



# **NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE GRADUATE STUDENTS' THESIS WRITING JOURNEY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of graduate students in writing their theses across four Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Bohol, Philippines, during the academic year 2024–2025. Using a narrative inquiry approach, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The study examined how institutional context, adviser-student relationships, and personal coping strategies shaped the thesis writing journey of graduate students. Findings revealed that participants commonly experienced thesis writing anxiety associated with perfectionism, fear of failure, time constraints, and language-related difficulties. Despite these challenges, the narratives also reflected growth, resilience, and academic transformation fostered through mentorship, peer support, and the development of scholarly identity. Variations in institutional contexts likewise influenced the students' experiences. Premier universities highlighted structured adviser support systems, rural institutions faced resource and accessibility limitations, while holistic learning environments emphasized emotional support and collaborative peer engagement. The study further revealed that the thesis writing journey, although demanding and emotionally exhausting, became a transformative academic experience where setbacks were reframed as opportunities for learning and personal growth. Based on the findings, the study recommends strengthening adviser-student relationships, providing capacity-building programs on qualitative research supervision, establishing peer writing support circles, and implementing context-responsive institutional support mechanisms for graduate students. By emphasizing resilience, meaning-making, and academic development rather than merely measuring anxiety quantitatively, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of graduate students within the Philippine higher education context.

**Keywords:** *Thesis Writing Experience, Graduate Students, Academic Resilience, Qualitative Experiences.*

## INTRODUCTION

Thesis completion is considered one of the most important milestones in the academic journey of graduate students. Beyond serving as a requirement for graduation, thesis writing challenges students' research competence, emotional resilience, critical thinking, and self-confidence. While some graduate students perceive the process as empowering and transformative, many experience significant stress and anxiety throughout the development of their thesis. Holmes et al. (2025) reported that more than 70 percent of graduate learners experience high levels of anxiety related to thesis writing. Although the prevalence of thesis-writing anxiety has been widely documented, much of the existing literature has focused primarily on quantitative measurements, leaving the lived experiences of graduate students less explored.

Previous studies revealed that thesis writing often becomes a source of emotional burden and academic pressure. Prabawati and Estria (2020) found that barriers encountered during thesis preparation may create feelings of helplessness, frustration, and self-doubt, which can slow students' academic progress and weaken their motivation to continue. Some graduate students even described feeling trapped between institutional expectations and personal insecurities, leading them to consider abandoning their research altogether. Similarly, Rohmah and Muslim (2021) and Liu and Ni (2015) emphasized that despite receiving adviser support, graduate students continue to experience academic and emotional struggles associated with fear of failure, perfectionism, lack of confidence, and language-related difficulties, particularly among non-native English speakers. These challenges often contribute to procrastination, emotional exhaustion, delayed completion, and diminished quality of scholarly work. One graduate student described the experience as "being drowned in expectations, and I was not even certain where to turn for help." Despite the growing body of literature on thesis-writing anxiety, existing studies have largely concentrated on identifying predictors, measuring levels of stress, and categorizing challenges using quantitative and thematic approaches. Limited attention has been given to understanding how graduate students personally interpret, negotiate, and assign meaning to their thesis-writing experiences through their own narratives (Ylijoki, 2001). More importantly, anxiety is frequently treated solely as an academic obstacle rather than as part of a broader process of growth, resilience, and scholarly transformation. Furthermore, students' experiences are often shaped by institutional culture, adviser relationships, peer support, and available academic resources, particularly within local contexts such as Higher Education Institutions in Bohol, Philippines.

Narrative inquiry offers an opportunity to examine thesis writing not merely as an academic requirement but as a deeply personal and transformative journey (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2019). Through storytelling and reflective meaning-making, graduate students reconstruct experiences of sleepless nights, repeated revisions, self-doubt, emotional

struggles, and eventual breakthroughs that contribute to the development of their scholarly identity. In this perspective, thesis-writing anxiety is not viewed only as a barrier but also as part of the process of becoming a researcher (Shinta, 2025). The narratives of graduate students reveal how experiences of fear, uncertainty, and failure may eventually be transformed into resilience, patience, confidence, and academic maturity. Anchored in both scholarly literature and observations of graduate students' lived realities, this study recognized thesis-writing anxiety as a universal yet deeply personal phenomenon. The study sought to explore the experiences of success and struggle encountered by graduate students during their thesis-writing journey, with emphasis on their challenges, coping strategies, emotional experiences, and personal insights. Through narrative inquiry, the study aimed to illuminate the emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of thesis writing while amplifying the voices of graduate students whose experiences are often underrepresented in academic discourse.

The study was grounded in Social Constructivism, which posits that knowledge and meaning are constructed through social interaction and lived experiences (Vygotsky, 1978; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Guided by the narrative inquiry framework of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the research viewed participants' stories as valuable sources of knowledge that reveal how graduate students make sense of their academic journeys within specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Likewise, the study adopted a constructivist and relational perspective that recognized reality as multiple, subjective, and shaped by relationships, emotions, and experiences. By documenting the narratives of graduate students across selected Higher Education Institutions in Bohol, Philippines, this study aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the human dimension of graduate education. The findings may help advisers and institutions recognize the emotional labor involved in thesis writing and encourage the development of more supportive, compassionate, and context-sensitive academic environments. Ultimately, the study hoped to promote a culture in which graduate students are empowered to complete their theses with confidence, resilience, and a stronger sense of scholarly identity.

## **Research Objective**

This paper explored the experiences of success and struggle that graduate students underwent during their thesis writing process, with emphasis on their challenges, coping strategies, and gained insights.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a narrative inquiry design to explore the lived experiences of graduate students in their thesis-writing journey. Narrative inquiry, according to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), focuses on understanding and interpreting participants' experiences through their stories. This design was appropriate because it allowed the

researcher to examine how graduate students described and made meaning of their struggles, coping strategies, and personal growth during thesis writing.

The study was anchored in a constructivist perspective, which recognizes that individuals construct meaning from their experiences within social and academic contexts. Through participants' narratives and reflections, the study explored the emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions of thesis writing. Narrative inquiry enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of how graduate students experienced anxiety, academic pressure, resilience, and transformation throughout the thesis-writing process.

## **Research Environment**

This study was conducted in four Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Bohol, Philippines, which were anonymized and referred to as HEI-1, HEI-2, HEI-3, and HEI-4 to ensure confidentiality. The participants were graduate students enrolled during the academic year 2024–2025, with at least two graduate students selected from the graduate programs offered by each institution.

HEI-1 offered graduate programs in English Language Teaching, Mathematics Teaching, Educational Management, Business Management, and Public Services Management. The institution was selected because of its established graduate programs and diverse student population.

HEI-2 was recognized for its strong academic programs, institutional support, and commitment to quality graduate education. Its comprehensive graduate offerings provided a suitable setting for examining varied thesis-writing experiences among graduate students.

HEI-3 represented a public university setting in a geographically isolated area of the province. It served students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and provided insights into the experiences of graduate students within a diverse academic and community environment.

HEI-4 was known for academic excellence and holistic student development. Its supportive educational environment and wide range of graduate programs made it relevant to the study of graduate students' thesis-writing experiences.

These institutions were purposively selected because they offered active graduate programs, had accessible locations within the province, and represented diverse academic contexts. The inclusion of these HEIs enabled the study to gather varied perspectives and richer narratives regarding the thesis-writing experiences of graduate students in Bohol.

## Research Participants

The participants of this study were graduate students from four anonymized Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Bohol, Philippines, identified as HEI-1, HEI-2, HEI-3, and HEI-4. The participants were selected from graduate programs offered by their respective institutions during the academic year 2024–2025.

