing their pedagogical knowledge and skills. Thus, they should be guided until they finish their degree. To guide them in doing their thesis by providing them with the necessary research knowledge and skills is of great importance. This is what this study ultimately hopes to achieve. Finally, this study supports the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations – quality education.

Objectives of the Study

This study investigated the challenges faced by graduate students in writing their thesis at ISU Ilagan Campus. Specifically, it aimed to:

1. Determine the students' perceived level of difficulties in thesis writing
2. Identify the factors that hinder students from writing their thesis.
3. Compare the perceptions of graduate students (MAIE-EM and MAIE-THE) of the level of difficulties in writing a thesis.
4. Suggest interventions to help graduate students cope with thesis writing difficulties.

Literature Review

What CMO No. 15, s. 2019 tells about Philippine Graduate Programs

Thesis writing is now a strict requirement to finish a master's degree program under CHED Memo 15, s. 2019. This policy issued by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) has upped the ante by raising the standards for graduate school programs across the country. This new policy aims to require more critical thinking and analytical skills from graduate students, as thesis writing requires students to demonstrate their ability to research, analyze, and synthesize information. It also encourages students to become more independent and self-directed learners, as they are required to find their research topics and design their research plans.

CMO No. 15, s. 2019 requires increased competencies in graduate students, which include doing research, among others. This law states that graduates must be able to conduct research, analyze data, and draw meaningful conclusions from their findings. These skills are essential for professionals in a variety of fields, including business, education, and healthcare. Hence, teachers pursuing graduate programs are expected to meet the demands of globalization, regional integration, internationalization of higher education, and the 4th Industrial Revolution by having cutting-edge teaching and learning content and methods. Additionally, they are expected to contribute to the advancement of knowledge through research. This is because CMO No. 15, s. 2019 emphasizes the importance of having graduates who are knowledgeable in research.

Hence, with this policy, every graduate student cannot skip writing a thesis to finish a master's degree program. This policy ensures that all students receive the same level of education and have the same opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Therefore, students need to be able to complete a thesis to earn their degree.

Problems Encountered by Students in Writing a Research Report

Because graduate students must research before they graduate, they need to cope with the rigors of thesis writing. But thesis writing is no easy task. Indeed, it is a difficult one and the following studies are just proofs of how difficult it is.

In 2020, Turmudi classified the most significant difficulties students face when writing theses or dissertations as academic language selection difficulties, time management, selection of appropriate research methodologies, identification of under-researched problems, lack of motivation among students, and finally relationship with a supervisor.

Meanwhile, Tiwari (2019) concludes by indicating that writing academic work is not an easy task because students are exposed to several challenges, ranging from identifying their research interests to collecting and analyzing the findings and then attempting to discuss them and develop implications and recommendations. One of the most common issues students face when writing theses is a lack of focus during the writing process. Students also lack the necessary language repertoire to provide clear sentences.

Al-Qaderi (2016) identified the most common challenges faced by MA and PhD students in the Arab world as a lack of a well-equipped library to access the necessary references and resources to complete the writing process. The difficult circumstances that students face in their social lives are a major barrier for them, and this applies to different Arab societies.

In 2016, Komba looked into the difficulties of writing theses and dissertations among postgraduate students in Tanzania. The study sample consisted of (103) research papers, which included (39) theses and (64) dissertations. According to the study, the most common challenges students face when writing a thesis are inappropriate presentation of different chapters of reports and a lack of academic writing skills. The common challenges students face when writing their thesis in English Educational Tribhuvan University were investigated by Tiwari (2019). The sample consisted of (15) students who had submitted their final draft of their thesis. The researcher used an interview to collect data. The study found that the unsupportive behavior of the supervisors and difficulties selecting the appropriate field or area of the study were the most common challenges when writing the thesis.

In the same vein, Puspita (2019) investigated the factors influencing students' difficulties in writing their thesis. The study interviewed 49 students. The data analysis revealed that students face significant challenges when writing their theses. Language deficits were the most difficult challenge for English students, followed by sociocultural factors and then personality factors. During the interview, it was discovered that the most common factors among students were a lack of confidence in deciding on a thesis topic and writing a proper literature review; difficulty understanding the university format of thesis writing; and difficulty paraphrasing sentences from the source to thesis writing.

