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## WRITING A MASTER'S THESIS: CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES

- ✘ COST IS 1401 - Strengthening Europeans' Capabilities by Establishing the European Literacy Network (ELN)
- ✘ Academic Literacy team of COST Action IS1401 which investigated thesis writing experiences of bachelor and master's students

- ✘ Aim: explore difficulties involved in the master's thesis writing as well as coping strategies
- ✘ Thesis writing – the entire process (coming up with the topic, conducting research, writing the thesis and defending it)

## METHODOLOGY

- ✘ 9 interviewees from 6 countries
- ✘ two years from the thesis defense
- ✘ about 60 minutes each
- ✘ five overarching themes : topic, supervisor, text production, personal issues, and under-resourcing.

Participant	L1	Study program	Program language	Language of the thesis
BIH1	Bosnian	Anglo-American literary studies	English	English
BIH2	Bosnian	Psychology	Bosnian	Bosnian
BIH3	Bosnian	Applied Chemistry	Bosnian	Bosnian
DNK	Norwegian	International Business and Politics	English	English
NOR1	Norwegian	International education	English	Norwegian
NOR2	Italian	International education	English	English
POR	Portuguese	Literature	Portuguese	Portuguese
UK	English	Literature	English	English
UKR	Ukrainian	Linguistics	Ukrainian, English	English

## TOPIC - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ personal interest
- ✘ *I was attending this masters programme because it was in my interest. And I was, I made a kind of a promise to myself that if I was to spend so much time and effort doing the master thesis I should do something that I really wanted. **And so that's why I was thinking more with my heart and my interests than maybe the sense.** (NOR1)*

## TOPIC - DIFFICULTIES

### ✦ Fitting the study program

- ✦ *I was aware that I was forcing a topic and that simply I want to put it in the framework where it can't be done. (BiH1)*

## TOPIC - DIFFICULTIES

### ✦ 'objective' ground

- ✦ I struggled with some of my subject being ... **it was more like having a coffee and discussing politics with a taxi driver**, and while I was near the end I was able to like ask them questions in ways where they were more balanced and sound about it (DEN)

## TOPIC - DIFFICULTIES

- ✦ Difficulties with finding the topic exert considerable pressure on students which results in negative emotions overwhelming them and making them unproductive.

## TOPIC - COPING STRATEGIES

- ✦ **Coming up with the topic:**
- ✦ extensive reading of literature,
- ✦ the courses students attended,
- ✦ supervisor's guidance.

## TOPIC - COPING STRATEGIES

- ✦ **Fitting the study program:**
- ✦ Adapting the topic of personal interest to the study program
- ✦ Sticking to the topic of personal interest regardless the consequences

## TOPIC - COPING STRATEGIES

- ✦ Self-motivation was recognized as a way to regain control and handle the lack of productivity caused by unproductiveness and strong emotional burden stemming from the struggle to find an appropriate topic.

## SUPERVISOR - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ Allocation of the supervisor:
- ✘ NOR2 satisfied, NOR1 completely dissatisfied
- ✘ *I didn't because she was she could have been in the room when I had the examination defence but she asked me if she could be there and I think she really wanted to be there but I didn't want her to be there. (NOR1)*

## SUPERVISOR - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ **Student – supervisor collaboration**
- ✘ unavailability either of the candidate or the supervisor (long-distance collaboration)
- ✘ Supervisors too busy
- ✘ Feedback issues
- ✘ Students need to write their drafts in time
- ✘ Students' readiness to contact the supervisor

## SUPERVISOR – COPING STRATEGIES

- ✘ Resorting to other means of support: family members, friends, peers, or other academics
- ✘ Geographical distance – modern technology

## TEXT PRODUCTION - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ **Beginning stage:**
- ✘ Reading source texts
- ✘ *It is not like reading literature, it is heavy language, heavy formulation. It is research. (DEN)*
- ✘ Starting to write
- ✘ *it took me a while to, to deal with it, to figure out where to start from, so this is a period when, when I was actually tapping in the dark (BiH1)*

## TEXT PRODUCTION - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ **Producing text (struggling with productivity)**
- ✘ struggles may be linked to:
  - + producing unified and coherent text
  - + producing the text within the given deadline

## TEXT PRODUCTION - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ **Genre issues**
- ✘ *Bachelor thesis didn't help me with my master's thesis since in the bachelor thesis I didn't have my own results, didn't have my own research, then discussion, that, that, that I didn't have in my bachelor thesis. (BiH3)*

## TEXT PRODUCTION - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ **Emotional issues**
- ✘ Emotions: **causes** of writing difficulties or a **consequence** of writing
- ✘ Emotions commonly referred to as producing writing difficulties are *insecurity, fear, and lack of self-confidence* while failure to fulfill the set goals is a source of *frustration*
- ✘ *Because you are **in the dark** because you are **insecure** and **in doubt** again. Am I finished? ... This is very contra productive and **it is eating up my mental health.** (DEN)*

## TEXT PRODUCTION – COPING STRATEGIES

- ✘ Getting started: reading
- ✘ Productivity issues: reading, attending writing seminars, seeking support from family and friends, managing time effectively, forcing oneself to keep writing.
- ✘ Genre issues: using previously defended master's thesis
- ✘ Emotional issues: distancing oneself from the text

## PERSONAL - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ **Relocation issues:**
- ✘ *because of my personal ehm life [...] it kind of shook me a bit as now I had to, after everything I accomplished and achieved here, I had to start from the beginning somewhere there, without knowing the language, [...] I could not register at the employment office, I was neither here nor there, so everything shook me a bit, **so the thesis ehm slowed down a bit, it suffered a bit.** (BiH2)*

## PERSONAL - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ **Financial issues:**
- ✘ Information on financial issues only surfaced in BiH and DEN data while it was not registered in data from other countries.

## PERSONAL - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ **Time management issues:**
- ✘ problems with prioritizing work, setting up clear deadlines and following them, and avoiding procrastination.

## PERSONAL – COPING STRATEGIES

- ✘ Geographical distance: social network
- ✘ Financial issues: petty jobs, move to a home-country
- ✘ Time management issues: investing effort to systematically organize one's time

## UNDER-RESOURCING - DIFFICULTIES

- ✘ Lack of access to databases
- ✘ Underequipped laboratories

## UNDER-RESOURCING – COPING STRATEGIES

- ✘ Lack of databases: personal contacts
- ✘ Underequipped laboratories: personal finances

## CONCLUSION

- ✘ We hope this study will contribute to better understanding of challenges involved in master's thesis writing and the possibilities for overcoming them.
- ✘ The study provides insights into the segments of master's thesis writing which very often remain hidden.

THANK YOU 😊

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