A total of eight graduate students participated in the study, with two participants coming from each institution. The participants were selected based on the criteria that they had recently completed their thesis and successfully graduated during the academic year 2024–2025. Their experiences provided relevant narratives and insights into the challenges, coping strategies, and personal growth encountered throughout the thesis-writing process.

## Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide conducted through key informant interviews. This instrument was appropriate for narrative inquiry because it allowed participants to freely share and describe their thesis-writing experiences while enabling the researcher to guide the discussion toward the objectives of the study. The semi-structured interview questions focused on participants' experiences, challenges, coping strategies, emotional responses, adviser and peer interactions, and personal growth throughout the thesis-writing process. Open-ended questions were utilized to encourage participants to narrate their stories in their own words and provide rich, detailed, and meaningful accounts of their experiences. The interview guide was validated by experts in narrative inquiry and graduate education research to establish content validity. The validators examined the instrument in terms of clarity, relevance, comprehensiveness, and alignment with the objectives of the study. Their feedback and suggestions were incorporated to improve the quality and appropriateness of the interview questions. This validation process ensured that the instrument was capable of eliciting rich narratives and relevant data necessary for understanding the lived experiences of graduate students in their thesis-writing journey.

## Research Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in several phases to ensure the gathering of rich and meaningful narratives regarding the thesis-writing experiences of graduate students.

First, the researcher coordinated with the graduate school offices of the selected Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to identify and recruit qualified participants. Invitation letters explaining the purpose of the study, participants' rights, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were provided to the selected graduate students. An overview of the interview guide was also given before the conduct of the interviews to help participants prepare and reflect on their experiences.

Second, semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was held in a quiet and comfortable location chosen by the participants to encourage openness and convenience. With the participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and documentation. The interview questions focused on participants' experiences, struggles, coping strategies, emotional responses, and personal insights during the thesis-writing process. Probing questions were also utilized to obtain more detailed and meaningful responses.

Third, field notes and observations were recorded during the interviews to capture non-verbal cues, emotional expressions, and contextual details that could enrich the narratives. Observations regarding participants' reactions and the overall interview environment were likewise documented to support reflexivity and interpretation.

Finally, the recorded interviews were transcribed immediately after each session to preserve the accuracy and completeness of the data. The transcripts were reviewed and verified using the audio recordings and field notes to ensure consistency, clarity, and contextual accuracy before the analysis process.

## RESULTS

This section presents the systematic analysis and interpretation of the narratives gathered from graduate students regarding their thesis-writing experiences in selected Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Bohol. Guided by narrative inquiry and Reflexive Thematic Analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006), the section discusses the major codes, categories, and themes that emerged from the participants' stories. The findings are organized into four thematic matrices: Matrix 1 focuses on the participants' overall thesis-writing experiences; Matrix 2 presents the challenges encountered during the thesis process; Matrix 3 discusses the coping strategies utilized by the participants; and Matrix 4 highlights the insights, realizations, and lessons gained throughout their thesis-writing journey. The analysis provides a deeper understanding of the lived experiences, emotional struggles, coping mechanisms, and personal growth of graduate students while completing their theses. Furthermore, the findings serve as a basis for recommendations aimed at strengthening thesis support systems, improving graduate programs, and enhancing advisory practices within Higher Education Institutions.

### Matrix per Aspect of Inquiry

#### Matrix 1. Overall Experience of Graduate Students in their Thesis Writing Journey

Codes	Category	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ experiencing productive and unmotivated days</li> <li>▪ tiring and overwhelming, mixed emotions</li> <li>▪ feeling disappointed</li> </ul>	Affective Swings	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ it's like a rollercoaster-plenty of challenges</li> </ul>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ sounds nice but burden hits when writing manuscript</li> <li>▪ honestly very challenging, the whole process is like rollercoaster-some productive days</li> </ul>	Emotional Dynamics	Emotional Rollercoaster Journey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ so tiring and overwhelming with mixed emotions</li> <li>▪ overwhelmed at beginning by enormous scope and unsure how to start</li> </ul>	Initiation Overwhelm	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ balancing work and time as student and teacher</li> </ul>	Work-Study Conflict	Balancing Demands
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ overwhelming; still working while writing thesis amid lots of workplace activities</li> </ul>	Role Strain	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ nothing moves if not working on it</li> <li>▪ nothing happens if laziness arises because only you can complete it</li> </ul>	Personal Accountability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ endless process of submitting drafts</li> <li>▪ waiting feedback, revising again</li> </ul>	Revision Endurance	Endurance and Fortitude despite Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ going to adviser with many varying corrections</li> <li>▪ hard to catch her at school because she's busy</li> </ul>	Adviser Accessibility	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ crying sessions especially when revisions come after thinking it's correct</li> <li>▪ frustration when initial ideas didn't align with results or revisions piled up</li> </ul>	Emotional Toll	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ challenging yet fulfilling—lots of challenges and struggles</li> <li>▪ fulfilling when you complete or achieve what needs to be done</li> <li>▪ really challenging et enjoyed doing it, surprisingly liked the process</li> </ul>	Redemptive Fulfillment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ learning new things during data interpretation that excited me</li> <li>▪ disappointing but really appreciating the experience, worth all the struggles</li> <li>▪ mixture of intense challenges, meaningful discoveries, personal growth</li> </ul>	Growth Amid Trials	Personal Fulfillment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ truly requires patience, hard work, commitment, consistent effort</li> <li>▪ finally breathing after gathering needed data, grateful for the respondents who gave time</li> </ul>	Completion Relief	

Matrix 1 reveals that the thesis-writing journey of graduate students was not merely an academic undertaking but also a deeply emotional and transformative experience. The narratives reflected emotional struggles, competing responsibilities, perseverance, and eventual fulfillment throughout the thesis process. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: Emotional Rollercoaster Journey, Balancing Demands, Endurance and Fortitude despite Challenges, and Personal Fulfillment. These themes collectively illustrated the complex realities encountered by graduate students while completing their theses.

## Theme 1: Emotional Rollercoaster Journey

The theme *Emotional Rollercoaster Journey* captured the fluctuating emotional experiences of graduate students throughout the thesis-writing process. Participants described their journey as exhausting, overwhelming, and emotionally unstable, characterized by productive days followed by periods of discouragement and lack of motivation. The narratives revealed that thesis writing involved constant emotional transitions influenced by academic pressure, uncertainty, and self-doubt.

### *Sub-theme 1: Affective Swings*

Affective swings referred to the shifting emotional states experienced by graduate students while writing their thesis. Participants described alternating periods of productivity and demotivation, often accompanied by feelings of exhaustion and disappointment. These fluctuations demonstrated that progress in thesis writing was rarely linear and was strongly influenced by emotional and psychological conditions. The findings suggested that thesis writing was not solely an intellectual activity but also an emotionally demanding process requiring students to continuously regulate their emotions. Moments of progress generated hope and confidence, while setbacks and unmet expectations often weakened motivation and self-belief. Despite these struggles, the emotional fluctuations also contributed to the development of emotional resilience and perseverance among graduate students.

### *Sub-theme 2: Emotional Dynamics*

Emotional dynamics referred to the broader and more intense emotional experiences associated with the thesis-writing journey. Participants commonly described the process as a “rollercoaster,” reflecting the unpredictable shifts between moments of success and periods of frustration. The findings highlighted the non-linear nature of thesis writing, where revisions, delays, and academic uncertainties continuously shaped students’ emotional conditions. The participants’ narratives also revealed that external responsibilities such as work and personal obligations intensified their emotional stress. As graduate students balanced multiple roles, even minor setbacks during thesis writing often became emotionally overwhelming. These findings emphasized that thesis writing involved not only cognitive challenges but also significant emotional labor.