In another study, Lestari (2020) discovered the common challenges that undergraduate students face when writing their thesis in The English Study Program. The study's sample size was 74 students, and the instruments used were a questionnaire and an interview. According to the study's findings, the most common difficulties that students face when writing a thesis are those related to students' English proficiency; time management; the selection of an appropriate research methodology; students' attitudes; students' research topic; co-advisor relationship; students' plagiarism; students' personalities; the large number of supervised students; advisor workload; and finally, difficulties with students' motivation.

Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia, Qasem and Zayid (2019) investigated the challenges that undergraduates face when writing proposals and research projects. The study sample included 60 undergraduates from the Departments of English and Computer Science. A questionnaire and informal interviews were used as research tools. The study's findings revealed that students face a high level of difficulty when writing research or conducting research projects. The study discovered a number of common challenges when writing research proposals and projects. These included difficulties in deciding on a research topic, a lack of adequate knowledge of research methodology, difficulties in locating relevant references, a lack of interest in research, a lack of understanding of the subject matter, and a lack of time, and research guidance.

Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza (2015) investigated the common mistakes made and challenges faced by postgraduate students when writing their theses using a sample of (80) master students and (20) lecturers. To collect data, the researchers conducted face-to-face interviews with lecturers and focus group discussions with master students. According to the study, master students made the following mistakes when writing their theses: broad and unclear topics, failure to state the problem, failure to identify the gap in the literature, using the wrong methodology, misunderstanding research terminologies, using the wrong citation style, and plagiarism. The study also revealed that students faced challenges such as the unavailability of supervisors for consultations, negative comments from supervisors, limited time, a lack of materials, and a lack of coordination. Meanwhile, in the Philippines Campillan (2019) looked into the difficulties in research writing among communication students at a private university. Based on the findings of the study, students struggled with formulating their research problem, writing their review of related literature, sampling their respondents, developing research instruments, transcribing interviews, and video production delays, among other things. They also encountered issues with coordination, plagiarism detection, and other challenges such as time constraints, the absence of research partners, personal issues, and other conflicts.

Similarly, Ocbian and Gamba (2015) determined graduate students' capabilities as well as their difficulties and the problems they met in the pursuit of writing research papers. In their study, they found the following to be of special difficulty to graduate students in the writing of a research paper or thesis: (1) looking for related literature and studies (2) determining the appropriate statistical tool (3) conceptualizing a research problem (4) determining the correct research methodology and procedure to be used (5) gathering data (6) presenting, analyzing and interpreting data (7) review of related literature and studies or theoretical and conceptual frameworks (8) writing abstract (9) discussion of results and findings (10) writing the introduction or background of the study (11) formulating the statement of the problem (12) conclusions and recommendations, and (13) acknowledging the sources of data or references.

Also revealed in the same study were the factors that hindered the graduate students in writing their thesis. These factors include (1) heavy teaching loads and other work assignments (2) financial constraints/budget (3) lack of interest and motivation to conduct research (4) lack of determination and commitment (5) low language proficiency level, and (6) personal problems.

Interventions Offered in Previous Studies

Writing a research report proves difficult as it was established in previous studies. However, the following interventions were offered in some research studies. In 2007, Hunter, et.al., discovered that faculty guided their students in writing their research papers and worked collaboratively. As a result, both respondents thought and acted in the same way, sharing the same ideas to solve the problems they encountered. However, they differed in how their personalities developed during the research process, with students believing that their socialization was improved and faculty believing that they were becoming scientists in the field. This concept provides insight into how a research intervention can improve research conduct, develop personality, and increase motivation to write other papers in their chosen field of internet research.

