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Abdelhafid Boussouf University Center of Mila



Institute of Letters and  
Languages Department of Foreign  
Languages Section: English

**Examining EFL Students' Difficulties  
When Writing a Master Dissertation: A  
Case Study of Master 2 Students at Mila  
University Center**

*A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements of the Master Degree in  
Didactics of Foreign Languages*

**Presented by:**

1. Manal Bennacef
2. Nada Baouta

**Supervisor:**

*Prof. Leila Bellour*

**Board of Examiners:**

*Chairwoman: Dr. Allili Souad*

*Supervisor: Prof. Leila Bellour*

*Examiner: Dr. Nihad Laouar*

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## **Dedication**

*To my very beloved father, mother, grandmother and two brothers for their love, patience, encouragement, and support. To everyone else who helped me with this dissertation, I thank them for every piece of advice and bit of their experience.*

***Manal***

## **Dedication**

*This work is heartily and proudly dedicated to my beloved family and friends who have been my constant source of encouragement and support throughout this journey.*

*To my role model, my extraordinary mother, whose unwavering love and support have been my biggest anchor in hard times.*

*I also dedicate this work to the memory of my beloved father.*

*To my siblings Basma, Bassem, and Haithem who have always been my biggest cheerleaders.*

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### **Abstract**

Writing a master's dissertation is a significant milestone in the academic journey of graduate students. The primary aim of this dissertation, which consists of two chapters, is to investigate the difficulties encountered by EFL master students during the process of writing their dissertations, as well as the possible reasons behind them. In this study, two major hypotheses were set. The first one is that the majority of students do face difficulties when writing their dissertations and the second one is that these difficulties may include writing academically, conducting research, personal, and social difficulties. As for research design, a mixed method is employed. A questionnaire is administered randomly to a sample of EFL master 2 students at Mila University Center in addition to semi-structured interviews directed at the supervisors. Our findings confirmed that students do actually struggle with various difficulties throughout the process of dissertation writing, among which we mention academic writing problems, research methodology problems, supervisory, technological, personal, and collaborative problems. Interview results for the most part align with students' reports and confirm the existence and the multitude of the encountered challenges.

**Keywords:** academic writing, EFL master students, graduate students, MA dissertations, writing difficulties.

## **List of Abbreviations**

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**MA:** Master of Arts

**SNDL:** Système National de Documentation en Ligne

**JSTOR:** Journal Storage

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## **General Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

Academic writing has been an area of concern for students, teachers and researchers for many years. On their journey through academia, EFL students struggle with their writing proficiency especially since English is not their first language. The problems in this range become more prominent when they are about to obtain their master's degree, as they are required to write a dissertation within a limited amount of time. In addition to this, and given the complex nature of this extensive piece of academic writing and the purpose it serves, another problem surfaces which is that of research methodology since students' research skills are also tested. The issues in this area are worthy of a thorough investigation due to the grand impact they bear on one's academic career especially that a great number of students experience them as suggested by existing research in other contexts. Having said that, we ask the question of whether the difficulties in writing a dissertation are also a hurdle for EFL students at Mila University Center and we aim to examine them to provide insight and remedial suggestions.

### **Aims of the Study**

This research work aims to examine the difficulties that EFL Master 2 students face when writing their dissertations at Mila University Center. This examination allows for a better understanding of the existing problem, and thus feasible solutions can be provided to improve the quality of dissertation writing in the Algerian context.

## **Significance of the Study**

This case study is of paramount significance as it examines one of the most troubling and common problems in academia which is that of academic writing and more specifically writing dissertations. Postgraduates' academic achievement is hugely influenced by the existence of these problems, and therefore a thorough investigation is of value in order to better understand the problems and provide feasible solutions that hopefully make a difference. The case study to be carried out not only adds to the literature on this topic in the Algerian context but also adopts a mixed-method approach which certainly contributes to the reliability of the data collected and the originality of the study itself. In addition to the new context, the present study explores other existing difficulties beyond the ones related to writing and research, which is a significant limitation in the majority of the already existing research.

## **Research Questions**

This research work aims to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do EFL students at the University Center of Mila face difficulties when writing their Master's dissertation?
2. What are the difficulties that EFL Master students encounter when writing a dissertation?

## **Research Hypotheses**

We hypothesise the following:

1. The majority of EFL students at Mila University Center do face difficulties when writing their dissertations.
2. The difficulties they face include writing academically, conducting research, personal, and social difficulties.

## **Research Design**

To achieve our research objectives, two data collection instruments will be used. Questionnaires with Master 2 EFL students at Mila University Center and interviews with the supervisors that are assigned to the concerned students. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected and analysed using statistical and thematic analysis. This design is chosen to make sure the issue at hand is looked at from different perspectives and for the data to be more credible.

## **Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into two main chapters. The first one is theoretical which is entitled 'Literature Review'. It is divided into three main parts. The first part defines academic writing and its characteristics, in addition to its significance and some challenges related to it. The second part defines dissertations and their general structure. While the third part presents a collection of existing research on the studied issue which is the difficulties when writing a Master dissertation. The second chapter is practical and is entitled 'Data Collection & Analysis'. This latter presents the tools and the process of data collection, in addition to the collected data from the students and the supervisors with its interpretation. It also addresses the limitations of the study and the suggestions and recommendations.

## **Chapter One: Students' Difficulties in Academic Writing and Writing a Dissertation**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is dedicated to reviewing the literature related to the key elements of our research in detail. These elements are academic writing, dissertations, and the existing research on the difficulties that students face when working on their dissertations. A variety of sources were used from a variety of contexts to enrich and provide a solid base for the practical part to take place.

### **1. Academic Writing**

#### **1.1. Definition of Academic Writing**

Academic writing is a critical skill for students, scholars, and researchers who are engaged in producing and disseminating knowledge in their fields of study (Murray, 2016). It involves a formal and precise style of writing, with an emphasis on evidence-based arguments and the use of citations to support claims (Swales and Feak, 2012).

Although various researchers defined the concept of academic writing differently, there are some common themes and characteristics that are generally associated with academic writing.

Swales and Feak (2012) define academic writing as “ the discourse of the academic Community,” highlighting its formal and specialised nature. They continue to point out that academic writing is characterised by specific genres, such as research articles and literature reviews, as well as a focus on argumentation and evidence-based claims. Flowerdew (2013), on the other hand, highlights the communicative function of academic writing, noting that it is a means of communicating research findings and ideas to a wider audience. He further stresses the significance of audience awareness in academic writing, explaining that writers should be aware of their readers' expectations and knowledge. Murray (2016) also supports the previous claim by defining academic writing as “ the process of writing that is used to

convey ideas and information that are intended for academic or scholarly audiences.” He highlights the importance of clarity, precision, and evidence-based arguments in academic writing, as well as the role of writing in shaping and communicating research findings.

Simply put, academic writing is a specialised form of writing that is characterised by formal language, evidence-based arguments, and a focus on communicating research findings and ideas to a scholarly audience.

## **1.2. The Significance of Academic Writing**

Academic writing is an essential skill for graduate students, as it is central to their coursework, research, and professional development. Swales and Feak (2012) stressed that graduate students must be able to produce well-written, evidence-based arguments and communicate their research findings effectively to their peers and to a wider audience. Similarly, Murray (2016) claimed that great academic writing skills can have a significant impact on a graduate student’s career success, particularly in academia. Thus, Graduate students who can produce high-quality research and written work are more likely to secure funding, publish their work, and obtain academic positions.

Overall, EFL graduate students face rigorous academic standards, and writing assignments is an essential part of meeting these standards. Therefore, Effective academic writing skills are essential to succeed in their MA programs and to meet the expectations of their professors and peers.

## **1.3. The Characteristics of Academic Writing**

Academic writing is a distinct form of writing that is used in scholarly research, publications, and academic assignments. It serves the purpose of communicating research findings, sharing knowledge, and engaging in intellectual discourse. It is characterised by specific key features that distinguish it from other forms of writing such as creative writing or journalistic writing. These features include formality, clarity and conciseness, citations and

referencing, logical structure, objectivity, criticality, precision and accuracy, and audience awareness. Understanding these characteristics is critical for anyone seeking to engage in academic writing, as they inform the style, tone, and structure of the writing. In this way, academic writing is not just a means of conveying information, but it is also a way of participating in a broader academic discourse and contributing to the ongoing body of knowledge within a field.

### **1.3.1. Formal Tone and Language**

Academic writing is expected to maintain a formal tone and language throughout the text. This means using precise, specific, and technical terminology, and avoiding colloquial language or slang (Flowerdew and Peacock, 2001).

### **1.3.2. Clarity and Conciseness**

According to Weissberg and Buker (1990), academic writing should be clear and concise, using simple and direct language to convey complex ideas. This means avoiding overly complex sentence structures, jargon, and unnecessary words. It should be easy to understand and communicate ideas in a straightforward manner.

### **1.3.3. Evidence-Based**

Academic writing is characterised by the use of evidence to support arguments and claims. This means using credible sources and providing proper citations to acknowledge the sources used (Swales and Feak, 2012).

### **1.3.4. Logical Structure**

Swales and Feak (2012) argue that academic writing should have a clear, logical structure that is easy to follow and understand. It should follow a structured format, including an introduction, body, and conclusion as well as the use of headings, subheadings, and other organisational tools to guide the reader through the text.

### **1.3.5. Objectivity**

Academic writing should be objective, and it should avoid personal bias or opinion. In other words, it presents arguments and claims supported by evidence and logical reasoning (Swales and Feak, 2012).

### **1.3.6. Criticality**

Hyland (2014) believes that academic writing should demonstrate a critical approach to the subject matter, analysing and evaluating different perspectives and arguments. This includes engaging with the literature, acknowledging alternative viewpoints, evaluating evidence, and developing informed and well-supported arguments.

### **1.3.7. Precision and Accuracy**

Academic writing should be precise and accurate in its use of language, grammar, and punctuation. This means using the correct terminology and avoiding errors in spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Precision and accuracy also require avoiding vague language or wordiness (Swales and Feak, 2012).

### **1.3.8. Audience Awareness**

Academic writing takes into consideration the intended audience, whether it be other scholars, students, or the general public. This means using appropriate language and tone that matches the expectations of the audience (Hyland, 2004).

## **1.4. Academic writing challenges**

EFL students often face numerous challenges when it comes to academic writing. Academic writing requires a high level of proficiency in English, including advanced grammar and vocabulary, as well as the ability to organise and communicate complex ideas effectively. For EFL students, who are not native English speakers, these tasks can be daunting and overwhelming.



Graduate students, particularly, encounter unique challenges in academic writing. They are required to produce high-quality writing which is expected to be scholarly, rigorous, and sophisticated. According to Swales and Feak (2012), one of the most prominent challenges is the use of academic language, which includes the appropriate use of grammar, vocabulary, syntax and discourse markers. Another challenge was stressed by Hinkel (2016) who argued that they struggle to express their ideas clearly and coherently. This can be particularly problematic for international students who may not have a strong grasp of the English language, or are unfamiliar with the conventions of academic writing in English. Moreover, graduate students may struggle to critically evaluate and synthesise information from different sources as they are expected to show a deep understanding of their subject matter and contribute new knowledge to their field, which requires the ability to read and critically evaluate existing research (Swales and Feak, 2012). Kamler & Thomson (2014) also stressed the problems with the conventions of academic writing, mainly the organisation of paragraphs and the use of references and citations.

In addition, EFL graduates also struggle on the affective side. A significant challenge is the lack of confidence in expressing their ideas in English. They may lack the language skills necessary to articulate their ideas effectively, leading to a lack of clarity and coherence in their writing (Phakiti and Li, 2011). Finally, it is worth mentioning that time management is a significant challenge for graduate students since they often have multiple assignments and deadlines to meet, which can be time-consuming and overwhelming as students may struggle to balance writing assignments with other responsibilities, such as coursework and employment, leading to poor quality writing (Murray, 2016).

## **2. Dissertations**

### **2.1. Definition**

In the context of higher education, writing is a major medium for demonstrating comprehension of disciplinary knowledge (Coffin et al., 2002). In the academic discourse, writing in general and academic writing, in particular, are used to accomplish a number of objectives. The achievement of these objectives largely depends on the fundamental elements of this kind of writing. In addition, academic writing can take on a number of styles depending on the goals and field of study of the author. The dissertation is one of these formats. The master's dissertation is the last requirement to earn the degree. This large piece of academic writing is based on previously published work and original research on the subject matter. The body of the dissertation is broken down into six sections: an introduction, a literature review, the methodology, the research findings, the discussion, and the conclusion. The following section will go into greater detail regarding these components.

### **2.2. Dissertation Structure**

#### **2.2.1. Cover Page**

The dissertation's cover page should include all the necessary information regarding the research work. The key components of the title page include the student's and the supervisor's names, the title of the dissertation, the document type, the department and institution, the degree program, the date of submission and the university logo (George, 2022).