### *Sub-theme 3: Initiation Overwhelm*

Initiation overwhelm described the confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty experienced during the early stages of thesis writing. Participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the scope and complexity of research, particularly when they were unsure how to begin the process. The lack of clarity and unfamiliarity with research requirements contributed to feelings of cognitive overload and self-doubt. The findings further revealed that the transition from theoretical learning to actual research implementation became a major source of stress among graduate students. Although participants possessed academic and professional experience, thesis writing introduced a new level of independence and

complexity that challenged their confidence. However, the narratives showed that these initial struggles gradually became opportunities for adaptation, learning, and growth.

## **Theme 2: Balancing Demands**

The theme *Balancing Demands* highlighted the struggles of graduate students in managing multiple responsibilities while completing their thesis. Most participants were employed professionals who simultaneously performed academic, work-related, and personal obligations. This theme consisted of the sub-themes Work-Study Conflict, Role Strain, and Personal Accountability.

### *Sub-theme 1: Work-Study Conflict*

Work-study conflict referred to the difficulty of balancing professional responsibilities with academic demands. Participants described experiencing exhaustion and divided attention as they attempted to fulfill work obligations while simultaneously writing their thesis. The findings showed that thesis writing required long-term focus and commitment, which often conflicted with the immediate demands of professional work. This conflict extended beyond time management and involved constant prioritization between academic and professional responsibilities. Graduate students frequently sacrificed personal time, rest, and leisure to meet both work and thesis deadlines. Despite these challenges, the participants demonstrated resilience by learning to manage competing responsibilities and adapt to demanding schedules.

### *Sub-theme 2: Role Strain*

Role strain referred to the pressure resulting from simultaneously fulfilling the roles of employee, student, researcher, and, in some cases, teacher or family member. Participants experienced emotional and mental stress due to the conflicting expectations associated with these responsibilities. Professional obligations demanded immediate attention, while thesis writing required sustained concentration and continuous effort. The findings revealed that role strain contributed to feelings of dissatisfaction, guilt, and emotional fatigue, as participants often believed they were unable to perform effectively in either role. Nevertheless, these experiences also promoted flexibility, adaptability, and resilience as graduate students learned to manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously.

### *Sub-theme 3: Personal Accountability*

Personal accountability emphasized that thesis completion ultimately depended on the students themselves. Unlike structured classroom activities, thesis writing required self-discipline, initiative, and consistent effort. Participants recognized that progress would only occur through their personal commitment and willingness to continue despite difficulties. The findings indicated that graduate students developed independence and self-direction throughout the thesis-writing process. Although the responsibility created

pressure and stress, it also encouraged students to become more disciplined, accountable, and persistent in accomplishing long-term academic goals.

### **Theme 3: Endurance and Fortitude despite Challenges**

The theme *Endurance and Fortitude despite Challenges* reflected the perseverance, patience, and emotional strength demonstrated by graduate students throughout the thesis-writing process. Despite repeated revisions, adviser-related difficulties, and emotional exhaustion, participants continued working toward the completion of their thesis. This theme consisted of the sub-themes Revision Endurance, Adviser Accessibility, and Emotional Toll.

#### *Sub-theme 1: Revision Endurance*

Revision endurance referred to the participants' ability to persist despite the repetitive and demanding process of revisions. Graduate students described thesis writing as an endless cycle of submitting drafts, waiting for feedback, and revising their work repeatedly under time pressure.

The findings revealed that continuous revisions created both cognitive and emotional exhaustion among participants. Repeated corrections often made graduate students feel frustrated and discouraged, especially when substantial revisions were required despite their efforts. However, these experiences also strengthened their patience, determination, and willingness to improve the quality of their research outputs. The narratives further indicated that revision became an essential part of the learning process. Although the repetitive nature of revisions was tiring, participants gradually recognized that each correction contributed to their academic growth, critical thinking, and research competence. Through endurance, graduate students developed persistence and discipline necessary to complete long-term academic tasks.

#### *Sub-theme 2: Adviser Accessibility*

Adviser accessibility referred to the challenges experienced by graduate students in communicating and consulting with their thesis advisers. Participants shared difficulties in meeting advisers regularly due to busy schedules, limited availability, and varying corrections provided during consultations. The findings showed that limited adviser accessibility often delayed progress and increased uncertainty among graduate students. Waiting for consultations and feedback created frustration, particularly when participants struggled to clarify revisions and expectations. Nevertheless, these challenges also encouraged graduate students to become more patient, independent, and proactive in managing their thesis work. Despite the difficulties, participants acknowledged the importance of adviser guidance throughout the thesis process. Adviser consultations, even when challenging to schedule, remained essential in helping students improve their research and maintain academic direction.

### *Sub-theme 3: Emotional Toll*

Emotional toll referred to the emotional burden and psychological strain experienced by graduate students throughout thesis writing. Participants described moments of frustration, disappointment, emotional breakdowns, and crying sessions, especially when revisions accumulated or research results did not align with expectations. The findings revealed that thesis writing significantly affected participants' emotional well-being. Academic pressure, uncertainty, repeated corrections, and unmet expectations contributed to feelings of stress, anxiety, and exhaustion. These emotional experiences highlighted that thesis writing involved not only intellectual labor but also emotional endurance. However, despite experiencing emotional distress, participants continued to persevere and adapt. The emotional struggles they encountered gradually contributed to the development of resilience, emotional maturity, and stronger coping capacities throughout the thesis-writing journey.

## **Theme 4: Personal Fulfillment**

The theme *Personal Fulfillment* captured the sense of achievement, growth, and satisfaction experienced by graduate students upon overcoming the challenges of thesis writing. Despite the difficulties encountered throughout the process, participants ultimately viewed the experience as meaningful, rewarding, and transformative. This theme consisted of the sub-themes Redemptive Fulfillment, Growth Amid Trials, and Completion Relief.

### *Sub-theme 1: Redemptive Fulfillment*

Redemptive fulfillment referred to the rewarding feeling experienced by graduate students after completing significant portions of their thesis or achieving their academic goals. Participants described thesis writing as challenging yet fulfilling, emphasizing that the hardships became worthwhile once they saw their accomplishments. The findings revealed that fulfillment emerged not from the absence of struggles but from overcoming them. Participants appreciated the process more deeply because of the sacrifices, patience, and persistence required throughout the journey. The successful completion of tasks and milestones generated pride, satisfaction, and renewed confidence in their capabilities. The narratives further showed that participants gradually reframed their struggles as meaningful experiences that contributed to personal and academic achievement. Thesis writing became not only an academic requirement but also a source of personal validation and accomplishment.

### *Sub-theme 2: Growth Amid Trials*

Growth amid trials referred to the personal and intellectual development experienced by graduate students despite the hardships encountered during thesis writing. Participants shared that they learned new knowledge, developed research skills, and discovered personal strengths while navigating challenges. The findings indicated that difficult experiences often became opportunities for growth and self-discovery.

Participants described moments of excitement during data interpretation, appreciation for the learning process, and recognition of their own resilience throughout the thesis journey. The narratives highlighted that growth emerged through continuous adaptation, reflection, and perseverance. Graduate students became more patient, confident, and academically capable as they confronted and overcame various struggles associated with thesis writing.

*Sub-theme 3: Completion Relief*

Completion relief referred to the emotional release and sense of relief experienced after accomplishing major thesis requirements and completing the research process. Participants described finally being able to “breathe” after gathering data and finishing demanding academic tasks. The findings revealed that thesis completion brought feelings of gratitude, relief, and emotional release among graduate students. Participants recognized that the journey required patience, hard work, commitment, and consistent effort, making completion highly meaningful and rewarding. Beyond relief, the completion of the thesis also symbolized achievement and transformation. Graduate students viewed their success as evidence of their perseverance, resilience, and capacity to overcome difficulties. These experiences strengthened their confidence and provided a lasting sense of accomplishment throughout their academic and personal lives.

