

THE MASTER'S THESIS PROCESS, ITS CHALLENGES,  
AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM:

An investigation of English Master's degree students' perceptions of their thesis  
process at the University of Jyväskylä

Master's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Maisterin tutkielma on yliopisto-opiskelijan tärkein opinnäyte, opintojen luonnollinen päätös, jossa esitellään opiskelijan hankkimia taitoja ja osaamista. Tässä tutkimuksessa käsitellään Jyväskylän Yliopiston Englannin kielen maisterintutkielman kirjoittajien mielipiteitä maisterintutkielmaprosessista. Tutkimukseen valittiin kymmenen haastateltavaa (viisi opiskelijaa ja viisi alumnia) 1,5h-2h kestäviin yksilöhaastatteluihin jotka nauhoitettiin ja litteroitiin, muodostaen 85-sivuisen aineiston, jotka teemoitettiin vastaus kerrallaan, erotellen vastauksista erilaisia aiheita ja näkemyksiä. Analyysissä ilmenee, mitkä asiat helpottavat graduprosessia, mitkä hankaloittavat sitä, sekä kuinka prosessia voisi kehittää. Tutkielmassa käsitellään neljää pääteemaa: kielitaito, tutkijan taidot, projektinhallinta, sekä tukimenetelmät.</p> <p>Tutkimuksesta käy ilmi, että opiskelijat eivät olleet tarpeeksi valmistautuneita maisterintutkielman kirjoittamiseen, ja heillä oli vaikeuksia selvittää suurimmasta osasta tutkielman eri vaiheita. Yliopiston tarjoama tuki sekä vertaisverkostojen merkitys korostui opiskelijan työskentelyssä niin tiedollisen, emotionaalisen kuin konkreettisenkin tuen tarpeen muodossa. Myös erilaisten toimintatapojen yksilöllisyys korostui maisterintutkielman teossa, ja tutkimuksessa löydettiin useita mahdollisia lähestymistapoja maisterin tutkielman hallintaan. Opintojen tulisi tarjota paremmat välineet maisterin tutkielman kirjoittamiseen, ja virallisen tuen tulisi pyrkiä selkeyttämään ohjeistusta sekä tarjoamaan enemmän konkreettisia työvälineitä opiskelijoille sekä gradun eri vaiheisiin että itse projektinhallintaan.</p> <p>Tutkimus sisältää runsaasti opiskelijoiden kokemuksia projektin eri vaiheista, joiden tarkoituksena on tarjota kattava läpileikkaus maisterintutkielmaan liittyvistä asioista. Erilaiset kehitysehdotukset ja vinkit tarjoavat muille opiskelijoille apua prosessista selviämiseen, sekä ohjaajille ideoita ohjauksen laadun kehittämiseen.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

“The Master’s thesis is an opportunity to demonstrate your learning outcomes and creativity. The thesis is written individually or jointly by two students. The Master’s thesis is your most important demonstration of competence so far. It is an opportunity to evidence your academic maturity and ability to put your thoughts into text. You can show you are able to choose a relevant topic, define a research question and master the required research methods. In addition, you can demonstrate your scholarship, critical and logical approach, and adherence to academic practices and rules. Thesis work involves *independent* reflection on social phenomena, familiarisation with theoretical discussions in the field, application of academic research methods, and integration of theory and empirical data. Furthermore, writing your thesis enables you to learn new things about yourself, for example, about your ways of work and capacity, perception, creativity, and perseverance.” (University of Jyväskylä 2019)

Welcome to a Master’s thesis written on the process of writing Master’s theses. This study was inspired by a popular theme amongst university students at the author’s university, the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, when students gathered over the weekend to work on their theses during an event called “weekend thesis undertaking”. One evening at this event, a group of English Master’s thesis students had a discussion about their Master’s theses, and problems they were having with it. It was during that discussion, when I decided to delve into the topic and find out why so many students are struggling with their Master’s thesis, and what could be done to eliminate these problems. This is a qualitative descriptive study which analyses the views ten English students; five who were in the process of writing their theses and five alumni who had completed their thesis within the past five years. The study discusses thesis work from the viewpoint of the students. The original in-depth analysis included over 350 quotes categorized thematically. The main findings are presented and elaborated on within this text. The results of this study can be utilized equally by students, teachers, and university staff to create conditions that better facilitate successful thesis work for Master’s degree students.

During the writing of this thesis, an ongoing theme in public discussions considering universities in Finland had been that students often graduate very slowly, some not at all. This seems to also have been a current theme concerning studies of various fields at universities around Finland, and the topic had also shared some room in newspapers and media.

*Helsingin Sanomat* (Salomaa 2016 for *Helsingin Sanomat*), has that only about a fifth of university students graduate in the target time of five years, and most Master's degree students graduate between six and seven years of study time. Many students are also working while studying. Furthermore, according to the study register information from across Finland's universities (Toivanen 2013 for *yle.fi*), only a third of all Master's degrees in 2012 were completed in five years or under, and a fourth of students managed their thesis in under seven years of studying (ibid.). According to educational administration statistics service Vipunen, a major difficulty in terms of providing workforce with degrees in higher education is that students tend to graduate slowly (Ministry of education and culture 2019). Only a fifth of students in humanities and arts graduate in the target time of five years, and only around 10 per cent of those exceeding the target time manage to graduate within the next year (ibid.). The rest take longer to graduate if at all.

When looking at study survey statistics, we can see that there are various possible reasons for delays in studies. Study survey statistics collected in 2009, 2010 and 2011 by the University of Oulu, in Finland (Liimatainen et al. 2011), describe reported reasons in table 1. The same study also lists reasons for meetings with a study psychologist within the academic year 2010-2011 (see figure 1).

Table 1. Reasons for delay of studies according to Opintopolkukysely (2011), by University of Oulu, Finland (translated into English from the original list)

Working while studying	Lack of motivation	Psychological wellbeing (energy)
Family life / relationships	Stuck with thesis	The challenges of a new phase in life
Factors relating to arranging studies and quality of studies	Difficulty of time-management and planning	Difficulty and demands of studies
Not enough guidance or direction from university	Laziness	

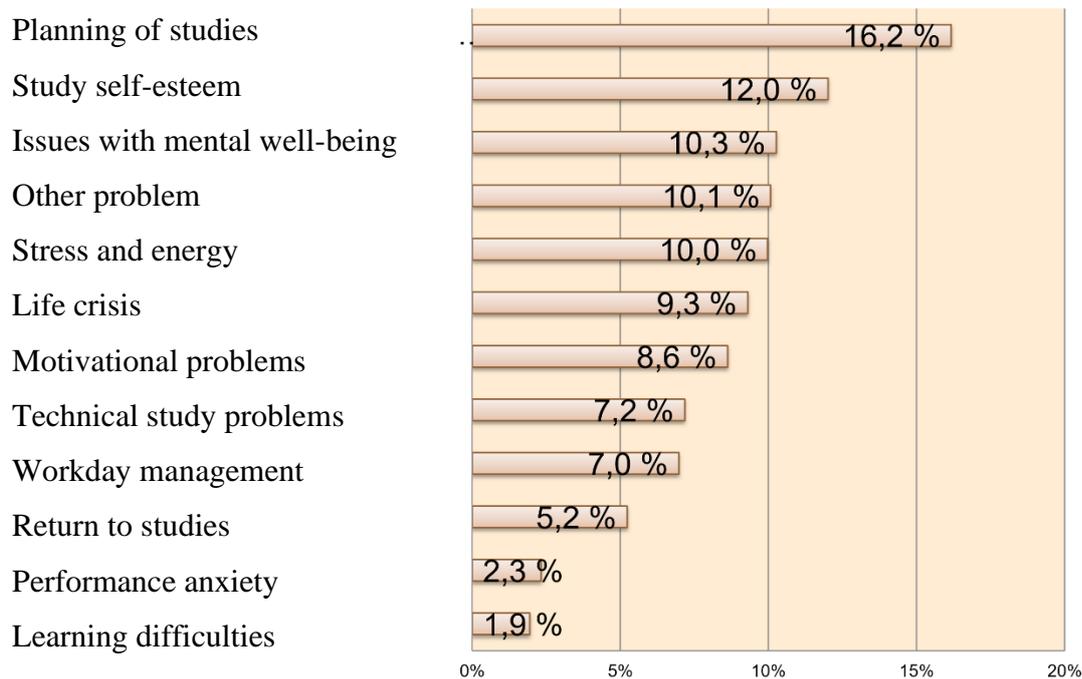


Figure 1. Reasons for study psychologist meetings within the academic year 2010-2011, University of Oulu, Finland

Looking at those 10,1% of students who had sought help for “other problem”, more than a third had done so because they were “stuck with thesis”. Out of the 594 students who participated in the study, across all the study years from freshman till the end of their studies, approximately 22 students had reported having been stuck with their thesis. 22 may not seem like much, but it is a large proportion of students at their Master’s thesis phase. It is also noteworthy that the number only lists those who have reported having major difficulties with their thesis and had had the courage to visit a study psychologist. The number of students struggling with their theses is likely higher. Although there were no up-to-date results available from similar surveys from other universities in Finland during the time of writing, it was likely that the difficulty of the thesis process is a wider phenomenon that touches most university students around Finland.

This study has been divided into six chapters. Chapter two provides an overview of prior research into thesis writing, discussing thesis writing issues from a variety of views present in literature. Chapter three presents the methodology, research context, objectives and research questions, and chapter four embodies the results of the analysis, which are sorted into thematic categories. Chapters five and six provide discussion of key findings and conclusions, respectively.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Non-native speaker academic writing**

According to a literary review on multilingual scholars' participation in core/global academic communities by Uzuner (2009: 250), English has a growing importance in research communication. As globalization increases, English is taking over the mass media, the Internet, entertainment, business, the tourist industry, communication, and international trade. The same works agree that English is also quickly becoming one of the only languages that multilingual publishers get their work published (*ibid.*). This study handles a specific genre of writing in English, referred to as "English for Academic Purposes", or EAP, in short. EAP usually concerns university level contexts and non-native speakers of English, and research into EAP is a major research field that covers academic discourse and translates the insights into pedagogically valid methods and materials (Charles 2012: 137-153).

In addition to just being about writing academic texts, EAP also has a position as a set of social practices within institutions (Charles 2012: 144). Students are to become members of a research community with certain types of disciplines (Bazerman 1988; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995), and learn to use citations (Harwood 2009). Hyland (2009) stresses that academic writing is "only effective when writers use conventions that other members of their community find familiar and convincing". Research into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has shown that students need to be competent in certain language areas and skills to be able to cope with academic demands (Berman and Cheng 2010: 25-40). Thus, non-native writing poses not only academic but added linguistic demands as well.

Uzuner's (2008) literature review discusses various reasons that stand in multilingual scholars' way of publication. I have listed here those that apply similarly to Master's thesis writers: the inability to meet the language and technical requirements for academic publication, problems adapting to the accepted norms of research reporting (such as writing introductions, literature reviews, and discussions), cultural problems such as differences between literary traditions in languages, the time-consuming nature of writing in a foreign language, and finally, lack of connections with members of the core academic communities for help (Uzuner 2008: 254-259). Hyland (2003: 50) displays similar results also adding that, NNES writers experience troubles considering their audiences, rely on a more limited range of items in their writing, offer stronger

commitments, and exhibiting greater problems in conveying a precise degree of certainty. The following excerpt from Hsu (2010: 9) further summarizes NNES writers well.

“Several investigations (Cameron et. al., 2010; Wang & Bakken, 2004; Ramanathan and Atkinson, 1999; Flowerdew, 1999: 243-264) show that NNES writers in tertiary education encounter different problems from NES (native English speakers) writers do, namely, having less facility of expression, taking longer time to write, having less rich vocabulary, struggling to making claims with an adequate amount of force, having their first language (L1) interfere in the writing process, and having troubles with writing. ... For language barriers, NNES writers show less fluent L2 usage, and produce less accurate and effective texts. For strategy barriers, NNES writers often exhibit a lack of composing competence, part of strategy incompetence could be explained by the fact that academic composing in that their L1 writing strategies may or may not be transferred to their NNES writing (Flowerdew, 1999: 243-264).”

The above discuss NNES' writing problems around the world, and the quality of English language education may vary greatly depending on location. In Finland, English is the most widely studied language, and attitudes toward it are positive and pragmatic (Leppänen et al. 2011). The proficiency in and use of English was also highest among younger generations and those who lived in cities and were relatively well educated (*ibid.*). Therefore, Finns have already high competence in English when entering an English language degree program. Academic composing strategies and collaborative learning are implemented at Finnish secondary education in their native language studies, contrary to what was observed by Flowerdew and Peacock (2001: 3-7) with students from other countries.

However high their English skills may be, several studies report that Finns seem to have several difficulties writing academic English. Already Ventola (1992: 191-220) pointed out that many Finnish writers tended to have problems with cohesion and coherence in areas such as thematic patternings, reference and connectors in their texts, while Mauranen (1993) showed how Finnish writers lacked authorial presence and relied much on Finnish language rhetoric, which made their texts problematic for their target audiences (Uzuner 2008:256). There is also some evidence that being a non-native speaker does impose challenges to Finnish university students within their Master's degree studies. In a dissertation, McCambridge (2019: 110-126) addressed that students and teachers often have differing views on what was considered good academic language. While interviewing Finnish Master's programme students at a Finnish university in

another study, it was found that students experienced problems with academic writing structure, struggling to keep their ideas and text clear and connected (Pitkänen-Huhta and Holm, 2012). The students regarded their teachers as authorities on what kind of text is acceptable and tried to write accordingly to their teachers' expectations (ibid.). Furthermore, McCambridge (2019: 110-126) found that both students and teachers emphasized the importance of arguing one's own point of view in academic writing, which seems to be slightly in contrast with another finding by McCambridge (2015: 185-193), where both students and teachers seemed to be frustrated by the vague requirements for academic writing. Dr. McCambridge and Prof. Pitkänen-Huhta were both working at the university that was studied in the present study at the time of writing this thesis.

## **2.2 Difficulties with Master's thesis writing**

The demands regarding the Master's thesis are not only linguistic. There is a good number of studies conducted worldwide on thesis writing challenges. Uzuner (2008) has reviewed various NNES scholars' participation and problems when engaging in global academic communities. However, at the time of writing, there were only few such studies conducted in Finland that focused on NNES Master's level thesis writing. A study of 72 student interviews on thesis writing by Ylijoki (2001: 21-34) has revealed that Finnish students had severe problems associated with drop-out, lengthening of the duration of studies, and personal anxiety, all regarding their Master's theses. The thesis writing is the final phase in achieving a master's degree and is the point where a student's voice becomes their own. A move from consuming and utilizing course literature, to conducting a piece of research more independently. Thesis writing is often the first time a student gets to conduct their own research and is intended also as an important part of showing that they are academically qualified as they graduate. Ylijoki (2001: 21) has also highlighted the need to examine the Master's thesis as separate to the more studied doctoral thesis, to which most studies including the word "thesis" refer to, for instance in aspects of motivation between the two theses.

The lack of research in this area in Finland was surprising, given how big of an issue thesis writing is for so many students. Many non-scientific sources in Finland, such as yliopistokoulutus.fi (2019), have listed a variety of trials and challenges that students may encounter, offering advice and practical tips regarding how to start the research project, figuring out and narrowing down a topic, setting realistic goals, time-management. In addition, sites like

Nyyti.fi (2019) have listed various tips and advice published by independent writers that have themselves struggled with writing the thesis but ultimately succeeded in it. The phenomenon is clearly an important one to tackle, yet scientific research remains scarce.

Discussion on possible difficulties for Master's thesis writing in the world includes various topics. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stress that students should be trained in doing qualitative and quantitative research. However, in Linthorst (2014), Amos van Gelderen, a language lecturer at the Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, stated that one problem was that "study programs simply don't teach their students how to write a thesis. After more than three years, they just have to start writing it." Accreditation at the Rotterdam University in 2012 had reported multiple problems with theses: insufficient linguistic skills, poor reflection on the theory in the field, too broadly formulated research questions, and students' choices were inadequately or even wrongly substantiated, or not substantiated at all (Linthorst 2014). Some of this discussion alleged that the requirements of many thesis programs are often vague and abstract. A clear assignment description was considered important, and the aim of the text and the reader for whom it is written should be clear from the start. If the length of the text, the components it should have, and the sources that need to be used are made clear, then it is not difficult to apply proper assessment criteria (Linthorst 2014).

Elsewhere in the world, Alas (2018: 5-21) found that students struggle with their theses both on the structural level (e.g. writing effective paragraphs, formulating thesis statements and topic sentences etc.) and while managing content (e.g. finding a topic and managing sources, securing clarity of expression). Komba (2015: 71-80) found that Tanzanian postgraduate students had problems in writing all the chapters which were included in their research reports. The challenges included inappropriateness in presenting different chapters of the reports and lack of academic writing skills. Students had problems justifying the problems which prompted them to conduct studies, problems with language, critical literature reviews, citation, and analysis. Similar results were presented by Fatahipour (2016: 15), researching the perceptions and practices of examiners and students of MA theses in Iran. For Iranian students, the four major areas of challenges in thesis writing were lack of clarity in explaining, thesis formatting, grammatical errors, and organizational inconsistencies. Finally, in the UK, Eley and Murray (2009) found that finding appropriate sources and incorporating previous research properly into theses was considered one of the major concerns for students.

It seems that the problems mentioned above are only scratching the surface. The problems that students encounter with their thesis process did not end with linguistic and academic writing, but many challenges were related to project management itself. Odena and Burghess (2017: 572-590) called this area “personal resilience and organization of work”. They found in a large-scale study of doctoral and graduate students in the UK that most interviewees reported working not only with tight deadlines but also around a job and family responsibilities. Similar results were also observed by Paltridge and Woodrow (2012: 88-104), who argued that students often needed to juggle research, profession and family responsibilities at the same time. Another observation by Odena and Burghess (2017: 572-590) was that for doctoral students, motivation toward their work was had in abundance, as well as emotional engagement with their chosen research topics. While engaged in focused studying, highly motivated students’ perception of time was minimised, a situation described in the literature as being in a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) Whether similar levels of motivation are found in interviews with Finnish MA students remains to be seen.

Adding to the problem collection, Dwihandini et al. (2013:1) researched a large group of thesis students at the English department of Mahasaraswati University, Bali, revealing that in addition to having difficulty writing appropriate and coherent text and having many linguistic problems such as grammatical errors, the most important factors affecting their thesis work were lack of confidence, lack of communicative competence, not having enough prior knowledge. Dwihandini et al. (2013: 1) categorized problems they found in three categories: psychological factors, sociocultural factors, and linguistic factors. The study followed the ideas of Brown’s (2007: 152-174) study of the principles of language learning and teaching, which expressed strong beliefs that psychological and affective factors affect the student’s thesis writing greatly.

The University of Jyväskylä website (2019) lists many of the key elements in a student’s journey with their thesis, mainly that it is an over-a-year-process that “involves extensive, independent long-term work and consists of various phases”. It is stressed that students should create clear schedules and goals for their project right from the start. For many students, the Master’s thesis is the first larger-scale independent study, and so careful study planning and time management skills are emphasised. Khozaei (2019: 310-324) has suggested in a recent study that non-native students develop many self-support mechanisms to enhance their academic work. While the relationships with supervisors and other members of the academic

community are important, there is also a need for organizational skills and mood management to meet deadlines (ibid.).

Many guides for thesis writing discuss the above problems and how to handle them. Zerubavel (1999) in his book *The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books* lists procrastination, perfectionism, write-life balance, and time-management as important factors. Good time-management and making progress have seemed to be linked to both stress-reduction and positive self-image of students (Lemon, 2007). Research on time-management and academic success conducted by Nasrullah and Khan (2015:71) on university students of Qurtuba University of Science and Technology, in Pakistan, have also concluded similarly. In their study, they found that time management and planning had a significant positive relation with the academic performance of students. Successful time management therefore seems to reduce stress and anxiety, and lead to higher academic success (Nasrullah and Khan, 2015: 71). Successful time management could prevent delays in the thesis process, and feelings of being stuck with it. It would not be surprising to find that successful time management and anxiety reduction also led to higher motivation and better self-confidence in thesis work. There is some evidence supporting this from Huerta, Goodson and Chlup (2017: 716-729), who found in their study that performance anxiety and lack of self-esteem were crucial factors in affecting motivation and progress with the thesis, and that self-efficacy was a statistically significant and large predictor of writing anxiety.

Based on this scan of various academic challenges that Masters' thesis writers face, it is clear that students meet not only linguistic and academic problems, but also many project management challenges along the way.

### **2.3 Support for thesis writing**

So far, I have discussed the thesis process, its demands and the various problems and challenges that students may encounter with it. The latter part of this framework briefly discusses the various support mechanisms that students have available to them.

Various studies on multilingual scholars have displayed that in addition to having courage, patience, and persistence, writing academic publications in a foreign language requires using constructive criticism to make constant revision and rewriting, and collaboration with

experienced researchers can help tremendously with publication success (Uzuner, 2008: 259). Studies on graduate students have found that novice scholars need sufficient guidance, modelling and mentoring to be able to socialize into disciplinary research communities, and that mentoring relationships should be constructive and dialogic (Uzuner, 2008: 260). In terms of Master's thesis writing, the most experienced researcher available for help is the supervisor, but nothing prevents a student from asking for help from other lecturers or members of the research community.

There are various ways in which the university supports a student's thesis writing process. Students receive personal supervision, seminar group guidance, and study counselling during their thesis process (Annala, Korhonen and Penttinen 2012: 313–336). In addition to this, students may use peer support, and various kinds of support from outside the university. Here is a short excerpt from the University of Jyväskylä's (2019) thesis advice:

“Guidance for the thesis process is provided in Master's seminars, in which the research topic and plan are accepted. Individual guidance is also provided during and after the seminars. Additional fine-tuning seminars may be arranged at the final stage of the process. Peer support is also important during the thesis process. You are thus recommended to find other thesis writers and, for instance, establish a thesis circle where you can discuss the various phases of thesis writing and share experiences.” (University of Jyväskylä, 2019)

### **2.3.1 Thesis supervision**

Supervision is arguably one of the most important assistive factors affecting thesis writing, and thus has received a considerable amount of discussion among literature in the field (Chang, 2006; Alas, 2018; Jonsson, 2012; Wang and Li, 2011; Khozaei, 2019; Määttä, 2011). While there was no research available that discussed Master's thesis group seminars at the time of writing, information on thesis supervision was of abundance, particularly on Dissertation supervision. As discussed before, some of the information on Dissertation supervision is likely to also apply to Master's thesis supervision, but there are likely also some differences between the two styles of supervision. Students' views on Master's thesis supervision have only been studied to some extent, for example by Filippou et al. (2017: 334-352), in international master's degree programmes in Finnish universities. By investigating four Finnish universities via surveys, Filippou et al. (2017: 334-352) found that students in international programs had

problems communicating and defining the responsibilities between student and their supervisor. Although there has been some interest in developing practices of supervising and guidance within Finnish universities (Erikson and Mikkonen 2003; Nummenmaa, Korhonen and Eerola 2005; Välimaa 2001: 55-72), information regarding NNES thesis writing in Finland remains scarce.

Supervisory relationships and their issues are a wide topic that could easily fill the entirety of this paper. The challenges of supervision and the difficult nature of student-supervisor relationships have been studied rigorously (see for example Eley and Murray 2009; Butler et al. 2014: 203-227; Paltridge and Woodrow 2012: 88-104; Filippou et al. 2017: 334-352). Ashwin et al. (2015) have stressed in their work that close cooperation and relationships between students and supervisors are essential. Wichmann-Hansen and Wrenfeldt-Jensen (2015: 330), on the other hand discovered that the cooperation might be challenged by differences in the perception of each other's role in the process, how the work should progress, how much independence should be displayed by the student and what the academic level of the graduation thesis should be. The general findings of Alas (2018: 5-21) were that while supervisors' tailored support was crucial for the students' sense of progress and overall development, students and supervisors often had different expectations for the supervisory relationship and focused on different areas in the process. Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006: 4-18) also found that students and supervisors had different understandings of the major difficulties and the root causes of those difficulties.

All this seems to indicate that while supervision is a crucial part of the thesis process, it is often riddled with problems within the relationship between the student and their supervisor. Wang and Li (2008: 88-96), also propose that some of the challenges may emanate from pedagogical shortfalls or lack of intercultural sensitivity in the supervision of students. Chang (2006: 2) agrees in highlighting the need for better academic support and intercultural sensitivity, while also concluding that supervision should be characterized by mutual respect and genuine communication to promote effective learning.

The kind of feedback and advice in thesis supervision has also received much discussion. Jonsson (2012: 63-76) has argued that for feedback to be productive, it needs to be useful, i.e. something that can be incorporated in students' upcoming work in the foreseeable future. Wang and Li (2011: 101-112) have divided thesis students into two broader categories: those

displaying a “reactive attitude who demand explicit and directive feedback” and those with a “proactive attitude who seek guidance and inspiration”. The category that the student falls into is determined by how advanced he or she is in terms of research experience (Wang and Li 2011: 101-112). Dekleijn et al. (2013: 1012-1026) have highlighted the complex nature of feedback in thesis writing, since the goals of a master’s thesis are often complex and differ from course work also in the dialogue-driven cyclical relationship of the student and supervisor discussing the student’s work continuously. They identified that students perceive goal-relatedness of feedback in terms goal setting, how well they are doing, as well as how to proceed to next steps. Students who perceived their feedback as positive and providing information on what they should do next were most satisfied with their supervision (Dekleijn et al. 2013: 1012-1026).

To give a further idea of how multifaceted the issue of supervision is, I have included here a direct quote from Alas (2018: 5-21), who had studied supervisors and students in Estonia:

”While guiding thesis writing, however, supervisors report on numerous problems that the students seem to encounter during the process and display in the writing produced in spite of the completed writing courses (e.g. finding a research focus, choosing proper sources, etc.). The reasons are probably diverse: lack of respective experience in their mother tongue, the volume of new information to be processed, lack of longitudinal feedforward (Jonsson 2012: 63–76), inability to transfer the skills acquired in the academic writing class to thesis writing and seeing the writing class content as a thing in itself rather than something that could inform thesis writing. Also, the area of research chosen by the student sets its own standards for the writing.” (Alas, 2018: 5-21)

Observing the citation above, one can begin to see that the issues involved in thesis writing and its guidance are vast, and probably also highly personal. It is likely difficult to pinpoint the exact origins of the students’ problems, but these types of studies give indications as to what to look for. The supervisory relationship and the type of guidance and feedback required by each individual student seem to be central aspects in what constitutes a successful thesis process, and thus deserve attention within the present study.

### **2.3.2 Peer support**

While support and feedback from supervisors is the most important support mechanism for most, studies in peer support have also yielded positive results. Chang’s (2006: 3) student

interviews in New Zealand also showed that students relied significantly on self-study and assistance from supervisors and peers. Data from her interviews “indicated that emotional support from supervisors and their social networks with peers play important role in facilitating their thesis writing process”. Kaakinen, Suhonen and Kaasila, (2017: 27) found in interviewing Master’s thesis students in Finland that peer support in the context of group supervision was a well-working method for Master’s thesis supervision, as it “supported students in completing their Master’s theses within the given time and helped them to reflect upon emotions during the process.”. Mental support seemed to be the most important type of peer support.

Based on a limited number of studies available, peer support seems to have a positive impact on thesis writing, especially related to emotional support. But what about friends and family? Many students mention them in the acknowledgement sections of their theses and highlight their importance in supporting their work throughout the process. Thesis stories written by PhD or Master’s students and collected by Waring and Kearins (2011) occasionally mention that family and friends were important in handling the pressure of working with the thesis. It seems that the impact of friends and family in thesis writing may be important, perhaps depending on the individual, and so the area warrants more research.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research context, research objectives and research questions**

The literature reviewed showed the need to conduct more studies of individual NNES scholars (e.g. Uzuner 2008: 261). The scarcity of research considering students' views on their master's thesis writing has also displayed a need to address the issue. Uzuner (2008: 261) has suggested that further research focus on exploring what kinds of processes multilingual scholars employ to adapt to academic writing techniques and approaches that are foreign to them, and how those gaps can be bridged more effectively. Elsewhere, studies on students' views on their thesis writing have proposed that future studies could focus on students who were not so successful in their strategies and had poor experiences at university to find out, from their perspective, what had hindered or delayed the development of their writing and learning about writing (Odena and Burghess 2013: 3-5).