Mullan, et.al., (2014) emphasized the incorporation of research capability building into their curriculum to provide positive outcomes for graduating medical students. Students have the opportunity to check the authenticity of their learning experiences as the faculty in the

medical school deliver instructions that are all research-based. Their projects required medical schools to conduct hands-on research under the supervision of their medical faculty. Through self-perceived research experiences, their method enabled their students to develop research capability. Given the level of difficulties met by the graduate students and the factors that caused these difficulties, Ocbian and Gamba's (2015) study offered these interventions: (a) conduct of seminar workshops on the areas found to be difficult (b) provision for more reading materials like foreign and local research journals and other references in the college library (c) development of modules or instructional materials on the areas where the respondents have difficulty, and (d) attendance to or participation in research presentations, colloquiums, or in-house reviews. Writing a research report or thesis has proved to be difficult by several studies. Several reasons or factors contribute to its difficulty. Nonetheless, understanding these factors can truly help address the problem. The interventions offered in previous studies as mentioned above show how the challenges in writing a thesis could be overcome by thesis writers.

Methodology

This study used the descriptive research method in determining the level of difficulties encountered by graduate students in writing their thesis as well as the factors that make it difficult for them to write a thesis. Respondents of the study were thirty-one (31) graduate students of ISU Ilagan who had already written their master's thesis. Used as an instrument in this study was a survey questionnaire taken from the study of Ocbian and Gamba (2015). It was modified to suit the objectives of the current study. The questionnaire was used to measure or assess the level of difficulties in thesis writing as perceived by the graduate students and the factors that hinder them in doing their thesis. Unstructured interviews and focus group discussions were employed to elicit interventions and solutions from the students. Survey questionnaires were sent to the students by email or Facebook Messenger. An unstructured interview was likewise done via Facebook Messenger, phone call, or video call. Descriptive statistics was utilized to summarize the data gathered. These include frequency count, average weighted mean, and ranking. To describe the level of difficulty, the following scale was used:

Scale	Range	Description
5	4.20-5.00	Very much difficult
4	3.40-4.19	Much difficult
3	2.60-3.39	Moderately difficult
2	1.80-2.59	Less difficult
1	1.00-1.79	Not difficult

To compare the perceptions of the two groups, a t-test was used.

Results and Discussion

Students, Perceived Level of Difficulties in Thesis Writing

The difficulties experienced by graduate students in writing a thesis are shown in Table 1. Of the 15 areas or skills identified, "*presenting, analyzing and interpreting data*", obtained the highest mean (4.20) with the qualitative description of "very much difficult." This indicates that graduate students considered presenting, analyzing, and interpreting the results of their findings to be of great difficulty when writing their research report.

Similarly, Tiwari (2019) concluded that when writing a research paper, students are especially challenged by collecting and analyzing the findings and then attempting to discuss them and develop implications and recommendations. In like manner, Ocbian and Gamba (2015) found presenting, analyzing, and interpreting among other areas to be of special difficulty to graduate students writing their thesis. Writing Chapter 4 (Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data) poses a great challenge to thesis writers because this part of the thesis requires logic and much thinking. To many graduate students, it is a daunting undertaking because aside from doing a logical presentation of the results, they also give their analysis and interpretation of the study's findings. Also, they need to back their analysis and interpretation with related studies to make it sound and convincing. The literature they cite should either support or contradict the findings. Hence, time, patience, and great skill are needed.

To the students, "*searching for literature and studies*" was a much more difficult area as indicated by the mean of 4.19. They did struggle to find related literature to support their research topics. This finding is quite similar to that of Ocbian and Gamba (2015) who found graduate students experience a problem concerning looking for related literature and studies. The same is true with Qasem and Zayid (2019) who found undergraduate students having difficulties locating relevant references. One reason that makes it difficult for graduate students to look for literature and studies is the lack of materials or references (Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza, 2015) and the inability to find modern, specialized, and related references (Qasem and Zayid, 2019). Their lack of skill in searching for references using electronic databases and the lack of available references like research journals in the library cause problems (Al-Qaderi, 2016) for graduate students in writing their review of related literature and studies.

Another area that graduate students perceived to be much difficult is the "*review of related literature and studies*" (4.17). The students had some difficulty writing the review of related literature because of its tediousness and complexity. This is the same as the findings of Campillan (2019) and Puspita (2019) who discovered that students struggled with writing their review of related literature. Besides looking for good materials, writing the review of related literature and studies is one area requiring great skills among thesis writers. Thus, it is a difficult task to do.