**Matrix 2. Challenges Encountered**

Codes	Category	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ balancing work and school are hard</li> <li>▪ balancing work and thesis, get tired after work</li> </ul>	Work-Life Balance Struggles	Time Management Conflicts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ less sleep to finish every part of each chapter</li> </ul>	Daily Routine Disruptions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ juggling time while doing thesis writing and handling responsibilities as full-time teacher</li> <li>▪ managing time while teaching and studying</li> </ul>	Professional Prioritization Pressures	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ financial problem</li> <li>▪ financial challenge</li> <li>▪ transport and snacks for adviser</li> </ul>	Financial Pressures	Resource Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ gave snacks to participants so they would answer</li> <li>▪ expenses for tokens</li> </ul>	Participant Incentive Costs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ shocked by large expenses</li> <li>▪ financial constraints</li> </ul>	Overall Financial Strain	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ broken laptop</li> <li>▪ no standardized instrument</li> </ul>	Logistical Barriers	Access and Availability Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ hard finding participants</li> <li>▪ participants unavailable</li> <li>▪ some think answering is burden</li> </ul>	Participant Access Hurdles	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ going back and forth to school for adviser meeting</li> <li>▪ hard in getting data</li> <li>▪ hard to be absent for study</li> <li>▪ had to go back multiple times</li> <li>▪ chasing panelists' schedule</li> </ul>	Repeated Travel Demands	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the thesis adviser is the one causing me to take a long time to finish, if I get my paper checked, correcting it would be too much hassle</li> <li>▪ hard constructing English since not English major</li> <li>▪ drained from lack of accuracy</li> <li>▪ school demands from master's program</li> </ul>	Academic Process Hurdles	Research and Revision Demands
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ finding title and topic is hardest</li> </ul>	Topic Selection Struggles	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ struggled with procrastination</li> <li>▪ constant pressure</li> <li>▪ doubt about finishing</li> </ul>	Procrastination and Doubt Cycles	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ many revisions, time shortage</li> <li>▪ undergoing endless revisions under time pressure</li> </ul>	Revision Overload	Emotional and Relational Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ scattered focus thinking about challenges</li> <li>▪ handling several coordinators and principal tasks prioritized</li> <li>▪ less time to sleep</li> </ul>	Personal Sacrifices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ took unpaid personal leave every school visit</li> <li>▪ no one understands why studying is important</li> <li>▪ prefer no salary than miss school</li> </ul>	Income and Leave Sacrifices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ less time for family</li> <li>▪ limited bonding moments with family due because of thesis writing</li> </ul>	Family Time Losses	

Matrix 2 presents the lived challenges encountered by graduate students during their thesis-writing journey. The findings revealed that the participants experienced interconnected academic, emotional, financial, logistical, and relational difficulties throughout the process. Five major themes emerged from the analysis: Time Management Conflicts, Resource Constraints, Access and Availability Issues, Research and Revision Demands, and Emotional and Relational Costs. These themes illustrate the complex realities faced by graduate students while balancing academic responsibilities with professional and personal obligations.

### Theme 1: Time Management Conflicts

The theme *Time Management Conflicts* highlighted the difficulty of balancing academic requirements with work and personal responsibilities. Graduate students struggled to allocate sufficient time for thesis writing while fulfilling professional duties and maintaining personal well-being.

#### *Sub-theme 1: Work-Life Balance Struggles*

Work-life balance struggles reflected the participants' difficulty in managing both employment and academic responsibilities simultaneously. Most participants were employed professionals who experienced exhaustion after work, leaving limited energy and time for thesis writing. The findings showed that balancing work and academic demands often resulted in physical fatigue, emotional stress, and reduced productivity. Despite these difficulties, the participants continued to fulfill both roles through

determination and commitment. Their experiences demonstrated resilience while also emphasizing the need for institutional support mechanisms responsive to the realities of working graduate students.

### *Sub-theme 2: Daily Routine Disruptions*

Daily routine disruptions referred to the changes in participants' normal routines caused by thesis-writing demands. Participants reported sleep deprivation, irregular schedules, lack of rest, and reduced time for self-care due to deadlines and academic requirements. The findings indicated that disrupted routines contributed to exhaustion, stress, and emotional instability. Although these sacrifices reflected the participants' commitment to completing their thesis, they also highlighted the importance of maintaining balance and promoting healthier academic practices.

### *Sub-theme 3: Professional Prioritization Pressures*

Professional prioritization pressures described the conflict between workplace obligations and thesis-writing responsibilities. Participants frequently prioritized professional duties because of immediate institutional demands, causing thesis writing to be postponed or delayed. The findings revealed that this imbalance often generated frustration, stress, and self-doubt among graduate students. Nevertheless, participants demonstrated adaptability by maximizing limited time and developing strategies to cope with competing responsibilities.

## **Theme 2: Resource Constraints**

The theme *Resource Constraints* emphasized the financial difficulties experienced by graduate students throughout the thesis-writing process. Participants encountered various expenses related to research, transportation, materials, and data collection.

### *Sub-theme 1: Financial Pressures*

Financial pressures referred to the direct expenses associated with thesis writing, including transportation, printing, adviser-related costs, and research materials. Participants expressed difficulty in managing these expenses alongside their personal and family obligations. The findings showed that financial limitations sometimes delayed research activities and increased stress among graduate students. Despite these challenges, participants remained resourceful and continued their research through careful budgeting and prioritization of expenses.

### *Sub-theme 2: Participant Incentive Costs*

Participant incentive costs referred to the additional expenses incurred during data collection, such as providing snacks or small incentives to respondents. Participants acknowledged that these costs were necessary to encourage participation and ensure successful data gathering. The findings highlighted that data collection involved hidden

financial demands that were often overlooked. Although participants willingly invested personal resources into their research, the narratives suggested the need for institutional support for research-related activities.

### *Sub-theme 3: Overall Financial Strain*

Overall financial strain represented the cumulative economic burden experienced throughout the thesis-writing process. Participants described feeling overwhelmed by the total expenses required to complete their thesis while simultaneously managing work and family responsibilities. The findings revealed that financial concerns affected not only academic progress but also emotional well-being and motivation. However, despite experiencing financial hardships, graduate students remained determined to complete their studies, demonstrating perseverance and commitment.

## **Theme 3: Access and Availability Issues**

The theme *Access and Availability Issues* focused on logistical and accessibility problems that disrupted the thesis-writing process. These included technical limitations, difficulties in accessing participants, and repeated travel requirements.

### *Sub-theme 1: Logistical Barriers*

Logistical barriers referred to problems involving inadequate resources and technical limitations, such as malfunctioning devices and lack of access to research tools or instruments. These difficulties delayed research activities and interrupted participants' concentration and productivity. The findings showed that graduate students had to find alternative solutions and adapt to limited resources while continuing their research. These experiences emphasized the importance of adequate institutional and technological support.

### *Sub-theme 2: Participant Access Hurdles*

Participant access hurdles involved difficulties in recruiting respondents and obtaining sufficient participation during data collection. Some participants reported that respondents were difficult to contact or unwilling to participate because they viewed research participation as burdensome. The findings indicated that these challenges prolonged the research process and contributed to frustration and emotional stress. However, participants also developed communication and persuasion skills while addressing these difficulties.

### *Sub-theme 3: Repeated Travel Demands*

Repeated travel demands referred to the frequent travel required for adviser consultations, school visits, and data collection activities. Participants described repeatedly traveling between work, school, and research sites, which consumed time, energy, and financial resources. The findings revealed that these travel demands added

to the overall burden experienced by graduate students. Nevertheless, participants continued to comply with these requirements, reflecting their determination to complete their thesis despite the challenges.