At the time of writing, there was also a lack of research on Finnish NNES experiences of Master's thesis writing, and while it was possible to find studies of NNES experiences from the points of view of exchange students or students in international degrees especially in Asia, their experiences might not correlate with those of Finnish students for cultural reasons. Discussing the issue at my faculty, both students and staff expressed the desire to learn to facilitate the Master's thesis process and thus facilitate graduation.

In the literature review, I identified various possible points of interest for further inquiry, from which I selected the following themes to explore in this study: Linguistic and research skill issues relating to the thesis writing process, thesis project management such as time-management, working methods, motivation, and self-confidence, and finally, the significance and nature of support mechanisms used by students such as supervision and peer support. The goal of this study is to examine the Master's thesis process from the students' points of view to identify the central challenges that students face during their thesis process and find ways to overcome them, so that the Master's thesis process would become easier for students and staff in the future.

To meet the aims of this research, the research questions of this study are the following:

1. How do Finnish students working on their English Master's thesis experience the process?
2. What do the students consider the key factors leading to a successful thesis process?
3. What are the major challenges that students face, and how could they be overcome?

### **3.2 Qualitative research method**

The focus of the study and the research questions led to the selection of a qualitative research method, which allows the examination of lived experiences, bringing forward the views of the participants (Yin 2016). The data were collected using thematic interviews, which were recorded for analysis. The thematic interview was chosen as the data collection method because it was the best method to acquire in-depth personal views on the phenomenon. These types of interviews are used to produce experience and impression-based data. (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000: 35.). The thematic interview is a suitable approach for examining interviewees who have all experienced a certain situation, namely here the experience of working with their Master's thesis. Interviews constitute useful data for the purposes of this study because they allow the examination of an individual's thoughts, feelings, experiences about the topic. In short, the thematic interview thus brings forward the voice of the interviewee. (Routio 2007) The information gained in thematic interviews is bound to the research environment and context of which it is gathered, but the results gained through them can give important and useful insight from which further research and hypotheses can be derived (Kylmä and Juvakka 2007: 79-80).

Qualitative data analysis was chosen for analysing the interview data in this study, since the analytic method focuses on the interpretative examination and the meaningful content of the data. Qualitative content analysis involves analysing transcripts, identifying themes, and gathering together examples of those themes from the text analysed. (Online QDA 2019).

### **3.3 Data collection procedure**

The participants for this study were invited following a purposive sampling approach, chosen by the researcher to represent a maximum variety in data and to describe the phenomenon with the help of many different views. Ten English Master's degree students were selected for individual thematic interviews, one-on-one with the interviewer. Interviews were done within two weeks during the Summer 2019 at a location chosen by the interviewee, most at either the

interviewer's or the interviewee's home, but also one outside at the beach. Interviews were recorded using two recording devices in case one would fail during the recording. Two interviews were also conducted online via video conference tools and recorded this way. The length of the interviews ranged from 90 to 120 minutes and they were conducted in Finnish, which was both the interviewees' and the interviewer's native language.

Preliminary interviews were used to validate the functionality of the interview structure and themes (Hirsjärvi and Hurme 2000: 35; Eskola and Vastamäki 2000: 24-42). In preliminary interviews, the interview structure was tested with two test interviewees to find out whether there were any possible gaps in the themes explored during the interviews, and to test the overall functionality of the interview structure. The preliminary interviews were successful and did not lead to any changes in the interview structure, and so the data gathered during those interviews were used as part of the research material.

### **3.4 Participants**

Ten participants for the interviews were selected from the University of Jyväskylä's English study subject. To obtain information from different points of the thesis process, five of the students interviewed had already graduated, and the other half were still in the process of writing their theses. To obtain the most up-to-date data, English Master's students at the University of Jyväskylä who had worked with their thesis within the last five years were chosen as the target group for the study. To obtain information about the thesis writing process and support mechanisms, all participants had participated in a one-year thesis seminar, as well as individual meetings with their supervisor for a minimum of one year. The research group consisted of five men and five women.

To obtain information about Finnish native speakers' views writing their Master's theses in English, the selected participants were all native speakers of Finnish. The cultural setting of the study focuses on Finnish natives working on their English Master's thesis in Finland, with supervisors who are also culturally immersed in thesis supervision in Finland. The University of Jyväskylä is a central geographical location in Finland, where students come to study from various locations around Finland. I chose a set of participants so that they had come from many different parts of Finland to study in Jyväskylä.

Three of the interviewed participants had experience in organising independent thesis workshops called Weekend thesis undertakings, funded by the Student Life organization at the University of Jyväskylä. Some participants had worked at the university as research assistants, and one was working as a study coordinator at the faculty at the time of interviews. Other participants had not taken a part in student organization activities or worked at the university. Each different student profile provided a different angle on the topic during the interviews.

The English language curriculum offers two pathways of studying English: one that focuses on discourse study and general language expertise, and one that focuses on language learning and teaching, which leads to a language teacher degree. Students from both specialization options were included (language experts and language teachers). It is also possible to complete a thesis with a pair, and to examine the dual thesis process, one dual thesis writer was selected to be interviewed in this study.

On a technical note, during the writing of this thesis a new curriculum for English studies was introduced in 2020, which introduced changes to the length and scope of the thesis, shortening the page requirements and reducing the study credits awarded for completion of the thesis. All the students interviewed in this study were or had been working on their thesis according to the curriculum prior to that, in which a recommended length for the thesis was approximately 80 pages and the thesis was awarded 40 study credits with 10 credits from the thesis seminar.

### **3.5 Interview structure**

The thematic interviews were semi-structured. The interviewee was informed that they could always speak freely and carry the conversation in their desired direction, although the interviewer would make sure that each theme would be covered in the interview. After giving consent for data collection as well as asking any questions the interviewee might have had about the interview, the interview could begin. In the beginning of the interview, background information about the interviewee was collected, and the interviewee's initial impressions of thesis work were asked before moving onto specific topic. The interview was focused on exploring what kinds of impressions the interviewee had regarding each theme, what positive and/or negative they had to say, as well as what improvement suggestions they might have had.

This study employed a mostly top-down approach driven by research questions, but also included some bottom-up inductive aspects (Braun and Clarke 2006). In other words, the initial topics of the interview structure were covered with each participant, but the structure also allowed for new themes and ideas brought up during interviews were discussed and then taken into discussion in following interviews with other participants. This way, some unanticipated themes rose to spotlight, including discussion on the benefits of writing a dual thesis or working on a thesis for an outside beneficiary. Many good improvement suggestions for different parts of thesis work were also identified following the interviewee's intuition.

Although the nature of thematic interviews is free and open for discussion, the researcher was careful not to influence or persuade the participants' answers in any direction. The interviewer followed the interviewee's ideas, asking clarifying questions, and presenting new themes as interviewees felt they had expressed themselves enough regarding each subject. The interviewee could always return to a prior topic should they remember something new or come up with a new idea at any point. At the end of the interview, the interviewee recapitulated the themes and topics that had been discussed, and the interviewee could express if they had anything to add to the interview in addition to the topics already covered.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

The participants agreed to a GDPR privacy policy agreement, presented to them before each interview, by signing a written agreement form that allowed the researcher to use their comments in the thesis. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent, and in a way that protects the replier's identity and privacy. All participation in this study was voluntary and should the participants have wished to withdraw from the data collection at any point, they had the option to do so. The content and purpose of the study were provided for the participants before the interviews. After the transcription of the audio recordings, the audio files were deleted permanently. For the purposes of maintaining anonymity and personal security, all ten interview participants were given a pseudonym which are used consistently throughout this analysis. In the case of supervisors' names and other names used during interviews, they were replaced with a general term such as "my supervisor", or the pronoun "they, them". In this study, the pseudonyms were nature themed.

Table 2. The list of pseudonyms used for interview participants

Interview participant 1	Leaf
Interview participant 2	Fish
Interview participant 3	Cuckoo
Interview participant 4	Reindeer
Interview participant 5	Herd
Interview participant 6	Brook
Interview participant 7	Moose
Interview participant 8	Thunder
Interview participant 9	Cat
Interview participant 10	Reed

### 3.7 Data analysis

The objectives of the research determined the data analysis process and approach. Thematic analysis was chosen to identify patterns and themes within the qualitative data that are important or interesting (Braun and Clarke 2006). This study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step framework, which is arguably the most influential approach to thematic analysis, at least in the social sciences, because it offers a clear and usable framework for doing thematic analysis (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). The analysis reports findings on two levels: semantic and latent. The semantic level reports the findings as they were said, and the latent level strives to identify and examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations (Braun and Clarke 2006: 84).

Once all data had been gathered, the recordings were transcribed into text by listening to the recordings and employing line-by-line coding. 18 hours of audio recordings yielded 85 pages of transcribed text data. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, open coding was then used to break down and categorize the data. The coding focused on identifying information about different aspects of the thesis process that were easy, difficult, and possible development ideas. Some of the coding responded to specific questions like "What was the thesis experience like?" or "For what purposes have you sought support for?". Preliminary themes already emerged during this stage, and most data fell under one or several of the topics used in the interview structure. After coding all the data, the preliminary themes were then reviewed, and all the relevant data was assigned under an appropriate theme, creating new themes as needed. These themes were evaluated until settling on a set of main themes for the study, which are presented in part four of this study. Once the analysis was done, the quotations used in the final version of the text were translated from Finnish into English by the author.



## 4 FINDINGS

### 4.1 General evaluations by students

In the beginning of the interview each interviewee was asked to think about what the easiest and the most difficult part of their thesis work had been, and then they could describe their experience with the thesis briefly. Two aspects quickly became clear when analysing the initial views of thesis work by each individual interviewee. Firstly, the scope of different experiences that students had had with their thesis were diverse, covering a vast area of topics for further discussion, and secondly, although similar views between students arose in many areas, the experiences from each interviewee were different, which indicates that the impressions of the process are likely highly individual in nature. Out of the ten participants interviewed in the interviews, five had clearly had a more negative experience than a positive one, two felt neutral about their thesis process, and three of the participants indicated that their thesis experience had been mostly positive.

- (1) If I'm going to be completely honest, it's not a very nice experience. (Cuckoo)
- (2) Quite interesting and challenging for sure. (Moose)
- (3) Full of shit, straight up. (Thunder)
- (4) For me it was a really positive experience in the end. (Herd)
- (5) Not very difficult, but not very easy either. (Leaf)

The students already went into great detail about specific areas of their thesis work during this first part, discussing various subjects they felt central to their thesis experience. Table 3 shows the answer distribution of the starting questions. From these, one can already begin to see the multifaceted nature of the topic. These views are included and presented as part of the analysis, under their appropriate themes. Figure 2 describes the four grand themes identified in the theoretical framework, under which various subthemes emerged during the analysis. I will now move onto discussing the key findings within each theme.

Table 3. Starting questions about thesis work, list of answers

<p>Positive comments expressed during preliminary questions:</p>
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- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bachelor's thesis experience helps with Master's thesis work</li> <li>- Master's thesis process teaches many things about oneself and how one should approach working.</li> </ul> |
|--|

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The beginning of thesis work is inspiring, when everything is new and there are new ideas</li> <li>- There are many interesting things about thesis work, data collection and analysis in particular.</li> <li>- Thesis work progressed well when one managed to keep pace working constantly.</li> </ul>
<p>Difficulties expressed during preliminary questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Studies don't offer enough of a basis and foundation to work on the Master's thesis.</li> <li>- Trouble continuing to postgraduate studies because of difficult experiences with the Master's thesis.</li> <li>- Lack of motivation for thesis as a teacher student, lack of relevance towards future work.</li> <li>- Difficulties emerging during thesis work may tangle and slow down the whole process.</li> <li>- Working a job during thesis work makes progressing more difficult.</li> <li>- Actually sitting down and writing the thesis is difficult and gaining enough motivation to actually do it.</li> <li>- The huge workload relating to the thesis is daunting.</li> <li>- The incompatibility of one's own working methods with thesis work.</li> <li>- Working with the thesis felt forced and unmotivating.</li> <li>- Everything else was more interesting than the thesis itself.</li> <li>- Had to work on one's own, when choosing a rare topic.</li> <li>- The thesis puts one's project managements skills to the test.</li> <li>- Felt like a career as a researcher and academic writing skills were not one's thing.</li> <li>- Following other people's work in thesis seminars made one feel like there was no rhyme or reason in their writing.</li> </ul>
<p>Improvement reflections expressed during preliminary questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finding relevance for oneself in thesis work is important: from thesis topic, field of research, work life employer, faculty et cetera could help in finding motivation.</li> <li>- The best way to work on a thesis was to do piece it into smaller parts of manageable work.</li> <li>- To try to produce as complete text as possible from the beginning was helpful, so that there was less proofreading to be done later.</li> </ul>

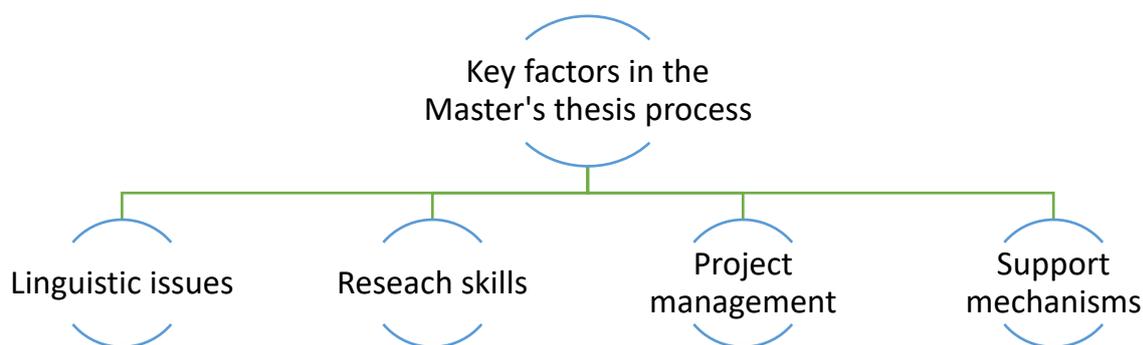


Figure 2. The grand themes regarding the key factors in the Master's thesis process.

## 4.2 Linguistic issues

The first major theme of this research was linguistic issues. The interviews showed that none of the interviewees had had any major problems with their thesis regarding writing in the English language. Most of them reported that their language skills were already good when entering their studies at the university, and that their pastime activities had given them good tools for working in English. Many students had also lived in an English-speaking country, and said that this had greatly improved their English skills and confidence. The participants said that the English language is present in many everyday life events and can be seen and heard almost everywhere in media in Finland.

- (6) I've always had a pretty good self-confidence with my English, and I write and read a lot in English so it has never been a problem for me. I have also lived in New-Zealand so. (Cuckoo)
- (7) I was in exchange in an English-speaking country after all, so I had been exposed to an authentic language environment, although as such you can hear English everywhere anyways. Rarely did I have doubts about how to say something in English. (Herd)

The amount of training that students receive in English during their studies seemed to prepare them well for thesis work. All participants said that it was more natural for them to write academic texts in English than it would be in Finnish, thanks to the amount of practice they had had in their studies. The basic level course "Academic Writing" was named many times as an invaluable course for developing English writing skills. Most of the source literature is in English, which helps with using correct terms and reduces the need for translation during work. The Bachelor's thesis was also mentioned to help in preparing for the writing of the the more extensive Master's thesis. The consensus was that it would have been much harder to write their thesis in Finnish than in English at this point.

- (8) I believe that that and my studies and Bachelor's thesis helped in that it was really natural to write in English. (Herd)
- (9) I feel like we've had enough language skills. Studies definitely offer enough competence in terms of language. (Moose)
- (10) It's probably good that we do it in English, because we study all the material and vocabulary in English, so we lack the academic vocabulary in Finnish. Try to explain something academic to someone when you don't know what the words are in Finnish, because you've never studied it. It's also good for postgraduate students because almost all research is in English. (Cuckoo)

The writing process was said to be a little slower than when writing in a native language, because one must consult the dictionary or search for certain expressions every now and then. Some participants also claimed that there are some small errors with language or negative transfer from their native language, but those did not pose any great problem. One student said that if they had any trouble writing, it would probably be with writing academic text, but even that did not seem to be a huge issue.

When asked about what they felt the consensus was about the topic generally at the university, the interviewees reported having heard mostly similar opinions from other students, although some had heard students having trouble with their confidence in writing in English.

- (11) I have heard from others that it is just as I said, that I don't know if anyone else knew how to write in Finnish. (Reindeer)
- (12) On the other hand, I have heard also differing opinions, that for some it has been more difficult in English. That they don't trust themselves enough in English academic language, even if they could easily teach it. (Cuckoo)

All in all, the interview participants felt that they were generally well prepared for work with the thesis in terms of language skills both from personal life and professional standpoints. The issues they reported were minor wording issues or that they had to learn to write in a more academic way. They all also said that it would be much harder for them to write a Master's thesis in Finnish.

### **4.3 Research skills**

The interviewees discussed the various phases of the thesis process: choosing a topic, writing a theoretical framework, using methods, collecting data and analysing it, as well as writing up the discussion and conclusion sections. The issue of individuality was apparent in this section, as some students found certain parts of the thesis easier than others, and the experiences between students varied a great deal. Here is an example of two reflections from the opposite ends of the spectrum:

- (13) I don't feel that any part had been particularly difficult, or that I would be scared of a certain part of the thesis, or that I would be unsure of what to write here et cetera. At least none of the parts that I've done so far haven't been extremely difficult. (Leaf)

- (14) Oh man, well this is a difficult question to start with considering how poorly the thesis has progressed, so I don't think there have been any part that has been easy for me. Perhaps if my studies offered more expertise, then it would be easier. (Fish)

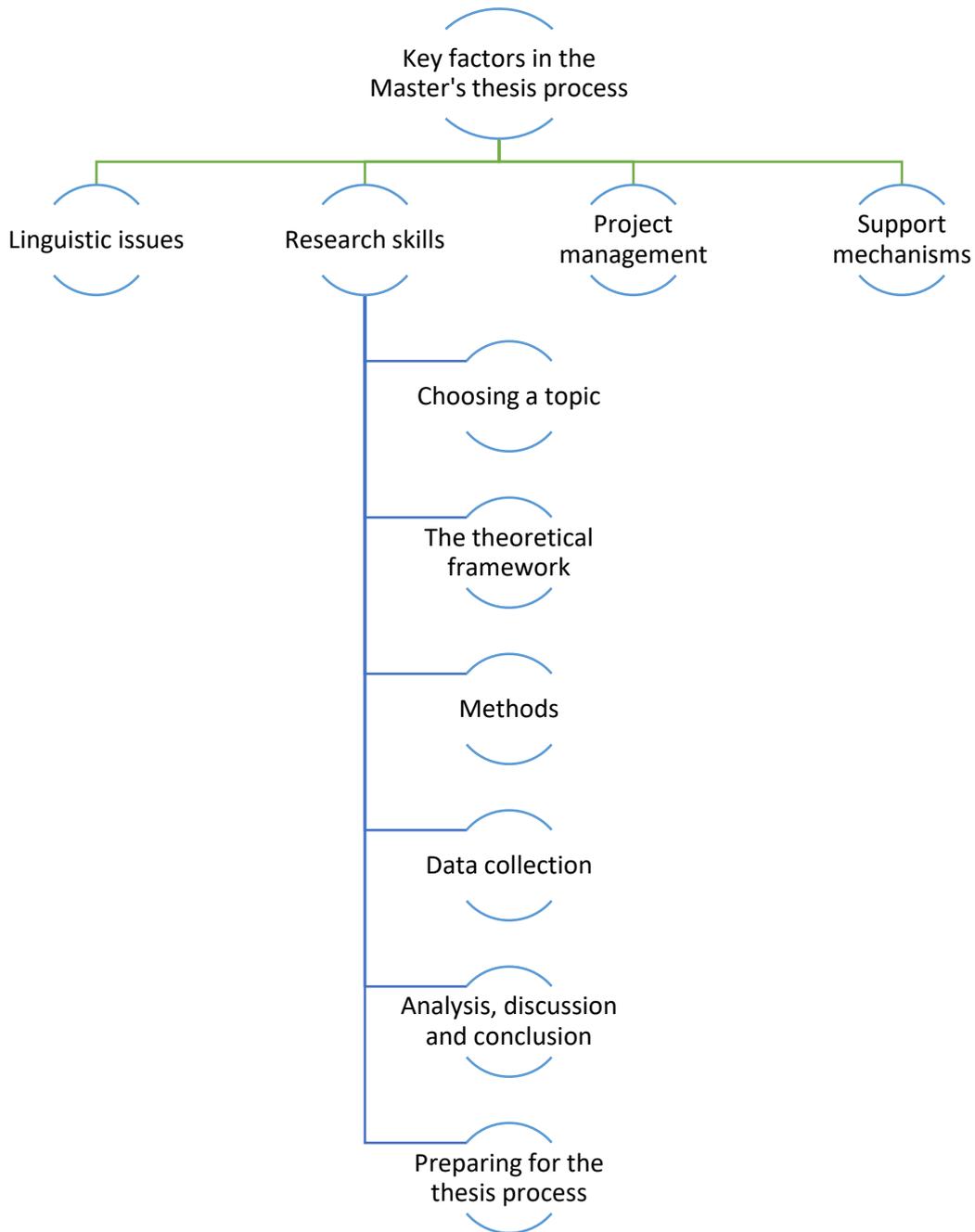


Figure 3. The subthemes of research skills.

### 4.3.1 Choosing a topic

Choosing the topic for a thesis was one of the most discussed parts within thesis work. Some students continued to research their Bachelor's thesis subject, and thus had no problem choosing

a topic, while others had struggled a great deal in finding suitable topics for their thesis. The synergy was high when continuing from a subject which the student had already familiarized with during their Bachelor's thesis. Jumping into an entirely new topic was found difficult and arduous for many, and some students even reported having been stuck with finding a suitable topic and defining it. It would therefore be advised that if the topic of one's Bachelor's thesis is a possible topic for further research, then students should consider continuing with the same topic.

- (15) I did my Bachelor's thesis on the same topic, so I had done a practice attempt already that I could work from with my Master's. I really don't understand why you would do a Bachelor's and Master's thesis on different topics. I would encourage people to continue from the same topic, because then you already have something to work from. In the Bachelor's thesis you already had found some sources, views and approaches that definitely don't work for you. It helped with the background theory process and how I presented my data, as well as offered practical things that I could develop further in my Master's thesis.  
(Brook)

There were many ways the interviewees had come up with their topics for their theses. Some had found inspiration from English courses or their workplace, while some had read other people's theses for inspiration. One student reported having chosen their topic by collecting the ideas interesting to them on separate post-its and choosing their topic from among them. Regardless, the interviewees expressed that much more support was needed for topic selection. While students generally liked the idea that they are free to choose and formulate their topic on their own, based entirely on their own interests, in practice students more often found themselves struggling to come up with a suitable thesis topic, narrowing it down, and formulating appropriate research questions for their research. The central problem seemed to be that the students were unaware of what kinds of research was done at the university and what kinds of research they themselves could do.

- (16) I think choosing a topic was difficult, when you didn't know what was relevant in language research at that time. If we had some theory or thing during one of our courses, it may have been something that was hot in the 80's, but may be that no-one has done any research on it since then. So, we need more teaching that prepares us for doing research. I mean I don't know if any student of English has any idea what language research is currently doing and how, with what methods. So, it's in a way weird that we are supposed to choose a topic, when we have no information on how it should be done. (Cuckoo)

- (17) Probably the connection with our own faculty and the field of research would be found more easily if we were told what kind of research is done here and what trends or orientations are central here. (Cattle)

The process of finding a topic for thesis writing could be started earlier during studies. Being well prepared to choose a thesis topic is especially important because once the thesis seminar starts, there is not much time for developing a topic during the seminar. Students felt that the seminar was helpful when the topic and research questions were defined, but one could miss the train easily if they could not figure out a suitable topic early, or if they had to change their topic for some reason.

- (18) And perhaps the topic selection process should be started already after the Bachelor's thesis, to feel if you would like to continue from that or whether you would be interested in something else. Right now I feel like the Master's thesis is something that is left for the last year only. And it feels rather disconnected from the other studies. But it should begin properly already at subject study level at the latest. (Cattle)

To tackle these issues of preparing for topic selection for the Master's thesis, special sessions could be organized where professors and researchers would discuss current and relevant research and present possible kinds of topics suitable thesis work. The idea is illustrated beautifully here by Cuckoo:

- (19) Studies could present an idea of the hot topics in current language research, to offer the students some thesis-writing ideas. All of these English faculty guys do research after all, so there could be one lecture that would be open for everyone, where they would present what topics could be available, what can be studied, and something concrete especially for those who are having difficulty coming up with a topic. The university could clearly present that for example there are currently these five areas of research and they are divided like this, that you could find out what you could grab there. So, they could offer topics, but you wouldn't necessarily have to take them. But that they would tell that these are hot right now and that means there is a lot of fresh research on them, so that someone wouldn't start researching something that hasn't seen any research since the 80's. And then you would get feedback like "what is this prehistoric topic you have?". Or at the beginning of the seminar an email could be sent to participants that this kind of research has been done recently. The message could be like "Hey you, who are starting your Bachelor's or Master's thesis within the next year, come here, this lasts for 45 minutes in some large space and there's candy and some lecturer or professor telling what kinds of stuff is currently going on, and people can ask questions. (Cuckoo)

Students seemed to consider the Master's thesis such a large piece of work that they had pressure of finding a stellar topic and that that pressure hindered the process. One student also pointed out that he was still stuck with their research proposal after many years because they hadn't been able to properly define their topic. One interesting finding was that when there were no restrictions to topic selection, a student could become overwhelmed with the freedom of choice, and so the freedom becomes counterproductive. The nature of the English Master's thesis is also that almost any topic can be suitable for a thesis but finding the connection with English can be difficult.

- (20) Choosing a topic felt difficult. On the other hand, for the Bachelor's thesis it felt a lot easier when the whole work seemed much smaller. I haven't been that satisfied with my topic in hindsight. I had set up too much pressure on what the topic should be like, and I panicked a little because I needed to choose a topic quick to begin working on it that I should have thought about it more thoroughly. I would do it a little differently now if I would do it again. Choosing the topic is a little difficult when we don't have anything similar to other subjects that there are options or something, but you just have to come up with it yourself. And the narrowing down and choosing in general is difficult. (Reed)
- (21) For me it is a kind of a creative agony that I'm supposed to write a thesis, but you can practically write it on pretty much anything as long as it is somehow connected to your own study subject. For me it is always easier to have some kinds of limitations, but it gets impossible when I have the freedom to do anything I want. Perhaps clearer directions for choosing the subject and narrowing it down, as well as formulating research questions would be needed. (Fish)

A problem that may arise with complete freedom of topic selection is also that students may choose a topic which no supervisor is familiar with, or one that is not at all central, thus reducing the available help they can receive from their supervisor during the thesis process. This may lead to the student being more or less on their own in terms of their research, as had happened with one interview participant. For this reason, it would be very beneficial for the students to receive more information on what kinds of topics are among the realm of knowledge at their current university, and to tell them that they can choose something more uncommon, but that it may be more arduous to find resources for that. The important thing would be to choose a topic that the student would have support for.