TABLE 1. Skills/difficulties encountered by the graduate students in writing a thesis

Skills/Difficulties Encountered	Mean	Description
1. Conceptualizing a research problem title (research topic)	3.74	Much Difficult
2. Writing the introduction or background of the study	3.68	Much Difficult
3. Searching for literature and studies	4.19	Much Difficult
4. Gathering data	3.77	Much Difficult
5. Presenting, analyzing and interpreting data	4.20	Very Much Difficult
6. Writing review of related literature and studies	4.17	Much Difficult
7. Writing the conceptual/theoretical framework	3.74	Much Difficult
8. Writing the research abstract	3.26	Moderately Difficult
9. Writing the results and discussion	3.77	Much Difficult
10. Formulating the statement of the problem	3.73	Much Difficult
11. Writing conclusions and recommendations	3.52	Much Difficult
12. Writing citations and referencing	3.55	Much Difficult
13. Paraphrasing and quoting	3.68	Much Difficult
14. Determining the correct research methodology and procedures to be used	3.80	Much Difficult
15. Determining the appropriate statistical tool	3.81	Much Difficult
Overall Mean	3.77	Much Difficult

"*Determining the appropriate statistical tool*" to treat data was identified by students of much difficulty (3.81) as well as "*determining the correct research methodology and procedures to be used*" (3.80). Ocbian and Gamba (2015) had similar findings when they

found out that the respondents encountered problems in determining the appropriate statistical tool and appropriate research methodology and procedure to be used in writing their research report. The selection of correct research methodologies proved challenging to researchers as found in separate studies by Turmudi (2020) and Lestari (2020). It is difficult to determine the correct research methodology to be used in a study due to researchers' lack of knowledge of methodology (Qasem and Zayid, 2019), and consequently, they select the wrong methodology (Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza, 2015).

Selecting the right research methodologies and statistical tools is considered Waterloo for thesis writers. This is where they need the help and guidance of a methodologist and a statistician who could provide them with the right direction in their study. Picking wrong methodologies and statistical tools shall mislead the study and achieve wrong results.

Still, another skill or area where graduate students encountered a problem, considering it much difficult was "*writing the results and discussion*" (3.77). This is Chapter 4 of the thesis. They admitted having struggles writing and discussing their findings. Such difficulty was likewise encountered by the graduate students at Sorsogon State College as found in a study conducted by Ocbian and Gamba (2015). Writing results and discussion is yet another part of a thesis that demands scholarliness from research writers. Logical presentation of results coupled with correct analysis and citations is truly needed. These are important skills needed to write this thesis part. The results and discussion part should be written well so the conclusions of the study are sound.

Graduate students also perceived "*gathering data*" as a much difficult (3.77) problem. How to gather data from respondents was challenging for them as this was a taxing job. Since the pandemic is over, the thesis writers do face-to-face gathering of data i.e., they administer survey questionnaires and interview their respondents. This requires them to exert some effort in gathering the needed data. They need time, patience, and focus.

"*Conceptualizing a research problem title (research topic)*" was another challenging task encountered by graduate students. They considered it much difficult with a weighted mean of 3.74. The difficulty of title conceptualization among thesis writers was also found in several studies (Ocbian and Gamba, 2015; Qasem and Zayid, 2019; and Lestari, 2020). One specific problem identified is the difficulty of graduate students to select, and decide on a particular research topic (Puspita, 2019). Often, students spend much time searching for possible research topics.

"*Writing the conceptual/theoretical framework*" likewise proved to be much difficult (3.74) to graduate students. It is in this part of the study that they provide the road map of their study and explain the theories and constructs they use. They find it hard because they ought to give some logical explanations of the relationships of variables and give the overall directions of the study, citing some theories upon which their study is anchored. This part of the thesis was also found challenging by the respondents in the study of Ocbian and Gamba (2015).

An area or skill likewise perceived as much difficult by graduate students was "*formulating the statement of the problem*" (3.73). This part of the thesis is truly problematic among thesis writers and this was established in previous research (Turmudi, 2020; Campillan, 2019; and Ocbian & Gamba, 2015). The graduate students found this area of much difficulty since they could not break down the main problem into sub-problems and they did not know how to formulate descriptive and inferential questions.