#### **Theme 4: Research and Revision Demands**

The theme *Research and Revision Demands* highlighted the intellectual and academic difficulties encountered by graduate students during the thesis-writing process. Participants struggled with writing, topic selection, and continuous revisions.

##### *Sub-theme 1: Academic Process Hurdles*

Academic process hurdles referred to the technical and intellectual difficulties experienced during thesis writing. Participants reported challenges in academic writing, particularly in constructing grammatically correct and academically acceptable outputs. The findings showed that graduate students struggled with research frameworks, methodologies, and academic standards, especially those who were not English majors. Despite these difficulties, the participants gradually improved their writing and analytical skills through continuous practice and revisions.

##### *Sub-theme 2: Topic Selection Struggles*

Topic selection struggles described the difficulty of identifying and narrowing an appropriate research topic. Participants considered this phase one of the most challenging parts of the thesis process because it required balancing personal interest, feasibility, and academic relevance. The findings revealed that uncertainty during topic selection often caused delays and indecisiveness. However, once participants identified a suitable topic, they gained greater clarity and direction in their research journey.

##### *Sub-theme 3: Revision Overload*

Revision overload referred to the repeated revisions required throughout the thesis-writing process. Participants described experiencing endless revisions under time pressure, which created emotional exhaustion and frustration. The findings suggested that excessive revisions often made participants feel that progress was slow despite continuous effort. Nevertheless, the revision process also contributed to skill development, critical thinking, and improvement in the quality of their research outputs.

#### **Theme 5: Emotional and Relational Costs**

The theme *Emotional and Relational Costs* reflected the personal sacrifices and emotional burdens experienced by graduate students while completing their thesis. The demands of thesis writing affected participants' personal lives, finances, and relationships.

*Sub-theme 1: Personal Sacrifices*

Personal sacrifices referred to the adjustments and compromises made by graduate students to prioritize thesis writing. Participants reported sacrificing sleep, rest, leisure activities, and personal comfort to meet academic deadlines. The findings indicated that thesis writing significantly disrupted participants' normal routines and contributed to emotional and physical exhaustion. Despite these sacrifices, graduate students remained committed to achieving their academic goals.

*Sub-theme 2: Income and Leave Sacrifices*

Income and leave sacrifices described the financial and professional costs associated with attending thesis-related activities. Participants shared experiences of taking unpaid leave from work to attend school visits, consultations, and research activities. The findings showed that these sacrifices increased financial stress among graduate students, particularly those already experiencing economic constraints. Nevertheless, participants continued prioritizing their education despite the impact on their income.

*Sub-theme 3: Family Time Losses*

Family time losses referred to the reduced time spent with family members due to thesis-writing responsibilities. Participants reported limited opportunities for bonding and quality time with their loved ones. The findings revealed that the demands of thesis writing created emotional strain and feelings of guilt among graduate students. Although these sacrifices affected relationships, participants viewed them as temporary challenges necessary to achieve long-term academic and professional goals.

Overall, Matrix 2 demonstrated that the thesis-writing journey involved multidimensional challenges affecting graduate students academically, emotionally, financially, and socially. Despite these interconnected struggles, the participants exhibited resilience, adaptability, and perseverance throughout the process. Their narratives highlighted that thesis writing was not only a demanding academic task but also a transformative experience that strengthened their determination, coping abilities, and personal growth.

**Matrix 3. Coping Strategies**

Codes	Category	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ scheduling</li> <li>▪ manage time bit by bit</li> <li>▪ writing down things to do</li> <li>▪ strict time management</li> <li>▪ balancing time to avoid cramming</li> </ul>	Time Management and Organization	Structured Routines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ daily routine</li> <li>▪ not letting any day pass without thesis progress</li> </ul>	Daily Scheduling Practices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ setting small daily goals instead of whole thesis</li> </ul>	Small-Goal Segmentation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ learned to push myself</li> </ul>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>learned how to manage time better disciplined to work consistently</li> </ul>	Self-Pushing Routines	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>using AI for guidance</li> <li>leveraging AI</li> <li>searching supporting details on Google Scholar</li> <li>using AI for research links and standardized tools</li> </ul>	AI and Research Tools	Technological and Resource Utilization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>extensive reading library resources</li> </ul>	Tool Standardization Aids	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reusing paper backsides to avoid waste</li> <li>being resourceful with connections</li> <li>giving snacks to participants</li> </ul>	Resourcefulness	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>pre-saving finances upfront so only writing remains focus</li> </ul>	Proactive Financial Planning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ask help from classmates and friends for guidance</li> <li>ask help from experienced peers who finished master's</li> </ul>	Social and Relational Support	Social, Spiritual and Emotional Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>thesis adviser's hands-on help constant follow-up</li> </ul>	Adviser Mentorship	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>put trust in God, pray consistently</li> <li>offer everything to God</li> <li>constant prayer for guidance, strength, wisdom</li> </ul>	Faith-Based Coping	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>relax when tired, divert emotions</li> </ul>	Emotional Diversion Practices	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>never surrender despite challenges, optimistic</li> <li>surrender challenges to God</li> <li>considering challenges as stepping stone to goal</li> <li>positive thinking despite worries</li> </ul>	Mindset Shifts	Psychological Resilience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Believing in yourself that you can do it</li> <li>Thinking positive days ahead</li> </ul>	Self-Belief Affirmations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Never surrender despite challenges, optimistic</li> <li>surrender challenges to God</li> <li>This too shall pass mantra</li> <li>Challenges fuel continuation despite burnout</li> </ul>	Persistence Mantras	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>looking at son's picture for motivation</li> <li>Reminding self of purpose when losing motivation</li> </ul>	Family Motivation Anchors	

Matrix 3 presents the coping strategies utilized by graduate students to manage the academic, emotional, financial, and personal challenges encountered during thesis writing. The findings revealed that coping was not merely reactive but also intentional, strategic, and transformative. Graduate students developed routines, maximized available resources, sought support systems, and cultivated resilience to sustain progress throughout the thesis-writing process.

### Theme 1: Structured Routines

The theme *Structured Routines* highlighted the deliberate efforts of graduate students to create order and consistency amid overwhelming academic responsibilities.

Participants developed routines and organizational strategies to maintain productivity and reduce stress throughout the thesis-writing process.

### *Sub-theme 1: Time Management and Organization*

Time management and organization emerged as essential coping strategies among graduate students. Participants utilized scheduling, to-do lists, strict time management, and gradual task completion to organize academic responsibilities and prevent cramming. The findings suggested that organizing tasks into manageable activities helped reduce cognitive overload and improve productivity. Beyond academic efficiency, time management also provided participants with a sense of control, discipline, and direction despite uncertainty and pressure.

### *Sub-theme 2: Daily Scheduling Practices*

Daily scheduling practices referred to participants' commitment to maintaining consistent progress on their thesis. Graduate students emphasized the importance of following daily routines and ensuring that every day contributed to thesis completion. The findings revealed that consistency minimized procrastination, reduced stress related to deadlines, and established accountability. Daily scheduling likewise promoted emotional stability by creating predictability and structure amid academic demands.

### *Sub-theme 3: Small-Goal Segmentation*

Small-goal segmentation involved breaking down the thesis into smaller and more manageable tasks. Instead of focusing on the entire thesis, participants concentrated on accomplishing small daily goals. The findings showed that this strategy reduced feelings of overwhelm and increased motivation by allowing participants to experience frequent accomplishments. Segmenting tasks also enhanced focus and productivity while making the thesis-writing process more manageable.