#### **2.2.2. Abstract**

The abstract should provide a summary of the research study's important elements. It should serve as an introduction, clearly describing what the reader may expect in the sections that follow. This is essential because, as the most read portion of any research report, people frequently decide whether or not to read a research study based on its abstract. The abstract

should contain the goal, procedures, results, and conclusion of the study (Murray and Hughes, 2008, p. 139).

### **2.2.3. Acknowledgments**

The acknowledgements section is where the researcher expresses gratitude to the people and organisations that helped with the research or made other contributions. This may be accomplished by providing money, resources, services, or data, or less directly by engaging in conversation and consulting, offering guidance or inspiration, or simply showing compassion and friendship at what may be described as trying moments in academic life (Murray and Hughes, 2008, p. 141).

### **2.2.4. Table of Contents**

The important chapters and sections of the dissertation are presented in the table of contents together with their page numbers. A table of contents that is straightforward and well-formatted sets the reader up for a high-calibre paper to come (George, 2023).

### **2.2.5. List of Tables and Figures**

All of the figures and tables that the researcher used in the dissertation are listed in a list of figures and tables, together with the relevant page numbers. These lists provide the reader with an overview of their usage throughout the text (Vinz, 2022).

### **2.2.6. Introduction**

The introduction makes up the first part of the body of work in the dissertation. It hooks the reader and provides a solid base and guide for the research on the chosen topic (George, 2022). In the sixth part of their book, Murray and Hughes (2008) discussed three elements that should be included in an introduction. The first element is the motivation for the research; this means an explanation of why the research is being done. They provided a couple of examples to answer this question, one of them being an observation that was made

during the academic career or a knowledge gap detected in the literature related to the subject. They added that by answering this question, the writing contextualises and highlights the roots of the research project. The second element that should be addressed is the nature of the investigation; this includes the research questions, and influential variables and hypotheses. The last element in the introduction was stated to be a short description of the approach adopted to conduct the investigation to help the reader develop a clear view of the research direction.

### **2.2.7. Literature Review**

The literature review is the follow-up part to the introduction. Randolph (2009, p. 2) stated that a literature review is a method of demonstrating the author's knowledge of a specific field of study, including vocabulary, theories, key variables and phenomena, as well as its methods and history. He adds that by conducting a literature review, the student learns about the key scholars and research organisations in the area. Writing a literature review also serves the function of giving the discussion section of a dissertation a framework for connecting recent results to earlier findings. It is impossible to determine how the new study advances the previous research without first determining the current condition of the earlier research.

### **2.2.8. Methodology**

Murray and Hughes (2008) stated that a research project's methodology section explains the procedures used to carry out the investigation and the techniques employed to gather and analyse the data. While "methods" more explicitly refer to the many ways in which data is gathered and analysed, "methodology" refers to the overall approach taken to the research process. The overall goal of the methodology section is the same, regardless of the field in which you are conducting your research. The goal is to give the reader an

overview of the methods used so that a determination can be made as to how appropriate they are given the research objectives. And how reliable the data they have produced is.

### **2.2.9. Results**

George (2022a) stated that the key conclusions of the data gathering and analysis that was carried out for the thesis or dissertation should be reported in the results section. All relevant findings should be presented concisely, objectively, and in a logical sequence. Any subjective evaluation of the reasons behind the discovery of these data or their significance should be left for the discussion section.

There are different ways to present the data that has been collected. According to Murray and Hughes (2008, p.154), the choice of presentation will partly depend on whether the data is qualitative or quantitative. The most common way to show quantitative data is through numbers laid out in the form of tables, graphs, charts, and diagrams. Naturally, when information is provided in this manner, references must be made to it when writing and comments should be included to draw attention to and clarify essential details of the data. A qualitative study may also include statistical data and the use of graphs, charts, and other visual aids, but it is also likely to include other forms of data, such as information about people's actions, attitudes, beliefs, and views. Unlike in a quantitative study, when the text only explains the data shown in figures, this type of data frequently fits itself better to a longer description written in normal prose with figures being utilised to support and clarify points made in the text.

### **2.2.10. Discussion**

This portion of the research project is where reflection takes place on the findings of the investigations and an evaluation of the importance of those findings in light of the objectives, stated hypotheses, and the current status of the field's debate as documented in the literature review (Murray and Hughes, 2008, p. 167).

Murray and Hughes (2008, pp. 168–169) emphasised that there are important guidelines that the researcher needs to follow when analysing and discussing the results. The first one is avoiding making claims that the obtained data cannot support. That is to say, the researcher should be careful not to make claims that are more extreme than what the evidence shows. Making claims that are not supported by the data will make the researcher come out as uninformed and careless and could seriously damage the validity of the entire work as well as the reputation as an exact and discriminating researcher. The second guideline is to avoid altering the data to suit the hypotheses. It is essential to take a step back, practice self-control, and evaluate the results fairly. To guarantee that the interpretations are solely based on what is obvious in the data itself, one should try to analyse the data from the perspective of someone else who has no stake in the study or its findings. The third one is to acknowledge and admit to the study's limitations. The reader will have more faith in all other facets of the research if the researcher is upfront and honest about any inadequacies. However, it is equally crucial that none of those shortcomings points to a fundamental problem in the study's conception or design.

#### **2.2.11. Conclusion**

The conclusion is the last core part of the dissertation. In this part, one should seize presenting new ideas or information and instead, try to summarise everything that has been found based on the research done that is worthy of highlighting again at the end of the work. One should also point out the contribution made in the specific field of study and encourage further research that could be done further in the field.

#### **2.2.12. Bibliography**

Murray and Hughes (2008, p. 170) stated that a bibliography is an in-depth listing of all the sources that were used in the research process. It will give the claims that were made more weight and credibility by acknowledging the ideas and works of others, directing the

readers to the materials that the researcher found to be helpful, and demonstrating that the researcher is conversant with the academic formatting standards.

### **3. The Difficulties of Writing a Master Dissertation**

The difficulties that students face when writing their research work is an issue that is recognized but remains under-researched. In this section, a selection of recent works from different contexts ( foreign and Algerian ) that address the issue is going to be presented in a concise format.

Existing research proves that the challenges faced are not limited only to the EFL context, but they continue to exist even with doctorate students. Munyao and Oduol (2021) conducted a qualitative study exploring the challenges that both master's and doctorate students face when writing theses and dissertations. To carry out their research, they selected a sample of 7 master's students and 3 doctorates from a private university in Kenya. The authors used open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect data. The results of this study showed that identifying a research problem and developing a research topic were major hurdles as well as some supervisor-related problems like disagreement and receiving responses. Procrastination, lack of data analysis knowledge and the gap between the research methodology theory and the actual practice also seem to be major difficulties.

Some studies approached the issue at hand differently where they used already-produced research works as a source of data. Komba (2015) in his study investigated the difficulties that postgraduates face when writing both theses and dissertations. His qualitative study employed a documentary research method, and was done on a large scale as he randomly collected and reviewed research reports from three different universities in Tanzania, with a focus on how appropriately the authors wrote each chapter. A total of 64 dissertations and 39 theses were analysed using content analysis in which he compared the candidates' work at hand to the ideal information that should be presented. To judge if the

documents were appropriately written or not, he used a set of criteria for each chapter. The findings of his study had shown that more than 50% of the candidates encountered a plethora of challenges in writing all chapters of their theses and dissertations. Broadly speaking; the lack of academic writing skills and the inappropriateness of writing when presenting the different chapters.

It was proven that the challenges can extend to even social and cultural ones and that they have as much of an equal impact on the process of thesis writing.

Bakhou and Bouhania (2020) recognized the understudied EFL context in Algeria specifically when it comes to the problems faced by Master students when writing their dissertations. The authors carried out a study that covered 8 universities from 8 different wilayas in Algeria ( Adrar, Ouargla, Eloued, Bechar, Bejaia, Oran, Blida and Batna). They carefully selected a sample which consisted of 30 students and 6 supervisors from the department of English in each wilaya and conducted semi-structured interviews supported by open-ended questionnaires to collect data.

The authors' study focused on the non-linguistic aspects of thesis writing and the results showed that indeed the entire research project proved daunting to students and that is due to both linguistic and sociocultural difficulties. The authors explained that the latter included a lack of supervisory and familial support, the research sample's unwillingness to cooperate, and inadequate academic training. While linguistic difficulties refer to the absence of some academic writing abilities and an inadequate understanding of research and thesis writing.

Bakhou and Bouhania (2021) conducted another qualitative study with a sample size of 15 students from the University of Adrar. The authors investigated the same problem with the aim to improve the quality of dissertation writing in the Algerian context using semi-structured interviews. Findings indicated that master students suffer a variety of



obstacles, including issues with starting their writing, language-related issues, and supervisor-related difficulties.

A series of studies done in the EFL context included both students' and supervisors' perspectives on the issue.

Qasem and Zayid (2019) researched the difficulties that undergraduate students have while beginning to write their research projects. At the University of Bisha in Saudi Arabia. The authors surveyed 60 participants from two distinct departments and conducted informal interviews with supervisors. They found that about 50% of students prefer to write research in their original language and that 70% of students find writing in English to be a very difficult task. In addition to the difficulty of locating trustworthy and pertinent materials, the study also examined issues relating to methodology, lack of interest, time, grasp of the subject matter, and guidance.

Ebadi and Pourahmadi (2019) explored the challenges that EFL master students faced when writing their master's thesis from both the students' and supervisors' perspectives. The authors conducted a qualitative study in which they collected data through semi-structured interviews. The authors' sample consisted of 40 EFL students and 10 supervisors from 5 major Iranian universities. The thematically analysed data showed a multitude of challenges some of which were common ones that both parts of the sample pointed out. These challenges included: selecting a topic of research, lack of knowledge about research and the inability to write academically.

In the same light, Alsied and Ibrahim (2017) conducted a study in a Libyan context at Sebha University. The authors wanted to know about the major difficulties that the students faced when writing their research and also the teachers' attitudes towards the students' work. Their sample consisted of 42 students and 4 teachers and they used a mixed-method approach to carry out their research. The authors' study revealed that the students faced problems when

developing their research and also reporting the findings along with difficulties in writing academically as the most challenging aspect. The teachers' attitudes turned out to be negative towards their students' research due to a variety of reasons including the lack of motivation, research knowledge, library resources, inadequate number of research courses and the unavailability of the internet at the university.

### **Conclusion**

The presented research reveals several key findings. Firstly, it highlights a weakness in writing skills, particularly in the context of academic writing in English. Secondly, it identifies a lack of knowledge, understanding, and practice in research methodology. Additionally, the research underscores the absence of essential factors such as regular contact, feedback, support, and guidance from supervisors. Moreover, the unavailability of reliable internet resources for conducting research is a significant challenge. Furthermore, uncooperative target groups and limited support from the family side further contribute to the difficulties faced. Finally, a lack of interest and motivation among individuals is also identified as a factor. These points collectively shed light on the various barriers and challenges encountered in the research process.

## **Chapter Two: Data Collection & Analysis of Findings**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to examine EFL students' difficulties when writing their master's dissertation at Mila University Center. The aim is to see whether they face any difficulties or not and to identify any existing difficulties. To achieve this, data was collected from both the students and supervisors adopting a mixed-method approach. This section of the dissertation is dedicated to presenting the gathered data and interpreting it. By the end of it, an answer to the research questions will be obtained and the previously stated hypotheses will either be confirmed or unconfirmed.

### **Methodology**

This case study adopted a mixed-method approach to examine the difficulties that EFL master students face when writing their dissertations. This design allows for different perspectives from the students' and supervisors' sides.

Quantitative research was done through questionnaires that were conducted virtually using Google Forms. The questionnaire was posted in Master 2 students' chat rooms and two university Facebook groups. It consisted of a total of 27 questions, a mixture of multiple (6) and single choice (8), Yes/No (9), and open-ended (4) questions. A total of 46 students responded to the questionnaire of around 150 Master 2 EFL students at the University Center of Mila.

The gathered data from the questionnaire was statistically analysed using Google Forms. Except for 3 open-ended questions which we analysed using a thematic analysis method.

Qualitative research was done through semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the 3 supervisors from the University Center of Mila. The interviews were scheduled via email and were conducted in person at the university in a calm area. The interviews consisted

of a total of 8 questions, and they were recorded using a smartphone except for one because the teacher did not allow it, so note-taking was used to keep a record of the collected data. The recorded interviews were, then, manually transcribed to be thematically analysed afterwards.

The gathered and analysed data from both the questionnaires and the interviews are presented in the following section.