"*Writing the introduction or background of the study*" was among those areas perceived much difficult (3.68) by the graduate students. This is the same experience shared by the graduate students of Sorsogon State College (Ocbian & Gamba, 2015). The introduction or background of the study is an important part of the thesis because it is where the researcher justifies the research. Apart from giving the current situation in the field, the thesis writer has to convincingly state the research gap, and by so doing he or she needs to cite some literature. Also, the writer has to mention therein the goal of the study. This part truly demands logical writing. The problem with many thesis writers was that they wrote broad and unclear topics, failed to state the problem, and could not identify the gap in the literature (Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza, 2015).

Still, another area identified as much difficult to graduate students was "*paraphrasing and quoting*" (3.68). Respondents in previous studies shared the same struggle with Puspita (2019) and Campillan (2019). To paraphrase is to restate a statement from another author using one's own words. When one paraphrases, he or she simplifies an idea. Graduate students had difficulty doing paraphrasing because they lacked the skill or patience to do it. They are tempted to lift ideas from previous studies and simply paste them into their paper (Ocbian & Gamba, 2015). This poses a great problem as it results in plagiarism. This is also true with quoting.

"*Writing citations and referencing*" was likewise identified as a much difficult (3.55) area or skill among the graduate students. Just like paraphrasing and quoting, citation writing and referencing were a struggle for thesis writers. Often, they forget to acknowledge or cite their sources in their paper (Ocbian & Gamba, 2015) and this poses a problem with plagiarism detection (Campillan, 2019). Moreover, it has been noted several times that graduate students commit wrong citation styles (Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza, 2015). They erred in following the correct style as prescribed by the school.

The last area or skill perceived as much difficult by the graduate students was "*writing conclusions and recommendations*" (3.52). The students struggled to write conclusions that would answer the problems of their study and recommendations that were based on the conclusions. They failed to align their conclusions and recommendations with the findings of their study. This problem was also identified by Ocbian & Gamba (2015). Of the 15 skills or difficulties in thesis writing, only "*writing the research abstract*" was perceived by graduate students to be moderately difficult (3.26). This means this skill is not as difficult to learn as the 14 others. However, writing the abstract is still difficult because it is the summary of the thesis. It is the thesis in a capsule. Writing has to follow some guiding principles which the thesis writers have to learn and commit to memory.

Finally, the overall weighted mean of the skills or difficulties in thesis writing as perceived by the graduate students was 3.77 described as "*much difficult*". This implies the great challenge being faced by graduate students in writing their research reports or theses. Moreover, this data denotes the need for enhanced academic writing skills to be mastered by thesis writers before they embark on writing their thesis, which is a colossal undertaking.

Factors Hindering Students from Writing their Thesis

The difficulties faced by the graduate students in writing their research papers or theses were not due to a lack of academic writing skills alone. There are also contributory factors as to why they could not submit their manuscripts on time and proceed to an oral defense. Table 2 below presents various factors that hinder graduate students from writing their theses. These were ranked by the students according to the degree of seriousness.

First in rank is "*heavy teaching load and other work assignments*". Many if not most of the graduate students of ISU Ilagan Graduate School were school teachers assigned in different public and private schools. They only attend graduate school on Saturdays. On weekdays they go to work and render not less than six (6) hours of teaching. According to them, although they have two two-hour breaks, these are devoted to teaching-related activities e.g., preparation of lesson plans, making of audio-visual aids, laboratory experiments, checking of test papers, and other similar activities (Ocbian & Gamba, 2015). Their teaching load is reduced only when they have administrative designations

but still, their time is used in performing their functions. Hence, they either had limited time (Manchishi, Ndhlovu, & Mwanza (2015) or lacked time (Qasem and Zayid, 2019) to do their thesis writing in school. Some of them admitted that their agency (Department of Education) even requires them to report on a Saturday for some teaching-related activities, making them physically and mentally exhausted.