### *Sub-theme 4: Self-Pushing Routines*

Self-pushing routines reflected the participants' internal motivation and self-discipline in continuing thesis work despite fatigue and challenges. Graduate students described learning to push themselves, remain disciplined, and work consistently even without external supervision. The findings suggested that these routines fostered independence, accountability, and perseverance. Participants gradually developed stronger self-discipline and personal responsibility throughout the thesis-writing journey.

## **Theme 2: Technological and Resource Utilization**

The theme *Technological and Resource Utilization* emphasized how graduate students strategically used technology, academic resources, and practical solutions to overcome limitations and improve efficiency during thesis writing.

### *Sub-theme 1: AI and Research Tools*

AI and research tools were identified as important aids in supporting thesis writing. Participants utilized artificial intelligence applications, Google Scholar, and other online research tools to gather information, improve writing, and access scholarly references. The findings revealed that these tools enhanced accessibility, productivity, and understanding of research concepts. Technology also helped participants save time and manage academic tasks more efficiently, particularly among working graduate students with limited study time.

### *Sub-theme 2: Tool Standardization Aids*

Tool standardization aids referred to the use of academic resources such as books, journals, and library materials to guide participants in meeting scholarly standards. Extensive reading and reliance on credible sources helped graduate students improve the quality and credibility of their work. The findings indicated that these resources reduced uncertainty and strengthened participants' confidence in their academic outputs. Access to scholarly materials also enhanced critical thinking and understanding of research processes.

### *Sub-theme 3: Resourcefulness*

Resourcefulness reflected the participants' creativity and adaptability in dealing with limited resources. Graduate students described practical strategies such as reusing materials, maximizing available resources, and finding alternative ways to accomplish research requirements. The findings demonstrated that participants did not passively accept limitations but actively sought solutions to continue progressing. These experiences strengthened problem-solving skills, flexibility, and resilience.

### *Sub-theme 4: Proactive Financial Planning*

Proactive financial planning involved preparing financially for anticipated thesis-related expenses. Participants reported saving money in advance to reduce stress and ensure uninterrupted thesis progress. The findings showed that financial preparation minimized disruptions caused by unexpected expenses and enabled participants to focus more effectively on thesis writing. This strategy reflected responsibility, foresight, and commitment to completing their studies.

## **Theme 3: Social, Spiritual, and Emotional Support**

The theme *Social, Spiritual, and Emotional Support* highlighted the importance of relationships, emotional connections, and spirituality in helping graduate students cope with thesis-writing difficulties.

### *Sub-theme 1: Social and Relational Support*

Social and relational support referred to the encouragement, guidance, and assistance received from classmates, friends, colleagues, and peers. Participants frequently sought advice and emotional support from people who shared similar academic experiences. The findings revealed that peer interactions reduced feelings of isolation and normalized the challenges experienced during thesis writing. These support systems also promoted collaborative learning, motivation, and emotional stability.

### *Sub-theme 2: Adviser Mentorship*

Adviser mentorship highlighted the significant role of thesis advisers in guiding and supporting graduate students throughout the research process. Participants appreciated advisers who provided hands-on assistance, feedback, and regular follow-ups. The findings suggested that adviser support reduced uncertainty, strengthened confidence, and improved participants' academic performance. Positive adviser-student relationships also provided emotional reassurance during stressful periods of thesis writing.

### *Sub-theme 3: Faith-Based Coping*

Faith-based coping referred to participants' reliance on spirituality, prayer, and trust in God as sources of strength and guidance during thesis writing. Participants consistently described prayer and faith as mechanisms that helped them endure stress and uncertainty. The findings revealed that spirituality promoted emotional stability, hope, and perseverance. Faith enabled participants to interpret challenges positively and maintain optimism throughout the thesis-writing journey.

### *Sub-theme 4: Emotional Diversion Practices*

Emotional diversion practices involved activities that allowed participants to temporarily shift their attention away from academic stress. Graduate students emphasized the importance of resting, relaxing, and taking breaks when emotionally exhausted. The findings showed that these practices reduced mental fatigue, restored emotional balance, and improved productivity. Emotional diversion helped participants sustain long-term engagement in thesis writing while protecting their well-being.

## **Theme 4: Psychological Resilience**

The theme *Psychological Resilience* reflected the inner strength, perseverance, and positive mindset developed by graduate students throughout the thesis-writing process. Participants cultivated resilience through self-belief, optimism, and determination despite repeated challenges and setbacks.

### *Sub-theme 1: Mindset Shifts*

Mindset shifts referred to the participants' ability to reframe challenges as opportunities for growth and learning. Graduate students gradually developed a more positive perspective toward difficulties and considered obstacles as stepping stones toward achievement. The findings revealed that adopting a growth-oriented mindset reduced discouragement and strengthened adaptability. Positive thinking enabled participants to remain motivated and committed despite academic setbacks.

### *Sub-theme 2: Self-Belief Affirmations*

Self-belief affirmations emphasized the participants' confidence in their ability to complete their thesis. Participants continuously reminded themselves that they were capable of overcoming challenges and achieving success. The findings indicated that self-confidence became an important source of motivation and emotional strength. Through repeated experiences and accomplishments, participants gradually strengthened their belief in their academic abilities.

### *Sub-theme 3: Persistence Mantras*

Persistence mantras referred to motivational statements and reminders used by graduate students to sustain determination during difficult moments. Phrases such as "never surrender" and "this too shall pass" served as psychological anchors that encouraged perseverance. The findings showed that these mantras promoted emotional regulation, optimism, and continued effort despite stress and exhaustion. Self-encouragement became a significant coping strategy throughout the thesis-writing process.

### *Sub-theme 4: Family Motivation Anchors*

Family motivation anchors referred to the emotional inspiration and encouragement participants derived from their loved ones. Graduate students often viewed their families as their primary motivation for completing their studies. The findings revealed that family relationships provided participants with purpose, emotional strength, and determination. Remembering their families helped participants persist despite fatigue, stress, and discouragement during thesis writing.

Overall, Matrix 3 demonstrated that coping strategies among graduate students were multidimensional and transformative. Participants combined routines, technological resources, support systems, and psychological resilience to navigate the challenges of thesis writing successfully. These coping mechanisms not only enabled graduate students to complete their thesis but also contributed to their personal growth, emotional maturity, and development of lifelong skills and resilience.

### Matrix 4. Insights

Codes	Category	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grateful for strong family/adviser support</li> <li>Good adviser relationship essential—guides direction, motivates, reduces discomfort</li> </ul>	Support System Value	Relational Lessons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zero intimidation with good personal adviser relationship lightens burden</li> </ul>	Family & Adviser Gratitude	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>supportive people (principal, colleagues, family, God)</li> <li>give courage to continue</li> </ul>	Courage from Peers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>thesis requires patience, hard work, commitment, consistent effort</li> <li>nothing happens if lazy</li> <li>learned to push myself</li> </ul>	Thesis Nature Insights	Process Realizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>every task completion is rewarding, patience/faith tested</li> <li>fulfilling seeing progress</li> </ul>	Task Reward Fulfillment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consistency is important even if days are imperfect</li> </ul>	Consistency Amid Imperfection	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds resilience and self-discipline, molds many values, gained self-control through challenges</li> <li>Different mindset after completion, colleagues trust me more, became prim and proper</li> </ul>	Character Transformation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learned time management, self-discipline, accepting constructive feedback</li> <li>Developed discipline, responsibility, consistency matters even imperfect days, gained confidence surviving hardship</li> </ul>	Resilience & Discipline Building	Personal Growth & Resilience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grown professionally and personally, learned patience, perseverance, strong heart, better people skills</li> <li>Adds confidence as educator, supplements knowledge despite non-education background</li> </ul>	Personal & Professional Growth	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed socialization skills, endurance, resourcefulness, learned to explore alternatives</li> <li>Strengthened patience, faith, resilience despite challenges</li> </ul>	Socialization & Endurance Skills	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't fear, it's a process not shortcut, you can finish</li> <li>Prepare physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, spiritually, persevere</li> </ul>	Advice as Bits of Insight	Visionary Guidance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose passion topic, find standardized tools, enjoy process</li> <li>After rain comes rainbow, look at positive results</li> <li>Strong foundation all aspects, enjoy, publish work</li> </ul>	Holistic Preparation Advice	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trust God, pray, timeline, patience, worth sacrifices</li> <li>Journey reveals capabilities or limitations, have faith</li> <li>One step at a time, seek help, own pace, pray, rest, not race</li> </ul>	Optimistic Outcome Focus	