- (22) I knew that I wanted to combine sign language translation and English translation in my thesis, so it was really difficult. I was lucky to do it at the university of Jyväskylä, because I knew of environments where the phenomenon was common. Narrowing the topic down was more difficult at the end, and I did extra work because I had such a topic. I didn't find much research related to my topic, because it's not central here. Sometimes I felt that I was trying to desperately figure it out on my own and explain it to others, because we don't have translation research here. It was challenging in some ways but nor was I left without support, I just needed to do more on my own. (Brook)
- (23) And that is also pretty difficult that you can go to a seminar based on your own interest, but you may still end up with a topic that the supervisor knows not so much about, and so it becomes more difficult to offer suitable sources and so on. In that sense it would be better to offer sources and ideas for topics, so that the supervisors would know exactly what you are doing next. (Cattle)

To counteract these problems, the Master's thesis seminar could offer more concrete guidelines for topic selection, and for narrowing down a topic to a manageable size. More concrete guidelines on how to choose one's topic, accompanied by pre-selected models and examples of good thesis topics would also help with this. A good way to bridge the gap would be to offer some thesis topics but leave the student to decide whether they would like to pursue a readymade topic or to find their own.

- (24) It's pretty good that you can choose your topic yourself, but it would be good to have some framework or examples or something about what the topics can be like and where you can search for them, because in principle you can write your thesis on virtually anything. If you were to be given a selection of options and you had a sample of material to analyse when beginning, it would ease the work tremendously compared to having to do everything from the beginning by yourself. That way you don't have the full power to choose your topic freely, or the independency, but for me for example it would have worked much better, now thinking in hindsight. A compromise would be if you had an opportunity to think of a topic on your own, but then there would also be pre-selected options also. (Reed)

All in all, the best course of action to improve Master's thesis topic selection seems to be to first, include clear examples and guidelines for what suitable topics can be already before the thesis seminar starts, accompanied by information about the kinds of research done currently in the field. Then, as the seminar begins, supervisors could continue to provide students with concrete ideas and inspiration through examples, as well as organize specific events aimed at familiarizing thesis students with ideas that they could study. This could reduce problems for

those who tend to get stuck with their thesis, while still offering the freedom for creative and original topics for those who wish to pursue them.

### **4.3.2 The theoretical framework**

Developing the theoretical framework was an easy and fun process for some, while it was extremely difficult for others. One opinion shared by everyone was that writing a theoretical framework required much work.

- (25) The theoretical framework was fun, although it was of course very arduous (Cuckoo)
- (26) Writing the background literature and reading it was a lot of work. (Cat)
- (27) For me, reading about the theory and collecting background research and writing that section has been easy, because it is in a way something where you don't have to think that much. (Leaf)

The most difficult aspect of writing a theoretical framework was keeping it compact. From a world of research available online, there was either too much research literature available, or barely any, depending on the chosen subject. Finding similar research done by others was a helpful factor for some.

- (28) Another thing was that perhaps when there was a lot of theory and everything felt essential, it was difficult to figure out what was essential for my own study. (Cuckoo)
- (29) Narrowing down the theoretical background was difficult and choosing what to include was a burden to me. Very little research has been done on my topic previously, especially in Finland it is still in its infancy.
- (30) Sometimes I felt that I hadn't gotten enough tools for that from the courses. It was rather arduous, and I used my Bachelor's thesis quite a bit and searched for sources using its bibliography. (Cat)
- (31) I found very similar research to mine done in Canada, which had pretty much exactly the kinds of sources I needed and all the terms were also defined. (Cattle)

A problem raised when discussing the theoretical framework was that the study subject did not offer any kinds of tools for evaluating the quality of sources, and many students that had already completed their research said that they still did not know which pieces of research in their literature review were appropriate and which were not, and this view does not seem to be central in thesis writing or evaluation of theses in any way.

- (32) I mean I still don't know which of those journals were respected ones. We lack the kind of information in the field to tell whether some publication is some nonsense publication that gathers all the trash articles, and which ones are the okay ones. We have no tools for this. (Cuckoo)

Students were also unanimous to say that they mostly had not received the appropriate training to tackle the theoretical framework.

- (33) Perhaps I felt like the studies did not really prepare me for doing the theoretical background, when in courses you were always given pre-selected material and good if you even needed to read those. So, I had a shallow basis on theory, and thus felt like I had to work really hard to get the hang of the field literature. (Cat)

It would be beneficial to offer guidelines for students on how much research literature needs to be explored to fill the requirements of the theoretical framework, how many different sources should be used, so that the literature review is credible and comprehensive enough. Reducing the amount of reading material handed out by lecturers and including more guided independent searching for literature and use sources would be a great way of preparing the students for this part of the thesis beforehand. Those types of courses could also be ideal opportunities to discuss the relevance and credibility of different research literature, and to learn to evaluate which research literature is good and which is not.

- (34) We should practice those skills needed in the thesis during our studies, and study searching for information and using sources. I think such courses where one would look for theory and choose sources independently would be good. There aren't many essays I've written in university where I've needed to use sources. If we go to many other countries, you can't hand in even a five-page course paper if you haven't used sources in it. And you could get feedback during that course from your teacher if you had used some rubbish sources. (Cuckoo)

All in all, it seems that more training and guidance for the use of sources is needed to prepare the students for the theoretical framework of the Master's thesis.

### **4.3.3 Methods**

Arriving at the methods section of the thesis process, it was clear that the easiest method in the participants' view was some form of qualitative content analysis, much like the one used in the present study, where the data was collected via either questionnaires or interviews, and analysed

qualitatively. Using other methods on the other hand had caused trouble for students. It was agreed by all participants that writing about methods and choosing a suitable method for their own study was one of the most difficult parts of thesis work. Many reported that they had struggled hard with this section of their thesis.

(35) My methods are pretty simple (interview and questionnaire, content analysis). I don't see it being especially difficult, but what I probably have heard the most is that writing about methods is the bane of our existence as English students. How do I formulate this so that it has been written scientifically, and what kinds of methods do I use to analyse my data. That is something that many people have had to fight with. (Leaf)

(36) Oh man, the research methods were difficult. That was probably the most difficult part. I feel like I still wouldn't want to do that even though I've done it once. I have no idea what they mean and what use there is be forced to choose one and do the analysis strictly following some method. I still don't really understand it. (Cuckoo)

The main reason for these problems seemed to be same as before in theoretical framework: the studies during the degree do not offer enough training in it. Students are not taught what kind of methods exist and which ones are useful for the different kinds of research that can be done. It is also difficult for one to find suitable models of these methods from source literature without guidance, because students have no idea what to search for and what methods are good for the research they wish to do. While reading about the different methods was considered useful, it was also perplexing, because every book and source describe their methods slightly differently, and a novice researcher can quickly become overwhelmed and confused when reading about the different methods available. Even when finding a method sourcebook, the student did not have the tools to evaluate whether that particular method could be used in their research and how to use it.

(37) It was more difficult to find sources for those methods. As far as I remember I read some method literature in Finnish, and that was helpful. (Cattle)

(38) Every book has vastly differing methods. How am I supposed to choose just one? The seminar handled the topic quite generally, but all of those methods could have been inspected more, and why they are important, and why it has to be so clear, because the method of analysis may define what kind of data you collect, because you cannot do everything with every method, and you need to be aware of the method when you collect data. And when I started to read about tens and tens of methods, I discovered that they were all different. I used some Hungarian guy's named Durek's method, and my supervisor was like: "why are

you using this in your thesis?”, and I said that someone else had used it, and then the supervisor said that you can’t really use it like that. And I was just like “Uh-huh?”. (Cuckoo)

The problems with methodology led many students to sticking with a method they had already used in their Bachelor’s thesis or using the qualitative content analysis method, because it was the most easily tangible one. Some said that they would have liked to try some other method but they felt that they were not well enough equipped to do so, and that adapting a new research method would merely increase the already high workload and make the thesis process more difficult for them. One student did not have a model for their method or analysis, which made the process much more difficult and time consuming, and another student who had attempted a mixed-method study said that they had struggled fitting the two methods together.

(39) Well I had some idea with the Bachelor’s thesis, but even then it was just like “okay let’s just take some method” and then somehow you managed to justify it and just go with it. So I felt like I have no toolset for this, so I didn’t even consider doing something like a statistics analysis or something else, I just thought to keep it somehow simple and such that I myself could at least understand it. (Cat)

(40) I was maybe nervous about jumping into something new, so I did not consider the interview method because of that. (Deer)

(41) And then I did not have a model for transcribing my data, so I had to figure it out on my own as I was using an unorthodox method and was handling my data with Elo software, which no-one but sign language personnel use. Analysing the data took an unholy amount of work and time. (Brook)

A light source for methods seemed to be to try to find other pieces of research that had conducted a similar study and see what kinds of methods had been used in them. This seems a recommended way of approaching the subject.

(42) It was only later after god knows how long I had been trying when I realized talking to my supervisor that I shouldn’t have approached it the way I had, reading all kinds of method works, but I should have read as similar research to mine as possible and see how they had done it. (Reed)

There are also some courses, especially at the advanced study level which do help with method use to some extent. Courses which require the student to think about methods and data collection were considered useful, and it was felt that there should be even more of those kinds of courses, so that the methods would not be completely foreign when starting the thesis process. Regarding existing courses about discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis

methods, one interviewee criticized the courses for not actually teaching to apply and use those methods properly. For those courses that do focus on improving the skills necessary for thesis writing, the course summaries could include a text in the course enrolment descriptions that this course is good for those who wish to develop the skills required for thesis writing.

- (43) Those courses which have been most useful in terms of developing skills related to thesis writing have been ones where we have written course papers resembling research papers. “Language and social media”, and “Language as social practice” were good, because you had to already think about collecting data and how to use methods, so that those things weren’t completely foreign when starting the thesis process. It feels like courses and course descriptions don’t specify that they include useful training toward thesis writing. I think that would be very good, to bring it out that “hey, in this course we are developing skills that are very useful in a researcher’s work”. (Reed)

Many students expressed that the different methods available could be explored more fully in the thesis seminar, or in a separate course dedicated purely on methods. Learning to concretely use different methods could solve most of the issues, while also for developing tools for those who wish to pursue a career as researchers. Advanced level courses could even be profiled to teach the use of certain methodology along with their existing content.

- (44) I think it would be good to have courses where one would complete some research piece thing where you would combine some views, like methods, which seem to generally be difficult for students. That would offer practice and a better understanding of how to choose methods and how to use them. I really wouldn’t mind if there was an actual course on its own where methods and their use would be discussed. And you could go for example to some workplace to carry out some kind of a small data collection. The methods should perhaps have more concrete practice and use at an earlier stage, because there isn’t enough time to discuss them thoroughly during the seminar. The methods are somewhat of a separate part of studies, and they are not much used on a practical level during our studies. (Reed)

Another problem that method courses would prevent is to avoid misconceptions of what methods are suitable for which kind of research. This prevents the problem where a student may wish to use a certain type of method but will then discover that that particular method is not well suited for the type of research they are doing.

- (45) At first I had thought that I wanted to do a conversation analysis or a critical discourse analysis or stance analysis, but then I fell for the qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis, because it was a familiar method to me, and was most descriptive of the issue I was

studying. So, I had a more ambitious goal with the method to examine the interaction in the comments more rigorously, but then I discovered that it did suit my topic that well. (Cattle)

To summarize, it seems that the methods section was one of the most difficult parts of the thesis to write, because students had little to no experience of different method use. Teaching students to use different kinds of methods during studies seems to be the best solution.

#### **4.3.4 Data collection**

Data collection seemed to be one of the easier parts of the thesis process for many. Especially interviews and questionnaires were well received as straightforward and easy data collection methods. Many that used these tools had done the practical decision of selecting easily reachable target groups or data that was readily available. Those who had collected their data by means other than interviews or questionnaires also reported that they had had no trouble finding data, choosing videos for analysis, or finding pieces of text or other discourse for analysis.

- (46) The data was easy to collect. I made interviews with ten teachers, contacted some friends, and those schools where I had done substitutions, so I got those interviews easily. You don't need to search for data when it is created during those interviews. (Cuckoo)

Motivation seemed also to be at a higher level at this phase, because after working with other people's work in the theoretical background, they could finally proceed with data collection of their own and the work felt more their own. Examining collected data was also said to be interesting.

- (47) At best it was interesting to do interviews for the thesis, and also going through the data was pretty interesting, having thought about what they said and analysing that. I feel like I got a lot of support for data collection and forms and all that, and to just carry on conducting the study. (Cat)

Having affiliation with the target group or potential data was especially helpful in data collection. Many participants said that they had used their working-life and free time contacts to find data or recruit individuals for interviews.

Data collection was not discussed extensively by the interviewees, because they felt that the phase was straight-forward and easy mostly. Based on the few comments relating to data collection during interviews, as well as the number of positive ones, it seems that data collection

did not cause any major problems to the participants of this study. It seems that students were also more motivated to work on this part of the thesis, because after working with other people's research the theoretical framework, the data collection part felt more their own.

#### **4.3.5 Analysis, discussion and conclusion**

Like data collection, the analysis, discussion, and conclusion sections were said to be somewhat easier than the beginning parts of the study, partly because the major pieces of the study had already been pieced together, and these sections included some straightforward work. There were no major problems during these stages, other than sometimes needing to clarify which of their content belonged in which section. For some students, these stages blended in together, as they took notes for later discussion during the analysis. Students had higher motivation during these phases as the work here was directly related to the students' own research at this point. Especially during later parts of the work when the students' own text started to make sense, many experienced increased confidence as well as motivation.

- (48) The analysis has felt considerably more interesting, because it is your own research you are doing, and you get to browse excels and so on. (Moose)
- (49) And the analysis was really empowering, I mean comforting, when you noticed at some point that there was some sense in this text of mine. (Cattle)
- (50) Of course, I had to complement my theory and edit it, but as I was doing my analysis I also made notes for the discussion part, so it came at the same time. Then again, when I was doing my analysis and had an idea, I always wrote it down immediately. Whether those notes were useful in the end or not, it was better to have them available. (Cuckoo)

The only major difficulties with the analysis and discussion were encountered in the beginning of the two phases, when the data had been collected but the student did not yet know exactly what to do with it. Defining the researcher's own views and angles was troublesome for some, as there was uncertainty about what kinds of statements could be made from the data and what could not. Writing out the analysis in an academic manner was also considered difficult by one student.

- (51) If I had to choose what is difficult, then I'd probably choose the analysis, because you have to write out those examples, and you question whether your writing is academic enough, because you can't use very academic text with that part. I don't actually know if it needs to be academically written, it may be more in my own head because I want it to be really proper. (Thunder)

- (52) Writing the analysis part: The most difficult was in some ways its beginning, thinking of what you were actually doing with the material now that you had it. (Cuckoo)
- (53) I was probably the most stuck in thinking about what my views in the analysis would be, and how I would execute them, and what specifically I wanted to research when there were many terms and themes related to my study. So which ones of them exactly I wanted to focus on. (Cattle)
- (54) The difficulty with analysis-discussion was that I did not know what I had the nerve to say, because the group I studied was a small group representing a community to which I myself also belong. Sign language translators. Perhaps it was partly writing out my own impression of things. How I write it, because the majority of people reading it don't know what the interpretation of the field was, and that the study shows that these are perceptions, and my analysis is based on those perceptions, and I'm not supposed to tell people what they should or should not do. So that was challenging. And how to apply those results. Even though I presented a lot of examples, I didn't want it to be the thing, but rather that "Hey, we are communicating, and we have lots of resources available, and we communicate like this and it is linguistically correct". (Brook)

#### **4.3.6 Preparing for the thesis process**

The analysis of the various phases of thesis work revealed that focus needs to be taken at least on three beginning parts of thesis writing: choosing a topic, developing a theoretical framework, as well as choosing a suitable method. Many students expressed their frustration towards their studies because after studying for many years at the university, they still felt ill-prepared for the thesis process. While most students felt that their studies prepared them well for their thesis linguistically, but not doing research writing. Apart from a few course papers which have a research structure, few tasks or assignments develop the exact skills required for thesis work.

- (55) The thesis was a terribly big project to do at once when you had no idea how to do it. I mean why don't our studies prepare us in any way for the thesis? We've been studying at the university for five years. Because the Bachelor's thesis is the only thing that comes close to that style, but even that is quite small and you really don't have any kind of basis to work from with you Master's thesis. There was probably that one academic writing course that somehow prepared a little. So I don't think that there is any sense having a 300 study credit program, and there is some three-to-four credit course and nothing else that would prepare us for the thesis. I was thinking during both of my thesis processes that there is absolutely

no sense in that I have been here for years and nothing that I have done has prepared me for this whatsoever. (Cuckoo)

The main pitfalls in terms of course contents included the lack of courses where one must search for and use research literature and sources which would prepare the student better for writing a theoretical framework, and the lack of concrete use of different methods in research, which would familiarize the student with relevant methods and their use prior to the thesis process.

- (56) It would probably be good if there were more studies that prepared us for the thesis. Should it perhaps be that the studies would direct towards thesis-style work earlier on, and that research work would always be integrated within those courses. (Reindeer)

The Bachelor's thesis is the only larger-scale research piece that prepares the students for the Master's thesis during the studies, but the larger scale of the Master's thesis made many students cower before it. The data shows some possible remedies. The research participants said that the best way to learn how to write certain sections of your thesis or learning how to do some technical formatting such as citation was to look at other people's theses and see how they have done it. This was listed as perhaps even the number one tool for thesis writing in general, helpful for virtually any part of the thesis process, and some interviewees regretted not reading other people's research in the beginning of their own process. Seeing what kinds of topics have been used in prior research helps with topic selection, reading what kinds of methods have been used in other theses can help decide what kind of method to use in one's own research et cetera.

- (57) It's a great way in general to read other people's theses, not just for building self-confidence, but also just for figuring out how you want to write your own thesis. I read one of my best friend's thesis a lot because I used much of the same methods, and for structuring it helps in figuring out in what order you need to say everything. And also for finding a thesis topic. Of course, it is worth checking with your supervisor that the thesis you are using has received good grades before modelling too much. One person's thesis was one of the main sources for my thesis, and I did the same in my Bachelor's. (Herd)

Reading other people's theses and using good models can help with each phase is one helpful factor, and supervisors could provide students with adequate examples of how each section could be approached and make sure that they are not following bad models. Students should also be encouraged to consider building their thesis on previous knowledge, either continuing to work on the same topic they did in their Bachelor's thesis, or a topic that they were already familiar with from other studies.

A longer-term solution to the problem is that different skill sets required in thesis writing would be better introduced and trained during studies. Courses which focus on exploring contemporary research topics in language research, offering students tools for figuring out their thesis topic early, courses that focus more on searching for research literature and articles independently, courses where students familiarize themselves with different methods used in the field and learn to use them concretely, and courses with assignments that require writing text similar to parts of the thesis. The idea is to focus more on the thesis as a natural finish line that the studies aim towards, and as an entity separate from other studies, as it is now viewed by many. The following excerpt from Cat describes the idea well.

(58) I'm perhaps of the opinion that the problem with the entire degree is that the studies are here, and the thesis is there. It should be approached in a way that all courses had a little of that content that prepares for research, and that it would start from year one, not just with academic writing, but also including tasks where you search for articles in certain places given to you. So, you would get some knowledge search skills from the start, and you would read more research and articles and would get to know how it works. So that way you would probably not feel like you don't know anything of this field of research. That would create great discussion during lectures for example talking about why this or that source is good or not. Somehow I feel like there is no "thesis 101 trick – this is how you write your thesis", and this way you would feel like you are an expert in the research after graduation, that you would know how to answer what kinds of research the field has, and what kinds of questions are being researched. I see it somehow in a way that the thesis should not be a separate thing from studies, but their logical endpoint. (Cat)

Lastly, an interesting opinion perhaps worth mentioning is that one participant brought up a point about the philosophy of science. He expressed that it would have been more motivating to learn about science itself, its philosophy, and why everything is done the way it is done. Perhaps adding this kind of information could provide better motivation for similar students wishing to know more about why research is done the way it is, to understand why the kind of research they do is important. This kind of philosophical education could be implemented within studies.

(59) It would have been nice to know more about the nature of science, and why it is relevant in life. The philosophy of science is not very central during our studies, because you can do fine without it. We don't go very deep with it. We are told to choose our method for our thesis, but we are not told where those methods spring from, and what the ideology behind it is. (Reindeer)

## 4.4 Project management

This part of the analysis focuses on project management issues. Figure X lists the major areas relating to project management. Time-management, working methods, motivation, and self-confidence describe each area of the thesis work, offering students' insight into what it was concretely like to work with the thesis and try to manage the various aspects of the project. Two topics that received a great deal of discussion throughout this section are discussed at the end: the magnitude of the thesis process as well as deadlines and strictness during thesis work.

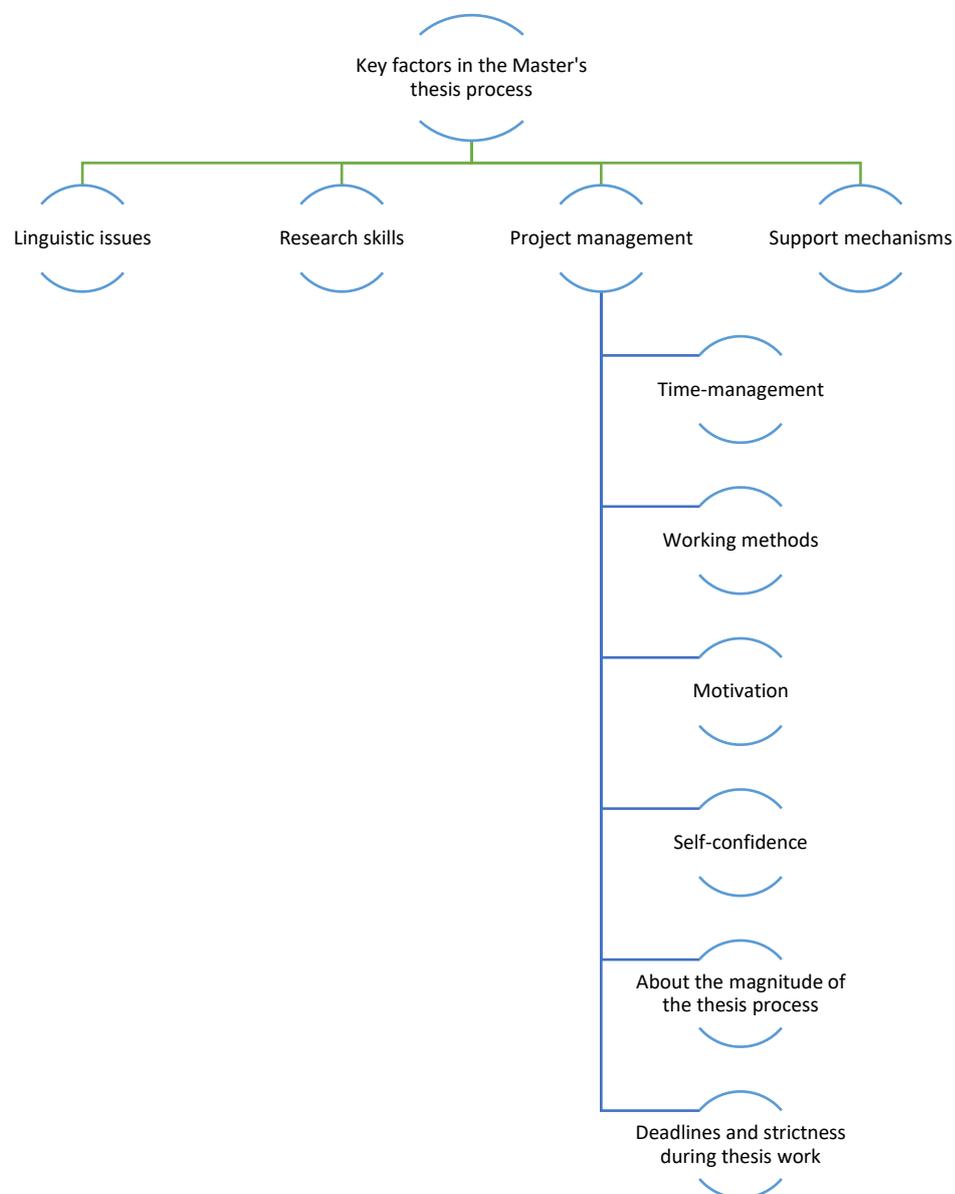


Figure 4. The subthemes of project management.

### 4.4.1 Time management

This section deals with how students allocated time for their thesis, what time constraints they had, and how they managed their schedules with their thesis.

In terms of time management, a crucial factor about completing the thesis was simply how much time they had to work on it. The different levels of available time posed differing results: being able to freely allocate time for the thesis without having the pressure of other work was helpful for some, while others felt that too much freedom resulted in more procrastination and less diligence to work on the thesis. Many students said that when they were not in a rush, they were simply lazy and did not work on the thesis as much as they should have.

- (60) I didn't feel any kind of horrible time pressure so that was also helpful. (Cat)
- (61) My own laziness is one reason why I haven't finished the thesis yet. I've noticed that if I have too much freedom with the work and freedom not to think about the thesis, then that affects negatively. (Leaf)
- (62) When I wasn't so busy at work, and had little other studies with a lot of time to spare I just wouldn't work on the thesis either. So I can just look in the mirror. (Moose)
- (63) I promise myself every once in a while to put some time toward the thesis, but it doesn't really happen. Usually if I get something else done then I may have a good flow that makes me jump into working with the thesis also, even without having schedule any time for it in the first place. So it has more been kind of inefficiency and inability to tackle the thesis even though I would have had time for it. It is difficult to say how I would get it done, probably it would require some kind of self-discipline then. I guess I should schedule time for it, although it's easier said than done. It is difficult to schedule, being such an independent process. (Fish)

Most students said that their other studies or courses did not pose any major problem to their thesis work, as those had mostly been completed by the time they were writing their theses.

- (64) Having time to work on it. I don't remember if I had some other studies left. I probably had some left, but the university life is quite relaxed, so they didn't bother me much. And I didn't have a job, so it was nice to work especially in the summer and after that, so being so late in our studies helped us focus on the thesis. (Reindeer)

Working part-time was also not an issue for students, as this would actually help in scheduling their job working time and thesis time together.

- (65) Finding time wasn't difficult, I had a part-time job, and I worked for a couple days and then committed a couple days to the thesis. I felt that that was pretty good, but then you still maintained the touch. And then there was a gap when I didn't work, so I thought that I would work considerably more during that time, but then those days slipped somehow, so I maybe got more done when I thought that I had thesis days and work days, because then I couldn't clown around because there weren't that many days to spare for the thesis when I had also work, so I used that time better. It increased my effectiveness. Having a part-time job helped me in scheduling my life and at the same time finding a rhythm for the thesis. So my life was under control. I feel almost that that work helped me in bringing structure to those days. Somehow it doesn't seem very intuitive, but then I used the time more efficiently when I had less of it. (Cat)
- (66) And on the other hand I was working part-time the whole time. In a way it irritated me to be working, but in a way it also helped in scheduling, that "okay here I will work on the thesis, and there I will work on my job". Really having that schedule helped me to focus on working with the thesis. (Cattle)

On the other hand, having a full-time job or doing study internships was said to slow down or even halt thesis writing at times, because there was simply not enough energy to work on the thesis in addition to other responsibilities. Students had to prioritize work opportunities over thesis writing sometimes, because of money and career reasons.

- (67) Honestly, I prioritized work, because someone is paying me for it, or because someone else's work depends on me finishing my work goes before the thesis. You put them first, and then figure out if you have time and energy to work on the thesis. In hindsight it wasn't sensible working on the thesis and so many other things at the same time, because the thesis is practically full-time studying. (Brook)
- (68) Sometimes I've had work. It is of course difficult to turn down potential work during these times, especially from your own field, just to finish your thesis. (Fish)
- (69) I can barely work on the thesis if I'm working, you just don't have energy after a full workday. My commute also takes one and a half hours in total a day. So 9+ hours are spent working or travelling to work and back, so there is not much time left to work on the thesis. I would also combine this with motivation, having gotten into an internship from my own field, because I had to also maintain motivation towards that internship. I just felt that so many resources go into working, and you want to do your job properly, so it is difficult to invest in the thesis at the same time. (Reed)

Related to work, money was a somewhat important issue for students when considering thesis work. Some students thought that having enough money facilitated setting aside time for thesis

work, while one student said that whenever they had enough money, they did not feel pressured or motivated enough to make progress, and only the looming threat of running out of money pushed these students to accomplish things.