## Results & Interpretation

### 1. The Students' Perspectives

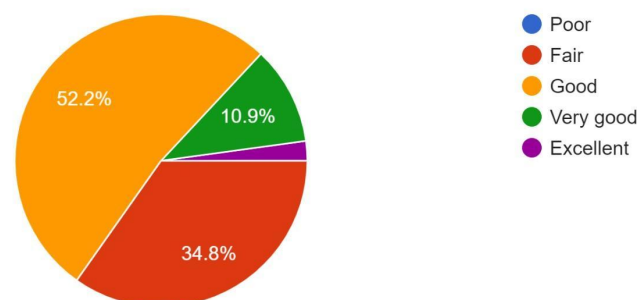
This section is divided into 3 subsections that present the data collected from the students' questionnaire along with a brief interpretation of it. The same pattern is followed throughout the entire section where we present the data in chart form and follow it up with an interpretation.

#### 1.1. Academic

##### Writing Figure 1

##### *Master 2 Students Description of Their Writing*

How would you describe your writing?  
46 responses



As seen in the above chart, 52.2% of the students consider their writing to be good which suggests that a majority of students have a positive view of their writing abilities. Following that, a total of 34.8% described their writing as fair. This group certainly sees

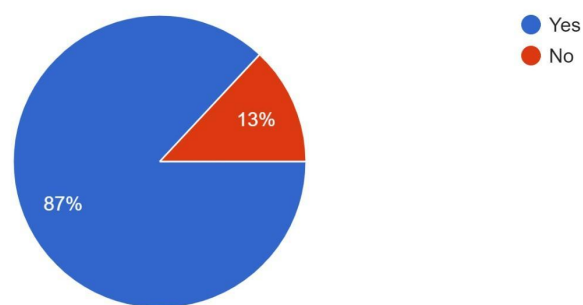
room for improvement as they may struggle more in terms of writing. Only 10.9% of students described their writing as very good. This suggests that only a minority of students have high confidence in their writing skills which makes them potentially stronger writers. Only one participant selected the option “excellent” to describe their writing which indicates a strong sense of self-confidence as well as a high level of competence.

## Figure 2

### *Importance of Academic Writing to Master 2 EFL Students*

Is academic writing important to you?

46 responses



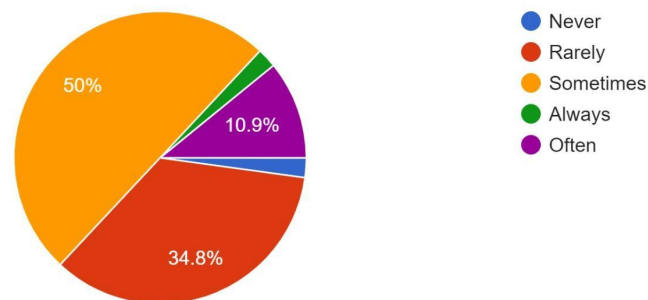
The above chart indicates that the vast majority (87%) of participants regard academic writing as important to them. This is a good indicator that the participants recognize the value and significance of academic writing in their academic and professional lives. On the other hand, 13% of participants do not regard academic writing as important as they cannot see the relevance or value of academic writing or may not feel confident in their ability to write effectively in an academic context.

## Figure 3

### *Students' Academic Writing Frequency*

How often do you write academic texts?

46 responses



As seen in the chart, half (50%) of the surveyed students sometimes write academic texts. This indicates that they engage in academic writing on occasion, but not necessarily on a regular basis. On the other hand, a notable portion of students (34.8%) admitted that they rarely write academic texts. This may be interpreted as a lack of motivation, lack of interest, or lack of confidence. This may also be due to the rigorous nature of academic writing that can overwhelm students. This suggests that this group may face future difficulties when writing academically. Moreover, 10.9% of the students reported that they often engage in writing academically. This indicates that these students are more actively involved in academic writing as they truly understand its importance. This regular practice is what makes this group better writers who may face fewer problems with their academic assignments.

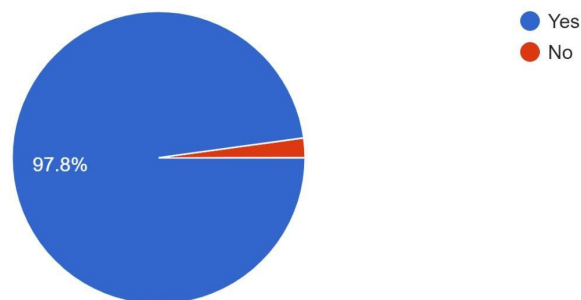
It is worth mentioning that only two participants chose the extreme ends of the frequency options. One participant revealed that they never write academic texts, while the other participant claimed to always engage in academic writing. These responses represent the outliers in the data, with the majority of participants falling somewhere in the middle range of the frequency options.

#### **Figure 4**

*EFL M2 Who Have Difficulties in Academic Writing*

Do you have any difficulties in academic writing?

46 responses



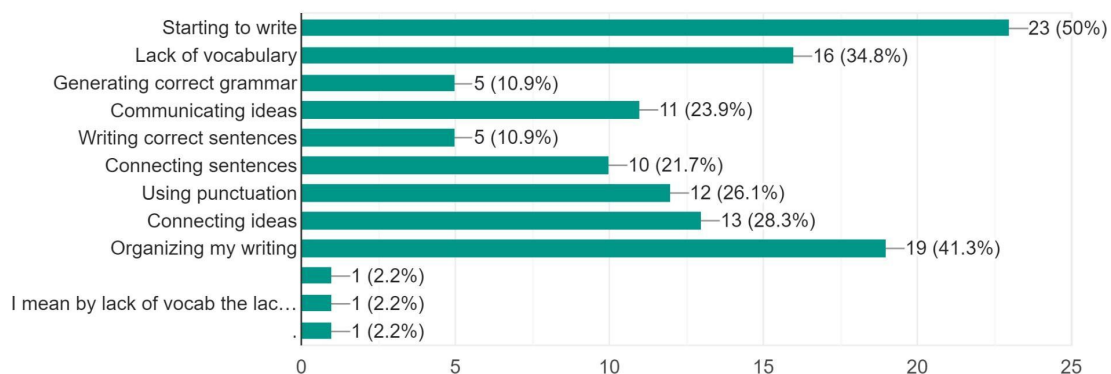
The evidence above shows that the overwhelming majority (97.8%) of the respondents reported having academic writing difficulties. This supports one of our research hypotheses on the possible difficulties that EFL M2 could be facing when writing their dissertations and suggests that this is a common issue among MA students. It is worth mentioning that the same respondent who previously described his writing as “excellent” reported that he does not have any academic writing difficulties. This may suggest that he is confident and competent in his ability to write effectively in academic settings due to extensive practice and the use of the appropriate writing strategies and techniques.

### **Figure 5**

#### *Academic Writing Difficulties*

If yes, what are they?

46 responses



This question was designed to unravel the actual difficulties that students have when writing academically. Half (50%) of the respondents found it difficult to start writing which suggests that many students struggle with getting their ideas onto paper and may experience writer's block. This is generally a common problem among writers, which can happen due to self-doubt, lack of inspiration, lack of clarity in ideas, external distractions, or even perfectionism.

Furthermore, 41.3% of students reported difficulties with organising their writing. This implies that students may struggle with structuring their ideas in a logical and coherent manner which ultimately leads to confusion and lack of clarity in their writing.

Other reported difficulties include a lack of vocabulary (34.8%), difficulty connecting ideas (28.3%), and challenges with using punctuation (26.1%). These results suggest that students lack language skills and are in need of further improvement in various areas including vocabulary building and learning to use punctuation effectively.

In addition, 23.9% of the respondents expressed difficulties in effectively communicating their ideas. This means that students may struggle to express their thoughts clearly and concisely, resulting in challenges in conveying their intended meaning to the



reader or even misunderstandings. This simply highlights the lack of students' language skills.

Another area of difficulty reported by 21.7% of students was connecting sentences. This indicates that students may encounter challenges in constructing cohesive and well-connected sentences that flow smoothly within their writing. Such results strongly correspond with all the difficulties discussed above.

Finally, a minority of 10.9% expressed difficulties in both generating correct grammar and writing correct sentences. This implies that students may face challenges in aspects such as grammatical accuracy, sentence structure, and overall language proficiency. These results were expected as grammar and syntax are usually challenging aspects of the language.

Overall, the results discussed above reveal that MA students have a limited understanding of writing strategies, inadequate language proficiency, and insufficient understanding of academic writing conventions.

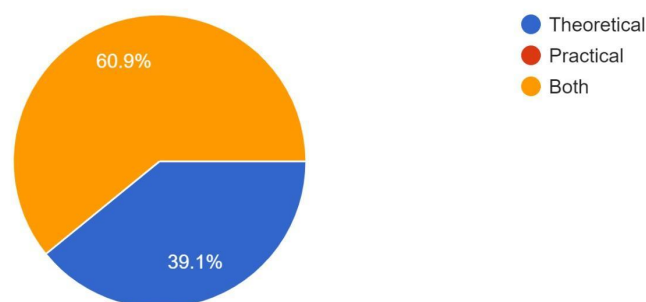
## 1.2. Research

### Methodology Figure 6

#### *Students' Description of the University's Research Methodology Classes*

The university's methodology classes are...

46 responses



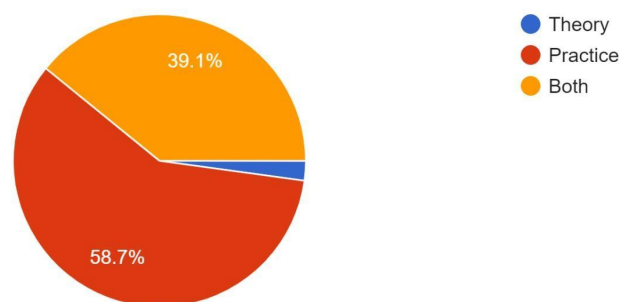
This question was designed to find out students' opinions on the current methodology classes. The majority of the participants described the content of the methodology classes as both practical and theoretical (60.9%). This simply suggests that they perceive a balanced approach to instruction in these classes. This means that they feel that they are receiving both theoretical knowledge and practical skills that are relevant to their field of study.

Only 39.1% of the respondents described methodology classes as theoretical. This significant group of participants may feel that the classes do not provide sufficient practical knowledge or skills. This response may indicate areas for improvement in the methodology classes to better meet the needs and expectations of all participants. It is important to note that the interpretation of "practical" and "theoretical" may vary among individuals, and that the participants may have different expectations and experiences with methodology classes.

### Figure 7

#### *Students' Opinions on the Supposed Content in Methodology Classes*

What should methodology classes focus on in your opinion?  
46 responses



As a follow-up to the previous question. Participants were asked what should be the focus of methodology classes. The majority of participants (58.7%) favoured practice as the main focus. This hints at participants' demanding need for more practice. They believe that hands-on application and practical skills are crucial in methodology classes. The remaining students (39.1%) expressed the view that both theory and practice should be equally

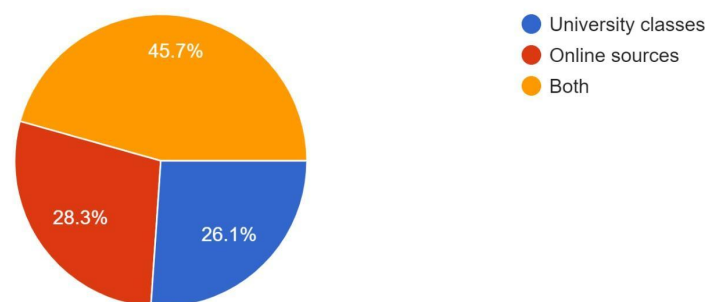
emphasised in methodology classes. These participants likely recognise the importance of theoretical understanding alongside practical application of both theory and practice to be the focus of the classes.

### Figure 8

#### *The Sources that the Students Relied on to Develop their Research Knowledge*

I acquired my research methodology knowledge from...

46 responses



According to the chart, 45.7% of the students reported that they rely on both online sources and university classes to develop their research knowledge. This indicates that they recognize the value of incorporating both digital sources and formal education in their learning process. This may also suggest that university classes do not provide students with sufficient knowledge urging them to use online sources.

On the other hand, 28.3% of students admitted to relying only on online sources which further solidifies that students find themselves needing to rely on online sources such as online tutorials, articles, videos, or research methodology websites to learn about various research methods, data collection techniques, and analysis approaches. They may find online sources to be more comprehensive, accessible, and convenient for expanding their knowledge in research methodology in comparison to the actual university classes.

In contrast, a significant minority of students (23.1%) reported relying exclusively on university classes as their source of research methodology knowledge. This implies that these

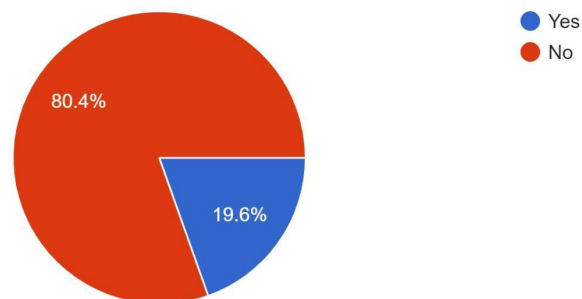
students regard the educational materials, lectures, discussions, and guidance provided by their university classes as beneficial and sufficient. They may prioritise the expertise and structured learning environment of their professors in developing their understanding of research methodology.