Matrix 4 presents the higher-order reflections and realizations gained by graduate students throughout their thesis-writing journey. The findings revealed that thesis writing was not only an academic requirement but also a transformative experience that shaped participants' perspectives, values, resilience, and personal identity. Through sustained engagement with challenges, coping strategies, and support systems, graduate students developed meaningful insights that extended beyond academic competence toward personal and professional growth. Five major themes emerged from the analysis: Relational Lessons, Process Realizations, Personal Growth and Resilience, and Visionary Guidance.

### **Theme 1: Relational Lessons**

The theme *Relational Lessons* highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships in helping graduate students navigate the thesis-writing process. Participants recognized that the support, encouragement, and guidance received from advisers, family members, peers, colleagues, and spiritual beliefs played a significant role in sustaining motivation and reducing emotional burden.

#### *Sub-theme 1: Support System Value*

Support system value referred to the participants' appreciation of the academic and emotional support they received throughout thesis writing. Participants emphasized that having supportive advisers and family members provided guidance, motivation, and reassurance during difficult moments. The findings revealed that support systems reduced anxiety, clarified academic expectations, and strengthened participants' confidence in completing their thesis. Beyond academic assistance, these relationships also provided emotional security and encouragement, enabling graduate students to remain focused and resilient despite challenges.

#### *Sub-theme 2: Family and Adviser Gratitude*

Family and adviser gratitude reflected the participants' appreciation for the emotional and academic assistance provided by their loved ones and advisers. Participants noted that having approachable advisers and supportive family relationships lessened the pressure associated with thesis writing. The findings showed that gratitude emerged as graduate students recognized the sacrifices, guidance, and encouragement offered by people around them. This appreciation shifted participants' perspectives from focusing solely on difficulties toward recognizing the positive contributions of those who supported them throughout the journey.

#### *Sub-theme 3: Courage from Peers*

Courage from peers referred to the encouragement and motivation participants received from classmates, colleagues, and fellow graduate students. Participants emphasized that supportive peers gave them courage to continue despite stress and exhaustion. The findings revealed that peer relationships reduced feelings of isolation

and promoted collaboration, emotional reassurance, and shared learning. Through these interactions, graduate students gained confidence, motivation, and a sense of belonging that strengthened their perseverance throughout thesis writing.

## **Theme 2: Process Realizations**

The theme *Process Realizations* captured the participants' understanding of the nature, demands, and realities of thesis writing. Graduate students gradually realized that thesis completion required patience, consistency, commitment, and continuous effort rather than immediate success or perfection.

### *Sub-theme 1: Thesis Nature Insights*

Thesis nature insights referred to participants' realizations regarding the demanding and rigorous nature of thesis writing. Participants emphasized that thesis completion required patience, hard work, commitment, and sustained effort. The findings indicated that graduate students learned to adjust their expectations and accept that thesis writing was a gradual process involving challenges, delays, and revisions. Understanding the realities of research reduced frustration and encouraged persistence throughout the academic journey.

### *Sub-theme 2: Task Reward Fulfillment*

Task reward fulfillment referred to the satisfaction and motivation experienced by graduate students whenever they accomplished portions of their thesis. Participants described feeling fulfilled and encouraged whenever they completed tasks or observed progress in their work. The findings showed that small accomplishments provided emotional rewards that strengthened motivation and sustained productivity. These experiences reinforced participants' determination to continue despite the difficulties associated with thesis writing.

### *Sub-theme 3: Consistency Amid Imperfection*

Consistency amid imperfection highlighted the importance of maintaining progress despite imperfect circumstances or unproductive days. Participants realized that consistency was more important than achieving perfection in every aspect of thesis writing. The findings revealed that accepting imperfections reduced pressure and frustration among graduate students. This mindset enabled participants to remain productive, flexible, and emotionally stable despite setbacks and limitations encountered during the process.

## **Theme 3: Personal Growth and Resilience**

The theme *Personal Growth and Resilience* reflected the transformative effects of thesis writing on participants' character, discipline, confidence, and overall personal

development. Through repeated exposure to challenges, graduate students developed resilience, perseverance, and stronger self-identity.

#### *Sub-theme 1: Character Transformation*

Character transformation referred to the development of values, attitudes, and personal identity throughout the thesis-writing journey. Participants reported becoming more disciplined, resilient, patient, and responsible as a result of their experiences. The findings showed that thesis writing shaped participants' self-awareness and strengthened their understanding of their capabilities and limitations. These transformations extended beyond academic achievement and contributed to long-term personal growth.

#### *Sub-theme 2: Resilience and Discipline Building*

Resilience and discipline building highlighted the development of inner strength and self-control through continuous exposure to academic challenges. Participants described gaining discipline, responsibility, consistency, and confidence in handling difficulties. The findings revealed that overcoming struggles enabled graduate students to become more adaptable and emotionally resilient. The process strengthened their ability to manage pressure, persist during setbacks, and remain committed to long-term goals.

#### *Sub-theme 3: Personal and Professional Growth*

Personal and professional growth referred to the participants' improvement in both personal competencies and professional confidence. Participants shared that thesis writing enhanced their communication skills, patience, perseverance, and confidence in their professional roles. The findings indicated that graduate students became more capable and self-assured in handling future academic and workplace responsibilities. Thesis writing contributed not only to scholarly development but also to broader personal and professional advancement.

#### *Sub-theme 4: Socialization and Endurance Skills*

Socialization and endurance skills referred to the interpersonal and emotional competencies developed during the thesis-writing process. Participants reported learning how to socialize effectively, endure difficulties, and become resourceful while managing research-related challenges. The findings revealed that continuous interactions with advisers, peers, and participants improved communication and collaboration skills. Likewise, repeated exposure to stress and obstacles strengthened participants' endurance, adaptability, and perseverance.

### **Theme 4: Visionary Guidance**

The theme *Visionary Guidance* represented the practical advice and future-oriented insights shared by graduate students based on their thesis-writing experiences.

Participants transformed their struggles and realizations into meaningful lessons intended to guide future researchers.

### *Sub-theme 1: Advice as Bits of Insight*

Advice as bits of insight referred to the practical lessons and encouragement graduate students wished to share with future thesis writers. Participants emphasized that thesis writing should not be feared because it was a process that required patience, perseverance, and trust in oneself. The findings showed that these reflections were grounded in actual experiences rather than theoretical assumptions. Participants highlighted the importance of maintaining a positive mindset, trusting the process, and continuing despite difficulties.

### *Sub-theme 2: Holistic Preparation Advice*

Holistic preparation advice emphasized the need for physical, emotional, mental, financial, and spiritual preparedness before and during thesis writing. Participants recognized that thesis writing affected multiple aspects of life and therefore required comprehensive preparation. The findings revealed that holistic readiness helped graduate students manage stress, sustain productivity, and avoid burnout. Participants emphasized that successful thesis writing depended not only on academic ability but also on emotional balance, financial stability, and spiritual strength.

