Proposed Mental Health Intervention for Thesis Writers

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For graduate students, writing a thesis can be extremely stressful and demanding. It may also have an impact on their self-perception, drive, and perseverance. Giving feedback is one of the most important methods of promoting learning and motivation. For thesis writers, receiving feedback from experts provides a chance to check their progress and keep going. This policy brief focuses on sharing the results of a qualitative study that explored the lived experiences of thesis writers when receiving feedback from experts and how it influences their motivation. In addition, it highlights the proposed mental health intervention for thesis writers. This intervention can play a vital role in addressing students' concerns and mental health challenges usually encountered during the thesis writing process.

Feedback is a vital component of the thesis writing process. Students frequently emphasize the beneficial effects of feedback on their mental, psychological, and emotional health, in addition to how it affects their performance. When feedback is offered as a one-way, written remark, it often results in unhelpful feedback (Carless *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, many students require assistance in understanding written feedback from supervisors, and they commonly feel stressed or disappointed when it is imprecise, brief, or of little use for their future academic development. Stress and anxiety are more closely associated with the thesis and their supervisors, leading to numerous graduate students quitting their programs for various interrelated reasons (Van Rooij *et al.*, 2021; Ali, Watson, & Dhingra, 2016).

Two central figures play a significant role in postgraduate research: the student and the supervisor or expert (Ekpoh, 2016). The interaction between the aforementioned, nonresponsive or inefficient supervisory evaluation, and a lack of sufficient feedback for work correction are all significant drivers of distress to thesis writers. On the other hand, graduate students experiencing a range of symptoms like fatigue, headache, gastrointestinal problems, and excessive worrying are common signs of mental health challenges. All of these may result to a decline in the achievement of personal goals and bring about exhausted and depressed students (Bazrafkan et al. 2016).

Thesis writers refer to the graduate students enrolled in thesis writing who have presented their topic proposal and/or colloquium and have received comments from an expert. Expert refers to the panel, thesis adviser, or professionals who are involved in supervising the students or the thesis writer(s). The experts' contribution to their growth as writers felt particularly vital. Additionally, a study by Yunie (2018) showed that experts are essential in introducing students to writing their thesis through expert feedback. With the help of feedback, experts can serve as gatekeepers for maintaining the quality of the research and mentors for their students, helping them conduct appropriate research and present it logically, coherently, and fluently (Neupane & Hu, 2020).

Receiving feedback undoubtedly has a significant impact on the motivation of thesis writers. Feedback increases motivation (Continisio, 2021). It motivates and excites writers to improve the quality of their papers. Feedback provides them with a clear direction and serves as a catalyst for setting goals, enabling them to work towards completing their thesis. As a

result, feedback and motivation will produce positive behavior and contribute to the student's well-being. Ryan and Deci (2016) pointed out that the aforementioned will benefit students in achieving their potential and success.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that negative experiences with feedback can have adverse effects on the mental health and motivation of thesis writers. Some students shared instances where they felt unmotivated and discouraged after receiving an overwhelming amount of feedback or insufficient feedback from the experts. The overwhelming feelings and uncertainty generated by excessive or inadequate feedback can significantly impact their progress. Such negative experiences may hinder their ability to make meaningful advancements in their work.

When students start a thesis without strong basic skills, they often run into a lot of problems. Many mistakenly think they can't finish and end up quitting. But, in reality, what we call "basics" for a thesis are quite advanced. Reading isn't just understanding words; it's also looking at, criticizing, and getting meaning from what you read. Writing isn't just making good paragraphs; it's making clear ideas and combining themes that explain the study. Thinking isn't just remembering and connecting ideas; it's finding patterns and coming up with new thoughts. With this, a thesis is like a tough lesson. It's there to teach students really high-level skills (Levine, 1999).

Indeed, writing a thesis can bring a lot of pressure and stress for graduate students. It can also affect how they see themselves, their motivation, and their ability to keep going. If students don't have effective ways of coping with this stress, their mental health can be at risk. With the help of proper feedback and a proposed mental health intervention for thesis writers, this will help the students lessen their feelings of uncertainty, cope with stress, and be motivated to complete their degree.

Proposed Mental Health Intervention for Thesis Writers

In the process of incorporating mental health interventions for graduate students, the basis was derived from the results of structured interviews with 13 Filipino postgraduate students who were currently enrolled in thesis writing.

Receiving feedback undoubtedly has a significant impact on the motivation of thesis writers. Results indicate that receiving feedback motivates and excites writers to improve the quality of their papers. Feedback provides them with a clear direction and serves as a catalyst for setting goals, enabling them to work towards completing their thesis.

It is also vital to recognize that negative feedback experiences may adversely affect thesis writers' motivation. Students have shared experiences where they received either too little or too much feedback, which left them feeling demotivated and discouraged. Overwhelming feelings and confusion resulting from an excess or lack of feedback can affect their progress. A specific scenario involves a student seeking advice from their advisers because they are struggling to complete their paper, but the adviser directs them to the guidance office. The participant shared that counseling services greatly helped them manage feelings of anxiety and worry regarding the feedback they received from their advisors.

Universities and experts must make a conscious effort to establish a balance while being aware of the potentially harmful effects of feedback. It's crucial to give insightful criticism that's precise and constructive while also being considerate of the demands and skills of each thesis writer. Addressing the negative effects of feedback on writers' wellbeing can be done by recognizing the significance of mental health assistance and by providing resources.

Proposed mental health intervention programs must focus on meaningful assistance that involves taking care of the struggles that thesis writers are experiencing (Rusell-Pison & Harris, 2019; Chen, 2023).

The following are the highlights of the proposed mental health intervention for thesis writers:

Anonymous questionnaires or feedback sessions.