### Figure 9

#### *Students' Attendance of Various Academic Activities on Research Methodology*

Have you attended any seminars, training, workshops, or conferences on research methodology?

46 responses



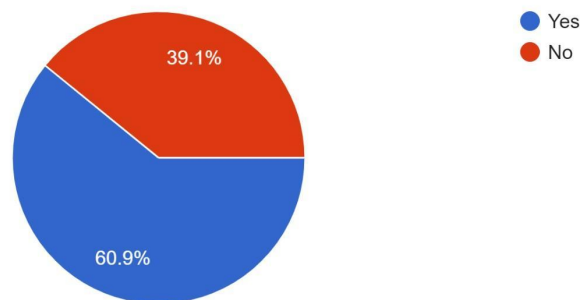
Only 19.6% of the participants have attended methodology-related academic activities while the vast majority of them 80.4% did not attend. This indicates either a shortage in these academic activities, to begin with, the students' unawareness of these activities, or simply their lack of interest or need to attend them. The results obtained from this question also confirm the fact that the students mainly rely on the university's methodology classes and online sources to learn about research methodology.

### Figure 10

#### *Students' Opinion on the Helpfulness of Methodology Classes*

Do you find the university's methodology classes helpful?

46 responses



A large number (60.9%) of respondents find the methodology classes to be helpful. This signifies the effectiveness of the current program used to teach the methodology module and that it fulfills their needs in terms of what is needed to carry out a successful research project. But the chart also suggests the presence of some problems hence the (39.1%) of students who thought that the classes were not helpful.

As a follow-up to this question, the students were asked to justify their answers whether yes or no. Those who found the methodology classes to be helpful reported that the classes provide them with initial and essential information and methods to be able to write their dissertations. They also added that the methodology teachers guide them through both theory and practice and provide them with helpful feedback. Some students specified that methodology classes are beneficial when they practise during the sessions.

*“Teachers of methodology give us instructions on how to properly write an academic paper”*

*“Teachers' explanations and tasks are helpful in preparing for your dissertation”*

*“Teachers give us crucial information.”*

*“They are helpful because we can apply the theory with the corrective feedback of the teacher.”*

*“Very helpful when we practise”*

Those who did not find the methodology classes to be helpful shared one common theme across the majority of their answers, which is the lack of practice and focus on theory during the sessions. In addition to that, some participants reported the insufficient content of the classes and that some teachers who teach the module are not specialised in methodology.

*“ Yes and no. Sometimes teachers focus on things we’ve already dealt with before instead of introducing new things that we actually need in our research and thesis writing. In my five years of studying at university, only one teacher gave us an assignment to write a short abstract and use all the techniques we learned in the process like paraphrasing, quoting and so on. It would be helpful if more teachers actually focused on giving us more practice.”*

*“ They always focus on the theoretical part only, they are totally insufficient.”*

*“University's methodology classes lack practice, it is mostly theoretical and focuses on memorising the lessons and not practising them, also the practical experience is not sufficient because usually, they provide us with useless activities that are not much related or needed for academic writing such as writing a dissertation, this goes since the first year.”*

*“The administration did not provide us with specialists in the methodology module, but they brought teachers of literature for example to teach methodology which is a big problem because the literature teachers can not help the students and assist them in the right way...”*

The students were also asked to suggest some ways in which the methodology classes can be improved and the vast majority of the participants responded that they would want the classes to be practice-focused and for the activities to be diversified. In addition to this, they

suggested that the module teachers should be especially experienced in academic writing, and provide them with personalised corrective feedback. Other respondents shared that the methodology module should be given more hours and novelty should be brought to its contents.

*“By providing students with practical experience in research methods and data analysis. Through assignments or projects, it can enhance their understanding of the concepts and techniques taught in class. Also by providing personalised feedback, and encouraging collaboration.”*

*“By providing more practical exercises for learners... practice makes it better.” “Yes. There are plenty of ways. First of all, when you actually reach M2, you’ll realise that you actually have no idea what the steps of writing a thesis paper actually are and your supervisor won’t be available to explain them all to you. One way to fix that is upgrading the syllabus of methodology that teachers are currently using to include steps, lessons and tips on how to actually write a thesis. The second thing I want to mention is that the syllabus teachers are using to teach is somehow the same for every year. What I mean by this is that what you’re gonna learn in the first year of college is the same thing they’ll teach you in your second and third years. There is no big difference except that maybe the teacher isn’t the same and the way they’re giving and handing out the lesson is different. It would be greatly appreciated if teachers can bring novelty to the module of methodology. This is a broad field. We cannot study the same things over and over again.”*

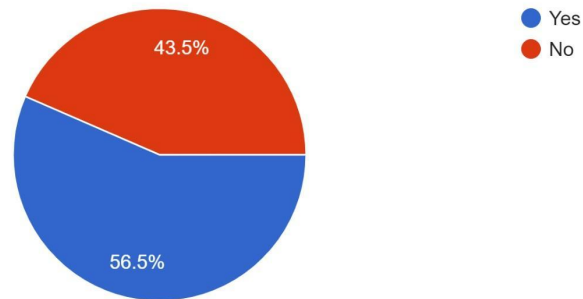
### 1.3. Dissertation

#### Writing Figure 11

##### *Students' Research Experience*

Have you ever written a dissertation or a scientific article?

46 responses



As the chart indicates, a percentage of 56.5% of respondents had previous experience in doing research work while 43.5% of them did not. These results were especially unexpected because 97.8% of the respondents previously reported having difficulties in various aspects of academic writing which is a core component of any research work. This means that having worked on a research project before does not minimise or eliminate any possibly met difficulties during the process.

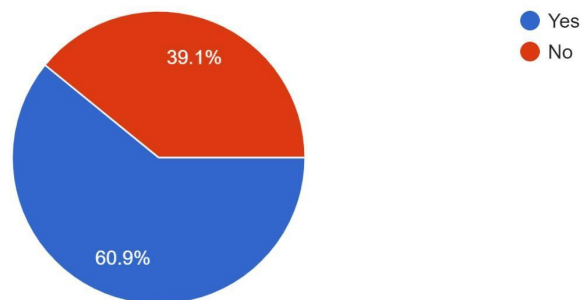
#### Figure 12

##### *Students' Motivation to Write a Dissertation*



Are you motivated to write your dissertation?

46 responses



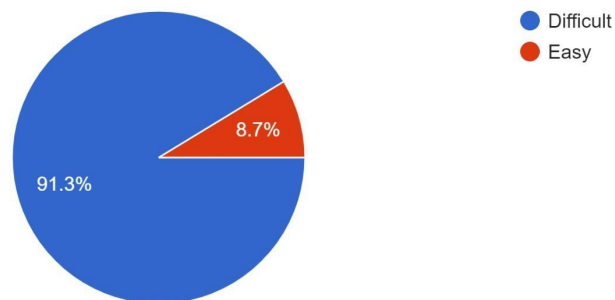
The majority (60.9%) of the participants reported being motivated to write their dissertations. One reason for this might be because the dissertation is the final step before they earn their master's degrees, or perhaps because it is a chance for them to showcase their knowledge, investigate issues and contribute to the academic discourse. On the other hand, 39.1% reported being unmotivated to do so. This could be due to their lack of interest, knowledge or experience in the field of academic research. Or due to other personal commitments that result in the dissertation not being a priority or of major importance. Another reason could be the lack of support and encouragement whether from their teachers, supervisors, or their families. The lack of confidence can also be a major cause of demotivation.

### **Figure 13**

*Students' Opinions on Writing a Dissertation*

Writing a dissertation is...

46 responses



The data this chart represents supports our hypothesis that the majority of EFL students at Mila University Center do face difficulties when writing their dissertations. As 91.3% of the respondents reported that it is difficult. While only 8.7% found it to be easy. Some possible reasons for this could be the complex nature of dissertations and the academic requirements that should be met and respected throughout the entire project, in addition to the fact that the methodology classes were reported as “not practical”, and therefore the students did not get much chance to familiarise themselves with writing the dissertation. The remaining 8.7% must possess the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to be able to consider dissertation writing easy.

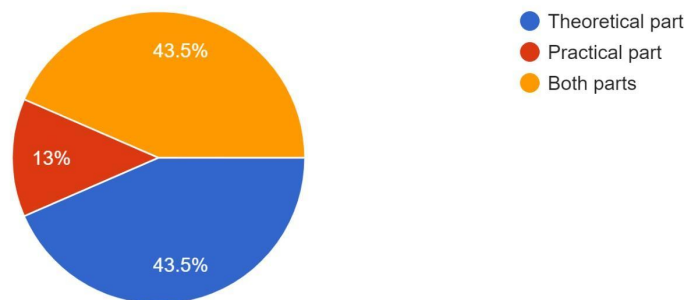
It is also worth mentioning that, despite the previous results indicating that 56.5% of the participants did write a dissertation or a scientific article before, a large percentage still find them to be difficult. This indicates that the students do not necessarily learn from their experiences and as a result it does not make dissertation writing an easier task.

#### **Figure 14**

*The Dissertation's Most Difficult Part*

Which part of the dissertation is most difficult for you?

46 responses



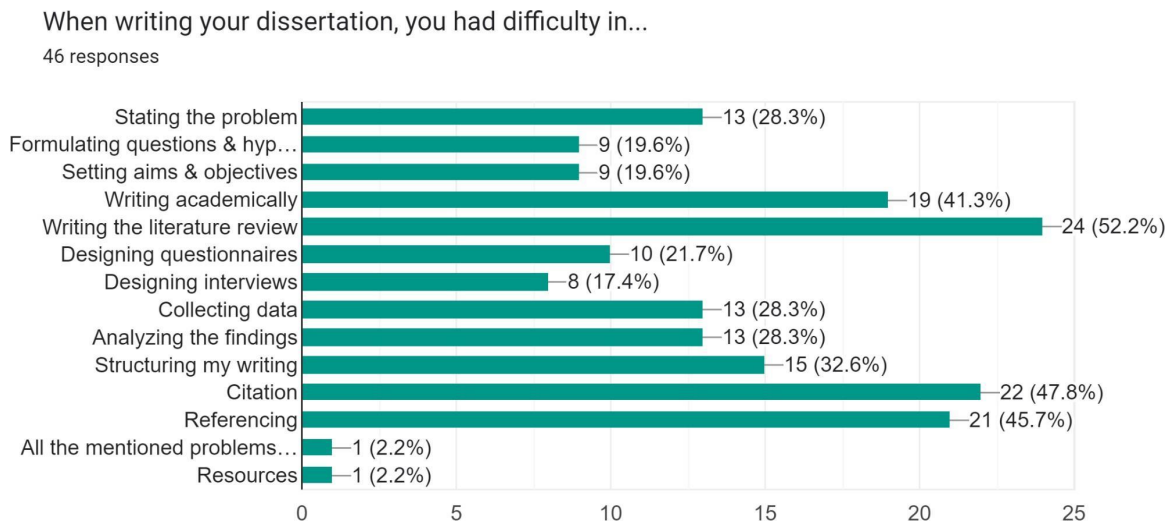
The above chart denotes that 43.5% of respondents find both parts of the dissertation to be difficult. This suggests the existence of a wide range of problems that the students are facing when working on their dissertations.

Another 43.5% found the theoretical part to be the most difficult. This could be due to the fact that it requires plenty of time dedicated to reading to be able to identify and understand the research problem, as well as, to generate an academically written literature review without falling into plagiarism. Lacking academic knowledge and skills could also make working on the theoretical part difficult.

The practical part was reported to be the most difficult by 13% of the participants. Since it revolves around collecting data, this part can present different types of challenges especially when the sample is not cooperative. In addition to the variety of variables that one should account for when designing interviews or questionnaires and the risk of bias when presenting and interpreting the results.

### **Figure 15**

*Students' Difficulties When Writing a Dissertation*



The above chart presents a variety of difficulties that the participants voted to be problematic for them when writing their dissertations. Writing the literature review proved to be the most difficult for the respondents (52.2%). This is because the literature review demands a long list of skills that the students should have to be able to generate one. These skills include reading, academic writing, summarising, paraphrasing, analytical, and synthetical skills.

The second most voted-for difficulty was citation (47.8%) followed by referencing (47.8%). This result was unexpected as the students were taught how to cite and reference sources from the very beginning of their academic careers in the methodology module. The presence of these two issues could be attributed to the lack of practice as reported previously by the students. Students also tend to neglect citing and referencing when they are taught, since they regard them as minor additions to the written text, only to realise their significance when they are called out for plagiarising by their supervisors.