The majority of the respondents explained that *“financial constraints/budgetary problems”* (second in rank) kept them from pursuing their thesis. As prices of prime commodities continue to increase, teachers need to tighten more their belts, meaning they have to live within their income. This makes it difficult for them to enroll and finish their thesis. Doing a thesis entails a lot of expenses from purchasing office supplies needed in the preparation of the paper to paying graduate defense fees.

“Personal problems” came third as a factor among the graduate students. Some of these personal problems include family problems or love life. Others include health-related problems.

TABLE 2. Factors that hinder graduate students from writing their thesis

Factors	Rank/Frequency						Overall Rank
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Heavy teaching load and other work assignments	16	9	3	1	0	2	1
Financial constraints/budgetary problem	12	11	3	2	3	0	2
Personal problems	1	7	10	5	2	6	3
Lack of determination or commitment	0	2	7	6	9	7	4
Lack of interest and motivation to do research	0	3	1	13	9	5	5
Low language proficiency level	2	0	7	4	8	10	6

Ranked fourth was the *“lack of determination or commitment.”* In an interview, the respondents admitted having no determination or commitment to finishing their thesis. This results from their divided attention or lack of focus. Because they are burdened with so many things, they cannot focus on writing their thesis. Their determination and commitment are weakened and eventually lost.

The fifth factor preventing graduate students from writing their thesis was a *“lack of interest and motivation to do research”*. The respondents admitted to having difficulty sustaining interest and motivation in doing their thesis. Since their primary mandate in school is instruction, doing research is considered by them to be an additional burden (Ocbian & Gamba, 2015). Most of them are required to pursue graduate programs primarily to secure promotion. Only very few are truly motivated to conduct research. Hence, their interest and motivation easily fade away. The last factor was *“low language proficiency level.”* With limited academic writing knowledge and experience, the respondents felt a lack of language proficiency. Because they had fears about writing their research reports, they were demotivated to even start the undertaking. In particular, they said they were afraid to write because they might have a poor language structure since they lacked the necessary language repertoire (Tiwari, 2019). Again, this problem is caused by a lack of academic writing skills (Komba, 2016) among graduate students. In addition to the identified factors, some respondents indicated during the interview that their not-so-good relationship with their advisers or supervisors was another factor that hindered them from pursuing their thesis (Turmudi, 2020; Lestari, 2020). They disclosed that they experienced difficulty communicating with their advisers. Moreover, their advisers were unsupportive of them. Instead of getting motivated through positive comments, they received negative remarks from their advisers when they went for consultations (Manchishi, Ndhlovu, and Mwanza, 2015).

Comparison between Perceptions of Graduate Students (MAIE-EM and MAIE-THE) of the Level of Difficulties in Thesis Writing

Table 3 presents the comparison of the perceptions of two groups of graduate students (MAIE-EM and MAIE-THE) regarding the level of difficulty in writing a thesis. The results show that there was no statistically significant difference in the perceived level of difficulty in thesis writing between students taking a Master of Arts in Industrial Education majoring in Educational Management (MAIE-EM) and those majoring in Technology and Home Economics (MAIE-THE). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H0) that there is no significant difference between the two groups in terms of perceived difficulty, is accepted.

TABLE 3. Difference between perceptions of MAIE-EM and MAIE-THE of the level of difficulties in writing a thesis.

Level of Difficulty	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	ρ-value	Decision	Remarks
MAIE-EM	3.767	0.167	-0.0946	0.9253	Accept H ₀	Not Significant
MAIE-THE	3.781	0.450				

From the above data, it can be deduced that both groups, MAIE-EM and MAIE-THE, perceived the difficulty level of thesis writing to be similar. That is, regardless of the major field, the graduate students experienced the same degree of difficulty across all areas or facets of thesis writing. In summary, the study suggests no differences in the perceived level of difficulty by the graduate students in writing a thesis, as both groups find it a truly challenging task.