(70) The most important thing was to secure my income, so I had little external stress to complete the thesis quickly or else I would run out of money. So that was important to me.

(Cat)

(71) And of course having a job ready and a source of income, even though it took time, meant that I could buy cheese if I wanted to without having to stress about everyday life and to think about what I would live off of. (Cuckoo)

(72) Money. If I have money, then I don't have to think about having money and then I can just work on the thesis. We have a lot of money in our household, living at a Koas student housing apartment, and my partner has money because they're working. But it is hard on my own pride not having money, so usually if the bank account is comfortable, I can work on the thesis a little more easily. I don't stress about anything other than money. In that sense having money isn't necessarily such a good thing, because I only work when I have that peak panic of not having money. (Thunder)

Evaluating what has been said, the participants' views on what kind of life situations were best them were personal, but a general theme seemed to be that full-time jobs and completely full schedules simply did not leave enough energy for thesis work, and thus working full time when thesis writing is not recommended, while some work obligations, especially part-time work were considered to have a positive impact on thesis work, as they forced the students to improve their schedules and allocate time more efficiently. When there were no other obligations whatsoever, some were able to focus completely on thesis writing, but others felt that making progress with their thesis was extremely difficult, when they were not making progress with any other aspect of life either. Again, this phenomenon was personal, but students should strive to reach a balance where if they feel too lazy to work on just the thesis in their life, they should incorporate a healthy number of other responsibilities to motivate them to also schedule their lives to make slots for thesis work. If money is the issue, then working just enough to support oneself could be a good option or taking a break from work to finish the thesis as one student had done and then continuing to work, if that is possible.

Outside of work and other major responsibilities, finding a balance between thesis work and other activities seemed important. Taking care of one's mental and physical health were important factors. Monitoring one's own health and energy during the process and recognizing

the need for rest and breaks as necessary is an important issue. Needless to say, they should not overburden themselves, but to seek for options where they prioritize the thesis, but leave room for relaxation.

- (73) If you try to work for four hours and after two or three hours you feel like you don't have the energy to go on, you shouldn't blame yourself for it, but be merciful. That is important. (Cuckoo)
- (74) If you only have two hours of time, then don't work if it doesn't feel good to you. (Moose)

When in trouble, reducing other responsibilities to a bearable amount helped students continue working with their theses.

- (75) Personal choices both help and make it more difficult. It is really up to you. In my situation I was working as a research assistant, weekend thesis undertaking project, and translations, so in the middle of that the thesis started to jam up just a little bit. (Brook)
- (76) It helped to have one free period from work to focus on the thesis entirely. In spring I also left out student organization work, which was helpful. I didn't have studies either. In a way a hectic life forces you to stabilize to have time for the thesis, so it was helpful when I also had time to sleep and to relax as well. That helped a lot. (Cattle)
- (77) I value sports quite highly, so I would have to fit in that also during those weeks when you are working, it becomes really difficult to get thesis work done. (Reed)

Some students reported that they had to forgo many social events to be able to make progress with the thesis. This temporary compromise was painful but necessary. For others, managing time for personal relationships posed some challenges for thesis writing, which also created some temporary discomfort. It seems important to try to strike a good middle point between thesis work and leisure time.

- (78) Probably living in another town helped, because there weren't a lot of people there, so I didn't have that social pressure or social life. And when I was pumped up, I left out everything else, when I was living in Imatra, and I didn't know anyone else there other than one couple who had a small baby, and so I didn't go to have easter meals nor did I go to my nephew's birthday, but instead was working on the thesis and so on. (Cuckoo)
- (79) Also, I just remembered that I also felt bad those times when I decided to work on the thesis, because I had to tell my partner that I couldn't see them that weekend. So it was a little depressing, but not a crisis in any way. (Cattle)
- (80) The external pressure was really strong when I was working on the thesis, I felt that younger students were like "come on, let's go!". And I was like "let me be old". That was

challenging sometimes. And sometimes I felt like “is this my life now that I just work on the thesis” and “will I miss something now?”. And probably I did miss something, but thinking back to to it now, I don’t think I missed that much. Being in a relationship helped alleviate that fear of missing out, that I didn’t have pressure to go to Freetime even after graduating. During the pedagogical study year I had an extreme burnout all the time but still you had to revel just to not miss the opportunity. It is important to have those people around you. (Cattle)

Managing thesis work with other work, social life, sports, and everything else that a student has in their life can be difficult and while there may be no right answer for everyone, finding a balance where prioritizing the thesis (and perhaps part-time work), but also having stress-relieving activities in life could be the most helpful way to survive the thesis process. Time and work management are personal affairs that require experimentation to find the methods most suitable for any given individual.

What could then be done by the student to improve time management and scheduling? Many students said that it just needs self-discipline to build schedules and stick to them. Those schedules should be taken as seriously as other work. It may be difficult because there is no immediate penalty for not working on the thesis, but in the long term, the penalty may come in various ways, such as anxiety, reduced motivation and self-confidence, as well as monetary penalties if the student cannot find work because of a delayed thesis, or they may have lower salary because they have not yet graduated. Booking a whole day at a time when the primary goal is to work on the thesis should work, as there is enough time for tuning in and preparation, as well as relaxation and breaks.

- (81) Sometimes the time management and concentration could have been better. Maybe it being such a long process demanded a bit of self-discipline to make constant progress, and to make that time go into the thesis constantly and not to something else. (Cat)
- (82) I have the same opinion as my supervisor, that you just have to mark in your calendar the days when you work on your thesis, and that they are not optional to work if you feel like it, but that you have to do it. And having clear schedules for what you are doing helped with the social pressure, so that you wouldn’t slip. Because when you slip, you start to slip more and more, because you feel like nothing happened the last time you slipped either. Because in a way nothing happens if you don’t work on your thesis. It just gets delayed. There is no immediate consequence other than that it starts to create distress at some point. Self-scheduling is important. (Cuckoo)

- (83) The scheduling could be used more, because when you don't make any schedules you get the feeling that you can do something else and you'll just work on the thesis later, but then when you have finished what you were doing you might think of doing something else, and then you might feel like relaxing a bit, and then you don't want to work on the thesis anymore, or then then some friend of yours calls you to go and play something, or to do this kind of a thesis interview, and then you are like "well thank god!". (Leaf)
- (84) On average you have to book time for the thesis. It is not a snack project that you can work on for 15 or 20 minutes at a time, but in retrospective I think that it would be good to book a whole day for it or more. (Brook)

Piecing the thesis into smaller manageable portions was a much-recommended idea. Building a timetable that shows the whole project and its different parts visually can help in determining where the student is at any current time with the thesis, and how much time they need for each phase. While different students need different amounts of time parts of their theses, it could be helpful that the supervisor provided some kind of an easily editable calendar or timetable template with slots for different work phases of the thesis. The student could then fill those in as they reflect their own thesis process, and use it to follow their process.

- (85) Some project manager who had graduated from somewhere in the faculty in the past came to lecture about writing research during my Bachelor's thesis times and said that it is easy: you just slice it up and use Excel tables to follow your work. And then I used those as a frame for my work. It helped me to follow my work because I had thought about the whole process at some point, and then I could mark a green marker to accept something when it had gone well and so on, which gave me the visual feedback on how I'm doing with the project. But also having pieced the project up helped schedule-wise, because you could see how much time you needed for different parts. (Brook)

Striving to work on the thesis as often as possible, even for a short amount of time seemed to work for most students. Working on the thesis every day helps the student keep in touch with their thesis. Resting from thesis work for more than a couple of days made it more difficult to return to their work afterwards, and their work was less effective because they have to do more tuning in each time to remember what they were doing.

- (86) It was a slowly-but-surely thing. Having just a page a day done was always one page closer to the end. (Cat).
- (87) You should slice up your time, so that even working an hour a day instead of thinking that you need to work for three hours a day and get nothing done. Even an hour at a time

helps, even just reading through the work in that time. It is recommended to make it into smaller bits, so that it is easier to schedule. (Reed)

- (88) It is especially good when reading theory that you could fit even half an hour in your daily schedule. Or to not have more than one day a break, because then it takes 20 minutes for you to remember what you did last week. (Cuckoo)

One interviewee reminded that postponing an assignment only makes it bigger in one's head, and can lead to some unrealistic thoughts regarding the demands of the process.

- (89) The more time you spend not looking at the thesis document, the bigger a bogey it becomes. It has been established many times that if you just look at the document and write a little every once in a while, then it doesn't become such a big thing or such a monster. So you can alleviate the stress just by working on it every once in a while and noticing that "hey, I have also some pretty good stuff in here". (Moose)

In this section, I have discussed what students had to say about time management and scheduling in thesis writing. In terms of successful time management, it seems that prioritization and discipline is the key. Students need to find ways to schedule time for their thesis and stick to it, and find a balance between thesis work, other responsibilities, and stress-relieving activities. Monitoring one's health and mood and deciding how to structure one's weeks to fit everything in was important.

#### **4.4.2 Working methods**

This section discusses the interviewees' views of the process of actually concretely working with the thesis. How did students concentrate on their thesis, what kinds of things hindered their concentration, and what could be done to improve concentration?

Students reported that many things affected their concentration during their thesis work. If their current life situation was well maintained and the student was feeling well in terms of their mental health, physical health, and social life, then it was easier for them to focus on their thesis work. On the other side, pressing or bothering matters in one's life made focusing on thesis work more difficult.

- (90) Your personal life, meaning family, friends, and social relationships can be a positive or negative factor depending on what kind of a situation you are in life. It is easier to work when your relationship is working et cetera. (Leaf)

- (91) Maybe if I had more or less done all the household chores and or if I had rested well over the weekend and recovered, I would have more motivation and energy. Sleeping well helped, considering how much thinking the thesis work required. (Cat)
- (92) Really basic things: having slept well, eaten well, and not having drunk too much coffee or not having a hangover helped a lot. (Cattle)

When striving to work on the thesis, some students said that they had much trouble not getting distracted by other things they found more interesting. For one student the distractions were such a problem that they felt that they needed to be forced to work on the thesis to be able to accomplish anything. Distractions would also become more frequent when encountering barriers or when something felt challenging.

- (93) Being at your computer in general is such a thing that you can easily just conclude that there is so much else to do in addition to that thesis that you are just about to open, like that new game you've just bought that you could play and so on. (Leaf)
- (94) Everything challenges my concentration. Especially when you don't feel like working, everything turns into distractions. I guess it is quite common that when you are supposed to work you start cleaning. That I think that there is all kinds of shit on the draining board, and then I go and clean that, and then I think that I should be writing my thesis but at home there are also all kinds of games and streams available. Even if I went to the university, I started to open Spotify or Discord when my motivation went down. I should probably be in some completely sterile room with no access to anything other than the thesis and my data. If I have the option to do something disruptive, then I will do it. Even if I would close browser windows et cetera at home I can still do whatever I want because those are rules that I myself have made. (Thunder)
- (95) Distractions like the social media or that "that guitar looks pretty good there, I'll play for a while to refreshen up my thoughts", and then "oh right, I was supposed to work on my thesis", and "oh, I have to have lunch now", and so on. Other stimuli kept disturbing me. These included activities that were more fun and easier to do. You could see it especially when you were stuck with something, like being unable to edit some chapter the way you wanted. So you just wrote it eight times and deleted it and modified it and then you felt really frustrated and felt like giving up for the day, then you would think about what has happened on Facebook, or what the weather's like, like it matters in any way, but you would still check. "Let's see Yle and what has happened in the world." (Cat)

The place where the student worked on the thesis in received much discussion. While one student said that they were able to work at home, it was not the most optimal place for most. Working at home provided many distractions which were said to hinder concentration.

Whenever flow was achieved, it lasted for a shorter amount of time than outside home. Almost all interview participants recommended working at libraries, the university, or some other public place where there were as few distractions and temptations as possible. Going somewhere to work provided a mindset of work, and once the student left their house, they committed to working on the thesis.

- (96) I was able to work at home. I had peace at home, and then I could also work at the library, where I could always find a computer in the morning. I had those physical requirements met. (Cat)
- (97) Libraries. I always went to the library to work. I worked at the library of Imatra and asked for a badge that would get me in every time. That helped. Going somewhere gives you a context where you have to work on it. I didn't have anything else to do in the library in Jyväskylä or Imatra, other than the thesis. Usually you can eliminate distractions by going to a library. (Cuckoo)
- (98) At home you may have too many distractions and stimuli. If you leave home, then you get the feeling of working now that you've left. For me, being in a public place was the thing that helped to concentrate. At home you just want to be in peace and to do what you want and the thesis doesn't fit the equation. (Moose)
- (99) When you went to the library and managed to find a spot with a computer there, you had fewer stimuli and you didn't all of a sudden start thinking about doing some laundry or cleaning up, but it was more like "what the heck am I hanging about here, I will work on this now and then go home to do something I like". (Cat)
- (100) An environment where the thesis was the centre of activities, while having nothing else to do was important. In the office, at the club room, in Konnevesi, or somewhere. (Brook)

Finding a place to work at that provided food whenever needed was great for concentration, since eating provided much needed breaks and reduced the time required to cook for oneself. Places such as the university with a university canteen, or events such as the Konnevesi thesis retreat or the weekend thesis undertakings were good, because they provided food whenever necessary. Staying at one's parents also alleviated the problem of food for some, whenever they visited their parents to work.

- (101) It helped quite a lot to get food even in Imatra, where they had a student canteen to eat in, so that I didn't have to think about food or eating. So that helped. (Cuckoo)
- (102) What I was also thinking about the weeks at Konnevesi and in those undertakings was that the best thing was not to have to think about eating. Because that can easily take a lot of

time to have to start thinking about food. Because you have to eat after all, because if you don't, then your brain gets jammed. (Brook)

The opinions on what kind of noise level in the space was most optimal for thesis concentration varied. Most students said that they do not need a completely silent space, but rather have either some instrumental music or other background noise to listen to to tune in.

(103) The space doesn't have to be silent. I don't listen to music that much normally, but when I work on my thesis I like to often put some music as a kind of background noise, because for me too much silence is maybe a little disturbing. For me it cannot be too silent if I'm trying to work or even sleep, because that becomes disturbing. (Fish)

(104) I like that it is quite quiet, and sometimes I listen to classical music. Songs with lyrics distract me, but some soothing and calming works when I don't start to focus on the lyrics. A background noise doesn't disturb me as long as it's not conversation. I can work at libraries or cafeterias as well. At some point I listened to a certain long list of classical music. That brought me into a working mood. (Reed)

(105) It doesn't have to be quiet, but more like something with a little hum in the background, or a peaceful place with some hustle and bustle audible from everywhere. The fact that your concentration isn't required anywhere else, but that something is happening is good. I know that that kind of a white noise helps a lot of people. (Moose)

One student also mentioned that it did not matter much what the place was or if there were distractions, as long as it was comfortable in terms of space, temperature and air.

(106) I can usually work at home when I get that forced flow on. Usually the defining factor then isn't disturbing noise or other stimuli, but when I get in the working mood it matters more if the space I'm working in is comfortable or not. My working efficiency gets affected immediately if it is too hot or if the air is too thick. That is one bad thing about those weekend thesis undertakings that there are so many people in small spaces working that the air is bad and that eats up efficiency, especially in the afternoons. (Fish)

Based on this, it would seem that for most students a comfortable place outside of home with minimal disturbances, option to have lunch or coffee breaks, and perhaps other people also working on their theses would be an ideal setting for work. Experimenting with different places, working from home, in libraries, cafeterias et cetera, alone, or with other people can provide the best experience for each individual. Students suggested that the university should emphasize and invest in readily available quiet, calm and comfortable study spaces for students.

- (107) Some study space could have been pretty good, although we could always be on our own working on it. But of course there could be more study spaces, those would be good. (Reindeer)
- (108) I think that the university should offer more study spaces, although the situation has been a little better with the opening of Rentukka, but the fact that the university library is under renovation makes things more difficult. (Cattle)

In addition to finding a suitable place in which to work on the thesis, each student should strive to create a routine for themselves on how they work on their thesis. The data showed that experimenting to find a routine that worked for each individual was a helpful way to approach the issue. The interviewees seemed to think that beginning to work each time was the most difficult part of working. This is where routines could help. Take this quotation from Moose for example:

- (109) One clear thing when I lived in Jyväskylä was like a ritual that got my mind into a good mood for thesis writing. When I went to work, I popped by the shop, bought certain things, went to certain computers in the library, and did some other stuff for fifteen minutes, giving myself that time, and then started working on it. That was pretty good. It kept the thesis under control. A ritual is such that will form on its own. For example, moving to another place affects it, but even here in Helsinki I will form my own ritual for it at some point. It just comes and then you follow it because it's intuition. And when it forms on its own, then it is already good for you. It doesn't necessarily have to be the most effective thing, but at least it helps you get something done. For me, going to get coffee from the library became a good break, and there were always some familiar faces there so I could then chatter a bit with them and give time for that relaxation. (Moose)

This student used a similar set of actions every time to tune in to their thesis work. He also said that it was important not to force oneself to start working right away, but to take that time to calm oneself and then shut off external distractions and start working on the thesis. Another student said that sometimes doing something else that was productive was a good method for preparing for thesis work as it provided a sense of efficiency.

- (110) When you go somewhere, give yourself time to do something small at first to tune in. That has helped me to calm myself and concentrate and to get into the mode of working, having just come to the university by bike or by running, and perhaps talked with someone. Give that time to that nonsense, otherwise the thesis will be a really miserable experience. It doesn't help to force yourself and to tie yourself to the computer if you're not working on the right things. (Moose)

For many students, finding the right time of day when they felt most productive was also an essential part of their routine.

- (111) I was definitely at my highest efficiency before lunch. I hate waking up in the morning BUT when I got myself up, I was the most efficient in the mornings. I could work in the afternoon, but it didn't feel very pleasant or efficient. And I couldn't get sh\*t done if I tried to work in the evening. I just thought that I should go to sleep. But for some it works that they work at night, you just need to find your own day and night cycle. (Cattle)
- (112) I wrote my thesis always in the middle of the night. I would go to the office in the evening and sit there until four or five in the morning when I would leave. And then I went home to sleep for a bit. And then going to the university and so on. Because I just had to finish it at some point, and I knew that I wouldn't be able to work on it at home. So the place made a difference. (Brook)

The importance of taking sufficient breaks was also stressed, and many students recommended the pomodoro method for dividing work time into manageable proportions. When taking time off the thesis, especially for more than one day, a useful tip was to write to oneself where they left off, and what they should be doing next, so that returning to work is easier.

- (113) Managing breaks was also important. You can't really carry on for a whole day straight. You need a break into that. Even better if you discuss with someone during that break. (Brook)
- (114) I used the pomodoro method. I felt that it helped me focus at least in theory. But then I noticed that if I put that pomodoro timer on, I just skipped those breaks many times because I didn't want to interrupt that good flow. But that pomodoro got me started. When I was in a rush and I had a feeling that I couldn't go on at some point, I thought that "hey, one tomato more now", and then I tricked myself into doing more after all. If you think about doing ten hours of active work, that's crazy, but then I did just that 25 minutes times four, and then I ate and then I could carry on, and somehow it worked. (Cuckoo)
- (115) I noticed that I could carry on much better when I divided that work time, and it was really more efficient. I was positively surprised by how much the pomodoro helped. Your brain goes to porridge if you try to just roast away. (Reed)
- (116) And a tip that I used was that when you stop working, you write out what you are supposed to next. So if you happen to not work on it the next day, you still remember what you were supposed to do, because you wrote it up. For example, "next time write about this", or "check this", or "read starting from this". That way you will get the hang of it immediately. It is a reminder to yourself at that point. (Cuckoo)

Whether working at home or somewhere else, all interviewees agreed that social media, phone and other distractions should be put away while working on the thesis.

- (117) All kinds of social media and the presence of my cell phone complicated my concentration. Because you want some kind of nonsense dopamine bursts from seeing some notification or something. It is a classic 2010s disease. Usually it helps a lot if you can leave the phone at home. (Moose)

In sum, finding a suitable place to work in, a suitable time of day, developing a routine, reducing distractions, and taking sufficient breaks seem like an effective ways of ensuring good concentration. Experimenting with the ideas presented in this section may lead to a more enjoyable thesis process.

- (118) You need to know yourself and whether the phone or the environment is an important thing. You should think about where you are working, to have a setup where you always work, because if you are in a place where you normally don't work, then you might not necessarily get into it as easily. You should test what works for you. And whether a silent or a noisy space is good. (Reed)

### **4.4.3 Motivation**

The amount of motivation that the students experienced varied to a great extent during the thesis process. For all interviewees, there were points at which the thesis had felt motivating and inspiring, but also points where the thesis had felt more laborious and unmotivating. The peaks in motivation seemed to be during the beginning of the thesis, when new ideas and inspiration was experienced, as well as during any phase of rapid progression. Having to revise written text over and over again was also frustrating.

- (119) It varied to some extent during the process. At first I felt that I had good motivation, then it sank a little when I realized that gathering all that source material was a devilish job, and then it felt almost insurmountable for a moment, but then when I got it rolling the motivation rose again, especially when I got to do those interviews I was like “yes, now I have these research questions and I'm like really going to ask real people what they think about them”, and then going through those preliminary results and analysis was also interesting, but then the motivation fell again a little when I concluded that “okay, I now

know what they said, now I need to write loads of pages of analysed text”, so there I was like “well, I guess we’re doing it now”. (Cat)

(120) I had a strong mindset to get it done. Of course, there were then those days when I goddammit wasn’t motivated at all. But especially having transcribed the data when I was supposed to start building something of my own I felt like something else interested me more. (Brook)

(121) I’ve had times when I’ve felt that I can’t manage to write. For example that methods part was such forced work that the whole motivation towards the thesis fell when I felt that it didn’t make any progress no matter what. (Reed)

(122) Probably there was some kind of excitement at first that “well hey, now I finally get to get this big thesis out of the way”, but now that it has been passively in progress for a couple of years the uppermost feeling is force-feeding. That it’s something that I have to do, but that doesn’t feel exciting anymore at this point. (Fish)

The fact that working on the thesis takes away time from other activities was said to be demotivating. When faced with a large-scale work such as the thesis, it may be difficult to motivate oneself to work on it when there are other things that feel more interesting. This was related to the long-term reward and patience required in longer projects, and many students did not necessarily enjoy the work itself as much as doing other things with that time. Some students felt like they were constantly losing valuable time when working on their thesis.

(123) Even though I have the whole f\*cking life ahead of me, but I get a horrrrrrible anxiety or a kind of a heart sink when I realize that I have to do it. And because I love to play and to blabber with my friends online and to watch some Critical Role show, then I feel like the thesis takes time away from my fun. I have a horrible preoccupation with thinking about how much time I waste on mandatory things. I’ve had that for quite a long time. So usually I have no motivation towards my thesis. (Thunder)

Probably not helping the issue was the forced nature of the thesis. Many students did not see the utility in writing a thesis. To those students, it felt like a forced issue, and they were struggling with motivation especially if the thesis process was delayed, or when they were having difficulties with their process.

(124) Probably it is that feeling of being forced to do it, a little similarly to doing the dishes for example. That you just really don’t feel like doing it. (Fish)

(125) I don’t like to write my thesis because I’m forced to do so, by this and this time, if I want to graduate. But I like to do other things there that have nothing to do with it. The same goes for applying for employment et cetera, and for applying for extension in study time, but

when I have to do it I just don't feel like doing it until I must. And then they just stretch and stretch. (Thunder)

It seems that the relevance the thesis or the lack of it was one of the main issues creating these problems with motivation. Some of the interviewees felt that there was generally very little relevance in their theses with respect to real working life or even research. As discussed in "choosing a topic" section earlier, students highly appreciated being able to choose their topic freely. The most important factor about relevance was that the topic was somehow important and interesting to the student. For some, finding a topic with relevance to their future careers or working life was motivating, and for some, finding a topic of some other self-interest helped them stay motivated. While finding relevance in terms of future work or employment was one of the more motivating factors, failing to find relevance was demotivating for some.

(126) And then people don't find that relevance. That it is just one separate accomplishment, when it could be really that showcase of your own skill, or for a teacher, some tool to use in your future career, or for an expert, your orientation towards a certain type of expertise that separates you from the others. All topics can be relevant, but in a way the language expert side has a really wide selection of topics to choose from, and perhaps it would help to have direction during that phase to stop for a moment and to think about what you want to accomplish with this. It doesn't have to be some great societal transformation, but make it relevant to you, so that it serves you in some way. If that relevance is just that that study project is ready, then fine. (Brook)

(127) And on the other hand when you can decide on the topic yourself then that is a little.. What I've heard is that some topics are like researching the vocabulary in the Friends tv-show, which can be fun to analyse, Friends or Futurama, but whether that's going to be useful for you in real life, who knows. So there I feel like these people see it in a way that they just have to get it done, and that it makes no difference if it's of any use to anyone as long as they finish it and it interests them, and then they graduate and get to do something else. (Leaf)

Finding relevance in thesis writing as future language teachers was considered difficult when not writing a teaching material package. Two students said that the thesis had nothing to offer to themselves in terms of their future career, and that it was an entirely useless piece of work for future teachers.

(128) Purely teaching-wise, I'm pretty sure that I will work as a teacher, and not as an expert or researcher. So the thesis seems a little like an extra loop that I have to jump through, when it doesn't directly support employment after graduation, nor does it offer skills needed at work. So as a teacher I wonder if the thesis is really that important for a teacher. But what

lecturers and teachers have said is that I should focus on something I find meaningful. So through that topic you can get a leg in the door into some field that you are interested in. For example, I could search for some firm that does e-learning and ask to interview their teachers, and perhaps get to work there after graduating. (Leaf)

To solve some of the problems regarding relevance, one should find a topic of self-interest, that they find important and meaningful in some way, whether it is through some topic that can lead to employment, creating teaching material packets, or some other personal ways.

(129) You CAN focus on things you can specialize in. For example, my thesis is related to e-teaching, so that kind of a thesis might spark an interest in some facets to get me to do e-teaching. On the other hand, teaching material packets can also be useful. In principle, you can see that a thesis can be useful, and it has also been argued to some extent that research skills are an important part of university studies. I've heard some comments from people from other fields asking what kinds of topics we have in the English subject, and how they could be of use. So that makes me think to what extent are they sensible studies, but usually you still find some usefulness and even applications toward working life. So even those researches on the Friends tv-show can be of some use, but whether they are useful in an academic environment or for the person completing that research, that's another story. (Leaf)

(130) So, I went to the University of Mumbai to talk about my thesis process. That was an interesting thing, but it has also demanded that I do figure stuff out on my own. But now my text has been used in some publications by some other people. There was also demand for my research because that kind of research didn't exist yet. We were also in aFinLa Applied Language Research event talking about my thesis. So these things have motivated me. (Brook)

(131) My own interest helped me during those times when I was banging my head against the wall. That was the biggest factor. The fact that I was interested in my topic, and that through my thesis I also got tools for doing my own work, and concepts for what I do. I could clearly see the will in having some research done on my topic in Finnish, because there is barely any research done at the moment. I knew that there were people waiting for that research to finish. I knew there was demand for it. There were changes in multimodality and also renewal of the curricula. And all of my colleagues were already in some PhD phase and I was still writhing with my thesis. I felt like there was need and respect for that work. (Brook)

In addition to relevance, being interested in doing research in the first place was found to be of great help in motivating oneself to work on the thesis. One should seek this kind of intrinsic

motivation if possible, by focusing on the aforementioned topic selection and finding purpose for one's own work.

