



## Students Experience in Completing Thesis at Undergraduate Level

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Received 25 Feb 2022,  
Revised 29 Mar 2022,  
Accepted 31 Mar 2022

### Keywords

- ✓ Students Experience,
- ✓ Thesis,
- ✓ Undergraduate Level,
- ✓ Supervisors.

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### Abstract

A thesis is a researcher's most essential piece of writing. Students consider writing a research document in the form of a thesis to be the most difficult task. The study aimed to investigate students' experiences in completing a thesis and the problems they faced during the process of completing their research. The study will be helpful for both supervisors and students to learn about each other's problems and find solutions. The mixed-methods study attracted the participation of 37 students from three universities in Pakistan for quantitative data and 07 supervisors for qualitative data. The distribution of the questionnaires was conducted using a purposive sampling technique. Frequency and percentage were used to analyze quantitative data, while the Colaizzi method was used to analyze qualitative data. The findings of the study revealed that unsupportive behavior of the supervisors, difficulty in choosing a topic, difficulty in data collection, and data analysis are general problems faced by students. The results suggest that students experienced both physical and psychological problems during the thesis process.

### 1. Introduction

A thesis is the written outcome of a methodical study that follows a period of supervised research at a university [1]. Originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate structure, format, and documentation are all demonstrated in the final output [2]. It fosters scientific thinking and makes it easier to understand how to choose a research topic and problem, how to formulate research question(s) and objectives, how to organize and conduct a study, how to manage and evaluate data, and how to report a study [3]. Starting with the proposed study topic, reviewing the research proposal, submitting research ethics approval, collecting data, analyzing data, writing the final report, final examination, and publication of the work completed, the thesis process entails a sequence of actions. As a result, thesis writing includes multiple goals for students, including the ability to write scientific papers in the field of study, conduct research that can be accounted for in terms of content and research processes, and eventually, apply what they've learned in their scientific field [4,5]. The thesis process can be described as complex because students are expected to combine their knowledge and skills in understanding, analyzing, describing, and explaining problems linked to the scientific topic in which they are interested [6]. Writing a thesis is not as difficult as some people believe. Students, on the other hand, confront numerous problems when writing or even preparing for thesis writing [7]. Their challenges range from determining and conceiving of the investigation's focus to analyzing and

reporting the data gathered [8]. They seek extra assistance from their supervisors in order to complete their theses. Students are required to work separately and autonomously while completing their thesis. Students frequently run into roadblocks when working on their thesis [9]. One of the obligatory prerequisites for students to complete their college education is the completion of a thesis. The normal period provided to students to complete their thesis is one semester or six months in the final year of the lecture, although in practice, many students require more than six months to complete their thesis. However, it turns out that most students are stressed out when writing their thesis, which causes them to miss out on graduation [10]. Internal and external obstacles are classified into internal and external difficulties in completing the thesis. Laziness, low motivation, anxiety of meeting lecturers, and difficulties adjusting to supervisors are some of the internal challenges. External challenges include trouble adjusting time with supervisors, a shortage of guidance time, difficulty choosing themes, frequent revisions, the length of comments from lecturers, parental pressure to graduate promptly, financial difficulties, work, and ageing [11,12]. These impediments can have a negative influence on students' well-being or even raise their chance of developing health problems [13]. The obligations and problems that students face during the thesis process can feel like a huge burden, leading to unpleasant emotions. Low self-esteem, frustration, motivation loss, and stress are all symptoms of negative feelings [14]. Thus, the thesis is one of the most prevalent roadblocks for graduate students [15]. The study is aimed to investigate students' experiences in completing thesis and the problems they faced during the process of completing their research at undergraduate level.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Methodology**

A study using a mixed-method approach yields a better and broader understanding of the phenomenon than a study using either qualitative or quantitative methods. This integration also increases readers' trust in the findings and conclusions reached by researchers in the study [16]. Frequency and percentage were used to analyze quantitative data. In-depth interviews with supervisors were used to gather qualitative data. The Colaizzi method was used to analyze the qualitative data.

### **2.2 Data Collection and analysis**

Quantitative data was collected through administering the questionnaires. For that purpose, purposive sampling technique was used to collect data from undergraduate students who have completed their thesis. The five-point Likert scale was used to collect data. The sample size was selected using L R Gay Table which consisted of 37 respondents from three universities of Pakistan. Colaizzi's method was used to acquire qualitative data from 07 supervisors. Each supervisor was interviewed separately for 20-45 minutes, with audio recording taking place during the interview.

A verbatim transcript is the initial step in the qualitative data analysis process. The data will next be analyzed using the Colaizzi approach, which has seven phases. Understanding the substance of each transcript is the first step. It is possible to conduct it by listening to the audio and reading the transcript 5-8 times. When completing the thesis, the second stage involves marking or coding relevant phrases, sentences, or expressions from the participants linked to the experience. The coding results are saved in a single file with the participant's name (file 1). The third stage is to create units, which are words, sentences, and expressions that are linked together based on a common theme from different contributors (file 2). The fourth stage is reading the two files, grouping them into a single topic, and merging them into the main theme. The fifth stage entails combining all of the findings into a cohesive

theme. The researcher determines the main theme supported by data files 1 and 2 and discusses it with the study team at this point. The sixth stage entails writing out all of the topics that have been discovered, as well as including participant experience data. Finally, the seventh stage of the analysis confirms the findings by returning to the participants to explain the findings of the sixth stage and to ensure that the findings of the analysis are consistent with students' experiences [17].