Suggested Interventions to help Graduate Students Cope with Thesis Writing Difficulties

Table 4 provides a list of interventions suggested by the graduate students to cope with the rigors of writing a thesis. The list contains several research capability-building activities (Mullan, et.al, 2014) aimed at enhancing the overall research skills of students most especially their writing skills. Ranked first is the *“conduct of seminar-workshops on the areas found to be difficult”*. The Graduate School has to initiate the conduct of thesis writing workshops, inviting able speakers who will discuss the rudiments of thesis writing. That is, they not only discuss the principles or guides for writing a particular part of the thesis but also provide adequate samples that students could use as a template. The discussion should be holistic, as it covers the entire thesis. Activities or workshops should be authentic and help students write a meaningful output, applying the concepts learned through the lectures. Attending such training helps not only the students but also the faculty improve their instructional ability. Thus, speakers to be chosen shall come from the academe and research organizations who are active researchers themselves and have been teaching thesis writing and publishing papers in reputable research journals. Second, is the *“development of modules or instructional materials on the areas where the students have difficulty”*. Students perceived the necessity of having modules or instructional materials (IMs) for thesis writing. An IM is very important as an instructional guide for students who do thesis writing, as they can use it anytime and anywhere. The idea of modules is self-paced learning. Students can do the activities and check their own work, thereby improving their skills (Ocbian & Gamba, 2015). Students can refer to these IMs whenever they find time to do so. These instructional materials should likewise contain authentic samples of well-written theses as a ready guide. They should be written simply and clearly. Modules are important because they are effective ways of delivering instructions to learners. The third suggested intervention by students is *“attendance to or participation in research conferences, colloquiums, or in-house reviews.”* Activities such as research conferences, colloquiums, or in-house reviews (either local or international) are truly helpful in enhancing the research knowledge of researchers because these activities aim at discussing the results of conducted studies. Indeed, these activities will help students gain wider exposure to the field of research and knowledge about writing quality papers (Ocbian & Gamba, 2015).

TABLE 4. Students' suggested interventions to help them cope with thesis writing difficulties

Suggested Interventions	Rank/Frequency					Overall Rank
	1	2	3	4	5	
Conduct of seminar-workshops on the areas found to be difficult	15	11	2	3	0	1
Development of modules or instructional materials on the areas where the students have difficulty	10	7	7	4	3	2
Attendance to or participation in research conferences, colloquiums, or in-house reviews	2	8	8	8	5	3
School's subscription to online databases for easy searching for related literature and studies	3	3	4	10	11	4
Provision for more reading materials like foreign and local research journals and other references in the college library	1	2	10	6	12	5

The "school's subscription to online databases for easy searching for related literature and studies" was the fourth intervention suggested by the graduate students. To help graduate students produce quality research papers, the Campus has to subscribe to online databases such as the Philippine E-journals, an online collection of academic publications from different higher education institutions and professional organizations. Through subscriptions to this electronic database, students could gain easy access to various published studies in the Philippines and Asia, allowing them to easily locate abstracts, full articles, and links to related research materials. This way, graduate students may have the facility to write their thesis, particularly review related literature and studies. The last but equally important suggested intervention is the "provision for more reading materials like foreign and local research journals and other references in the college library". Because at the moment there is a dearth of references like books and research journals, the Graduate School may suggest lists of varied references, particularly research journals, to be acquired by the campus library. The acquisition can be done through a monthly subscription to publishers offering collections of locally and internationally published research journals. This will truly help graduate students gain access to different sources for their thesis writing endeavors.

Conclusions

Based on the above findings, this study concludes that the graduate students of ISU Ilagan Campus experience much difficulty in writing their thesis due to a lack of academic or technical writing skills and factors such as heavy teaching load and other work assignments, financial constraints or budgetary problems, personal problems, a lack of determination or commitment, a lack of interest and motivation to do research, and a low level of language proficiency. Regardless of their major field, graduate students consider thesis writing a challenging task that requires great effort and skill. However, with the help and support of the Graduate School and the school administration, the difficulties being faced by the students can be addressed accordingly.

Recommendations

In view of the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are forwarded:

1. The Campus may adopt and implement all the suggested interventions of the graduate students.
2. More intensive training in research writing should be provided, particularly in Methods of Research.
3. Graduate students should be encouraged to apply for and receive scholarship grants to ease the financial burden of thesis writing.
4. Assigned thesis advisers are encouraged to provide moral support to their advisees, seeing to it that they guide them from the start until the successful completion of their thesis writing.

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