The issue of citation can play a significant role in why the literature review is the most voted-for difficulty, because it can easily put one in a situation of plagiarism.

Writing academically was among the top five most voted-for difficulties (41.3%). It was anticipated that this problem presents itself here because 97.8% of the participants reported previously that they have difficulties in academic writing. It is rather surprising, however, that the issue of academic writing still finds its place even among MA students. The absence of practice and familiarity with this style of writing is definitely the main reason that it is still problematic. Students specifically found trouble structuring their writing (32.6%) which is a core feature of academic writing. Given that the dissertation is a long piece of academic writing, it can be more challenging to achieve overall cohesion, flow, and consistency of argument.

As the chart indicates, the students face some difficulties in parts that are considered primary for the research process. These difficulties include stating the problem (28.3%), formulating questions & hypotheses (19.6%), and setting aims & objectives (19.6%). This indicates that the students lack the necessary background information on their research topic as well as their inability to identify gaps in existing research. Another reason is the lack of planning ability that enables them to conduct research in an organised consistent manner.

Students also reported having difficulty with multiple elements of the practical part as seen in the chart well above. These include designing questionnaires (21.7%), designing interviews (17.4%), collecting data (28.3%), and analysing the findings (28.3%). These results can be justified by what some students previously reported on the helpfulness of methodology classes. They said that they were not taught how to design questionnaires and interviews over the entirety of five years of studying methodology. This lack of practice and experience is only realised when they start working on their dissertations. The problems of collecting and analysing the data can be massively made easy using some software tools, but for the most part that depends on the accessibility of the sample, the instruments used, analytical skills and the students' proficiency when it comes to using technology.

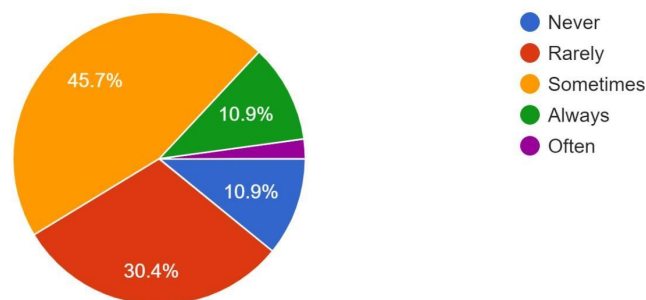
Only one student added the difficulty of finding the necessary resources to carry out the research work, which indicates the unlikelihood of it being a major issue. And only one student ticked all the boxes to indicate a struggle with all the suggested difficulties.

## Figure 16

### *How Frequently the Students Fall into Plagiarism*

How often do you find yourself in a situation of plagiarism?

46 responses



The above chart reveals that 45.7% of the respondents “sometimes” fall into plagiarism while the other 30.4% rarely do. These two categories of students could be unintentional plagiarisers. Only 10.9% never find themselves in a situation of plagiarism. This indicates their mastery of summary and paraphrasing skills in addition to flawless citation and referencing. Another 10.9% reported that they always find themselves in a plagiarism situation. This denotes that they lack the necessary skills and are quite careless about the ethics of academic writing. This can also be applied to the one student who reported often falling into plagiarism.

The students were asked to justify their choices at any of the five degrees of frequency. Those who never or rarely plagiarised reported that they simply are careful, and that they try to always paraphrase themselves, or use paraphrasing tools and they also try to just follow the rules of citation and referencing.

*“ You simply have to abide by the regulations of citations and quotations and your work will be plagiarism-free.”*

*“I do provide always the reference while I paraphrase or summarise what I wrote, then I check whether there is plagiarism by using online websites”*

*“We always take into consideration the sources in order not to fail in such situations”*

*“I always write in my own words”*

Other students who either chose sometimes, always, or often fall into plagiarism, said that it was because of a lack of experience, knowledge and time to research. In addition to finding difficulties in paraphrasing, citing and referencing sources, and committing mistakes. While others said it is just easy to copy and paste.

*“While writing the theoretical part it is difficult for me to change the words and keep the meaning”*

*“Honestly, it is easier to copy and paste what others have already written, mainly when it is written well !”*

*“Never written a dissertation before so going through other researchers' works and taking information from it, I find myself committing plagiarism sometimes”*

*“We were not taught about plagiarism anything before then boom you have a dissertation to write and ‘be careful from committing plagiarism or you will be punished’”*

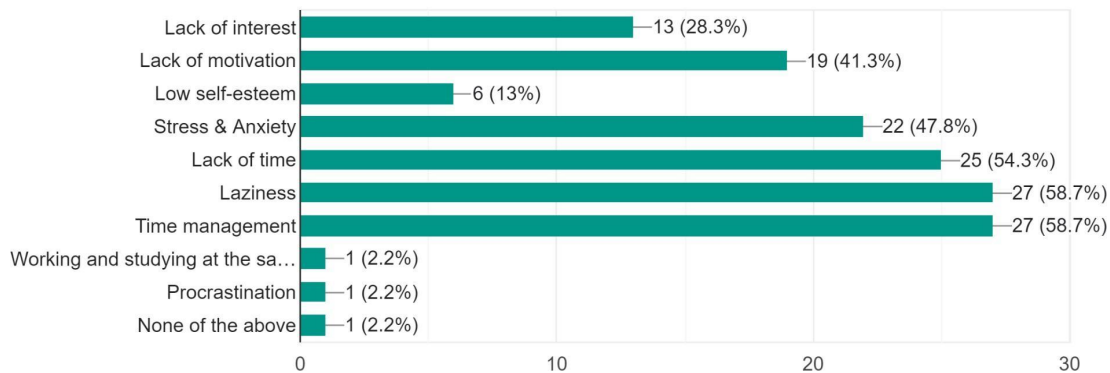
*“You think you own the information in the first place but then you either realise or discover that it's not yours, but it just stuck in your subconscious mind when you read it. This may be a problem of not remembering in the first place if it was your idea or someone else's.”*

## **Figure 17**

*Personal Difficulties*

Which of the following personal difficulties did you face when writing your dissertation?

46 responses



The participants' responses in the above chart indicate that personal problems also present themselves as difficulties and that they negatively impact the process of writing their dissertations. These include laziness (58.7%), lack of interest (28.3%), and motivation (41.3%). This indicates their lack of discipline, seriousness, and commitment to pursuing a master's degree. Some respondents (13%) struggled with low self-esteem as a difficulty. Multiple reasons can interfere when it comes to this issue, but people with negative opinions of themselves can negatively affect their level of productivity, creativity and achievement. A good number of respondents (47.8%) reported stress and anxiety as a major difficulty. Stress can be caused by other personal commitments, time limits, and even the relationship with the teammate and supervisor in some cases. This is of no help if one is trying to work on a research project. Anxious students can find it difficult to focus which therefore affects their productivity.

As it is seen in the chart above, the participants also reported some issues related to time. A large number (58.7%), reported time management as a major difficulty. They either lack time management skills, or there is just too much on their plate in terms of commitments and they fail to set their priorities straight. Hence why 54.3% reported the lack of time as a difficulty.

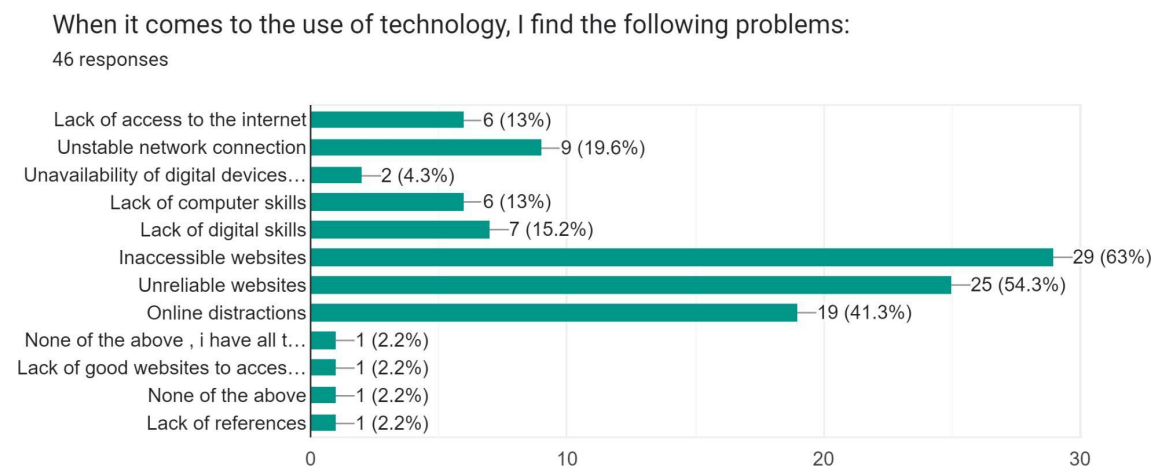


One student reported that studying and working at the same time is a problem for them. While another mentioned the procrastination issue, which is more common than one could assume.

Only one student reported that they had none of the above difficulties. This goes to show their level of excellence, mental stability and discipline.

**Figure 18**

*Technological Difficulties*



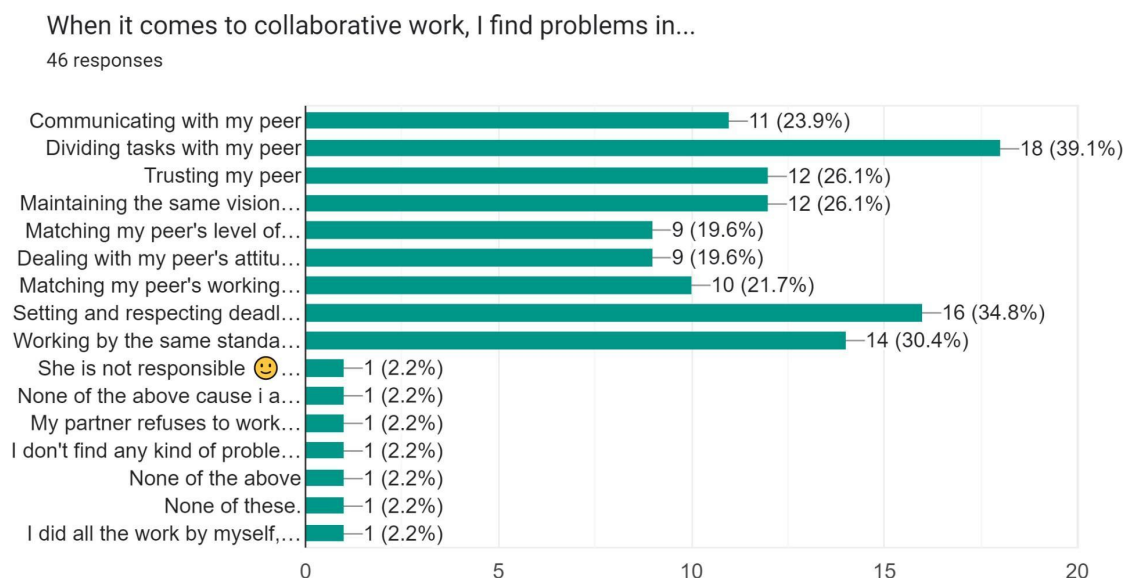
As the chart denotes, the two most voted-for issues are inaccessible (63%) and unreliable (54.3%) websites. The majority of the valuable resources on the Internet are paid, therefore the students are limited in terms of what they can use to enrich their research projects. The students also faced some internet-related difficulties including a lack of access to the internet (13%) and unstable network connection (19.6%). Students do not equally have access to a good internet connection, especially those who live on the outskirts and those who cannot simply afford to pay for it. It was reported that the unavailability of digital devices is also a difficulty for 4.3% of the respondents. Most of the dissertation work is done using these devices, and it makes the process much easier. The absence of such facilities can put the students at a loss, especially if it is not included in the university's services.

A good number of students reported a lack of computer (13%) and digital (15.2%) skills. This technological illiteracy is a result of the students' unfamiliarity and lack of training in the area. In fact, in this day and age, proficiency in using technology is considered a basic skill so it is surprising to see this considered as a problem. Online distractions were reported as a difficulty by 41.3% of the participants. This was expected since most students who have access to the internet and are working on their dissertations from home are more likely to lose focus, waste time and procrastinate working on their research project. This is due to social media and the huge amount of entertainment it can provide. So students who lack discipline and resilience will end up easily distracted.

Only two students reported having none of the listed problems. This goes to show their proficiency in using any technological means that could help them progress their research work without letting any of its negative aspects affect them.