(132) There were perhaps other intrinsic thoughts too. Like I thought that by working on the thesis I will show that I know something about this, and present my expertise, so that also motivated quite a lot in a way, and then I could familiarize with the topic, and I wanted to be an expert on something. (Cattle)

(133) Being interested of the doing in general. Perhaps motivating myself to work on the thesis was easy. That made finding theory and writing and editing easy. I like working on a thesis study because it's interesting, so that motivated me. (Reindeer)

Money or the prospect of future employment was another key motivator. Some students who were already working during their thesis process were encouraged to graduate by their employers. The prospect of a raise or a position in a certain workplace were considered great sources of motivation.

(134) Money could motivate me to work. If I got paid to do it, it would have been already twice. If I was working for some firm, a motivator could be to be able to combine work and the thesis considerably better. (Moose)

(135) My employer helped me in it, when it looked like there would be no more work for a while, my boss said that I should work hard on the thesis for a couple of months, and then come back, and then I set a goal to work my ass off and I also did that. That motivated and encouraged me. I got 40 pages done then. (Cattle)

(136) Well perhaps if I was working and would get a raise right when I got the job would motivate me. I would work a little unnecessarily cheap without the degree, so those kinds of external motivators would work for me. Or having a teacher post available, or a substitution, but that I would need those papers. So those kinds of working life prospects would motivate me. That's why people work on these degrees afterall. (Cat)

On the other hand, many language expert students did not feel that their future career options were tempting or encouraging. While teacher students had a more direct direction towards teaching after graduation, language experts did not always know what they could do after graduation, which lead to reduced motivation to finish the thesis.

(137) I don't consider my employment options very good as a language expert. It is the curse of that study orientation. You have to dig something from under a rock. I've been thinking of branching into communication, but that is difficult to find, and from just the language side there is nothing unless you get into translation or freelance translation. And in addition that is a really unstable source of income. It's just that vague feeling that when you have an upper

level degree, you will get work, and better work, as long as you just have some degree. It motivates me semi-much to have a better job in the future, to be better off in the future, because if you don't have money, then things are not going to go well. (Thunder)

While some students wished to continue to postgraduate studies after their graduation and were motivated to perform well in their thesis work for that reason, others did not feel encouraged because of their negative impressions and experiences from their Master's thesis process.

(138) Postgraduate studies. And knowing that I wanted to apply for PhD studies at some point. That motivated me to complete my thesis fast and well. (Cattle)

(139) I've been left with a kind of a mood that now that they are trying to urge me to do postgraduate studies, I'm somehow not really interested because the Master's thesis was so difficult. (Cuckoo)

In relation to the social and societal benefits of having a student status versus being unemployed or in working life, two interviewees discussed the matter as having many sides. In general, while the student status has its benefits, having discounts and a safety network to rely on, moving to working life can provide much better income and it is still as okay to participate in student activities as an alumni if students wish to do so. After all, being a student for too long may start having negative effects on one's sense of competence, as well as monetary problems.

(140) Of course, there was that motivation to graduate and to finish the degree, so it felt that delaying the thesis would have been pointless. Although I didn't have any clearer consequence as such. My work doesn't require a degree, and my pay didn't go up the moment I graduated, but I still didn't want to dangle it further. Of course there is that side of being used to and having been institutionalized with student life. That it is easy to say that you are a student, and that you study this or that. Well, I go to have lunch, and I pay 2,60€ for it. There are quite a lot of benefits, and then the status is such that if you don't get employed right away after graduation and if you are insecure about your own skills and your competences, then that is a stressful situation to move from being a student to working life, or from being a student to the register. So it is nicer to say that you are a student rather than that you are unemployed. But then how long is it nice to say that you are a student. So if you're on your second decade studying and your studies are delayed for whatever reason, then that doesn't create a good feeling either to have someone ask whether you are a student and what year you started, and you answering "some time long ago". Probably there is some societal pressure involved in assuming that you study for a certain amount of time and then move on to working life. Work is different from studying, you have stricter schedules, and most people work from Monday until Friday from nine to five or something like that, so

being tied to work means that you cannot be at a lecture from ten to twelve and then sit at lunch and finish these assignments at some time et cetera. (Cat)

- (141) I wouldn't really subscribe to the whole hanging around as a student as being a motivating thing from a benefits point of view. You get more benefits from graduating and then getting some unemployment daily allowance et cetera. Well the social environment and the support network is a bigger thing, when you are a student, there are all kinds of life and student parties and social gatherings which are part of the student life, but even if you graduated, you would likely still have a lot of student friends, so I would say that economically it is not profitable. Perhaps you have more social benefits when you have all those social events that belong to students. But in principle nothing prevents you from participating in those after graduation. You can participate in your student organization's events after you've graduated. (Leaf)

Motivation toward thesis work was a grand theme including many aspects. As with many of the earlier themes, this one was also highly individual. The amount of motivation varied throughout the process and maintaining it against other interesting or pressing matters was often difficult. The most important thing about finding motivation towards thesis was finding relevance in the thesis for oneself, regardless of whether it was professional or personal. Monetary and future employment reasons were also important sources of motivation. Based on this, it seems that the connection of the thesis to life needs clarifying. Making clearer connections to working life, as well as discussing ways to make the process feel more meaningful for the students should help with motivation.

#### **4.4.4 Self-confidence**

As part of the interviews, students were asked to describe their self-confidence as it applied to thesis writing, and whether they had any problems with it. As with motivation, self-confidence varied much during the thesis process, most greatly when the student was moving between two different parts of the thesis and starting to work on a new part. Most students had good overall self-confidence throughout their work, although the process felt overpowering at times. Earlier experiences with coursework and prior life correlated well with thesis confidence. Those who had had positive experiences were more confident, while those who had struggled also had more problems with their thesis confidence.

- (142) I got it done. I mean I never doubted that I would not get finished. I always felt that I would, although at times it was frustrating. Yeah, the methods and background were difficult,

but otherwise I had a good self-confidence, especially once I got the hang of those two. Then I just built that pyramid and knew that at some point that top piece would be put in place.  
(Cat)

(143) I had good self-confidence. Probably my own experiences help, and the kind of picture you've built of yourself and from other people's views over the years. Those things do affect. For me it had a positive effect that the staff and teachers in the subject had a positive attitude towards me, I also hear that I'm an active and brisk and all that. It does put some pressure on me also, but I felt that it was positive pressure, because I'm a pretty study-oriented person. I like to learn new things, and also to bring out my expertise, which I felt I got to do with my thesis. (Brook)

(144) I had pretty good self-confidence. I had more or less good experiences from the Bachelor's thesis, so I knew that I could do it. I felt that my skills were sufficient, but we definitely did not have enough tools. I have a pretty good self-confidence with everything and I don't really spin things too much in my head anyways, so I don't know why the thesis would be any different. (Cuckoo)

Some students had experienced imposter syndrome after having completing the Bachelor's thesis, and found find real trouble working with the Master's thesis. This problem is probably related to the increased demands in the Master's thesis and the lack of confidence in one's abilities.

(145) Well if you had problems with self-confidence, then those problems had already started during your Bachelor's thesis; that you thought that you had no idea what you were doing and that the only reason why you managed to do it was because your supervisor was holding your hand the whole time and gave straight directions on what to do on a platter. And that now you don't manage because the Master's thesis is a different thing and you have developed an imposter syndrome, which in my opinion is quite common that people think that they have somehow progressed to the thesis phase and they don't know at all what they're doing, and that some day someone will come to ask you what the f\*uck you are doing. (Leaf)

One student said that while they generally were very confident as a person, and believed that they were capable, they had unrealistic expectations of their own work which resulted in not making progress because they thought nothing was good enough. This kind of perfectionism was reflected in many students' attitudes and was often the source of some stress. The same student also said that their motivation and self-confidence increased when they looked at how much work they had already completed and continued that many students must manage between

wanting to showcase their abilities and skills motivating them to work on their thesis as opposed to being motivated to do something else with their time.

A subject identified earlier within the different parts of the thesis process was having insecurity writing proper research as novices. This was attributed to being new to scientific writing and thesis writing, sometimes led to the questioning of one's abilities as a researcher. As discussed earlier, proper training could be the solution to this.

(146) The background theory is such analytic and theoretical work that it's different from you trying to explain in your own words something about a picture for example that has a text here and it's this colour, and when you're writing it you start to feel like it's not written academically enough (Thunder)

(147) When you've developed the theory part for a long time to support your thesis and you build that shaky tower of yours, you sometimes get the feeling that you don't know if it makes any sense and start to wonder whether it is all in vain and if you have to start all over from the beginning. So you just have to return to your chain of thought that this goes this and this way, and you have to do that continuous checking with it. I would think that in the end it was coherent. But we did sometimes get those feelings of terror, but that is part of the process in a way. We were anxious about whether it was relevant, whether our research answered those research questions we had set. (Reindeer)

It was clear that making progress with the thesis had a huge impact on self-confidence and was one of the most important aspects with regards to motivation. When the thesis process was going well, the students could relax and enjoy other life as well. Allocating time well can reduce the stress that the thesis may otherwise create. On the other hand, having been stuck for a while or not having worked on the thesis for a long time had a negative impact on self-confidence, and sometimes even made the students doubt their ability to survive the thesis process.. At such times, breaking the barriers and keeping on making progress with the thesis was essential to maintaining self-confidence.

(148) In a way it was liberating to have the weekend off. You could spend the weekend with good consciousness. Because usually during the weekend you felt like you should have been working on the thesis but instead watched Netflix and then on Sunday tried to anxiously do something feeling guilty of not having done anything proper over the weekend. (Cattle)

(149) Just the fact that I haven't made any progress has eaten away some of my own self-confidence, just the doubts about whether you can do this, and that way I've started to have doubts about working life and its projects as well. I've had stress about the thesis. Having it

be delayed has increased stress, especially during those times when I haven't had any good excuse like work. So probably the stress has been born from the pressure of knowing that you should work on it, and the shame of not having worked on it. (Fish)

- (150) Making progress helps with self-esteem, and perhaps discussing with someone and just purely ideas and clarity in planning helps. Many times I've gotten more self-confidence from just finding a clear direction and idea for my work even if I haven't made any progress with the writing itself. You feel much more peaceful when you know what you are going to do before you've even started. And on the other hand when you stress about your thesis, that's when you start feeling like you're not good and that lowers that self-confidence. The less progress you make with the thesis, the more it stresses you out, and the more it lowers your self-confidence. (Reed)

Students were often worried about delay or tight schedules with their thesis, and sometimes being in a hurry caused discomfort and stress. Whenever the thesis was progressing at a slower rate, then also stress and discomfort became more common. This anxiety could then be alleviated by making progress again, or in tough situations by doing something else for a while to refresh one's thoughts away from the thesis process.

- (151) And then I had those moments when I didn't have time for it anymore and didn't make any progress. And that was helped by making progress again and by getting some sense into your work. My supervisor recommended me to Konnevesi by telling that I needed a break from all the other work because I was already working at the faculty. (Brook)

- (152) I've had stress towards the thesis when I had a deadline which I had to have a lot done and I didn't have lot done, so I just went to the library to work. It was hectic, and I felt vexed by having to spend long evenings at the library, but in the end I was really happy that I had a good crunch with it and got a lot done. (Moose)

Another important factor in maintaining motivation was setting achievable goals and constantly striving to work towards them. While each student's abilities and personal resilience is different, this is something that every student can actively strive for in their own way. To maintain motivation throughout the work, students should set clear achievable goals and strive to keep working towards them.

- (153) Determination. It helped me to have altogether decided to write it in a year. That helped me a lot. My own motivation towards it. And probably also taking some longer breaks after having worked for a while and rewarding myself. So, I had some free time and it didn't just become constant anxiety, but then you could really see your friends or go to the movies or cook something nice or. Self-rewarding and self-motivation were good methods. (Cattle)

(154) You should set those achievable goals. If I've achieved some goals for example during the thesis undertakings, then I've had better motivation to also work on it afterwards. (Reed)

(155) It is quite a difficult topic for me, this motivation. I say that I don't have it but I don't really know where I would produce it from. I guess the best way would be to get some kind of a start to it and then use that steam to push through to the end. Making it into a kind of a snowball. Getting the snowball rolling I think is a good idea for it, grabbing some goal to work for five minutes or even half an hour will get you hooked on many things. (Fish)

In the end, thinking that countless other people have finished their thesis before was helpful especially at times of trouble.

(156) I just thought that others have also done it with as bad starting point and basis, but they've also succeeded. (Cuckoo)

(157) The much-heard thing in seminars as well is that others have also made it, and pretty many people have written a Master's thesis in this world. That I don't believe that I'm the guy who suddenly can't do it. (Moose)

The main aspects of self-confidence in regard to the thesis process seemed to revolve around knowledge on what to do and striving to make constant progress. Providing students with adequate tools to tackle the thesis is important in the first place, but so is relieving problems and obstacles during the process, because being stuck for a long time had a significantly negative impact on self-confidence and motivation. The need to always keep working on the thesis and cannot be highlighted enough, because it is the only way to reduce delays and stress caused by them. It is, again, also important to monitor one's wellbeing to not overwork oneself, and to be merciful if something is not going as it should be.

#### **4.4.5 About the magnitude of the thesis process**

The Master's thesis is for many the first large-scale academic work they have ever done. The analysis revealed that completing it requires an array project management skills and perseverance. The thesis is the one piece of work that presents the student's capabilities and enables them to graduate. Due to the status and demanding nature of the thesis, many students think that it has to be perfect and ground-breaking to be acceptable. The data showed that the magnitude of the thesis reduced many students' motivation, affected self-confidence, and slowed the students' progress.

- (158) Well I guess you could say that it is related to motivation that if I had motivation to do it, then it would be done quite quickly, but when it's such a big piece of work and you look at it that way, you can easily feel like it will never be done, that it is quite understandable that it may be difficult to motivate oneself to work on it. Quite few people have that intrinsic motivation. (Leaf)
- (159) It is a rather large job and many people think of it from a kind of a perfectionist standpoint. Even though they say that you should just finish it, not thinking about how good or bad it is, you still want it to be a sensible study. You put so much time and effort to it that you want it to be useful to someone, no matter what the grade will be. (Leaf)
- (160) I get terrible pressure from thinking about how much I have to do. Perhaps it's because my topic is theoretically difficult. And theoretically I don't have much trouble with it, but it feels like it has to be that THE THESIS with which you graduate and then you think that it's not good enough because you feel like you need to overdo yourself even though the level you're at is enough. I feel like I should do it better than well. (Thunder)

To reduce the problem of the thesis becoming too big and frightening, a few approaches could be made. Many students stress about the large piece of work so much, that it has become a transitional rite for them, and its status as a final challenge has made the students scared. To prevent the thesis from becoming a scary monster, it would be important to try to set a suitable scale for it. As suggested within the time management section, when faced with this large-scale project, it could be helpful to think of the thesis as a set of smaller, more manageable proportions of work, and to consider the thesis as a workload designed to take a full year or more, not to be completed in a month or overnight.

- (161) In my experience the thesis is often made into a monster or a boulder, when it should be approached from a different point of view, that it is a part of the studies which has to be done to complete the degree. But that that boulder also consists of pieces. Supervision and peer support help with that, but when you manage to divide the process into manageable pieces, then it is not such a big monster. The thesis on the polytechnic side is also only 30 study credits, and even that gets built up to some kind of a troll. So it seems to be a kind of an transitional rite that you have to kill that troll and Saint George and so on. So it is part of this kind of folklore and urban legend that you worked on it day and night and did nothing else and then it was f\*cked and then you had to do it all over again. (Brook)
- (162) If I had used those tools that I have now from the beginning, like splitting the thesis into parts, it would have been much easier to focus on smaller goals and that it is enough to work on a smaller part at a time then the thesis would probably be finished already, but it

feels like I've learned it the hard way. For me it helps to focus on only a certain part at a time. (Reed)

The students are in a difficult middle ground between researcher-level expertise and student-level ability. They are not sufficiently equipped for higher level research, but feel the expectations and pressure to produce expert-level text. To counteract the stress caused by the beliefs of students, the real nature of the thesis as a natural endpoint to studies should be highlighted, and that it is designed for practicing research work, and so it does not have to be perfect to succeed. Setting realistic expectations for the length, quality, and demands of the study can help lessening the stress over the thesis. Again, encouraging students to build those timetables and stick to their time management schedules to make constant progress and to encourage them to use support at a low threshold are important points to highlight. Overcoming the pressure of writing a perfect piece of work and just writing the thesis, whatever it will be like is a healthier way of approaching the subject.

(163) I have to say that many people take it too ambitiously, that they go and observe a hundred lessons and collect a sh\*tload of data and half of the thesis process goes into that. But it's not supposed to be like that. You're recommended to finish it in a year, and you just become exhausted with it if you work too much. It's just a thesis, and you can make it quite concise. I got easily over a hundred pages from one f\*cking online website post, so I feel like many people feel like they need to revolutionize the whole scientific world, or that they have to have some extremely innovative learning packet. It's great to have ambition, but it turns against you if you think that it has to be perfect. But really, you can get a really good grade from it just by doing it. I think that is a bigger problem, than just not being interested at all. That your own thesis starts scaring you. (Cattle)

#### **4.4.6 Deadlines and strictness during thesis work**

One topic that emerged as central during the whole theme of project management touching time management, scheduling, setting good goals, and ensuring constant progress was the discussion of deadlines and the need to impose them on students. As the thesis is a mostly independent endeavour, almost all interviewees said that they had had difficulty managing their work on their own, when there were no strict deadlines or demands from the thesis seminar or supervisor. As discussed briefly during time management, one problem with self-made deadlines was that there were no sanctions for not fulfilling the work by the deadline, so there was simply not enough encouragement to meet unofficial deadlines. To remedy this problem, the majority of

interviewees discussed the possibilities of creating stricter deadlines with the supervisor, and in thesis seminars, demand that the students follow them. It would be important to demand at least some progress, because even if the progress leads to discovering that the current thesis topic is not suitable or needs to be adjusted, at least the student is making progress and slowly going in the right direction.

(164) I think that we should be demanded to stick to schedules. Of course, it is difficult if you don't have a topic, for example. But that you wouldn't start slipping all the time. So, I think the supervisor should be able to demand that the students stick to schedules. And of course there are all kinds of exceptional situations, and people have other things in life than the thesis, but the supervisor shouldn't give too much leeway. It is such a big project that it would perhaps demand a setting schedules and sticking to them. I think we are given too much freedom and then there are those people who are like "I don't really know what I would do", that has the recipe for disaster. For me at least, scheduling works much better. (Cuckoo)

(165) Stricter timeframes, perhaps. I feel like the university is sometimes too free about things. Basically, the students are given a schedule, but it's not forced, and then in the end you can do whatever you want, with focus on independent studying. On the other hand, it is a nice thing, but it may also lead to not getting things done, or that the focus may slip into other things. During my thesis process I've been interested in many kinds of courses that have nothing to do with the thesis or even graduation, but still I've felt the interest to take do all kinds of things in addition to the thesis. (Fish)

(166) And then you can arrange hand-in dates with your supervisor. So you have a clear date for having a certain part ready, because I feel like most people get nothing done unless they have to, and very few people have such a strong motivation toward the thesis because it is such a big project. I just knew that I needed those frames for the scheduling. Without them I knew that I would slip endlessly. (Cuckoo)

(167) Especially during these times when study time is limited, you should also schedule the seminar, to demand faster progress. Meeting once or twice a week and babbling about things and taking a cup of coffee doesn't advance anyone, especially those who already have trouble with the process. And then you get stressed out, and freeze. So, the seminar should really demand to make some progress. It could be shutting one gate to proceed on forwards. I would like clarity and requirements. Those people who are independently oriented make progress no matter what, but those people who need deadlines and ass-kicking should be encouraged to get them out of the institution at some point. With all my love, n:th year students. You are wasting society's money. (Brook)

Although the need for individualized scheduling and stricter deadlines was clear, many students still did not wish for strict deadlines. This was a controversial point about their needs. Approaching the issue from the supervisor's side, the goals, schedule, and the level of strictness with deadlines and encouragement could be jointly defined by the student and their supervisor. That way, they could set reasonable and manageable deadlines, but it would still demand that the student made progress each time. However, it is to be noted that the interviewees wished against any forceful driving of students to work with their thesis, unless they themselves asked for it. Thus, the responsibility of determining what kind of demands the supervisor can set should be on the student, and the student should be determined what level of encouragement they wish to receive.

(168) Generally speaking, there are points to being able to work at your own pace. If you were demanded to produce a certain number of pages within a certain time during the seminar, you might just scratch together something, but that could just then be some fluff text with no point. And people are at such different situations in their lives, that some may be working full-time, and some may be writing only their thesis. And then people write in different ways. So I'm thinking of what that could be then if you did not match a deadline, do you get kicked out of the seminar and have to participate again next year, or what kind of beating you get, and that would likely be directed towards those who already have it pretty hard. But perhaps there could be some positive encouragement that you could be told what joy you could get from managing to work on the thesis. I'm not a big fan of strict deadlines, so I feel like that rehabilitation club style is also good for mental health. It is largely independent work after all. The seminars are a small part of that work, and you only have a couple meetings a month. (Cat)

(169) I knew what I had to do, but I just didn't do them, so I didn't really have the urge to contact my supervisor to kick me in the butt in practice. In a perfect world I would always have someone in my head to slash me to work on my thesis. That would be good. But that is something I assume the university cannot offer me. Sometimes we discussed that I should work, but I would have probably benefitted from stronger encouragement, sometimes even with power words, but I would say that as a whole it has been good, because people work at such different phases with their theses. Some are like "hello, I will take two years to complete this thesis because I have so much other stuff in life that take up time", and some people are like "I will finish this thesis in half a year, because I already have two thirds of it done when starting the seminar. Individualized level of ass-kicking would be good, so that whenever you create your research plan, you could discuss with the supervisor whether you want light,

medium, or hardcore ass-kicking. The personalization and individualization does occur at least partly, but I think there is never too much of it. (Moose)

From here, one can begin to see the complexities of the issue. The whole thesis process is a highly independent endeavour and students make progress at their own pace and are at differing points with their theses at any given time, making group seminar demands difficult. An upside to not having deadlines is that there is less stress at first, but then if the student does not make enough progress in time, the delayed thesis project and the difficulty of making progress starts creating stress that way, so it is also a two-edged sword.

(170) For me, working independently, not requiring to have done something at a specific date is good, because it's so independent. I would have benefited from some deadlines, but on the other hand it clears stress when not having deadlines. And if something causes stress, you start avoiding it and that only makes things more difficult. It's more about myself and my character that causes it. It's not about the demands. A little stricter touch could be helpful, but on the other hand I recognize that it could be harmful for many people. I would see that the touch should be that you can work at your own pace and there is no pressure to accomplish things to a certain time. It could work if in the beginning of the seminar you would have a conversation about it to set goals for progress and whether you are completing your thesis in a year or more. At that time you could agree together whether personally you would set strict deadlines or whether you would rather work at your own pace in peace. Usually it's impossible to agree on a shared goal like "hey, write your thesis in a year", because that will never happen. (Reed)

(171) There should not be excess stress imposed from the supervisor's side but to think about it in a way that everyone is in a different kind of situation and the process should not be rushed either, because you might have good ideas if you think it through. I mean if we were pressured more, some might graduate faster, but the problem would be that some wouldn't, and others would suffer from really strong reactions to that stress, which societally would cause really bad things. (Leaf)

A balance between freedom versus strictness in thesis writing could be achieved by first discussing with the supervisor what the level of encouragement and deadlines should be, offering the freedom to conduct their research as they see fit while also offering topics, opportunities and practical advice, as well as information on what to do if the process does not start rolling as expected. Then, the student could set out to work on the thesis. At any time, should they have become stuck or not made progress in some time, the supervisor could contact

them after a while to ask about their situation and to offer concrete support for advancing their thesis. This excerpt from Leaf describes this approach:

(172) For the beginning, there could be a lot of freedom on how you wish to carry out your thesis, but also offer topics, opportunities, and concrete directions on what to do if things don't go as planned. It is worth giving a lot of rope to start with, and then if you notice that the student has hung themselves with it, then you could have your eyes and ears open to what kinds of support could be offered and what the student needs. It could be a good custom that if it is noted that a student's thesis has been delayed, a check-in could be made to ask how they are doing, and what concrete could be done to advance their thesis. It would be beneficial as supervisors to be vigilant for people who get stuck with their theses, to discuss what could be done to support them best, and create an environment and plan that works best for them. Usually if you are a person that gets stuck with the thesis or take a lot of time with it, then you probably also need to look through the process with the supervisor and that you have a structure offered externally to follow and to graduate and get out of here. So as I said, in a way it is good to give that rope, but then if you see that the student has hung themselves with it, then you can start untangling the knot and to offer more precise directions and more focused external pressure for graduation. (Leaf)

#### **4.4 Support for thesis work**

This next section deals with the available support methods that students can use in their thesis work. This analysis discusses first, supervisor support and thesis seminars, and then moves on to discussing other support mechanisms that students may use, including peer support, friends, and family.

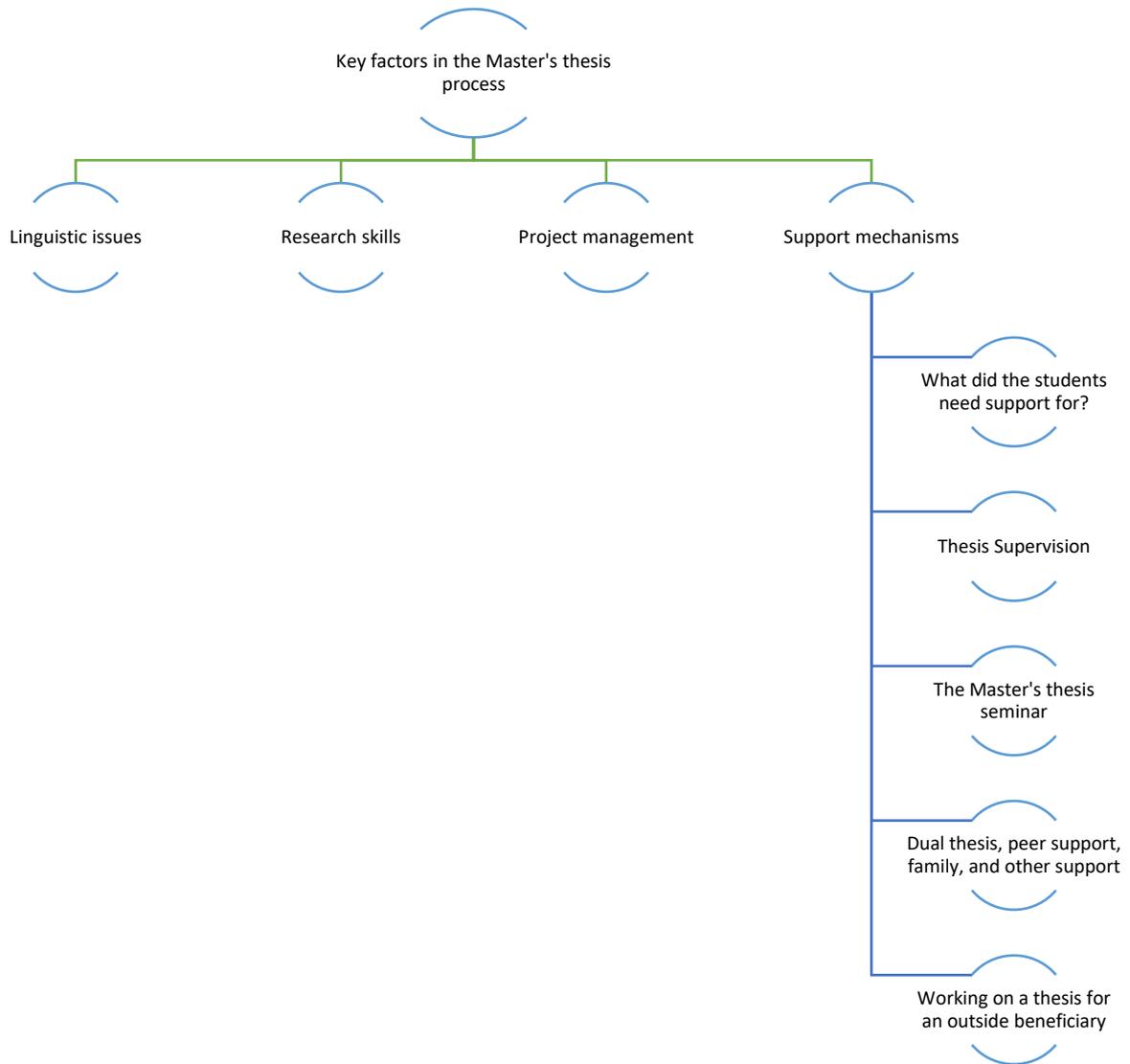


Figure 5. The subthemes of support mechanisms.