### *Sub-theme 3: Optimistic Outcome Focus*

Optimistic outcome focus referred to the positive outlook maintained by graduate students regarding the outcomes of their thesis journey. Participants believed that difficulties were temporary and that perseverance would eventually lead to rewarding outcomes. The findings indicated that optimism strengthened resilience, reduced anxiety, and sustained motivation throughout the thesis-writing process. Viewing challenges as temporary and manageable helped participants maintain hope and continue working toward completion despite hardships.

Overall, Matrix 4 revealed that the thesis-writing journey became a meaningful process of self-discovery, reflection, and transformation among graduate students. Through their experiences, participants developed deeper appreciation for relationships, discipline, resilience, and perseverance. The insights gained throughout the process extended beyond academic accomplishment and contributed significantly to their personal, emotional, and professional development. Thesis writing therefore emerged not only as a scholarly requirement but also as a transformative life experience that shaped graduate students into stronger, more resilient, and more purposeful individuals.

## DISCUSSION

This study explored the lived experiences of graduate students in writing their theses in selected Higher Education Institutions in Bohol during the academic year 2024–2025. Using narrative inquiry, the study focused on understanding the participants' experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and insights throughout the thesis-writing process. Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, the study examined the emotional, academic, personal, and relational dimensions of thesis writing and how these experiences contributed to the participants' growth, resilience, and development as graduate students.

### Findings

1. Overall Experience. Graduate students reported that thesis writing was both great and challenging. Themes included emotional rollercoaster ride, balancing between what they found hard to control: work, family, and academic life, endurance and fortitude even when they faced the hardships, and personal fulfillment, which is the feeling of satisfaction at the end of the ride when one has made it through the hardships.
2. Challenges. Graduate students also faced a number of challenges, including time management issues that persisted, with many indicating they were torn between professional responsibilities and thesis deadlines. The other constraint they faced was a lack of access to references or funding. A major cause of hardship was the need to conduct research and make revisions. Emotional and relationship costs were also present as graduate students expressed their anxiety, sleep deprivation, and self-doubt.
3. Coping Strategies. The process patterns were set by graduating students, creating small daily goals to handle the changes. They turned to technology and resources, employing AI for formatting, standardization, and research assistance, demonstrating resourcefulness in leveraging available tools. The presence of advisers, peers, colleagues, and family, providing social, spiritual, and emotional support, was also critical to completing the journey. The psychological resiliency theme was also high, with some reporting that they survived through prayer or self-motivation.
4. Insights. Among graduate students, knowledge of relationships was developed through instruction on the importance of working together and being guided by advisors. The values of patience and persistence are among the process realizations they have developed. The second important lesson was the personal growth and great willpower acquired during their voyage. The achievement of the thesis was deemed to give them a sense of pride and hope for their future activities, as it was perceived as a visionary suggestion.

## Conclusions

The stories of the thesis-writing process among graduate students show the deeper meaning of research not only as a task to be fulfilled but also as a process of becoming a rigorous scholar, a self-reflective practitioner, and a knowledge producer. Within the context of inquiry, this paper emphasizes that the reasons students had problems related to the inaccessibility of advisers, scarcity of resources, and competing needs were not just hindrances but rather experiences that led them to associate themselves with them as researchers.

Thesis writing is not only an expression of writing a scholarly treatise, but it is also a highly human experience. Sleepless nights, edits, doubts, and revelations form an epic in which struggle is transformed into perseverance, fulfillment, and scholarly maturity. The initial impression of fatigue and wasted time slowly transforms into research as a journey towards progress, making one stronger and more self-assured about one's academic success.

Thesis development is therefore not only pegged on written chapters, but also on patience, flexibility, and appreciation. In the background of any bound thesis are these silent sacrifices, silent conquests, which might remind the institutions and advisors that valuable research assistance must go beyond technical surveillance to the emotional and human sides of academic activity.

Placing these findings within the framework of narrative inquiry, the study supports the thesis that graduate students' journeys are stories of becoming researchers who can manage complexity, becoming resistant, and becoming members of a community that can project their cohorts' perspectives into their lives.

## Recommendations

Specific Problem	Who Benefits	Detailed Recommendation
Work-Life Balance Struggles	Graduate Students	Establish a realistic weekly schedule that separates work, thesis tasks, and rest, ensuring energy is preserved before engaging in academic work.
Daily Routine Disruptions	Graduate Students	Maintain a consistent daily routine with fixed thesis-writing hours while protecting sleep and recovery to sustain long-term productivity.
Professional Prioritization Pressures	Graduate Students & Institutions	Students should apply time-blocking strategies, while institutions provide flexible timelines to accommodate working professionals.
Financial Pressures	Institutions	Provide targeted financial assistance such as transportation, printing, and consultation support to reduce recurring thesis expenses.

Participant Incentive Costs	Institutions	Allocate small research grants to cover participant tokens and incentives, easing the burden of data collection.
Overall Financial Strain	Institutions & Graduate Students	Offer early financial orientation and budgeting support, alongside institutional subsidy programs for thesis-related costs.
Logistical Barriers	Institutions	Establish a resource hub with loaner devices, internet access, and standardized tools to ensure equitable research conditions.
Participant Access Hurdles	Graduate Students & Institutions	Encourage early participant coordination, supported by institutional linkages with schools or organizations.
Repeated Travel Demands	Advisers & Institutions	Shift to hybrid consultations and structured scheduling to minimize unnecessary travel and repeated visits.
Academic Process Hurdles	Graduate Students & Institutions	Provide writing support programs focusing on academic language, structure, and clarity, especially for non-English majors.
Topic Selection Struggles	Advisers & Institutions	Conduct guided topic development sessions to help students identify feasible and researchable topics early.
Procrastination and Doubt Cycles	Graduate Students & Advisers	Use peer accountability groups and regular check-ins to maintain motivation and reduce self-doubt.
Revision Overload	Advisers	Deliver clear, consolidated, and prioritized feedback to streamline revisions and avoid unnecessary repetition.
Procrastination and Doubt Cycles	Graduate Students & Advisers	Use peer accountability groups and regular check-ins to maintain motivation and reduce self-doubt.
Revision Overload	Advisers	Deliver clear, consolidated, and prioritized feedback to streamline revisions and avoid unnecessary repetition.
Personal Sacrifices	Graduate Students	Promote realistic goal-setting and self-care practices to balance workload and prevent burnout.
Income and Leave Sacrifices	Institutions	Provide flexible policies such as online consultations and reduced on-site requirements for working students.
Family Time Losses	Graduate Students & Families	Encourage intentional time-sharing strategies and family awareness to maintain relationships during thesis writing.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study strictly adhered to ethical standards in the conduct of qualitative research involving graduate students. Prior to the data gathering process, permission to conduct the study was secured from the concerned Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The participants were properly informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their rights as respondents through an informed consent process.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and participants were given the freedom to withdraw at any point without penalty or disadvantage. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly observed by using pseudonyms and anonymized institutional identifiers such as HEI-1, HEI-2, HEI-3, and HEI-4 to protect the identities of both the participants and institutions involved.

The researcher ensured that all gathered information, interview recordings, transcripts, and narratives were used solely for academic and research purposes. Data were securely stored and handled with utmost confidentiality. Throughout the conduct of the interviews, respect, empathy, and sensitivity were maintained to ensure that participants could comfortably and freely share their lived experiences.

Furthermore, the researcher practiced reflexivity and objectivity during the interpretation and analysis of the narratives to preserve the authenticity and trustworthiness of the participants' stories. The study likewise complied with the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, confidentiality, and integrity in qualitative research.

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