## 2.2 Results

### Result of Quantitative Study

Quantitative research explores the correlations between variables in order to test objective notions. Instruments can then be used to measure these variables, resulting in a number of variables that can be analyzed using statistical methods. The final written report includes an introduction, literature, theory, methods, findings, and comments [18]. The result of quantitative data consisted of the responses of 37 university students, as shown in Tables 1 to 14.

**Table 01** I faced difficulty in choosing a topic.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	02	04	03	08	20	37
Percentage		5.40	10.81	8.10	21.62	54.05	100

**Table 02** Lack of my commitment/interest to the assigned task.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	05	06	02	10	14	37
Percentage		13.51	16.21	5.40	27.02	37.83	100

Table 01 shows that 75.67% of respondents agreed that they faced difficulty in choosing a topic. 16.21% of respondents disagreed, and 8.10% of respondents were neutral about this statement. This indicated that the majority of respondents faced difficulty in choosing a topic. Table 02 shows that 64.85% of respondents agreed with the statement. 29.72% of respondents disagreed, and 5.40% of respondents were neutral about this statement. This indicated that the majority of respondents had a lack of interest to the assigned task. Table 03 shows that 72.96% of respondents agreed with this statement. 27.01% of respondents disagreed with this statement. This indicated that the majority of respondents did not get enough time to complete the assigned task. Table 04 shows that 64.86% of respondents agreed with this statement. 32.43% of respondents disagreed, and 2.70% of respondents were neutral about this statement. This indicated that the majority of respondents were overburdened with the assigned task.

**Table 03** I did not get enough time to complete the assigned task.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	03	07	00	20	07	37
Percentage		8.10	18.91	-	54.05	18.91	100

**Table 04** I was overburdened with the assigned task.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	04	08	01	17	07	37
Percentage		10.81	21.62	2.70	45.94	18.91	100

**Table 05** I lacked sufficient financial resources.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	03	09	01	15	09	37
Percentage		8.10	24.32	2.70	40.54	24.32	100

**Table 05** shows that 64.86% of respondents agreed with this statement. 32.43% of respondents disagreed, and 2.70% of respondents were neutral about this statement. This indicated that the majority of respondents lacked sufficient financial resources.

**Table 06** I had inadequate discussions with my supervisor at regular intervals.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	04	08	02	14	09	37
Percentage		10.81	21.62	5.40	37.83	24.32	100

**Table 06** shows that 62.15% of respondents agreed with this statement. 32.43% of respondents disagreed, and 5.40% of respondents were neutral about this statement. This indicated that the majority of respondents had inadequate discussions with their supervisors at regular intervals. **Table 07** shows that 70.26% of respondents disagreed with this statement. 29.72% of respondents agreed with this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents disagreed with this statement.

**Table 07** My supervisor guided me properly.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	17	09	00	07	04	37
Percentage		45.94	24.32	-	18.91	10.81	100

**Table 08** I did not get adequate formats and examples of thesis writing.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	07	06	05	14	05	37
Percentage		18.91	16.21	13.51	37.83	13.51	100

**Table 08** shows that 51.34% of respondents agreed with this statement. 35.12% of respondents agreed, and 13.51% of respondents were neutral about this statement. This indicates that the majority of students did not get adequate formats and examples of thesis writing. **Table 09** shows that 56.75% of respondents agreed with this statement. 29.72% of respondents disagreed, and 13.51% were neutral about this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents did not get cooperation from their institute. **Table 10** shows that 56.75% of respondents agreed with this statement. 32.42% of respondents disagreed, and 10.81% were neutral about this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents did not get proper access to the digital library.

**Table 09** I did not get cooperation from my own institute.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	04	07	05	13	08	37
Percentage		10.81	18.91	13.51	35.13	21.62	100

**Table 10** I did not get proper access to the digital library.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	03	09	04	06	15	37
Percentage		8.10	24.32	10.81	16.21	40.54	100

**Table 11** I faced difficulty adjusting to the supervisor.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	02	08	02	17	08	37
Percentage		5.40	21.62	5.40	45.94	21.62	100

Table 11 shows that 67.56% of respondents agreed with this statement. 27.02% of respondents disagreed, and 5.40% of respondents were neutral about this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents faced difficulty adjusting to the supervisor.

**Table 12** I faced difficulty in finding themes.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	03	09	06	10	09	37
Percentage		8.10	24.32	16.21	27.02	24.32	100

Table 12 shows that 51.34% of respondents agreed with this statement. 32.42% of respondents disagreed, and 16.21% were neutral about this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents faced difficulty in finding themes.