A general impression of the students was that there were plenty of different kinds of help available for thesis writing from the university side. The supervisor provides individual support, the student participates in group thesis seminars, the university organizes support grants and workshops. While the university offered much support for thesis writing, however, it was difficult to find information on what to do in cases when everything had not gone according to plan. One student had not been working with their thesis for a while, and she was unsure whether her supervisor was still available to supervise her, and whether there were any restrictions on how long one can work with the thesis.

- (173) Some clarity should be placed in communicating what happens when everything doesn't go as expected. You don't really know what you are allowed to do with the thesis, like how much you can delay it, and does the supervisor stay the same, and I didn't for

example know if I had to do the seminar again. That kind of metaknowledge isn't available. I like to search for information on my own, but I didn't find any, and had to ask the supervisor of for it. There is nothing on the university website about the thesis being a two-year process. There should be more information on how long you can generally delay it, I guess you can somehow deduce it, but there is nothing about what happens if your studies had gone badly. What do you do if your studies haven't been so successful? Especially at the end here, there is nothing like that for it. It would be nice if there was some kind of guidance for that, so that you wouldn't have to panic about seeing the supervisor, especially if you are already under much pressure to contact them. You are just like "what the damn do I do? There is nothing written anywhere!". (Thunder)

This problem could be easily solved by adding information online on the university website or in another appropriate place about what can be done when encountering problems with the thesis process. This could reduce the stress and uncertainty of seeking help that students may have in these kinds of situations.

#### **4.4.1 Thesis supervision**

When asked about the significance of the supervisor's guidance in their thesis work, most students expressed that the support offered by the supervisor had been extremely significant and important to them, while two students stated that it had not been crucial to see the supervisor often to make progress. The significance of the supervisor's opinions about the thesis was also considered crucial, because in the end the supervisor is one of the two who evaluators of the thesis.

As part of the interview, students were asked to reflect on what kinds of assistance they had sought out from their supervisors. The different topics are summarized in Table 4 with the number of mentions from different interviewees in brackets. The purpose of Table 4 is to provide a short overview of different kinds of feedback and advice the students sought from their supervisor.

Table 3. Responses to the question "For what kinds of things did you seek out help from your supervisor?".

Question: "For what kinds of things did you seek out help from your supervisor?"
1. Structures (2)

2. Theoretical background (2)
3. What kinds of source literature should one look for (2)
4. Content of thesis (2)
5. How to proceed or continue on to a next phase (8)
6. Feedback on written text and how to improve it (6)
7. Help for building a survey (2)
8. Help verifying the thesis topic (2)
9. Tips for motivating oneself and staying focused (2)
10. Mental support (5)
11. Figuring out the research ethics section (1)
12. Methods (3)
13. Analysis (1)
14. Data collection (1)

One of the supervisor's most important roles was guiding the students through the thesis. The supervisor guided the students to use proper sources and methods, while also clearing our any false conceptions that students might have had about what kinds of method or approach they should apply in their thesis. The supervisor's general knowledge of research and how it should be done was considered crucial in guiding the students through the thesis process.

(174) Perhaps I was at first thinking method first when I wanted to be a discourse analytic expert, but then my supervisor asked me what I actually want to research. And then I pondered it, and then the supervisor was like "how about content analysis?". My supervisor is smart. I could also write out the ethical part really well, I have to admit that I used the sources given to me by my supervisor. For the background I mean. (Cattle)

Students asked their supervisors for assistance on a wide variety of issues ranging from technical things and working methods to mental support. One of the two major roles of the supervisor was to provide affirmation and feedback during the transfer phases when moving from one part of the thesis to another confirm that which had already been completed, and to suggest what to do next. The supervisor was asked for help on concrete things, different structural issues during the different parts of thesis work, the theoretical framework, method selection, searching for sources, creating data collection methods such as questionnaires or interview structures, and writing the research ethics section. The most appreciated kind of feedback concrete feedback that would propel them forward. A good amount of compulsory meetings with the supervisor should ensure that they are going in the right direction with their thesis.

(175) I've always gotten good directions, they have answered well to all my questions, and I've received feedback. And it's not only feedback towards content, but as an extra plus you

almost get therapy from the supervisor. You get therapy, books, thesis guidance, and mental support. I mean they'll probably start offering massages soon. (Thunder)

(176) Personal meetings with the supervisor have been extremely profitable and useful for my thesis, and I think it is good that support is offered and that it comes at certain phases that you should see the supervisor, so you don't get left without it, but that it is connected to the seminar that when you enter a certain phase with your thesis, you should see the supervisor to see that everything is alright and that you don't start heading in the wrong direction. The right amount of free and compulsory supervision. And that's how it should be, not like you have to meet every weekend, but meeting whenever you enter a certain part of the study, and you have reason to meet, and then you see what could be done next. And when you start to think about some topic or research methods or research question, the thesis writers themselves don't have that knowledge or know-how like supervisors do, so the supervisor can then say that this or that part needs a little more direction and that they can share their knowledge at certain points, and so a compulsory meeting at those times is a good policy in my opinion. (Leaf)

(177) Being in touch with my supervisor has helped a lot. You know what to do next and get feedback and modification suggestions that way. I have gotten a lot of ideas on what to do next in those personal meetings, and good ideas on sources, for example what kinds of sources I should look for. I'm satisfied with the supervision. It has always helped when I have talked with my supervisor. (Reed)

The other major role of the supervisor was to provide mental support and to act as a thesis therapist. It was considered important that the supervisor infused the students with courage that they can survive their thesis process, and that they treated students' worries in a kind, professional and adult manner. Sometimes the supervisor's role was even seen as therapeutic in nature, and that therapy was much needed especially in difficult situations during the process. All interview participants' experiences dealing with their supervisors had been positive and had felt encouraging. Meeting the supervisor was said to relieve the stress and uncertainty. For most students, their thesis supervisor had played a great role in helping with problematic situations and encouraging and building self-esteem.

(178) Yes, it has been quite significant. Visiting the supervisor has always helped to realize that these things aren't that difficult or complicated after all. And I've needed especially that mental support. Sometimes if I have felt like the thesis is at a halt, which it has been, then I have received consolidation that it will be okay. I haven't needed help for technical or mechanical things yet as my thesis is not that far yet, but it has been more mental support and more general advice, and many times just seeing the supervisor and setting some

deadlines for this thing has encouraged me. All this external support along with supervision has helped me with the stress. (Fish)

(179) My supervisor is really nice and encouraging. It has been really important to me, because if the supervisor was really critical and abrupt, I would easily freeze with them. They have always been encouraging and easily approachable, even when sometimes everything is frankly speaking f\*cked. They have always infused me with faith about the future and made me believe that maybe the thesis will be completed. (Reed)

(180) Seeing the supervisor raised my self-confidence and gave me the feeling that I had all the support I needed to help me with this and to confirm that it is going somewhere and that the graduation will come when I finish this. (Cat)

The supervisor's role was also key in times of trouble and in breaking through obstacles encountered during thesis work. Being able to approach the supervisor in times of trouble would help the student push through their hardships.

(181) It was really important to me. Even though I worked quite independently and quickly with the thesis, it was really important especially for getting over those problematic parts and barriers I wouldn't have gotten over without the supervisor, and I feel like that is really important to many students. It is really fascinating how for the student it is so important to be able to ask for advice and to present their questions and to start clearing them that way. (Cattle)

(182) For me it has been quite central for example if I have fallen into a rut with the thesis, to have supervision to help me with it. Without supervision I would probably have gotten stuck a considerably earlier on some part. Afterall, I've finished over a half of it at the moment, which is an encouraging thing, and then the supervision is such that even if I was stuck I know that I can ask the supervisor for help. (Reed)

When offering this help for students whose thesis is either stuck or delayed, it would be important to consider why the work has been delayed, and to consider the situations that students may be in. Many life events may hinder thesis work, and the student's responsibility to ask for help if they have not made progress or have been procrastinating even though they would have had time to work on it. Appropriate support systems could be created for those students who have not managed to make progress with their thesis but still wish to do so given their current life and study situation.

(183) Of course, there may be the case that the graduation has been left hanging because of say, personal trouble, then it may be disruptive to impose pressure for graduation. For example, if you've had some kind of family tragedy or other such things, you should not be

demanded to carry on working with the thesis. But maybe they could be asked if they need support, and the supervisors could have some kind of handbook of what could be done in different situations. If the problem is that the student has had some personal issues, then they could be asked if the supervisor could help them with something, or what else could be done, but then if it's just that "Ohh, well I just haven't done it and I've been procrastinating", then there could be something that the supervisor could offer, such as "Let's go through the next year, and at what points you could work on it and could we agree on a check-in every month or even every week, when you could have a couple of pages done? How about that?". So, the supervisor could go through some things with the student. Or perhaps that the supervisor could say that "Hey, I have another thesis student who is at a similar situation, could I pass on the contact information, or that you could agree on a time when you go to work on it together?". So the supervisor could always have some help to offer, rather than to just talk.

(Leaf)

All students were satisfied with their relationship with their supervisor. The students felt that the support they had received was flexible, humane, and characterized with empathy and caring, which was what they said they needed. With the individual meetings, the supervisor and student could always focus on the matter at hand, the supervisor providing applicable feedback.

(184) I felt that it was good. I didn't get any pressure in terms of time limits, meaning that I could work on the thesis at my own pace, and meet whenever necessary. I was never told not to come, that I have fallen behind and the supervisor doesn't have time, but I always got a meeting whenever I felt it was necessary. Like I said, I always got support whenever I needed it. Didn't receive any external pressure or bad feelings. I mostly left the meeting feeling relieved and with something concrete to do next like modify the text. I felt like "pew, I've made some progress again". That worked really well. I didn't have any problems. You always got pushed a little bit forward, and at the end the job is done all of a sudden. (Cat)

(185) It has been sterling, and flexible and humane before anything else. No matter what kind of issue I've had or what kind of thesis anxiety I've struggled with, I've always left the meeting with the supervisor wiser and feeling lighter. I would not criticize the supervision.

(Fish)

Supervisors were reachable via email and face to face meetings flexibly, and they replied to students' emails rapidly. It was considered important that the supervisor was available through both email and in person.

(186) I liked those personal meetings a lot. My supervisor was always flexible, and up to date with the issues, and you could always see them. Sometimes we had agreed to see each

other for half an hour, but it could stretch up to an hour to go through everything. Communication worked well, and if I had something that was unclear, I could send an email and usually got a reply back on the same day or the day after at the latest. (Cuckoo)

(187) I liked being able to meet face to face, but also receiving written feedback. I would rather go visit than to send an email to ask about something, because it was also easier and faster to discuss things that way, because it always takes more time to write an email and to get a reply for that. (Brook)

(188) Now that I sent a message to my supervisor after a long time of not talking to them, I received an answer very quickly, along with info and suggestions, which gave me a great boost, and immediately I got the feeling that the supervisor is there to help and is flexible, even if I'm on the other side of the country. I have no complaints of my supervision. I sent a horrible outburst of worries to my supervisor even though they were on research leave, and it felt terrible, but then the supervisor just said that they are there to help. (Reed)

No personal chemistry problems between students and their supervisors were reported by the participants. The only unnerving experience that students sometimes had was “bumping into their supervisor” when they themselves had not made any progress with their thesis for a while, or felt that they had underperformed in some aspect of their thesis process, but that nervousness was related to their own self-esteem and not provoke from the supervisor's side. Those nerves could sometimes prevent the student from contacting their supervisor, no matter how supportive the supervisor had been.

(189) I didn't have any passive-aggressiveness or other unpleasant flavour with my supervisor.

(190) I didn't really had any problems, although I remember at some point when I had perhaps done some part a little worse than I would have wanted and then I had handed that in on a specific date, and I hadn't heard anything back in a couple days, and then I bumped into my supervisor on campus, and turned a 180 degrees and walked the other way because I was embarrassed and thought “oh no, now they have read what I had sent them”. I just had a kind of shame, no real bad experiences. Like being a novice academic really, and that my work was a little shitty. (Cuckoo)

(191) I haven't had other problems than the fact that I usually don't seek supervision because I feel embarrassed to do it. My supervisor has showed me many times that they are chill and that delay isn't a problem, so it is all between my ears. (Thunder)

All in all, the students interviewed in this study had found their relationships with their supervisors important to them, especially in guiding them forward, offering mental support, and in helping them to break through obstacles. Students found it important that the supervisor could

be easily reachable both online and face to face, and that had a professional way of treating the students' worries and requests. Sometimes, students were anxious or worried to see their supervisor because they felt ashamed or uncertain about their work, or because they had not been making progress the way they had hoped. The supervisor should have a handbook of different concrete aid they could provide the students in different situations.

#### **4.4.2 The Master's thesis seminar**

All students working on their thesis must also participate in Master's thesis group seminar meetings, which last for approximately one year. In here, a group of students supervised by the same supervisor gather mostly biweekly to discuss general parts and issues regarding the Master's thesis. Each supervisor has their own specialities in terms of research, and the students can choose a suitable supervisor and seminar based on their interests. The thesis seminar also functions as a small peer network with which students discuss their theses.

The most important role of the seminar seemed to be that it provided the necessary basic information about each phase of writing the thesis.

(192) I feel like I got enough information on how the thesis is structured and how to carry on with the process through the seminar. You get the basic blocks from the seminars and the supervision, the rest is largely up to you. (Brook)

(193) The structure of the seminar is good. You go through the things well and you get a good foundation and schedules. There was a lot of material there, for me it was enough. I have a clear picture of how the thesis should be done. I mostly knew what I had to do, having learnt it during the years, how to write an academic text and how to do a research piece. The advanced knowledge you need was good in the seminar. (Thunder)

Apart from providing information, students appreciated that the seminar provided peer support, in what some interviewees called "rehabilitation club" style, where peers gathered together during the seminar to share their feelings and thoughts about how they are progressing with their theses. Hearing that other people also had problems gave a sense of empathy that helped overcome negative feelings towards the thesis.

(194) The "alcohol rehabilitation club" style is sometimes good in my opinion, because there you have a peer support network and it is sometimes nice to hear that others haven't managed to make progress either. It would be terrible to be in a group where for some reason

you were the only one without the goal of graduating in one year. Then you would always have an inferiority complex and would feel like quitting the whole process. (Cat)

Generally, the seminars were not considered as useful as individual meetings with the supervisor. While the seminars provided good information generally, the discussions they were put in in those groups were often left superficial. The more narrowly focused and individual the discussions were, the more they seemed to aid specific students' needs, but then some students did not benefit from them at all. This is why some students did not wish to ask specific questions during the seminar meetings, because it hindered the cohesion and progress of the topic currently at hand during that seminar meeting.

(195) The seminar lectures weren't terribly useful for me. They were in a way additional there, and sometimes you would have good conversations, but maybe they didn't feel that useful after all. The contents weren't terribly necessary, and sometimes the discussions were left quite superficial, and you didn't get the hang of the practical use of them. It is a good idea to separate the thesis writers into seminars and smaller groups based on what kind of research they were doing, as you had similar problems and things with it. That was useful. Those larger group discussions when staying within those wider lines weren't as useful. I felt that I had mastered that information, and I felt that I really didn't get much from the lectures with the whole group together. In a way it is a nice thought that there is peer support, but the discussion was superficial. (Reed)

Some students even felt that the thesis seminars were a complete waste of time for them and did not feel like they made any progress with their thesis during the seminar meetings. Especially those students who had had prior experience writing a thesis or having previously completed another degree said that they did not benefit much from the meetings.

(196) The seminar felt a little adhesive that you just have to go through these things because we must, so I felt like they did not add anything to the thesis process, and then when those topics were so widely spread, I didn't feel like I got anything from the meetings. Some single instances I felt like I got like one source from someone during the whole time. So, I didn't really feel like I got any use of the seminars. (Cuckoo)

(197) The thesis seminar supports the work, but there are things that have been discussed earlier in academic writing one and two, and then you have completed a Bachelor's thesis, and I had done an another degree before, so by the time I entered the seminar, I had already gone through the same things four times during the last five to six years. So. It is a difficult question in a way because you want it to be as individualized as possible, because that would be the best kind of supervision because when it is tailored for you, but to what extent can

that be done. So, considering the resources I would say that the current system was good.  
(Leaf)

One problem that occurs with the seminars is that many people are at different points with their thesis during the seminar meetings and are working with very different thesis subjects, and while discussions with others were considered pleasant, the students did not feel like those helped them proceed with their thesis, because they often had such differing topics. Some students found that they were left behind because they couldn't define their topic and research questions early, while others who were already far ahead in their work felt like sitting in the seminars listening to instruction about a phase they have already completed was a waste of time for them. In the seminars, the students sometimes felt that their mutual discussions did not bear much fruit for them.

(198) I also liked to chat with others during the seminar about what they had been thinking and doing, but I think those meetings could be developed more. Because you discuss things together in the seminar, but they have such differing topics that I don't know how fruitful that discussion then is. You can get new ideas, but do you really remember them after the seminar? You are at such different phases during the seminar that it feels difficult, and if you are having trouble coming up with a topic, you can miss the train there. Or then if you are really advanced, you may feel really useless discussing some topic. You would benefit from the seminar the most if everyone was at the same phase more or less, but people are working at such different paces and it cannot be demanded that they all work at the same pace. (Cattle)

(199) They have striven towards having similar topics in each seminar so that they could discuss them, but you still feel like well these other people really don't necessarily have such similar topic, so you get a bit of an artificial feeling that you just blather a bit and then go home. (Leaf)

A central role of the seminar seemed to be that it should eliminate as much uncertainty and insecurity as possible from the beginning. To reduce the level of uncertainty that students experience in the beginnings of their seminars, the more general "frequently asked questions" about thesis work could be addressed, as well as guiding the student towards individual meetings with their supervisor for more focused guidance on their study-specific problems and worries. The students should be advised that not everything needs to be clear from the start, and that many questions that students have are personal to their own thesis topic and can be dealt with in personal meetings with the supervisor.

(200) One thing that came to my mind is that there were really many questions like how much data I need and so on that is very detailed and individual. So, if I would like to improve

the seminar, I would say that it should be brought out as early as possible that many things are personal and that they will be dealt with during individual meetings and supervision. So, it should be clear that if you don't know something about your study, it may be individual and research-specific, and has to be cleared on its own, and is nothing to be panicked about. I have to say that even though the seminars are really good, everyone still has that surrounding uncertainty and insecurity that you don't know everything you should know and that there has to be some reason why that is. And that should be eliminated. All the uncertainty away right away. (Thunder)

Many interviewees said that especially the beginning of the seminar should focus more on helping the student to figure out their thesis topic, as the beginning goes by fast and if the topic is not well defined by the third or fourth week, one can easily be left behind with their progress.

(201) The critical first part of the thesis was over quite quickly, so I felt like it could have worked out if the thesis topic had already been somewhat chosen. But when I went to the seminar without a topic, then I just had to quickly choose some topic and then the first part was over when you didn't really have a proper topic or research questions. (Fish)

Some students also said that another improvement could be to standardize and specify the guidelines for each thesis section on a concrete level, so that students can see more clearly what they are expected to do in each section of their thesis.

(202) Maybe we would need some clearer structure for it, that in this phase you need to write these things exactly, or that these things need to be said here. Okay, you can find that in the "tutki ja kirjoita" -book in Finnish, so seek and you will find. Perhaps those requirements could be made a little simpler. (Brook)

To improve the problem of people being in such different phases during the thesis seminar, the seminar could be organized more clearly into different parts for each phase, providing clear goals and specific instructions on how to make progress in each phase. This would be especially important for those students who were struggling with their work. The thesis seminar could, for example, separate students into different profiles of thesis writers, based on how fast students wish to make progress with their thesis, what kinds of grades they are pursuing, or how strict deadlines they wish to have with their thesis. Another way suggested was to divide the seminar into parts where one hour of the seminar would be reserved to those who are further with their thesis and one hour for those who are slower. A division based on the students' timeframe and schedule goals could also work. This kind of differentiation would be especially useful, because

while some students wished for more strict deadlines, others did not, which once again presents the need for more personalized supervision during the thesis process.

- (203) Of course one possible way would be to divide and to chop the two-hour seminar into an hour for those who are faster, and an hour for those who are slower, or to personalize the seminar in some other way. For example, if you have a goal to finish by the end of the year, you could have those people with the same goal in one group, and if your goal is to graduate sometime in the far future, then have those people in one group. The kinds of goals do affect what kinds of guidance you need and what kind of knowledge and at what points. So perhaps this timeframe goal idea is something that could be developed further. (Cat)

Students seemed to also need concrete help on what to do when they were actually working with their theses, and advice on how to make progress with the thesis and this could be offered in the seminars. The student working on a thesis for the first time may not have the concrete skills or knowledge to know what the thesis should be like exactly, and so project management support could be of great aid, and this could be offered in the thesis seminars.

- (204) I would say that we need more support related to writing the thesis, not just for the background discussed in seminars, but for the writing process and the physical phenomenon when the student is writing their thesis. For the thesis as a project. Support for scheduling and motivation. The physical and concrete project, how the student carries it out, needs quite a lot of help because the thesis is probably the first grand-scale project for many students, and completing it on your own without prior experience on the subject is pretty challenging, and self-scheduling and motivation is probably the thing that many students struggle with. (Cattle)

Students had various beneficial ideas that they wished would be highlighted at the beginning of the thesis process. Completing the thesis for an external beneficiary such as a workplace or an organization or completing a teaching material packet or literature review should be explored. Another concrete way of aiding would be to highlight various peer support methods (see section 4.4.3): the dual thesis, Weekend thesis undertaking and Konnevesi thesis retreat events. Students could be encouraged to participate in those events least once during the thesis process to see whether they would be helpful. There could be even events inside the thesis seminar like these events, where once or twice the seminar would be officially arranged for all the seminar group members so that they could set their goals and come together to work on their thesis for a day or two with the occasional help of the supervisor. This would offer synergy for those

students working with similar topics, theory, or methods, creating the possibility of sharing the workload.

- (205) The dual thesis idea could be raised up and talked about more. It works phenomenally at its best. I don't see any reason not to advertise it. You have done all kinds of works with people during your studies, so there might be someone you know or have worked with that you could write a thesis with, but you just don't necessarily acknowledge it. (Leaf)
- (206) I would see that it could be beneficial to talk more about the thesis undertaking events and to encourage students to participate. Then those who found them useful could continue participating in them, and those who felt like they didn't need them could still learn something valuable there, but could continue somewhere else if they wanted. It would also be good to organize and fund more of those kinds of events, so I would see that that would be one good improvement. (Leaf)
- (207) I bet that the seminar could also benefit from thesis retreat type sessions, for example if the supervisor could arrange such an event for one day say, once every two months. Then if you got stuck with something, you could ask the supervisor about it. (Cattle)
- (208) In our seminar group there were many people working on similar topics, and that is what science is that you build new information on top of existing information. If we were to utilize that to our advantage more, that would be beneficial for me. That way you could share the burden. And you would get more responsibility when you were not the only one benefiting from it but there would be someone else too, and maybe a third person who could then utilize your theory directly. (Moose)

This section has discussed what the interviewees had to say about the Master's thesis seminar. The two most important roles of the seminar were to provide clear and sufficient instruction on what the students had to do in each phase of the thesis, and to provide peer support via group meetings. It was clear that individualized support was the most beneficial kind of support in the students' opinion, and the more specific the discussion, the more students would benefit from it. This was, however, difficult, as students were at very different phases with their theses and often had very different needs for discussion, and so many students felt that they did not benefit much from the seminar meetings. Another finding was that the thesis seminars could be used to spread information about possible peer support activities as well as provide concrete tools for working with the thesis as a project, not just working on the contents of each phase. The thesis seminar should therefore focus on developing these aspects in the future.

#### **4.4.3 Dual thesis, peer support, family, and other support**

This section deals with additional support systems that students used throughout their process, first discussing the dual thesis as a thesis writing method, and then discussing peer support events such as Weekend thesis undertakings and Konnevesi thesis retreats, and the importance of support from family and other sources.

#### **4.4.3.1 Dual thesis**

The dual thesis can be considered the ultimate source of peer support, as writing the thesis with a partner offers the constant help from a peer working on the same project. One of the interviewees had completed this type of study with a good friend. This interviewee had had a positive experience of their thesis work. The reason that they started to work together in the first place was that he was initially struggling to figure out a suitable topic for his thesis, and a friend of his had come up with a good topic and asked him to be his pair in working with that idea. The interviewee whose the pseudonym name was Reindeer, described their working methods as follows:

- (209) We always gathered together around a table to think about those things that we had sketched and took those that fit the template. Our method was to go to our place or my thesis partner's place, mostly usually to my partner's. And we thought that we would work on the thesis for the rest of the night, and we bought spaghetti and glogg because it was Christmas time, and even after that because it formed into a tradition. But that pasta was f\*cking good, you wouldn't lose your concentration because of getting hungry, and you could carry on for hours on end, and then you would have glogg to get some sugar. Back to the roots kinda stuff. It was a really peaceful space and we were at my thesis partner's place because he lived alone so we could be undisturbed. But we also had to remind ourselves that it had to also be fun. At best made our friendship deepen, not break, in that thesis process. It was the best space to work on the thesis that could have been. We could be there on our own in a relaxing space with our pasta, scratch our arses and take a sh\*t. The only problem when working at the university is that you cannot scratch your balls in the middle of working, and to rock your sweatpants. So the best is probably to go to your friend's place to work. For me it worked to go there. Even the fact that for my thesis partner it was their own house, they still couldn't work on anything else during that. So when I entered, that space became a workspace. And then if they were doing something else I just asked them "what the hell are you doing?".  
(Reindeer)

Interpreting what was said, working with a partner helped this student in all areas of work: time management, concentration, motivation, self-confidence, and stress maintenance. They were able to develop a functioning routine for their work with the thesis. The two had compatible working methods, and they were able to share the work so that they both worked with parts they enjoyed working with. The partners was able to motivate each other and ensure that both were concentrating and working on their thesis when they were supposed to. Sometimes they also had times when the partner caused some irritation during work, but those instances were well managed and did not lead to any major issues.

(210) The easy thing about it was that I was writing it together with a partner, and that we could share the job in a way that they would write the parts that I didn't like, and I would those that they didn't like, and that worked for us just perfectly. I could search for data and outline the theory and write the text, and they could do all the irritating business like transcription and all forms and contacting people and that way I could be like a library mouse. (Reindeer)

Another finding was that contrary to all other interviewees, this student had barely needed the supervisor's support throughout the thesis project. Although they had been very lazy during the thesis seminar, the pair work enabled them to "do it solo", as the interviewee said, and they only used their supervisor two times throughout the whole process. Based on this preliminary finding, working with a partner could drastically reduce the workload of the supervisor, as well as increase the available sources of peer support for the student.

(211) When we were doing it in the summer, we did it largely without supervision. We pretty much did the whole project without supervision. In the very beginning we went to discuss the topic and whether you could do it from this kind of topic, and then got verification, and then we discussed what we should do now and where to proceed after that, and then we did those things and at the end went to show the supervisor the work and asked what is still missing and what we should still develop. So we did the whole thing technically in two sessions. So you should work with a partner. I recommend it warmly based on my own experiences. (Reindeer)

The interviewees who had not worked on a dual thesis also had opinions about the idea. All the students interviewed expressed their interest towards the idea of working with a partner on their thesis, while some recognised that working on a dual thesis was perhaps not for them. The greatest benefits to the dual thesis were seen to be constant peer support for motivation and

brainstorming, positive encouragement in focusing on working together, and sharing the workload together.