Mechanisms for evaluation and feedback (online and offline modalities) from thesis writers should be established by higher education institutions in order to assess the effectiveness of the experts' guidance. Students may be given a chance to share their opinions, suggest changes, and identify areas where they might need more help through anonymous questionnaires or feedback sessions. It's critical to acknowledge the personal journey that thesis writers take (Badenhorst, 2018). This can be done through 15 to 20-item paper-based or online surveys to guarantee the anonymity of the writers. Universities can make use of this input to improve the advising procedure over time and guarantee that students' requirements are properly satisfied. This monthly activity, facilitated by the office of the graduate school can serve as outlet for thesis writers to express their worries, specific areas that need assistance, and unload their emotional exhaustion. Results of the surveys and recommended strategies for intervening should be shared during monthly meetings with graduate school faculty or thesis experts.

Integrating Wellness activities, Counseling services, and Workshops

These programs can play a vital role in addressing the students' concerns and challenges that may be encountered during the thesis writing process. This may include individual, dyad, and group sessions that utilize contemporary and evidenced-based mental health practices and coping strategies. Wellness activities like meditation, relaxation, yoga, and mindfulness can help to reduce stress (Barry et al., 2018). Contextualized needs of the thesis writers should also be considered in crafting various wellness activities.

Colleges and universities don't have to cover every possible student need with their health services, but they should inform students about the resources available to them. This includes academic support, health services, and wellbeing programs, which should be accessible throughout the school year. Information about these activities should also be posted around the campus and through their Learning Management System (LMS). Campaigns aimed at reducing the stigma around mental health issues can make it more normal for students to seek help. Regular schedules for workshops (such as beating procrastination, self-care, mindful writing, etc.) and appointments for in-person counseling should also be provided in partnership with the university's Counseling or Wellness center.

Universities can team up with offices on campus, like student services or graduate student organizations, to organize workshops and share resources on competencies that promote mental health, even if they're not directly related to academics. The most crucial support often comes from counseling centers and mental health professionals (Rusell-Pison & Harris, 2019). Dedicated counselors and auxiliary mental health professionals like clinical psychologists, life or career coaches should also be within reach to students. Psychotherapy provided substantial benefits to students in distress (McAleavey *et al.*, 2017). Routine psychotherapy was found to be very helpful across different problem areas. Facilitating therapeutic sessions will directly address thesis writers' mental health problems and issues related to motivation.

Peer mentorship and support groups.

Universities and offices in charge of students' welfare and development can set up peer mentoring programs and accessible support groups. This can be done through face-to-face or online conferences (via Google Meet/Zoom). Throughout the thesis writing process, peer mentors can offer encouragement, share their experiences, and offer insightful advice.

According to Scherer *et al*. (2021), making connections with peers can help students feel less lonely and more like they belong on campus. Being part of these groups can also give students chances to relax, learn new skills, and continue doing they love before starting their program. Peer mentorship and support groups can be beneficial to thesis writers who are prone to excessive worrying and those who are lacking in social and emotional support.

Overall, it is generally believed that graduate students exhibit higher levels of stress and anxiety in writing a thesis than in other academic phases. Universities, panels, and advisers must make a conscious effort to establish a balance while being aware of the potentially harmful effects of feedback. In addressing the common mental health problems (excessive worrying, fatigue, distress, anxiety, etc.) of thesis writers, providing effective communication channels, and resources like peer mentoring/support groups, counseling services, research clinics, and wellness centers are suggested.

Key Recommendations for Policy and Practice

It is therefore suggested that educational institutions that offer graduate studies consider the following for institutional decision-making and practice:

Maintain balance and limitations when providing feedback to thesis writers. Both excessive and insufficient feedback can have a negative influence on the motivation of students. It is suggested that both experts and thesis writers have at least 2-3 consultations every month. Striking a balance ensures quality and a positive direction. Part of the consultation should be dedicated to checking on the mental health of the thesis writers, highlighting their personal struggles, current worries, and offering available resources in the institution.

Establishing clear channels of communication between thesis writers and advisers is also recommended. This may involve establishing guidelines for communication frequency and preferred channels (such as face-to-face meetings, online platforms, or email) before having a consultation with advisers. In addition, response times are also crucial for communication since some experts have additional workloads in other areas. Clear lines of communication encourage routine connection and guarantee that students are able to reach their advisers for suggestions or comments.

Graduate research offices or units may also post fixed/available consultation hours for research cliniquing.

This information can be shared via public announcements or posts on various online platforms. Thesis writers can be asked for their preference to receiving the assistance whether in-person or online.

This can be very helpful especially when a thesis writer is in need of another expert's point of view or feedback. Contextualized and implement the Proposed Mental Health Intervention for Thesis Writers. Look further to the specific needs of thesis writers. For instance, graduate students under the faculty of Math and Sciences may have unique needs as compared to those under the faculty of Languages and Social Sciences.

Similarly, thesis writers who are unmarried/married, full-time student-scholars, part-time graduate students might raise different concerns. As regards the continuous improvement of the program, it is also recommended to conduct program evaluation activities in the future.

Conclusions

In postgraduate research, the roles of the student and the supervisor are crucial. Thesis writing is generally accepted as the most challenging stage in a graduate student's academic journey. The thesis writing process itself can trigger mental health challenges. Consistent and sufficient feedback from experts motivates writers and facilitates progress. Expert feedback also contributes to the improvement of the quality of writers' work. Experts assist writers in enhancing the overall quality of their work or research by pointing out strengths and weaknesses. This motivation encourages writers to put in more effort and make progress in their work. Educational institutions that offer graduate studies should review existing policies related to thesis writing, provide student services, and implement mental health interventions for thesis writers.

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