**Figure 19**

*Collaborative Difficulties*

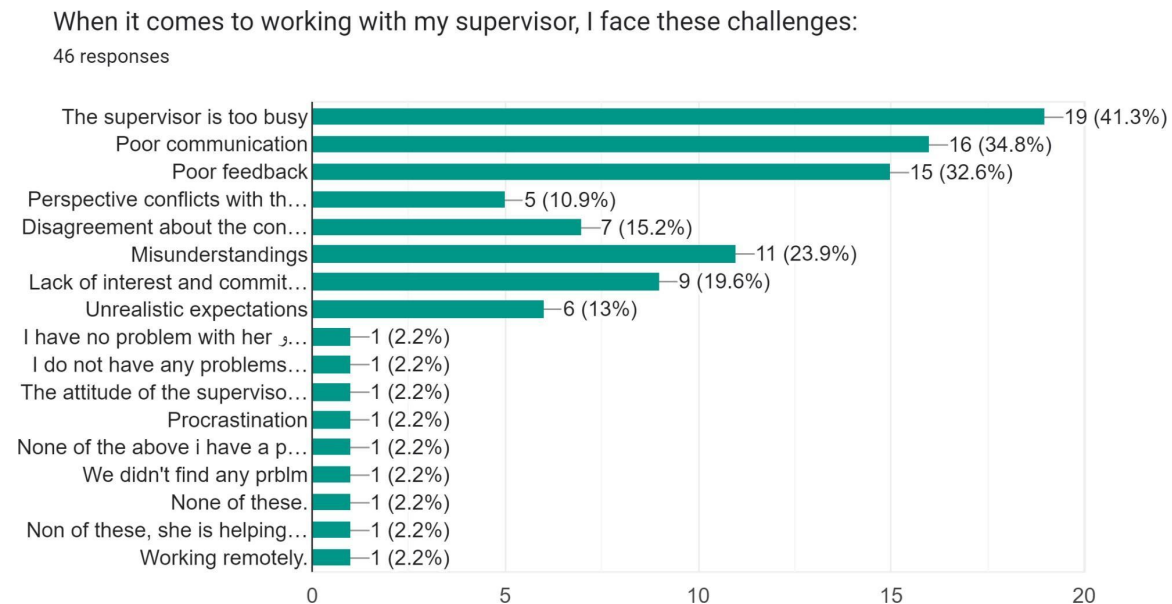


Pairwork certainly proved to be difficult for the participants, since many of the listed problems were selected by the students as seen in the above chart. The first major difficulty was task division between teammates (39.1%). This is probably due to each student's availability, preference and individual skills. There could be a clash if one party is not satisfied or overwhelmed by the assigned tasks. The second difficulty was setting and respecting deadlines (34.8%). This requires discipline and commitment from both parties and any delays or complacency could result in tension between teammates. Third was working by the same standards (30.4%). Matching the level of desired quality is quite rare especially since some teammates are rather careless and they do not prioritise working on the dissertation due to other commitments. Fourth is maintaining the same vision (26.1%). This is quite important and detrimental to the consistency of the research work. The pair should be on the same page in terms of their research objectives.

The respondents also reported having difficulty in matching their peer's working pace (21.7%) and proficiency level (19.6%). This mismatch is due to the fact that the students are either paired randomly or based on any friendship they might have. The students also tend to vary a lot in terms of their proficiency.

The participants also faced problems when it came to dealing with their peer's attitudes and personalities (19.6%) and trusting them (26.1%). Three students also reported their teammate's irresponsibility and their refusal to work on the dissertation while only four of the students reported having no issues working with their peers.

Overall, working with someone else on any research project presents a whole new set of challenges to deal with and lots of things to consider. This will persist due to the huge number of students in the master's program, and the fact that one does not have the option to write the dissertation alone.

**Figure 20***Supervisory Difficulties*

The students reported a variety of challenges when it comes to executing and managing their research project with the guidance of the supervisor. The supervisor being too busy was reported to be a challenge by 41.3% of the respondents. The supervisors as academic figures have multiple commitments in and outside of the university, in addition to the fact they are admitted to more than two groups of students who are working on their dissertation. And with all the needs and difficulties that the students face when working on their dissertations, it is almost impossible for the supervisors to be present and supportive at all times. The second two major difficulties are poor communication (34.8%) and poor feedback (32.6%). This can be a problem, especially for some students who need their supervisory sessions to be in person and need detailed corrective feedback on everything they produce. This issue highlights the students' heavy reliance on the supervisor.

Students also reported the existence of some interpersonal problems with their supervisor that make writing the dissertation difficult. These include misunderstandings

(23.9%), perspective conflict ( 10.9%), and disagreements when it comes to the content and methods (15.2%). It makes sense that misunderstandings occur since it was reported by the students that poor communication was a difficulty. This could have been avoided if both parties made clear the rules and systems that should be followed throughout the process from the very beginning. Perspective conflict can also occur especially with some stubborn students who are very keen to do things their way. In this case, the supervisor should be trusted because they are experienced and know exactly what the requirements of the university are. But at the same time, students' opinions and creative ideas should be equally respected and considered by the supervisors' side. This also applies to disagreements about the content and methods.

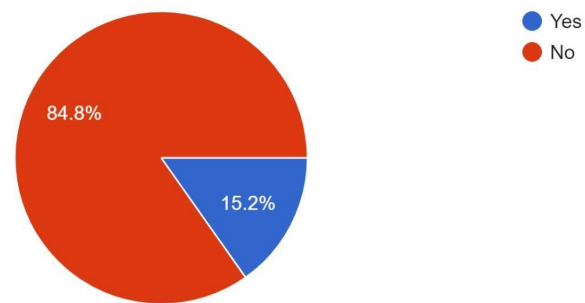
The lack of interest and commitment from the supervisor was reported as a difficulty by 19.6% of the respondents. This is one of the consequences of the supervisors being occupied most of the time, but their occupation should not be used as an excuse to neglect their responsibilities towards the supervisees. In addition to this, students voted for unrealistic expectations to be also problematic (13%). This can be through expecting the supervisees to make zero mistakes and always abide by a certain time limit. Many of the supervisees lack experience and practice when it comes to dissertation writing, so for the supervisors to expect high performance and productivity is irrational.

Only four of the respondents reported having no problems with their supervisors and that they are quite helpful. Shockingly, one student reported their supervisor's unhelpful attitude and that they fail to respect them and use rude language to communicate.

**Figure 21***University Resources*

Does the university provide the necessary resources for your research work?

46 responses



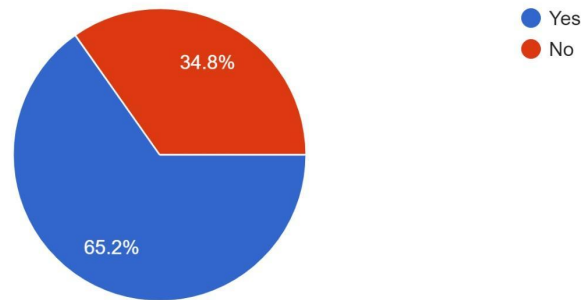
As the chart above indicates, an alarming majority of the students (84.8%) reported that the university does not provide the necessary resources for their research work. This signifies a perceived deficiency in resources such as databases, libraries, funding, equipment, and research facilities. Such limitations may potentially hinder the process of research and dissertation writing which makes it more challenging for them to produce in-depth high-quality research.

In contrast, a minority of 15.2% expressed their content with the currently available university resources. This may be due to successful experiences that allowed these students to access the resources they need, enabling them to conduct their research effectively and meet their academic requirements.

**Figure 22***Sample Cooperation*

Was the sample willing to answer questionnaires and interviews?

46 responses



According to the chart, 65.2% of the participants reported that their sampled individuals or participants were cooperative in answering the questionnaires and doing the interviews. This implies that students had positive experiences due to the willingness and responsiveness of their samples. These students face minor difficulties when administering their questionnaires and interviews which facilitated the data collection process. Cooperative participants are more likely to provide accurate and reliable responses, contributing to the overall quality of the research data.

On the other hand, 34.8% of respondents reported encountering problems with their sample's willingness to answer the surveys and interviews. This suggests that a significant proportion of students struggled with obtaining the necessary responses from their sample group. This reluctance could be caused by a variety of factors such as lack of interest, time constraints, unwillingness to participate, or any other barriers that affected their cooperation.

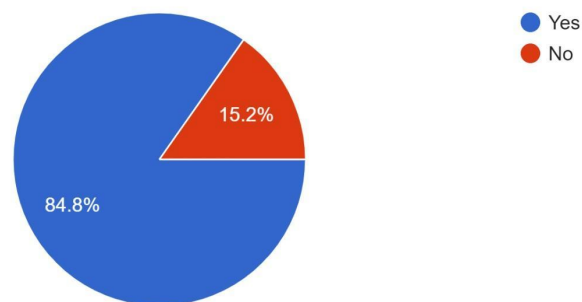
It is worth mentioning that students facing difficulties in getting responses from their sample group may need to explore strategies to increase cooperation. This could involve providing clear instructions, establishing rapport with participants, addressing any concerns

or barriers to participation, or incentivizing participation to motivate individuals to respond to the surveys or interviews.

### Figure 23

#### *Familial Support*

Was your family understanding and supportive during the process of working on your dissertation?  
46 responses



In terms of familial support, the overwhelming majority of students (84.8%) reported having understanding and supportive families. This can be greatly beneficial for students as they navigate the challenges of dissertation writing. Familial support can contribute to students' motivation, well-being and overall resilience during the demanding period of dissertation writing. It can help students maintain more focus, manage stress better and stay committed over the long run.

It is worth mentioning that a small percentage (15.2%) of students reported not having understanding and supportive families while working on their dissertations. This lack of familial support may lead to feelings of isolation, increased stress levels, or even difficulties in balancing academic responsibilities with family obligations and expectations. All the aforementioned may easily hinder students' research progress and negatively affect its outcomes.



## 2. The Supervisors' Perspectives

This section presents the data that was collected from the interviews with the supervisors. Each of the 8 questions is treated separately using thematic analysis to analyse the supervisors' answers. Each analysis is followed by interview transcripts for support.

### **Q1: How would you describe your supervisees' performance?**

The supervisors were asked to describe their supervisees' performance when writing their dissertations, and all three of them described it as average. This was predictable as the vast majority of students have reported that they consider dissertation writing to be difficult and also reported the various difficulties they faced. Which included problems with writing academically, conducting research, problems when working with the supervisor, and personal, technological, and collaborative problems. Overall, the supervisors' report on the students' performance does not contradict the previously stated data from the students' questionnaire.

#### **Supervisor 1**

*"...Yes, they are average, but they are hard workers, so I can't complain. They're really hard workers. So I think the hard work makes up for their level of English. Sometimes I just feel so angry when I'm correcting. I feel like shouting at them, and I just want to shout at them."*

#### **Supervisor 2**

*"...This year, let's say average."*

#### **Supervisor 3**

*"Average."*

### **Q2.1: Did your supervisees face any difficulties when working on their dissertation?**

The supervisors were also asked whether or not their supervisees faced any difficulties when working on their dissertations, and they all answered yes. This confirms

what was previously found through the questionnaire, where 91.3% of the respondents described dissertation writing as difficult.

**Supervisor 1**

“Yes.”

**Supervisor 2**

*“When they are doing their dissertations, yes, of course. They find difficulties of different types.”*

**Supervisor 3**

“Yes.”

**Q2.2: What are these difficulties?**

As a follow-up question, the supervisors were asked to name the difficulties that their students were facing. They reported a variety of difficulties that stretch from academic writing skills, specifically linguistic difficulties, to research skills, mainly the ones necessary for the theoretical part of the dissertation.

Academic writing was considered a major difficulty by 41.3% of the students, although the majority of them described it previously as good. From the supervisors’ perspective as well, academic writing proved to be a prominent issue for students; all of the interviewed supervisors emphasised and mentioned an extension of specific problems related to it.