(212) Many of my friends have written a thesis with a pair. Those who are, have thought that it is good to write with a friend and to cheer and schedule each other on. And then you can share the responsibility so that not all of it is just left for yourself, but you can for example focus on different things in the theory. (Reed)

(213) At least all of my friends writing dual theses have said that it was a really good idea and that there is much less work per person. I don't really understand why they are not demanded more even though there are two people writing it. Because they likely feed off of each other so that would be easier. (Cuckoo)

Another positive side to the dual thesis was that doing research cooperatively is a more accurate reflection of real-life research. Most articles and books are not written by a solitary person, but rather at least partly with other people. There does not seem to be any concrete reason why a thesis should be worked on by one person only. Two interviewees even said that the thesis could be developed into a bigger project with three or more participants, and in these types of theses the skillsets used by individual students could differ based on the parts of the thesis they were working on. This could also open up opportunities for cross-disciplinary research between study subjects.

(214) The dual thesis should be emphasized because rare research projects in life are done on one's own. At least parts of the thesis would be worth doing in pairs, because you can discuss things with your partner, which is sometimes irritating of course when the other person doesn't think the same way and you would just want to produce text, but you would also get a wall to bounce back ideas from, in addition to ass-kicking encouragement. The fact that co-operation is important in that kind of work in academic life should be discussed much more. Because I want to believe in doing a thesis for life reasons and not for school reasons. So, it would be good that the thesis actually prepares you for that. I think the theses should bring out cross-disciplinarity more, create more real life. Like languages, education, brain research, and information technology is comboed all the time in research, so you could do that kind of research straight away. (Moose)

(215) So, if there weren't ready topics for everyone, then perhaps the thesis could be written as a bigger project. I don't know why it would have to be narrowed down to a dual thesis for example, could there be some, say, four people groups as long as no-one is a free passenger there, I wouldn't see it problematic. Especially if they have managed to produce some kind of a multidisciplinary thesis, it is very fascinating as a thought. (Fish)

The flipside of the dual thesis is that finding a suitable working partner with similar methods and work ethic can be difficult, especially for those students who have very unorthodox working methods or for those wishing to maintain full control of their work. This was the reason why some students said that they had not considered the dual thesis as a viable method for them. The dual thesis could also be harmful for friendships, although none of the interviewees had heard of a concrete case where this had happened.

(216) But it never came to my mind in the beginning because I didn't have a best friend there who I would have liked to do my thesis with, and I wanted to do it on a really theoretical topic and many wanted to do a teaching material packet or an interview-based study et cetera. I could probably work with someone other than a friend, but it would help to have a really good friend when you know the other person's methods and work and know that they fit with yours. So having a stranger to work on the thesis with would pose some trouble in the beginning with getting to know each other and adapting to working with them, so that never came to my mind. (Thunder)

(217) I thought that I don't have the courage to take a pair to write with because I was afraid of being left behind of the schedules and making the partner's work suffer from it as well. On the other hand it was really topsy-turvy, because then if you would have had a partner to work with, you would have someone to answer to for it, and would have taken responsibility, and the thesis would probably have made more progress that way. (Reed)

(218) I wouldn't be able to work on such a thing as a dual thesis, because my working method is such that I don't do anything for a long time and then work my \*ss off. I think you should work at the same pace, but both people would need to understand each other and work for towards the thesis, and create a joint product rather than an individual's work. But collaboration skills are important, and you have to have them, and make it a shared work really. It wouldn't work like "you write I'll dictate". And that you would see the synergic collaboration in the work requires to have good synergy. (Brook)

I would conclude this section on the dual thesis by stating that finding a suitable partner with similar goals and working methods seems to be greatly beneficial in all parts and sides of thesis work. The views of the one student who had done a dual thesis were so drastically different from those from other students working on their theses alone, that it at least considering the dual thesis as a thesis type could be recommended to any student starting their thesis project.

#### **4.4.3.2 Peer support**

The interviewees agreed that the most valuable support mechanism outside of thesis supervision seemed to be other people who were either working with their thesis or had completed a Master's thesis at some point in their lives. Those people were said to be most able to relate to and offer advice and empathy for thesis writing. These types of friends and acquaintances were helpful to the students in a very concrete way. The most important factor about peer support was to have peer pressure to concentrate on working, and to have someone to talk to every once in a while, especially in times of trouble to clear one's head and to reduce the effects of distractions (4.4.2 Working methods). Many students said that it was comforting to hear that others might also have had difficulties working with their theses.

(219) Friends, those who had worked with a thesis or had completed one. I didn't really feel like I needed much help from outside the university in addition to that. Friends helped by increasing my wellbeing. And it was important as such to know that others had done it and that you are not the only one or alone with it, although you were working independently a lot. (Cat)

(220) I've talked about topics related to the thesis with my friend groups. Just explaining to your thesis to someone, and saying it out loud and forming it in a way that you can justify it to someone is a useful thing especially in the beginning, because then you have to think about how you explain it and how you present your questions and argue your data collection and methods and how they are useful. You cover those topics pretty well when you discuss them with friends, who then nod away and pretend that they're interested. Now that I'm talking about this, I feel like I should be writing my thesis at the moment. Most of those tips come from people who have been writing their thesis, like "I used this kind of method here" or something. (Leaf)

(221) Even if you don't get concrete feedback, it's nice to talk to people and relieve your stress about what you've been working on and to get comments back like "oh, you've also had trouble with this part, well nice to hear that, how have you thought about getting over it? Okay, well I guess I could also try out some tomato-timer." But then when you work on your own, you may get stuck inside your head with something, which can open up surprisingly easily just by explaining it to someone. (Cat)

A common problem identified in the time management section (see 4.4.1, Time management) was that many interviewees reported simply not being able to follow their own schedules or deadlines that they had personally set on themselves. This is where peer pressure was a key solution for most students. Working in a space where other people were also working was praised for being a useful method for creating and maintaining concentration.

- (222) In terms of time management, working with the thesis was easier to arrange when it was done with someone rather than alone, since this creates more responsibility to following the set schedules. Peer pressure and working with a friend can provide the needed pressure of sticking to schedules. Most progress was made in places and situations where other people were also working on their theses, such as in Konnevesi, or during weekend thesis undertaking events.
- (223) Going with a friend is good, which is what many people do with exercising, that they go with a friend. Then you don't have the temptation to go to a bar on a Friday night. (Cuckoo)
- (224) Probably peer pressure is good, having other people also working with the thesis makes you not want to completely loiter around. Of course you can always go to the library, but I at least have such bad self-discipline that if I feel like not working then I will probably just leave or browse my cell phone or something. (Fish)

### **Weekend thesis undertakings**

The most praised support system outside of official university support were the Weekend thesis undertaking events organized by university students with the financial help of the Student Life network of the University of Jyväskylä to increase and encourage peer support networks in thesis writing. The student who founded this event concept, as well as two other students who had organized these events were interviewed in this study. The basic idea of a weekend thesis undertaking event was that every month, thesis writers gathered together to work on their thesis for one weekend, starting with defining their goals for that weekend and presenting them to the others. Then, each participant would work on their thesis for the weekend in the manner they wished, taking advantage of the available peer pressure and support as needed, and at the end of the weekend every participant would gather together again to discuss what they had managed to do over the course of the event. The idea was to provide peer pressure, support, scheduling, and concentration for thesis work for a short period of time each month.

These events were highly praised by students who had participated in them. The weekend thesis undertaking format allows for students to piece their work into smaller manageable portions of work, and to visualize their progress over the reporting sessions during the weekend, even when the work done is reading or searching for articles which normally does not provide as many concrete results as writing for example.

- (225) For myself, the thesis was a difficult thing, and so I applied for funding and founded the weekend thesis undertaking events. So, they were born from my own agony. Having work cut into smaller pieces, and being responsible to others about accomplishing things was good. (Brook)
- (226) It helped to be one of the organizers of the thesis undertaking project, I mean to some extent there was additional work in the organizing, but then you also had to go there to do something, so that also helped a lot. (Cattle)
- (227) The good thing about the undertakings and in my own work I noticed was that after working for a day and reading three articles and thinking and drawing a mind map and everything, you feel like you haven't achieved sh\*t at the end of the day. But you have. It may not have concretized itself as seven written pages by then, but you are heading towards that. Or having worked on interview data for two hours, but at some point you have to do that. And there are steps you don't think of as work. So you need to get feedback from doing that, or input from that. Especially reading the data feels useless because you don't get anything visible from it. There is a lot of incubating in the thesis process, which is really annoying, because it doesn't show anywhere, but you have to do it. (Brook)

One greatly appreciated fact about these workshops was that there was always someone who one could ask for advice and help to break the next barrier, to keep working, especially in difficult situations. Even talking to someone and bonding with them about a difficult situation that they had both encountered could help in overcoming obstacles. This communicational style of working also develops important working life skills as one needs to be able to explain themselves and their research in an understandable manner in real life as well.

- (228) About peer support and conversations, that is what prepares us toward working life. There being some who represents a totally different field and you having to explain to them something so that a completely clueless person understands you prepares those kinds of skills too. (Brook)
- (229) I liked the fact that there was always someone to ask whether something sounded sensible to them. And then it was nice to listen to someone being stuck with something, and then someone from an entirely different field asked them to explain themselves to them, and then they said that they understood the idea like this or that, was it right?, and then the other one could realize that they had to explain something better. (Brook)
- (230) If you have questions or get stuck, it would help to always have someone to ask for help in breaking that wall and getting past it. And even just having a friend say that they haven't gotten through some phase either can help to develop methods to push forward like

jumping over a section and continuing on something else and returning to that part later.  
(Leaf)

The peer pressure when others are were working with their thesis also raised the threshold of wandering to do something else during the weekends, and the positive working environment encouraged to focus on the task at hand.

(231) Thesis undertakings have helped quite a lot, I may have made more progress there than in weeks, regardless of also being one of the organizers. For me they have been priceless, somehow having people around you and the attitude that everyone works makes you want to work as well, especially when you're responsible to the others. I feel like my thesis wouldn't have made any progress haven't I gone to those events. So, it makes you feel like you make progress. And also in those events it has been easier to talk to other people because they are struggling with the same process. (Reed)

### **Konnevesi thesis retreat**

The university grants money for a week in "thesis retreat" at a resort in Konnevesi. These events were praised for providing an environment free of other stress or responsibilities and enabling full concentration on the thesis. The same benefits of thesis undertaking events were also experienced here. Many students who had gone there said that they had made much more progress there than working at home.

(232) One thing that was good was when I was at Konnevesi for a week. I sought a grant for going to Konnevesi to a thesis retreat, and went there to write. That was probably the most productive phase. I wrote most of my analysis, the first version of my conclusion section, and maybe even some parts of the introduction there, which is incredible to think how much good text I managed to do in a week. It was a good change in working environment. Even when you had the same computer and the rest of your gear, at home it's much easier to click open a webpage and go into some Facebook to browse. During the retreat, I had somehow just decided that I cannot access anything else than the thesis. I remember almost being shocked when someone turned on the television in the canteen. I was somehow in that mindset that I'm isolated from the outside world there, and just working on my thesis. I have recommended that unconditionally to all my friends. It eliminated the things that might otherwise come between you and your thesis. Didn't have to think about housekeeping, I just walked into the canteen to eat and talk to the others. Everyone was motivated, nobody stayed to loiter around after the lunch, but talked how they had made

progress and then said goodbye to meet later at six for the next meal. And then you would go to the computer to bang on the thesis. (Cat)

To expand the benefits of the Konnevesi-style thesis work, a similar setting could be created in other thesis writing scenarios as well, including the thesis seminars:

(233) When I was actively writing, there were not perhaps as many of these writing workshops. Those would have been useful. I was just now thinking, whether that Konnevesi-positive kind of experience could work here in Jyväskylä locally as well, so that you could get a similar drive, similar concentration without being there. You could get peer support there. If the university would support by organizing study spaces for those, then it would surely help some to go there to work under a some group pressure, and to talk over coffee during breaks. It's nice to not be completely inside your own head there, and inside that thesis document. (Cat)

Although the weekend thesis undertaking and Konnevesi models have been suitable for many students, one student pointed out that it should be acknowledged that there are many students who do not wish to participate in these events but could benefit of other kinds of thesis work events. There may for example be students who find sharing their problems and worries about their thesis too embarrassing and do not wish to participate for that reason. One model does not suit everyone, so many kinds of peer support groups as well as support methods of a very low thresholds should therefore be considered to help those in need.

Although there are sources of peer support currently available to the students, the interviewees said that there can never be too much of it. The Weekend thesis undertaking and Konnevesi - style structures could be adopted by university personnel to develop more of these types of events for all students. One student suggested that utilizing a team from the university or PhD students in developing these efforts could prove useful.

(234) It's cool that we have that weekend thesis undertaking project, but then we could also have some work group from the university staff to develop support for that. Perhaps the seminars could benefit from utilizing PhD students to develop something like that. (Cattle)

(235) It would be great if the university offered more peer support opportunities. There is some, but there can never be too much. (Moose)

### 4.4.3.3 Family support

The two most important sources of help were emotional support listening to thoughts about the thesis writing process, as well as motivational support in encouraging to keep working with the thesis. Family could offer a different kind of perspective onto that of the university staff or supervisor, and this can be helpful in looking at the thesis from a layman's perspective. Only one student said that the support of their family had not been especially important to them.

(236) Well, yeah, I did get a lot of help from my father, who has worked as a researcher in his past, so that was an outside resource. And I have talked about everything with my wife I too, so that of course helped. (Reindeer)

(237) It is quite important, the outside support, because it gives always a different perspective towards thesis writing when it is from the outside, and you get different kinds of questions, and it helps to handle the subject from a different angle. (Fish)

On the other hand, some students reported that unless the family members had written a thesis themselves, they did not always understand the student's worries or thoughts well enough to be able to directly help with the process, and while speaking with one's family could provide positive encouragement, it would also create pressure and nerve-racking expectations. Pressure from family was nevertheless considered more positive and caring than negative in the end.

(238) It was a little difficult to get support from my mom who had never written a thesis, because she didn't know what it's like. (Cuckoo)

(239) My family is more like asking what is going on. Usually when I've visited home, they've asked me one on one how it's going and give some tips like write a little at a time, and write at home and it feels a little repetitive. And my mother has tried to motivate me by promising me to give me some of my inheritance money when I graduate, but I take it as maybe more like pressure, because my parents are a little assertive sometimes, and are low-key like "it would be really good to get it done...". I've probably gotten the most support from my partner, because they want to emphasize that I have time to study in peace, but they also demand that I actually study. Sometimes my partner gets angry at me and I start to feel embarrassed, which gets me to work. That's the best thing, guilt tripping. Haha. It is justified that someone kicks me in the butt to get me to work. It's been nice to get support from outside the university, but it has perhaps created more pressure, because I'm not the only one waiting for me to graduate, and I like to please everyone else before myself, so then I get a little feeling like "I have to do it... I have to do it.. Otherwise everyone will be f\*cking disappointed.." But that just shows that they are interested so it's just fine. It shows that they give a f\*ck. (Thunder)

#### 4.4.3.4 Other support

There were some instances where a student had used their personal relations in the research field and connections with work to ask questions they had regarding their topic of research, and some students said that they had received assistance from their employer in finding participants for data collection. Depending on the topic, different kinds of professional relations could be of major assistance for students. These kinds of networks provided useful for the students, and so thesis students could be encouraged to also find these related networks outside of the university based on their research topics.

(240) I got help from my workplace for finding interview participants, that helped a lot. The contacts there helped me to find targets for my questionnaire. (Moose)

(241) In addition to the weekend thesis undertakings, I had networks in sign language and sign language translation, and multimodal research, with which I bounced ideas and asked for feedback from academics. Because I had a theoretical framework in my thesis, but I wanted someone who knows about the field to read it and to confirm that there weren't any blunders there. And I've actively sought out people in the field of sign language, some translations and some researchers, for example a Facebook group which hadn't been active for a long time, but we had a meeting where we could discuss the topic. I happened to talk to a PhD student who had a similar topic, and we sat down and drank a hell of a lot of coffee and then struggled together with our topics. I had a supervisor from the English department, but then also precision people to ask for certain things. A teacher who had been teaching sign language before and had done a dissertation on multimodality. Then I myself did studies in sign language, and so I got around those small circles. (Brook)

The City of Jyväskylä was mentioned as a good place to be writing a thesis in, as the library and study spaces were close and readily available. The Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) was also mentioned as important for emotional support when dealing with distress and problems that affected thesis work.

Summing up, the most important support outside of the official supervision and thesis seminar were peer support events such as the weekend thesis undertakings and Konnevesi thesis retreats. Work and social life connections were also considered beneficial. The most valuable people for support were those who knew what the process was like, having worked on a thesis or similar work in the past. Having someone to talk to about the thesis, to encourage working, and to break

any obstacles quickly was one of the key elements of successful support mechanisms. The most important position of family and friends was to provide mental support and encouragement.

#### **4.4.4 Working on a thesis for an outside beneficiary**

As the final part of ways to support students' thesis writing, I have included a popular topic raised in the interviews, which is the idea of working on a thesis for some concrete beneficiary. This means working on a thesis for an enterprise or academic organization, to have some concrete purpose for the thesis in addition to being a practice work and a means of graduation.

The idea of working on a concrete thesis topic for a real-life beneficiary received support from all interviewees. Finding meaning in one's thesis work was one central aspect of this topic. It was said that having a real-life purpose for the thesis would be more motivating, because there would be someone else also benefitting from it, and that working for a company could provide clearer goals for the whole project from the start. This subject ties strongly to the ideas discussed in section 4.4.3, Motivation, in that it creates a bridge between studies and working life. There were also many other benefits that this style of thesis work can offer, including external pressure in the form of time-management help, deadlines, and schedules. Many students need assistance with their project management and working for a company that would assist with those would be beneficial.

(242) I would definitely see it as a positive thing to work for an outside beneficiary. At least for me it would motivate immediately more. You complete the thesis for yourself in the end, and even though you go to talk to your supervisor every once in a while, it is a different thing to work on a project for an outside employer. Even though we do get student allowance. I would see that it would probably benefit many facets, at least from my behalf I would see it as a beneficial thing. (Fish)

(243) Students need some meaning to the work, that it is not just some study achievement that has to be done to graduate and to go to work. It is not necessarily intrinsic motivation, but it is something specific as a packet, that you can work on and you don't have to think about the whole world when choosing your topic. And then someone would be waiting for the thesis to complete, so that would help in scheduling. For example when I went to India to present my thesis, I had to write essentially an article for that, so that was one clear thing to finish, and I had good motivation for that, because it had a perceivable end to it. And then I got proofreading for it from a colleague. (Brook)

- (244) Working for an outside beneficiary would motivate if it had clear smaller deadlines, because I don't know how to evaluate my own use of time, and I don't know how to estimate how much time it takes for me to do something. I would probably just postpone everything towards the end, if there weren't any deadlines before the end. The best possible thing would be to go to that workplace to work on the thesis. I go to work and work and then leave. But the idea is that when you leave you don't have to think about it in the evening. (Thunder)

Working for a company could also have other benefits, for example for finding a suitable topic for a thesis, making the thesis project more concrete. Some workplaces could even provide a good working environment, tools and support for doing research, and perhaps the students could find important connections for their future careers or even working for that same company they completed their thesis for after graduation. This could be very beneficial especially for language expert line students, as that program lacks the work internship that many other study subjects have, including the English teacher line which has teacher training.

- (245) If there was work reserved for me then hell yeah I would work on my thesis. I bet it would inspire me a lot. I think that in the English subject you don't have to do a work training, but I think it would be good to do that. Those internships can give you a foot in the door to working life. I have heard from many friends that they have gotten work straight away. On the other hand, you don't necessarily need a separate language training, but from an employment standpoint it would be really good. (Thunder)

Connecting to topic selection the English faculty could also reveal at the beginning of thesis seminars if they had some projects that students could write their theses for. The same idea could be implemented while organizing those topic introduction events. Students were complaining that while in many other study fields connections to real work are more common, they seem to be lacking in the English subject. The faculty could assemble a summary of what is being researched at the time in the research field, what kinds of connections they could offer, and what similar theses have been written before for other beneficiaries.

- (246) In the universities of applied sciences, because work practice is part of the subject field, many papers are commissions from working life, and in many cases you have to find some link to working life, or to find a supervisor there. This could be brought up more that if the university has piece in some ongoing research studies that could be studied, then they could offer them to students. (Brook)
- (247) If the faculty has some connections, it would be great if they could offer them to the students. And we have the centre for applied language studies here and a lot of teaching

research. I bet they have a lot of material for studies. But that it the student's responsibility to find currently. (Cuckoo)

(248) So whenever they are discussing the themes during those meetings I suggested, they could also introduce different kinds of researchers who are researching the topics, and they could provide topics that way. Some of the material could be that they would tell that the university has this kind of material available for study. I know some people who have written their thesis on a similar topic after me using that kind of material and I was like "well darn, why didn't I know about something like this?". (Cuckoo)

## 5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to act as a bridge between the relevant literature discussed in chapter 2, and the findings of the current research. It is hoped that discussing the findings can provide further insights to the Master's thesis process and how it could be eased.

The study set out to explore the thesis process from the students' perspectives, and it quickly became clear that the topic was extremely wide and complex. As such, the project expanded in length beyond what was initially expected, having to consider not only the technical aspects of thesis writing, but the addition of project management and support mechanisms, which could have easily filled the text of a thesis of their own. Regardless, the various aspects of thesis work were studied rigorously with the three research questions in mind, arriving at results of the main aspects that students considered central to their thesis process, the positives, and the negatives, and how to improve upon difficulties.

1. How do Finnish students working on their English Master's thesis experience the process?
2. What do the students consider the key factors leading to a successful thesis process?
3. What are the major challenges that students face, and how could they be overcome?

In the following, the themes identified in the previous chapter will be discussed in relation to the research questions. Some students said that the thesis had been a positive experience and that they had learned much about themselves during it, some students had found the thesis extremely difficult and frustrating, while for some it had not been easy nor difficult. Many students did not feel that the thesis was relevant or motivating to them but strived to accomplish it more out of necessity. Generally, the thesis process was considered long and arduous, with various phases that most students felt ill-prepared for. That said, some students had enjoyed the process and had found doing research interesting. The results of this study indicate students shared views of many popularly problematic aspects of the thesis process, and all of them had struggled with their thesis at some point. While the students' views were by no means completely homogenous, there were not many totally opposite views of any part of the process. When exploring the themes, most approaches identified can be used to address some students' problems without hindering the experiences of others.

Firstly, the data highlighted the need for studies to better train students to work on their theses in many areas, the most central parts being formulating a topic, writing a theoretical framework, and learning to use methods. Most problems or issues that the interviewees reported could be corrected by providing better tools and bases for thesis writing already during studies. Especial care should be placed early on defining the research and finding a suitable topic for study, and staff could organize topic-centred workshops for this purpose, providing examples of suitable thesis topics as well as presenting what kind of research is being done in language studies. Studies should also train their students to search for references and use them properly in research writing, so that the theoretical framework would be easier. As for methods, a course that teaches students to concretely use methods is one solution, and another is to integrate method use better within existing courses.

The second finding was that students needed more detailed and concrete guidance throughout on the whole overall thesis process by introducing more thorough instructions on the whole thesis process, with information on what to do in various situations, especially when something goes wrong with their thesis or when the thesis process becomes delayed. Reducing as much uncertainty as possible and “demystifying” the thesis is the second major finding of this study that should be considered.

And instructional list or FAQ site could be placed online in an always available place where students could access it to address whatever issue they were having, without needing to contact the supervisor or other support first, to keep the threshold of seeking support as low as possible. Information on the different types of theses that can be written, the dual thesis, working for an outside beneficiary, and the benefits of various other support mechanisms could be highlighted here. This central thesis-hub should also include a complete step by step guide to the different work phases of each thesis type with example texts and tips that students could always check if they had trouble with any part of their theses.

A third finding was that students need help with various points of thesis project management. The most central points to completing a thesis were to piece the process into smaller proportions, create schedules, stick to them, and always strive to make progress, while utilizing different support mechanisms as needed. The study revealed that while many students did not wish to have strict deadlines at first to avoid stress and hurry, they later regretted not having made as much progress because of that, and many had started to think of the thesis as a scary

monster, which led to reduced motivation and self-confidence. The findings of this study have offered various ways to manage the thesis project that students can experiment with, and that can be recommended by supervisors. All this material could also be provided on the aforementioned website. The study shows that even at this level, students could benefit from a “basics of research project management” course before the thesis seminar, where all the concrete skills would be discussed and trained. A way of identifying when students have problems and finding concrete ways to help them at those times should be emphasized.

Fourth, the study shows students required both concrete and technical support as well as emotional support to get through the process. The supervisors and individual meetings with them had the most central role in guiding thesis writing, while the group thesis seminars were more needed to provide general guidelines and support. Apart from official support, the most important source of other support was peer support, which could be provided in various ways including workshops such as Weekend thesis undertaking or Konnevesi thesis retreats, as well as in other ways. Students also benefitted from the support from their families or connections with work. The students needed most help during the transition points between different work phases with their theses, as well as whenever encountering problems or barriers, to prevent them from becoming stuck and pushing on.

I will now further discuss the results of the study and relate them to previous research.

## **5.1 Linguistic issues**

The students interviewed in this study felt that their language skills were generally high and sufficient for thesis writing, and they had an active background in English language from living in Finland and using English there. Although students reported that writing in English was somewhat slower, reflecting Uzuner’s (2008) findings, they did not seem to have encounter any other problems that most non-native English speakers’ traditionally encountered. The views of these Finns seem to reflect general findings about the high English skills of highly educated Finnish people by Leppänen et al. (2011). The students’ opinions about their ability to write English academic text were in line with (Pitkänen-Huhta and Holm, 2012) in that they regarded their supervisors as authorities on what kind of text they should produce, but they did not experience many problems writing academic text at thesis level. In fact, the views of these Finnish writers contrasted almost all NNES academic writers at least on the level of personal

experiences, since they did not experience the vast variety of problems that most earlier research on students from other countries had indicated. This is likely attributed most strongly to the whole degree being taught and studied in English. As such, linguistic issues do not need improvement.

## **5.2 Research skills**

Comparing the results of this study to studies on related to research skills, there was significant similarities to a study by Ylijoki (2001: 21-34) where many Finnish students had had serious problems with the lengthening of their studies and personal anxiety with their theses. The students interviewed in this study did indeed seem to have difficulties with similar issues and many more. The struggles writing the different parts of the thesis were visible during the interviews, which support Komba (2015: 71-80) and Fatahipour (2016: 15). Especially Komba (2015: 71-80) had had very similar experiences from their study, suggesting that students' problems writing their theses and dissertations in all chapters of their research reports could be minimized if they were taught to use research methods effectively. Other similar problems discussed by Dwihandini et al (2013: 1) and Brown (2007: 152-174) such as self-esteem, communicative competence, and not having enough prior knowledge were also present in the present study. Some students reported having problems finding appropriate sources and incorporating previous research properly into theses, supporting the work of Eley & Murray (2009). In addition to these issues, as discussed, this study revealed that students struggled with topic selection, and they did not have a clear idea of what was researched at their faculty. The need for preselected thesis topics or at least ideas for topics was clear.

A finding from Linthorst (2014) seems to be in the centre of the problem: the study programs simply do not teach their students how to write a thesis. Students interviewed in this study had similarly poor reflection on the theory in the field, problems with research questions, and some of them they made poor choices regarding their theses, which they later regretted. The students in the English subject at the University of Jyväskylä were also not trained to use different methods and to do research in general, and so there is more room and need for such training. For each part of the thesis, clearer guidelines should be included so that the student would know exactly what they were expected to do. In addition to listing for example "in the analysis, analyse and describe the data from the point of view of your theoretical framework, describe your findings and in the discussion, discuss and compare your findings to previous research"

the instructions should state what it concretely means to “analyse” and “discuss” data, and how exactly they differ from each other. Including these more precise instructions should save students and supervisors much time from struggling to figure out each part and having to rewrite parts.