**Table 13** I faced difficulty in gathering/collecting data.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	03	06	01	09	18	37
Percentage		8.10	16.21	2.70	24.32	48.64	100

Table 13 shows that 72.96% of respondents agreed with this statement. 24.31% of respondents disagreed, and 2.70% were neutral about this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents faced difficulty in gathering or collecting data.

**Table 14** I am satisfied with my thesis process.

Level	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Frequency	37	12	14	03	06	02	37
Percentage		32.43	37.83	8.10	16.21	5.40	100

Table 14 shows that 70.26% of respondents disagreed with this statement. 21.61% of respondents agreed, and 8.10% were neutral about this statement. This indicates that the majority of respondents were not satisfied with their thesis process.

### **Result of Qualitative Study**

Qualitative research entails looking into and understanding the importance that individuals or groups place on a social or human issue. Data collected in the participant's surroundings, data processing that evolves inductively from particular to broad themes, and the researcher's interpretations of the data are all part of the research process. The final written report's structure can be changed. Those that conduct this form of research advocate for an inductive approach to research, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of expressing a situation's complexity [18]. The result of the qualitative data consisted of the responses of 7 supervisors:

#### **Theme 1: Students tease while choosing topics**

Supervisors said that it varies from student to student, like how some students tease and ask irrelevant questions at an undergraduate level. Students are not interested as they are more interested in taking a course than doing research, so they are asking lame questions and teasing their supervisors.

Students take a very long time to choose their topics as they are either waiting for someone to help them choose a topic or asking their supervisors to assign a research topic to them.

*Students at the undergraduate level tease me while choosing research topics because they think that they can take a course rather than do research. They asked me to assign a research topic. And it takes too much time to select their research topic.*

#### **Theme 2: Problems of students**

There were lots of problems students faced, and they discussed their problems with their supervisors. The supervisors said that students have problems choosing topics, lack of interest in doing research, fear of plagiarism, and fear of thesis.

*I heard many problems from my research students: they have a fear of choosing their research topic, a fear of plagiarism, anxiety and stress issues during research, problems in doing literature reviews and data analysis, and for females, it is difficult to travel for data collection.*

The participants also discussed many other problems, including the availability of research supervisors.

*My students shared other problems, such as: the supervisors they like are sometimes not available to them; sometimes the supervisors are short of time as they cannot give proper time. Students are burdened because they are taking other courses while doing research. Students also face financial problems while conducting their research.*

#### **Theme 3: Most challenging thing while supervising thesis**

Supervisors said that they face many challenges, but the most challenging things while supervising are students who have no background or knowledge of research, a lack of interest from students and a shortage of time.

*The most challenging thing to me is the shortage of time, as supervisors have lots of other tasks to do other than research, while supervision is a full-time job and students have no background of research and have only one semester to complete their research at the undergraduate level.*

#### **Theme 4: Steps taken for the alleviation of problems in research**

Supervisors said that it should be planned from the beginning of the degree. Teachers should assign such tasks so that the students can develop the habit of creative writing.

*In my opinion, it should be planned and executed from the start of the degree to prepare the students for creative writing and rational thinking. There might be no subjects for research in one semester, and the institute should provide technological support for the poor students who do not have laptops or gadgets for doing research.*

#### **Theme 5: Physical changes during completion of their research**

Supervisors said that the students faced physical changes like health issues and eye issues.

*Students as well as supervisors face health issues such as back pain, eyesight issues and headaches.*

#### **Theme 6: Psychological changes during completion of their research**

The participants said that they observed psychological changes in students as they have stress issues and overburden.

*I have seen many psychological changes in students while they are completing their research studies as they are facing stress and sometimes fear of supervisors, and some students are very depressed due to research.*

#### **Theme 7: Supervisors does not guide them properly**

Supervisors say that they are giving their maximum time to the students, but students feel this because they have stress, so they say that the supervisor is short of time.

*I dealt with all the students properly and effectively and gave proper time to each student. A single supervisor has the responsibility of dealing with many students, so sometimes a student may be neglected, and then the student takes it negatively.*

*I give a proper schedule to my students, and when their assigned time is finished, I check their work, but those students who are not interested in research always make lame excuses.*

### **Conclusion**

- It's important to note that writing a thesis or dissertation is a difficult task. It is primarily the result of adequate direction and effective instruction. The findings of this study revealed that the most significant general issues faced by eighth semester students were lack of information, experience, funds, and regular meetings with supervisors. The most common concerns associated to the institute were determined to be a lack of research projects and a shortage of resources.
- When students finish their thesis, they feel the support of a positive support system on the one hand, but they also feel a loss of support on the other. During the thesis course, students experienced a variety of physical and psychological difficulties. Despite physical and psychological difficulties, students can analyze the thesis, learn from it, and hope that this course will continue to exist. Academic and psychological services are included in the integrated and comprehensive mentoring service programme, which might be one of the efforts to avoid and recognize discomfort in students while they are working on their thesis.

**Acknowledgement:** None

**Disclosure statement:** *Conflict of Interest:* The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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