**Supervisor 1**

*“...Second is academic writing. It seems like students are not even aware that there's something called academic writing. Or they think maybe that their English is already academic...So this is the main difficulty that most of them face, even from last year, the previous years. Academic writing, they just have nothing to do with it although their English is good. Again, I can't complain, but sometimes their English seems poetic...”*

*a student wrote for me “so that students can shine” like no, you can't write ‘shine’ in academic writing. And one student wrote “Let's delve into this” as if she's giving, like, an informal speech.”*

### **Supervisor 2**

*“...Their academic writing skills are limited, so they commit a lot of mistakes when they write, linguistic mistakes, mainly. They keep repeating the same reporting verb for so many pages. Although I have given them a list of different reporting verbs. The problem with tenses, sometimes the reporting verb is in the present, and sometimes it's in the past. Another problem is capitalization. This is a big problem, especially in terms of titles. They capitalise only the first word. Problem with punctuation. This is a big problem for all, I say, all the supervisees over the years. They have a big punctuation problem. Also, the accordance between verb, singular, and plural of the verbs and the subject. More linguistic problems.*

*Also, in terms of the ideas, they explain their ideas in Arabic. Sometimes they use redundancy and they find that the ideas are confusing, I can't correct them unless I ask the student, what do you mean by this paragraph or what do you mean by this sentence? It's up to them to tell me what's in their mind. And then I rewrite it in the English language because they can't express themselves well yet. So these are just a few examples of the mistakes that I usually find.”*

### **Supervisor 3**

*“They do not know how to write academically because they do not read.”*

The interviewed supervisors reported many other difficulties that the students face besides academic writing. These difficulties are more specific to dissertation writing and research conduct. The theoretical part of the dissertation is where most of these difficulties reside. But students, also, find difficulties when writing the practical part

### **Supervisor 1**

*“First, I asked them to do interviews, and I realised that they don't know how to do analysis for interviews because they are used to analysing questionnaires. They don't know how to do the analysis for interviews, which is a qualitative method, although I taught them last year how to do that. But students unfortunately just attend and pass the exam just to get a good mark, and then they throw everything away...Because I didn't realise that they don't know how to do thematic analysis. So this took some time.”*

### **Supervisor 2**

*“Let's say they have a research difficulty because they don't have research skills. I mean, from the very beginning, they start saying that we didn't find the references, however, Google and websites in general contain millions of articles and books and blogs. And even YouTube channels, some of them are educational. Scholars deliver lectures and explain topics in the videos. Students come immediately and say, we didn't find the resources which means that they lack research skills on how to find the information. So this is a main skill. The other one, I don't say most of the time, but sometimes, they lack summary skills and they don't know how to avoid plagiarism. They plagiarise without intending it, without being conscious of it. So summary skills, analytical skills, and synthesis skills. Among the difficulties also is the selection. They are not selective in terms of the ideas to be put. If the dissertation ranges between 60 and 100 pages. They put a lot in the literature review. I say try to limit yourself to 30 pages in the literature review. But no, they always exceed it because they say, we found a lot of things...so they can't select what is most pertinent to that topic, of most importance to it, of most relevance to it.”*

### **Supervisor 3**

*“...Making questionnaires and interviews, specifically formulating questions. The questions should be in parallel with what is in the literature review...they should be taken from it. In*

*addition to this, they tend to repeat the same questions in different ways...They do not know how to analyse the findings unless guided through the process...They have difficulties referencing others' ideas...citations, references, paraphrasing and quoting."*

The above-mentioned difficulties by the supervisors are all aligned with what the students previously reported concerning the difficulties they face when writing their dissertations. As they also reported writing the literature review, academic writing, citing, referencing, and designing questionnaires and interviews to be problematic for them.

**Q3: Students' questionnaire results indicated that they are not satisfied with the current methodology classes; they want them to be more practical. What's your opinion about this?**

The supervisors were also asked whether it is true that the methodology classes should be more practical as the students reported in the questionnaire. They all agreed to some extent with the students' view, and they are aware of the issue. However, they highlighted the problem of the time limit and the large number of students in every class, and they recommended that the students take the current methodology classes more seriously and rely more on themselves when it comes to practice.

#### **Supervisor 1**

*"Yes! I agree. I agree...in my classes, I tried as much as I could to focus on practice rather than theory. We didn't have much time because of COVID. We, I think, only had like four or five sessions in the semester. Yes, but if only I could have more sessions, I could have done more practice. And my colleagues and I always discuss this issue in methodology, it's more of practice rather than theory. We can do theory, but the rest has to be practice."*

#### **Supervisor 2**

*"I agree to a large extent. I know about the content of the methodology classes, but I don't know how this content is delivered, what they are doing exactly in the methodology class,*

*whether it is beneficial or not, and whether the problem is with the practice or with them, for example, they don't pay attention to different things said by the teacher. And then when they come to the practical part, they say it's the problem of the course. However, I think that they also share some responsibility here because, for example, the references, citations, APA, MLA...how to summarise, how to read, and reading skills. They have dealt with them during their BA degree in the second year; in the first year. When they reach their master's degree because they didn't practise, they start saying, We haven't studied this...I agree with them to a large extent. However, there will be a problem with time because methodology classes will extend, and will necessitate double the hours that are dedicated to them now...three hours. Maybe it's not enough for conducting the practical part. And there is also the problem of large classes. So the teacher can't supervise 40 students in the tutorial and direct their practical part or supervise what they do in the fieldwork. It's really impossible. I don't say hard, it's impossible.”*

*“Yeah, to rely on themselves and to rely a little bit on their supervisors during conducting their research. Because after the supervisors provide them with all the details and the methodological points...It's somehow relevant to the learner-centred approach, they have to do the work by themselves. This is not to contradict myself. I agree that there are some shortcomings with our methodology classes. I noticed that. From the performance of the students, I have noticed that.”*

### **Supervisor 3**

*“I agree, they need to be more practical...but there is the problem of time limit...the number of sessions is not enough...not enough teachers...but the students also tend to neglect the methodology module thinking it is not important, and they are absent in the periods around Eid, Ramadan...Strikes...”*

**Q4: The literature review was chosen as the most problematic part. Why do you think so and what are some suggested solutions?**

Furthermore, the supervisors were informed that students' questionnaire results indicated that the literature review was chosen as the most difficult part of the dissertation and they were asked about their opinions regarding the matter. They mentioned various reasons such as lack of confidence, finding the gap, originality, content selection, citation, referencing ideas, quoting, paraphrasing, academic writing, plagiarism, synthesis, and the lack of reading. The latter stood out as teachers insisted on the importance of allocating enough time to reading as well as employing the appropriate reading skills to deeply explore previous literature and understand it properly. Interestingly, teachers' responses align nicely with the data that the students' questionnaire provided.

**Supervisor 1**

*“ I think it's because of a lack of confidence. Because we all struggle to find originality. And even if we find or we think that we found something original, we lack the confidence to say that our topic is original. In order to make it original, you have to be able to know what others said. You have to have prior knowledge of what others said. You have to really understand what they said. Because sometimes you think you understood, but you really didn't...”*

*“It's difficult...it's not easy to find a gap because people are very active. I mean, scholars in general. Even in Algeria, people have become more active in research. But overseas, scholars are very super active. Like they publish a lot. In a given field, you find plenty of papers published in a year. So it is a bit challenging to make a gap. Especially if you are a beginner.”*

### Supervisor 2

*“ Well, I think because they don't have the habit of reading. Literary review needs extensive reading. So it necessitates time, it necessitates patience, long attention span because you need to understand what you are reading. It's not a novel or a short story. It's not reading for leisure. And then when you read, you have to select. They have problems with selection...what to put and what to discard. When they select what to put in...how to write it, they have a problem with the writing, especially with academic writing. These are the most important difficulties, I think, that they are facing.”*

### Supervisor 3

*“ Because they struggle with the constituent parts of the literature review for example form, citations, referencing ideas, quoting, paraphrasing, academic writing, not enough reading, synthesis, and plagiarism. The literature review takes time, they do not start early and they waste a lot of time...that is why it is problematic for them. They also lack reading skills.”*

### Q5: Why do you think students plagiarise?

When asked why students plagiarise, supervisors mentioned lack of awareness, laziness, time constraints and pressure, and limited language proficiency as the main causes. It is worth mentioning that the surveyed students reported similar reasons behind their acts of plagiarism. Some even admitted that copying is just easier which further confirms teachers' perspective.

### Supervisor 1

*“Because they are lazy. I think they don't know how bad it is. Not bad, but illegal... that people go to court because of plagiarism. Yes. So here, our students are unaware. Like they take it for granted as if it's normal...and the reason why is that they are unaware of how serious it is. Our job, as teachers. We need to bring this awareness... It's not something good*



*to do... because they are lazy. Some students, generally speaking, instead of doing research, they just plagiarise.”*

### **Supervisor 2**

*“I think that it is on purpose. It is laziness. They are stuck. They are short of time. They want to get rid of it, so they keep it as it is...But when I talk to them, they swear that they didn't know that it is plagiarism. They just took it as it is and they put the reference...Sometimes, yeah, they copy-paste everything, pages, paragraphs, and they tell you it's my work, when I tell them no, they stop. But they try to defend themselves all the time... They try to be innocent.”*

### **Supervisor 3**

*“ Because they lack language proficiency...specifically reading and writing skills. They are not able to read and write. They are also not able to compare and contrast and situate everyone's opinion...in the literature review.”*

**Q6: The majority of students found the supervisor's unavailability, poor communication, and poor feedback as challenges when working on their dissertations.**

**What do you think about it?**

When informed that the majority of students found the supervisor's unavailability, poor communication and poor feedback as challenges when working on their dissertation, each supervisor expressed a different perspective regarding this issue. The first supervisor showcased an understanding of this problem as she emphasised the significance of the supervisor's guidance for students working on their first academic work. She stressed that without the guidance of a supervisor, it is challenging to proceed with the research, as students may lack the necessary knowledge and experience. On the other hand, the second supervisor acknowledged that the issue of supervisor unavailability has been raised over the years, but insisted that this issue is not influencing students as it is being constantly resolved

by the administration. The third supervisor offered a completely alternative perspective, suggesting that the challenges faced by supervisors can be mitigated if students take ownership and initiative. It was implied that students hold responsibility for the problems that occur as they should be more willing and active when it comes to their dissertation.

### **Supervisor 1**

*“Of course, this is a challenge, a big one, because it's your first time writing an academic work on your own. And this is just not possible without the supervisor's guidance. The topic is yours, of course, the research is yours. You're the one who is responsible for making decisions. The supervisor is not expected to make decisions on your behalf, but his job is to guide you. You cannot go ahead and proceed with your research. It's just not possible because you don't know how to do it. You need someone to guide you. So it's just not possible to finish a thesis without supervisors' guidance.”*

### **Supervisor 2**

*“Yeah, this is a problem that has been raised over the years, but not always the absence of the supervisor. It doesn't happen 100 % in our department. Every year, one or two supervisors are absent. And then before one month, before two weeks, before three months, the supervisor is changed. They assign, the administration, assigns another one to carry out or to accompany the student in carrying out their research. Not a great problem in our department.”*

### **Supervisor 3**

*“This is what they think. ‘laziness does not only apply to students.’ It all depends on the students, if they work hard the supervisors are going to do the same. The students should always initiate work and take responsibility.”*

**Q7: The majority of respondents reported that the university does not provide them with the necessary resources for their research work. Is that true?**

The supervisors were informed that the majority of respondents reported that the university does not provide them with the necessary resources for their research work, and were asked whether they think it is true. Two of the interviewed supervisors disagree with the students' claim. One supervisor mentioned that the university does provide the SNDL platform through which students can access a wider range of academic resources. The other supervisor was surprised that this problem exists, and considered the university's library and the Internet as good resources. The supervisor who agrees with the students' report, thinks that the university not only does not provide in terms of academic literature but also when it comes to the logistics that support the students in the process of conducting their research.

### **Supervisor 1**

*“ There is an account called SNDL... I even told my students about it, but I realised that they don't know it. It gives you access to many good journals. I even use it. I think it's a good thing that the university gives us this account. Because journals like JSTOR, you find plenty of articles on JSTOR. What else? There are pretty good journals in SNDL. So I kind of disagree about this one. It's a misconception. They think that we have nothing in this university. I even thought that there is no such thing as this account. I didn't realise that until my colleagues told me, because I thought, again, our university is a hopeless case. Yeah, but it's a good thing, really. I was so happy to discover that it exists.”*

### **Supervisor 2**

*“I agree 100 %. I add to it all the logistic means that are necessary for conducting research are not available and are not provided by our university. Like, for example, the library. Yes, there is a space, but I don't think that is enough. There is no silent area in the library for people who need to work in silence. They should divide it into parts. A big room for group work, and they should discuss in a low voice. And another room for individual work, but talk is permitted from time to time. And another room for silence, we call it the silent area. So this*

*is not available. In addition to that, we have the problem of the Internet, the problem of computers. I see that most students bring their laptops because they think... There's a problem with our computers. Either they are out of order or they have a virus. They would contaminate your flash drive... etc. So I am not satisfied. I think if they solved this problem, we would enhance research at our university for the students, master students, doctoral students, and teachers...So we need Wi-Fi in the classes in which we teach. We need the data shows for the presentations of the defended theses. We need a lot of things...We need to extend the opening hours of the library...public buses stop early and university buses should be...their time should be aligned with the time of the library...”*

### **Supervisor 3**

*“...It's the 21st century, and this is still a problem!... The university's library is a good resource, as well as the Internet...”*

**Q8: According to your experience, what are some solutions you suggest to help students work better on their dissertations?**

As a final question, the supervisors were asked to suggest some solutions for the students to work better on their dissertations, based on their experience. To answer the question, they emphasised that the students should work on their reading and academic writing skills, and for the students to take things more seriously and try to be more independent when it comes to doing their academic work. All three supervisors suggested that more hours should be added to the methodology module and that a specific module for academic writing should be added to the program. All of this creates more time and room for practice to take place.