While the Bachelor’s thesis had offered some experience in thesis writing, and there had been some courses that a research-type final assignment, the students felt that they were ill-equipped to deal with specific parts of the thesis. As suggested by earlier studies, hands-on work with the different tools and methods required in thesis writing prior to the thesis process could be the key to success. For example, to ease work with the theoretical framework section, Alas (2018: 5-21) suggested in her research on Estonian Master’s thesis students that in order to improve the students’ abilities, they could be taught to use proof-reading tools and corpus-based resources to provide a wealth of thesis samples as well as opportunities to make informed decisions about improving their work. More practice could also be incorporated in courses, in the form of discussion of samples of good and less successful samples of graduation theses, and ways of improving the latter (*ibid.*). Similar approaches could be applied across the board for thesis skills. Tools that students could use would be to read other successful theses as well as guides written on thesis writing that supervisor could recommend. Supervisors could also include pre-digested lists of literature that offered instruction for building a theoretical framework or the use of methods. The studies should at least include at least more practice on searching for literature independently and using sources in coursework, as well as practice using different research methodology.

In terms of requirements, students expressed that they more or less knew what they were expected to do but did not know the exact details on how to arrive at that finished product. Thus, what Linthorst (2014) argued about improving the requirements assessment criteria applies also here. The thesis structure could benefit from expressing more concretely and openly the requirements and expectations on what kinds of topics are suitable for English Master’s theses, how much theoretical background is needed to support a Master’s thesis and which research is considered valid as background information, what literature is available on methods and what kinds of methods are valid for research, to name some improvement suggestions. McCambridge (2015: 185-193) had found results at a Finnish university, where both students and teachers had seemed to be frustrated by the vague requirements for academic writing. The interviewees of

in this study did not find the requirements of the thesis vague, but they did say that their instructions on writing it were vague.

### **5.3 Project management**

Comparing the results of this study to suggestions listed by non-scientific sources in Finland, yliopistokoulutus.fi (2019) lists many similarities with the results of this study. For example, problems listed by the former included: trouble with the beginning of the study and narrowing down a suitable topic, reaching for perfection, as well as time management problems. The results of this study were much in line with the solutions presented. Students should use support to figure out their problems and to brace themselves for upcoming problems, be merciful to themselves, and to set realistic goals and expectations. Especially time management issues were similar. Students might have no time at all for the thesis, or have too much time and get nothing done, and that would lead to stress and panic. The solutions are to schedule time for the thesis in one's life, to piece the thesis into smaller manageable parts, and to strive to keep working on the thesis daily. Some of the general findings of this study could be included on yliopistokoulutus.fi website to offer the insight for a wider audience. The findings of this study are also in line with the Finnish university student support website nytyi.fi (2019), which has stated that self-confidence issues with students often spring from perfectionism or unrealistic expectations and suggested that student should lower their expectations and demands to realistic levels.

What was found about project management was directly in line with Khozaei (2019: 310-324), in that the need for organizational skills and mood management was extremely necessary throughout thesis work. A balance between work and leisure time needs to be established. Time management played a big role in this, and its importance was also recognized by Nasrullah and Khan (2015: 71), who concluded that proper time management was highly related to the academic performance of university students in Pakistan. Many of the students interviewed in the present study had work and other responsibilities that they had to manage at the same time as they were working on their theses, which was also an issue indicated by Paltridge and Woodrow (2012: 88– 104) who argued that students often need to juggle research, profession and family responsibilities at the same time. The results support also Odena and Burghess (2017: 572-590) who showed in their study that in the UK, most interviewees reported working not only with tight deadlines but also around job and family responsibilities. It was also

discovered in the present study that having full time work or too many responsibilities provided trouble with thesis time management and scheduling, but the right amount of other responsibilities such as working a half-time job would actually benefit thesis time management as well.

Successful time management and its effects on performance anxiety and self-confidence were present in Lemon (2007), Nasrullah and Khan (2015: 71), and Huerta, Goodson and Chlup (2017: 716-729), who all found that successful time management and making constant progress had important roles in stress-reduction and maintaining motivation and a positive self-image. This was also a key finding in the present study.

The working methods section of this study established various views and tips from the interviewees that can be utilized by students to enhance their experience. Some interviewees said that they could achieve the “flow” state described by Csikszentmihalyi (1996) after managing to begin working and finding their own individual routines. The individuality in students’ working methods was highlighted here, and experimenting with the ideas provided can be of great use when discovering what works for each individual. To highlight a few, the most success generally were found in working outside of home in a public place, reducing distractions, taking enough breaks, and working under peer pressure were found some of the most successful of working methods.

In terms of motivation, it was interesting to find that while doctoral students in Odena and Burghess’ (2017: 572-590) study had an abundance of motivation toward their work and topics, the same was not as common for the Master’s thesis students interviewed in this study. Ylijoki (2001: 21-34) had found similar results, indicating that the motivation of Master’s thesis students had been different from those of PhD students. These findings support the hypothesis that there are some innate differences between the PhD and the Master’s thesis processes. The lack of motivation in the latter could be due to the more forced nature of the Master’s thesis, where most students are not aiming to become researchers after graduation, while PhD students have chosen this path. Interestingly enough, two of the students interviewed in this study who did have aspirations for further research careers also had had some of the more positive experiences with their theses and had had more motivation toward writing a good thesis. Finding relevance in one’s work, whether from future employment or some personal source seemed to be the key feature in carrying the process through. To help with this, the university

could invest in displaying the different ways in which the Master's thesis can be useful for the student in the future, including specializing in certain areas of study and building bridges to possible employment.

## **5.4 Support for thesis work**

Close cooperation and good relationships between students and their supervisors were essential except for the dual thesis student, which lines with Ashwin et al.'s (2015) *Reflective Teaching in Higher Education*. The results of this study are also in line with findings from Chang (2006) in that both findings suggest that supervision should be characterized by mutual respect and a sensitivity for genuine communion and heartfelt communication. Contrary to Wichmann-Hansen and Wrenfeldt Jensen (2015), the students interviewed in this study did not report having major any problems with their supervisors. In this respect, the present findings also differ from the studies by Filippou et al. (2017) as well as other researchers (Deounian, 2011; Eley and Murray, 2009; Butler et al., 2014: 203–227; and Paltridge & Woodrow, 2012: 88–104), who had encountered problems within communication between the student and their supervisor. It seems that supervisory relationships of the interviewees of this study were good compared to those of many others. Contrary to Chang (2006) and Wang and Li (2008), there did not seem to be any challenges emanating from the supervisors' pedagogical shortfalls. Generally, the student-supervisor relationships of the target group of this study were satisfactory.

Master's thesis seminars had not been studied before. The results of this study indicated that individual support was more useful than that provided in group seminars, which were used mostly for learning the general guidelines of thesis writing. While the "rehabilitation club" style of meetings where there were no absolute deadlines and students could bond about their experiences was considered comforting, it did not provide the students with enough concrete help to push forward with their projects. The thesis seminars could therefore benefit from rework in providing better instructions and perhaps incorporating some concrete workshops taking inspiration from thesis writing events discussed in section 4.4.3.2, Peer support.

Individually tailored support and forward-looking feedback were among the most desired types of support, which is in line with previous research on supervision. In regards to feedback, the results are very much in line with Jonsson (2012: 63–76), in that students very much wished to

receive “feedforward”-style feedback, the kind of feedback that guides forward and shows specifically and in an individualized manner what to do next and how to improve one’s writing. Dekleijn et al. (2013: 1012-1026) have also highlighted similar results to the present study in that in their study, students perceived goal-relatedness of feedback in terms goal setting, how well they were doing, as well as how to proceed to next steps. Students who perceived their feedback as positive and providing information on what they should do next were the most satisfied with their supervision. The students interviewed in this study said also that their thesis supervisor had the authority to decide whether their writing was good enough. These results are similar to what Pitkänen-Huhta and Holm (2012) had observed about students at the same university some years ago. Some students also wished to have their supervisors provide them with encouragement and pressure in the form of mutually agreed deadlines and goals. This would create much-needed external scheduling to counteract the lack of self-discipline that most students felt during their thesis processes.

The results from peer support correlate well with previous research, maintaining that mental support was an important part of peer-support (Kaakinen, Suhonen & Kaasila, 2017: 27). Peer support was also important in helping to break obstacles and resolve thoughts in one’s head. Chang (2006: 3) also reported similar results in that her data from interviews indicated that “emotional support from supervisors and their social networks with peers play important role in facilitating their thesis writing process”. Many of the stories from the interviewees were also similar to those in Waring and Kearins’ (2011) collection of thesis survivor stories, where friends and family were often said to be important in handling the pressure of working with the thesis. Nyyti.fi (2019) also recommended seeking support and talking to peers about the thesis process, as well as utilizing thesis guides and mental health services, which many of the students interviewed in this study also needed and had done. Based on the overwhelmingly positive views of the interviewees, highlighting peer network workshops such as the Weekend thesis undertaking events or Konnevesi thesis retreat events to students for their various benefits is highly recommended. Adding to this, one student’s dual thesis experiences indicated that working with a friend on the thesis can be warmly recommended as an option for those beginning their Master’s thesis process, as can working for an outside beneficiary, as it can provide much needed support in terms of scheduling and motivational help. Highlighting the possibilities of utilizing these various support mechanisms does not take away from any process, and could be advertised in the beginning of seminars or even earlier to give students time to consider using them.

## **5.5 Applications & limitations**

This section discusses the possible applications and limitations of this study, while evaluating its validity, reliability, suitability of methods to observe the phenomenon. Various opportunities for further research are also presented.

When observing the validity of the research, we are measuring the ability of the research method to measure a phenomenon, and what was attempted to be measured. (Hirsjärvi and Sajavaara 2003: 213). In other words, we are observing the functionality of the method of analysis, variables and target group.

Care was taken to not influence the atmosphere or presuppose any bias toward positive or negative direction when discussing the themes during the interviews. The phenomenon of thesis work was approached from the point of view of finding what works and what does not work, and analysis focused on finding out a wide variety of views and opinions, and actively searching for improvements and solutions for emerging problems. No major contradictions found within the data that would question the reliability of the research. Therefore, it is safe to state that an explorative and descriptive picture of student impressions of their thesis work has been formed. Further research to validate and test the results on a larger scale could be made by replicating the study, or for example through the design of a larger sample interdisciplinary questionnaire.

The interview was built to discuss specific research questions in the absence of a similar validated interview. The interviews in this study reached a small but representative number of English students at the studied university. The benefits of interviewing students as opposed to using a questionnaire as a chosen method are that it was easier to acquire in-depth data via interview, and the interviewer could ensure that questions were interpreted appropriately. The design of this study is such that it could be replicated to study NNES thesis process impressions at other universities.

It seems that the free-flowing thematic interview format was a suitable method for this study, also from the interviewees' points of view. At the end of each interview, the participant was asked to give feedback on the interview itself and the topics covered in it, as well as fill in any gaps they felt that the interview might have left. All of the interviewees expressed that they

liked the format and felt that it covered the main issues related to the thesis process and its difficulties widely. The open nature of the interviews was especially liked, as the interviewees could speak their mind freely and offer ideas of their own, making the interview feel like a conversation. Being familiar with the interviewer was said to be a helpful factor in setting the mood, but also because some interviewees felt that speaking about the thesis was a sensitive and somewhat tough subject, and that it could have been difficult to speak about it with a complete stranger. The fact that the researcher shared the participants' language, culture, and background as a Master's student proved advantageous in building trust and rapport the interviews.

Of course, the studied students represent just one Finnish university's teaching/learning context, which sets limitations to the generalizability of the findings. It is not possible to discuss student researcher types for example, but it is possible to draw some preliminary conclusions about Finnish students' perceptions on their thesis work and steps that can be taken to ease the process. Further study could also include the views of exchange students writing their Master's thesis in Finland, as well as students whose native language is something other than Finnish.

The participant recruiting method provided students with various backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints. The interviewees shed light on wide area of topics, but the list is by no means comprehensive. As one student pointed out during their interview, some students never express or display their troubles with their thesis processes, which leaves some experiences undiscovered. This is unfortunate, since this "silent" group could also be one that needed the most aid with their thesis process. Further research could focus on finding ways to voice the opinions of those are not inclined to participate in interviews.

This study focused on student and learner perspectives regarding thesis writing. The perspectives of the students are subjective and reveal the side of the student in the thesis writing process. In a future study, these perceptions could be compared with supervisors' perceptions of the issues, to find possible discrepancies and misunderstandings within communication. Until then, the results of this study can be read by supervisors and university staff to alleviate this issue in one direction.

Apart from a few preliminary deductions, this study did not primarily search for correlations or connections between different variables. There were two reasons for this. First, the primary aim

of this study was to explore the phenomenon in its entirety as comprehensively as possible, and thus the themes and topics discussed in the interviews yielded a massive amount of qualitative data to analyse, limiting the possibilities of completing in-depth axial coding and comparisons. Secondly, although the amount of data acquired was large, the data only came from a small sample of the target group, which would not have provided enough substance for reliable comparisons and generalizations. Some observations were made during the analysis of possible correlations, but any larger scale adaptation requires more research. This leaves room for further study in comparative analysis and the search for causalities and correlations within the different aspects of thesis work. For example, a study could focus on exploring differences and similarities between those thesis writers who had been more successful and left the process with a positive image, to those who had struggled or perhaps been unsuccessful so far with the process with a more negative image. This could further highlight the possible problematics of the process.

When evaluating the results of this study, it needs to be remembered, that the students interviewed were all native Finns, and the results may not apply to exchange students or students with another nationality. A similar study format could be applied to explore the views and experiences of students from other nationalities in future research. In addition, although the data group included an even number of participants from different sexes, gender was purposefully left out of the focus of this study, as the focus was not to identify possible differences between genders in thesis writing. The study also did not compare results between language expert and language teacher lines. These aspects could be observed in another study.

The study could be duplicated to investigate the same cultural group on a larger scale, or switch study group to that of another study subject with a Master's thesis writing process in English. Studying a group in a different area in Finland or comparing results between two ethnicities could also be of interest. All of this would be helpful also in further validation of the research method. A larger scale study could be fashioned also in survey form to investigate the topic further and include quantitative data. The study could also be adapted to consider Bachelor's theses, or doctor's disseminations.

When comparing the results of this study to other research, it needs to be remembered that the students views, and opinions were in the centre of this study. This means that it was not possible to compare for example Hsu's (2010: 9), or Ventola's (1992: 191-220) concrete findings from

problems within written academic texts of non-native speakers of English with the results of the present study, because the material is fundamentally different. One is from a student viewpoint and the other was focused on analysing their actual written texts.

And finally, two topics that this study merely touched upon were the dual thesis and working on a thesis for an outside beneficiary. The pros and cons of both could also be explored in their own studies.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This was a qualitative piece of research that focused NNES Master's thesis students' impressions of their thesis process, the difficulties they faced, and what could be done to make the process easier. Building on previous research, the study has attempted to paint a picture of the phenomenon and highlight key factors regarding the thesis process. The thesis process was discussed from the points of view of linguistic issues, research skills, project management, and support, with many subsections regarding each theme. Various possible solutions to problems were explored throughout the study, and the students' views were presented in numerous amounts of excerpts from interviews to illustrate points.

This study highlighted the necessity of preparation, support, and perseverance. The different skills that students learn during their studies lay the foundation on which the students create their thesis projects. These skills can be trained and improved upon to make work easier. Throughout the project, the students' project management skills are tested, and different support mechanisms are used to aid in their journey. Here it is necessary to make sure that the student receives all the appropriate guidance they need from the university side. At the end, the student will finish their thesis.

We arrive now at the end of this Master's thesis. Thank you for reading it. If you are a student, I hope that you found some help for your struggles. If you are a supervisor, I hope that you can utilize some of this information to improve your supervision and group seminars. Regardless of who you are, I hope that you have found this study interesting and that it has helped you better understand the complex nature of the NNES Master's thesis process. To end, I leave you with these last quotes from two interviewees that I found reinvigorating:

- (249) That I would like say to a lot of students that it is JUST a thesis. It doesn't define the rest of your life, and that it is nothing worth being depressed or anxious over. It is maybe seen as too big of a project that cannot be tackled, and it should be divided into parts and schedule it so that it doesn't start being that horrible big boulder that will never be done. Everyone should strive towards finishing it. (Cattle)

(250) One of my friends sometimes said that “oh man, it’s Friday, I feel like drinking a glass of wine but I don’t have any excuse for it”. But then they thought that “no but hey, I have finished and returned my thesis a year ago, that is always a reason for celebration. That I don’t ever again have to do a Master’s thesis.” (Cuckoo)

“The best thing about the thesis is that it is over.”

-Cuckoo

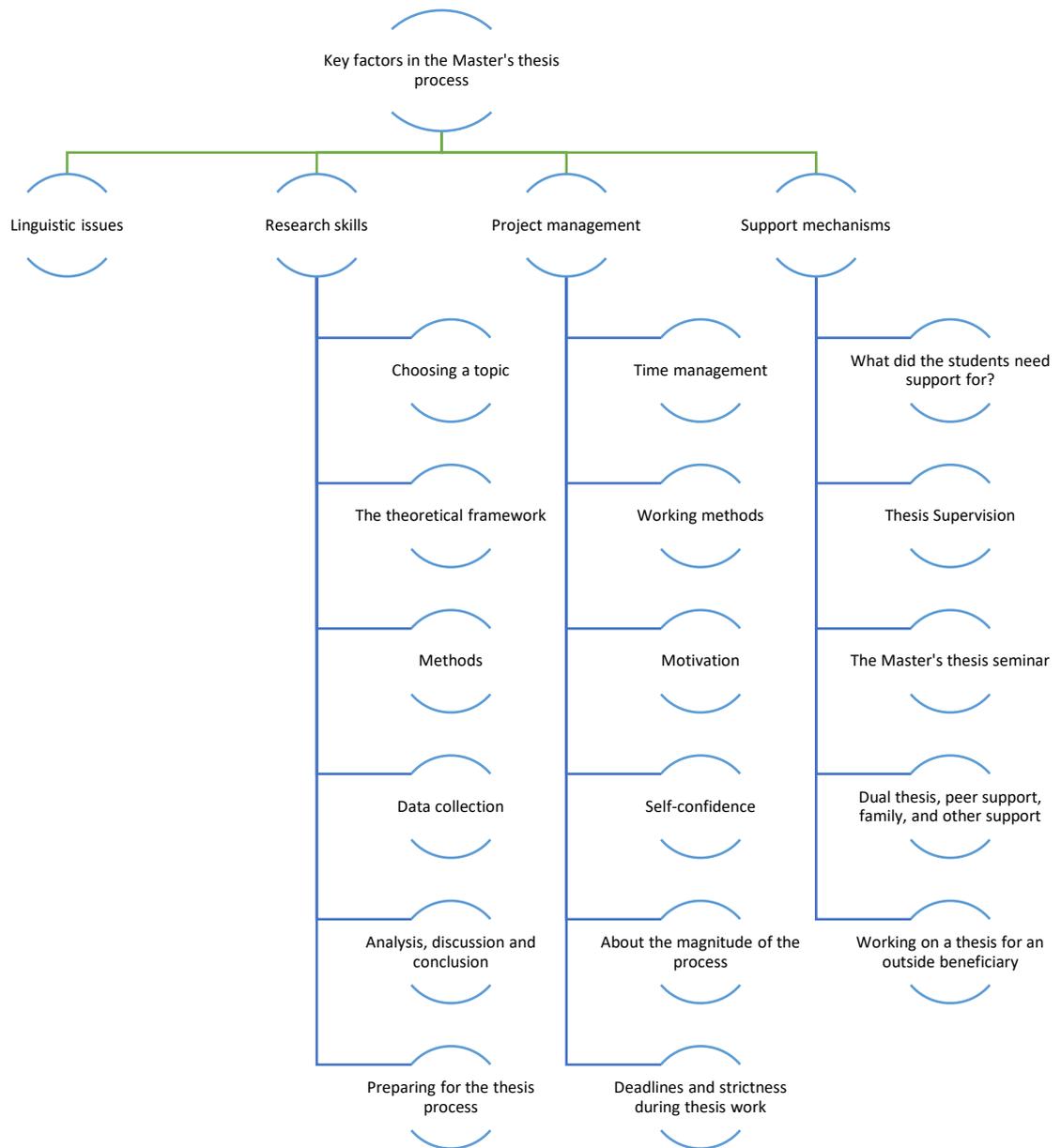


Figure 6. The key factors in the Master’s thesis process expanded.



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## List of appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview structure

This interview structure was built as a guide to ensure that all the essential topics and themes were discussed during each interview. The interviews were in Finnish, and so the question list was also in Finnish. The wordings in this structure are casual, and their purpose was to remind myself, the interviewer, to consider each topic during the interviews.

In the beginning of the interview, I explained the following general disclaimer regarding the interview and its purpose to the interviewee, and then after answering any questions the interview might have had about the study, began the interview.

Tämä on Temaattinen haastattelu, jossa tarkoituksena on selvittää haastateltavan kokemuksia ja mielipiteitä aiheeseen liittyen tarkastelemalla ilmiötä erilaisten teemojen kautta. Esitän sinulle haastattelun aiheen, ja sitten käydään haastattelua eteenpäin niin että voin esittää sinulle lisäkysymyksiä jokaiseen teemaan liittyen. Tarkoitus on, että pääset vapaasti kertomaan ajatuksistasi jokaista aihetta kohtaan. Tässä haastattelussa ei haeta yleistettävää dataa, vaan mahdollisimman paljon erilaisia kokemuksia ja ideoita aiheeseen liittyen.

Haastattelututkimus Englannin kielen opiskelijoiden gradunteosta. Haastattelun tarkoituksena on selvittää, mitkä asiat helpottavat opiskelijoita gradun teossa, ja millaisia haasteita opiskelijat kohtaavat, sekä miten haasteita voisi lievittää, sekä miten opiskelijat arvioivat yliopistolta saamansa tuen.

#### **Alkukysymykset:**

-Äidinkieli Suomi

-Olet Englannin kielen opiskelija / Olet ollut Englannin kielen pääaineopiskelija Jyväskylän Yliopistolla.

-Työskentelet / olet työskennellyt englanninkielisen gradun kanssa vähintään vuoden verran, tai saanut sen valmiiksi viimeisen viiden vuoden aikana.

#### **Yleiskysymykset:**

Mikä gradun teossa on helpointa? Miksi?

Mikä gradun kirjoittamisessa on vaikeinta? Miksi?

Millaisena kokemuksena koet graduprosessin? Kuvaile lyhyesti.

#### **Osaaminen:**

**Kielitaito:**

- Koetko, että kielitaitosi on riittävä gradun tekemiseen?
- Millaisia haasteita Englannin kielellä tehtävä gradu aiheuttaa?
- Miten kielihaasteita voisi helpottaa?
  - Koetko, että opintosi tarjoavat tarpeeksi kielitaidollisia valmiuksia gradun kirjoittamiseen?
  - Miten opintoja voisi muuttaa niin, että kielitaidolliset haasteet helpottuisivat?

**Akateemiset taidot:**

(akateemisilla taidoilla tarkoitetaan tässä gradun sisällöllisiä asioita kuten gradun eri osien kirjoittaminen, muotoasiat, kirjallisuuskatsauksen tekeminen, tutkimusmetodien valinta, datan kerääminen, analyysi, discussion, lähteiden lainaaminen, sekä muut osiot.)

- Mikä tai mitkä osat gradun kirjoittamisessa ovat olleet sinulle haastavia?
- Miten näitä osa-alueita voisi helpottaa?
  - Opinnoissa jotakin mikä voisi helpottaa?
    - Koetko, että oppiaineesi muut opinnot valmistavat sinua tarpeeksi opinnäytetyön tekemiseen?
    - Millaista opinnäytetyön tekemiseen valmistavaa opetusta kaipaisit opintojesi aikana?
    - Osallistuisitko kurssille joka keskittyisi erityisesti gradun tekoon liittyvien tutkimus- ja kirjoitustaitojen kehittämiseen?
    - IT-tukea?

**Tukimenetelmät****Graduohjaus:**

- Miten koet graduohjauksesi?
  - Koetko, että saamasi graduohjaus on ollut riittävää ja laadukasta?
  - Ovatko vaatimukset selkeät?
  - Toimiiko kommunikaatio?
  - Oletko saanut sinulle sopivaa palautetta?
- Millaisiin asioihin olet hakenut eniten apua graduohjaajaltasi?
- Millaista graduohjausta haluaisit graduohjaajaltasi? / Millainen graduohjaus olisi sinulle hyödyllisintä?
- Onko ohjauksessasi ollut ongelmia? Jos on, niin millaisia? Miten niitä päästiin yli?

- Kuinka paljon merkitystä graduohjaajan tuella on ollut gradusi kanssa?
- Millaista tukea haluaisit että yliopistolta tarjottaisiin enemmän gradun tekoon?
- Miten graduohjausta voisi sinun mielestäsi kehittää jotta se olisi parempaa?

### **Muu tuki**

- Millaista muuta tukea olet saanut tai hakenut gradun teon aikana tukea graduohjauksen lisäksi?
  - Millainen yliopiston ulkopuolinen tuki on ollut sinulle hyödyllistä?
  - Esim. muut akateemikot, vertaistuki, ystävät, perhe tms.
- Kuinka merkityksellistä kyseinen tuki on gradusi kanssa työskentelyn kannalta?

### **Opiskelu-elämän haasteet:**

- Mitkä asiat omassa elämässäsi tuntuvat/tuntuivat helpottavan eniten gradutyöskentelyä?
- Mitkä asiat omassa elämässäsi hankaloittavat/hankaloittivat eniten gradun tekemistä?

### **Ajanhallinta**

- Miten yleensä järjestät aikaa gradun teolle?
- Onko jotain mikä aiheuttaa ajankäyttöisiä haasteita gradun teossa?
  - Koetko, että muut opinnot vaikuttavat mahdollisuuksiisi tehdä gradua?
  - Työskenteletkö opintojen ohella? Miten koet tämän vaikuttavan?
- Mikä voisi helpottaa ajankäyttöä?

### **Keskittyminen**

- Mitkä asiat saavat sinut keskittymään graduusi?
- Mitkä asiat hankaloittavat keskittymistäsi?
  - Millaisessa ympäristössä koet parhaiten pystyväsi työskentelemään gradun parissa?
  - Kuinka suljet muut häiriötekijät pois, jotta voit keskittyä graduun?
- Mikä mahdollistaisi paremman keskittymisen gradun tekoon?

### **Motivaatio**

- Miten motivoitunut koet olevasi gradun kirjoittamiseen?
- Mitkä asiat eniten motivoivat sinua työskentelemään gradusi parissa?
  - Motivoiko työelämään siirtyminen valmistumisen jälkeen tekemään gradua?

- Parigradu / ulkoiselle ympäristölle tekeminen?
- Millaiset asiat voisivat lisätä motivaatiotasi gradun tekoon?

**Itseluottamus**

- Millainen itseluottamus sinulla on gradun kirjoittamista kohtaan?
  - Koetko, että luotat itseesi ja siihen että taitosi ovat riittävät ja selvität prosessista?
  - Mikä lisäisi itseluottamusta aiheeseen liittyen?
- Onko sinulla ollut stressiä graduun liittyen? Mistä se johtui ja miten sitä voisi vähentää?

**Loppukysymykset:**

- Onko jotain gradun tekoon liittyvää jota ei käsitelty tässä mitä haluaisit sanoa? positiivista tai negatiivista
- Onko sinulla jotain muita ehdotuksia siihen kuinka gradun teko prosessia voisi helpottaa?
- Mitä mieltä olit haastattelusta? Tuliko käytyä hyvin aiheet läpi?

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