### **Supervisor 1**

*“I try to tell them they can work on their academic writing while they are working on dissertations. When they read articles, they can have a small notebook. They can just copy*

*some phrases or sentences that those scholars use. Just phrases, not the idea. Again, we're not plagiarising, just phrases...bit by bit, their English will become better...They can do extra efforts on their own. Because sometimes they just come to me and ask me how we do this and this and that when they actually can Google it, easily. I also want to ask them to put a little focus during methodology classes. And to try also to work on their academic writing independently...And they have to make a difference between academic writing and slang language because they all speak in slang, like movies, English of movies...Of course, it will be better to have teachers' guidance and if only there was a module, like one module for academic writing...another advice is to be confident when writing a dissertation and to make your voice heard. Because most of the time students just keep talking about what others said, while forgetting to tell us what they think, about their opinion. Sometimes they keep writing and I forget what their thesis is about. They just give you definitions, plenty of definitions and then I forget why they are including this...they have to sign post. You have to tell me why you are writing this. So all of these are very important to the readers...make sure to proofread it before submitting ...read it more than twice or three times make sure to do that. Because it is a very common thing ...typos...students...I feel like they are careless when it comes to submission ...they don't revise it ...maybe they are scared to revise it...just be confident and look at your thesis before submitting it because you will find plenty of typos...I don't like finding plenty of typos because it makes me think that the student is careless...and it is not a good thing...it affects my marking..."*

### **Supervisor 2**

*" To organise reading classes and academic writing seminars. And we add a module for academic writing for practice. 2 hours of practice with the teacher every week, at least in their master's degree. First year and second year. This would be very helpful. So it is a matter of reading and writing skills. They need to be improved. Yes, basic research skills."*

### Supervisor 3

*“Follow the written expression and the methodology modules...Take things seriously. Work on their language skills especially reading and writing...Start working on your dissertation on time...Use the Internet and don't rely on the supervisor in everything.”*

### Conclusion

All of the above-presented data provides a clear answer to our research questions and confirms both of our research hypotheses. We can and without doubt, conclude that EFL master students at Mila university center do face difficulties when writing their dissertations. These difficulties range from academic writing skills to research skills and the production of both the theoretical and practical parts of the dissertation. In addition to other external ones including social, personal, technological, supervisory and logistic difficulties.

### Limitations of the Study

Although this study was successfully conducted, it still has some limitations that could be reasons for minimising its quality and the generalisation of its results. These limitations include:

- Time constraints
- Only one-third of the target population answered the students' questionnaire.
- Limited access to the relevant literature.
- The limited number of quality studies on the issue.
- Some of the respondents did not answer the open-ended questions in the questionnaire.
- The supervisors' sample is quite small, and the supervisors were selected using purposive sampling.

## **Suggestions and Recommendations**

### **For Students:**

- Students should claim responsibility for their academic progress and be more autonomous.
- Students should work on improving their basic academic skills, especially reading and writing.
- Students should not neglect the research methodology module even if they are not completely satisfied with it.
- Students should actively participate in research seminars, training and academic writing workshops.
- Students should learn how to navigate their academic challenges relying on themselves and the Internet.
- Students should not let any of their personal difficulties get in the way of writing their dissertation and should learn how to better manage their time.
- Students should learn how to better communicate with their peers, and make sure to fairly allocate tasks and hold responsibility for them.

### **For Teachers & Supervisors:**

- Supervisors should allocate more time to their supervisees and provide them with more detailed corrective feedback.
- Supervisors should consider the option of virtual supervisory sessions and virtual feedback using software tools, due to time constraints and the accessibility and practicality of such tools.
- Supervisors should schedule fixed supervisory sessions, fixed timing, and set systems of communication from the very beginning so that each party knows what to expect.
- Supervisors should be more understanding and patient with novice researchers.

- Teachers of methodology and written expression should focus more on practice and diversify activities.
- Teachers should raise awareness about the importance of academic writing skills, research skills and the ethics of research.
- Teachers of all modules should ask students to write more assignments.

**For University Responsibles:**

- The university should highly consider allocating more time to the methodology module and create a specific module for academic writing for all levels.
- The university should organise more academic workshops that could help the students work on their academic skills and technological proficiency.
- The university should improve the logistics that help the students and teachers to work better on their research projects. This includes the accessibility of the Internet across the university, the organisation of libraries, and the availability of modern technological tools.
- The university should raise awareness about the existence of SNDL and expand access to a wider range of academic journals and books.
- The university should work with the teachers and the supervisors to improve the posted student manual and be more clear about their requirements for dissertation writing.
- The university should give the students the option to work alone on their dissertations.
- The University should consider adding firm measures to limit plagiarism.

**For Future Research:**

- A quantitative study of the issue with a focus on the supervisors' perspectives will allow for a larger sampling.



- A qualitative study on the supervisory difficulties when writing a thesis or a master's dissertation.
- A study of the impact of technological proficiency on dissertation writing.
- A study of the impact of software tools' overuse on students' academic skills.

### **General Conclusion**

This dissertation tackled one of the biggest problems that exist in the world of academia, which is the difficulties faced when writing the dissertation. We targeted the population of EFL master students at Mila University Center. And we adopted a mixed-method approach to examine the issue from the perspectives of both the students and the supervisors. Our research instruments included both the questionnaire and the interview, and the data collected were analysed using statistical and thematic analysis.

The collected data validated both of our research hypotheses and answered both of our research questions. It was found that EFL master students at the University Center of Mila do face difficulties when writing their dissertations. These difficulties were various and they are mainly concerned with the students' academic writing skills and research skills. In addition to a set of other difficulties that are social, personal, technological, collaborative, and supervisory. The reported data from both the students and the supervisors align for the most part and do not show any contradiction. The collected data align as well with the findings of the previously reviewed literature on the studied issue and even add to it in terms of the number and scope of the identified difficulties.

With regard to its limitations, the data that this dissertation provides is still nonetheless valid and it successfully provided insight into the present issue specifically in the context of Mila University Center. It also paves the way for further future research, as to the complexity of the studied issue.

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## Appendix A

### Students' Questionnaire

Dear students,

This questionnaire is designed for the purpose of investigating the difficulties and problems you are facing when writing your master's dissertation. Please use a couple of minutes to fill it out.

#### Section 1: Academic Writing

**1. How would you describe your writing?**

Poor

Fair

Good

Very good

Excellent

**2. Is academic writing important to you?**

Yes

No

Please justify.....

**3. How often do you write academic texts?**

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

Always

**4. Do you have any difficulties in academic writing?**

Yes

No

**If yes, what are they?**

Lack of ideas

Lack of vocabulary

- Generating correct grammar
- Communicating ideas
- Writing correct sentences
- Connecting sentences
- Using punctuation
- Connecting ideas
- Organising my writing

Other .....

## **Section Two: Research Methodology**

**1. For how many years have you been studying methodology?**

.....

**2. The university's methodology classes are...**

- Theoretical
- Practical

Both

**3. What should methodology classes focus on in your opinion?**

- Theory
- Practice
- Both

**4. Do you find the university methodology classes helpful?**

- Yes
- No

Please, justify .....

**5. I acquired my research methodology knowledge from...**

- University Classes
- Online Sources
- Both

**6. In what way can methodology classes be improved?**

.....

**7. Have you attended any seminars, training, workshops, or conferences on research methodology?**

Yes

No

### **Section Three: Dissertation Writing**

**1. Have you ever written a dissertation or a scientific article?**

Yes

No

**2. Are you motivated to write your dissertation?**

Yes

No

**3. Writing a dissertation is...**

Difficult

Easy

**4. Which part of the dissertation is most difficult for you?**

Theoretical part

Practical part

Both parts

**5. When writing your dissertation, you had difficulty in ...**

Stating the problem

Formulating questions or hypotheses

Setting aims & objectives

Writing academically

Writing the literature review



- Designing questionnaires
- Designing interviews
- Collecting data
- Analysing the findings
- Structuring my writing
- Citation
- Referencing

**6. How often do you find yourself in a situation of plagiarism?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Always
- Often

Justify .....

**Section Four: Psychological and Technological Support**

**1. Which of the following personal difficulties did you face when writing your dissertation?**

- Lack of interest
- Lack of motivation
- Low self-esteem
- Stress & Anxiety
- Lack of time
- Laziness

- Time management

Other: .....

**2. When it comes to working with my supervisor, I face these challenges:**

- The supervisor is too busy
- Poor communication
- Poor feedback
- Perspective conflicts with my supervisor
- Disagreeing about the content and methods
- Misunderstandings
- Lack of interest and commitment from the supervisor
- Unrealistic expectations

**3. Was the sample willing to answer questionnaires and interviews?**

- Yes
- No

**4. Was your family understanding and supportive during the process of working on your dissertation?**

- Yes
- No

**5. When it comes to collaborative work, I find problems in...**

- Communicating with my peer
- Dividing tasks with my peer
- Trusting my peer
- Maintaining the same vision with my peer
- Matching my peer's level of proficiency
- Dealing with my peer's attitudes and personality

Matching my peer's working pace

Setting and respecting deadlines

Working by the same standards

Other.....

**6. Does the university provide the necessary resources for your research work?**

Yes

No

**7. When it comes to the use of technology, I find the following problems:**

Lack of access to the internet

Unstable network connection

Unavailability of digital devices (computers, PCs, tablets, smartphones.)

Lack of computer skills

Lack of digital skills

Inaccessible websites

Unreliable websites

Online distractions

Other.....

## Appendix B

### Supervisors' Interview Questions

**1. How would you describe your supervisees' performance?**

- Poor
- Fair
- Average
- Good
- Excellent

**2. Did your supervisees face any difficulties when working on their dissertation?**

- Yes
- No

**What Are these difficulties?**

.....

**3. Students' questionnaire results indicated that they are not satisfied with the current methodology classes and they want them to be more practical. What's your opinion on this?**

.....

**4. The literature review was chosen as the most problematic part. Why do you think so? And what are some suggested solutions?**

.....

**5. Why do you think students plagiarise?**

.....

**6. The majority of students found supervisors' unavailability, poor feedback and poor communication as challenges when working on their dissertations. What do you think about it?**

.....

**7. The majority of respondents reported that the university does not provide them with the necessary resources for their research work. Is that true?**

.....

**8. According to your experience, what are some solutions you suggest to help students work better on their dissertations?**

.....

### الملخص

تعد رسالة الماجستير من أهم إنجازات طلاب الدراسات العليا في رحلتهم الأكاديمية. تتكون هذه الرسالة من فصلين وهي تهدف إلى التحقيق في الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلاب ماجستير اللغة الإنجليزية أثناء عملية كتابة رسالتهم، وكذلك الأسباب المحتملة وراء هذه الصعوبات. تستخدم هذه الدراسة المنهج الوصفي لتجربة فرضيتين رئيسيتين. الأولى تتمثل في أن غالبية الطلاب يواجهون صعوبات عند كتابة رسالتهم والثانية هي أن هذه الصعوبات قد تشمل الكتابة الأكاديمية، إجراء البحوث والصعوبات الشخصية والاجتماعية. بالنسبة لأدوات البحث تم الاعتماد على طريقتين مختلفتين. تم إجراء استبيان على عينة من طلاب ماجستير 2 لغة الإنجليزية في المركز الجامعي لولاية ميله بالإضافة إلى مقابلات تستهدف المشرفين. أكدت النتائج التي توصلنا إليها أن الطلاب يواجهون بالفعل صعوبات مختلفة طوال عملية كتابة الرسالة ، من بينها مشاكل الكتابة الأكاديمية ، ومشاكل في منهجية البحث ، بالإضافة إلى مشاكل تخص الإشراف والتكنولوجيا، وكذلك مشاكل شخصية وتعاونية. كما تتوافق نتائج المقابلات في الغالب مع تقارير الطلاب وتؤكد وجود التحديات التي تواجههم بشكل مستمر.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** طلاب الدراسات العليا، صعوبات، طلاب الماجستير في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الكتابة الأكاديمية، رسائل الماجستير .

## Resumé

La rédaction d'une thèse de master est une étape cruciale pour les étudiants diplômés. Cette étude se concentre sur les difficultés rencontrées par les étudiants en anglais langue étrangère lors de la rédaction de leurs thèses, ainsi que sur les causes potentielles de ces difficultés. Les résultats confirment que les étudiants font face à divers obstacles tels que des problèmes d'écriture académique, de méthodologie de recherche, de supervision, de technologie, problèmes personnels et collaboratifs. Les résultats des entretiens correspondent en grande partie aux rapports des étudiants et confirment l'existence et la multitude des défis rencontrés.

**Mots clés:** Étudiants diplômés, difficultés, étudiants en anglais langue étrangère, écriture académique, thèses.