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Thesis writing anxiety among Polish translation students: Findings from a survey study / Ansiedad ante la redacción de tesis entre los estudiantes de traducción polacos: Resultados de una encuesta

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Abstract: This article focuses on the anxiety experienced by undergraduate and graduate translation students during the process of thesis writing. The survey study described in the paper examines the challenges of academic thesis writing against the backdrop of increased mental health concerns among young adults, driven in part by the COVID-19 pandemic, the unstable economic situation in Poland and the war in Ukraine. A sample of 111 translation trainees from 13 Polish higher education institutions participated in an online survey in April-May 2022. The participants were categorised into four groups based on their thesis writing stage and experience. The study tested three key hypotheses: (1) experience lowers anxiety, (2) experience reduces perceived difficulty, and (3) repeaters exhibit improved time management skills. Additionally, participants provided insights into strategies for alleviating thesis-related anxiety and recommended actions for supervisors to mitigate such anxiety. The findings offer valuable guidance for both translation educators and students.

Keywords: Translator education; Thesis writing; Anxiety; Mental health

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Resumen: Este artículo se centra en la ansiedad que experimentan los estudiantes de traducción de grado y posgrado durante el proceso de redacción de sus tesis. El estudio por encuesta descrito en el artículo examina los retos de la redacción de tesis académicas en un contexto de creciente preocupación por la salud mental entre los adultos jóvenes, agudizada en parte por la pandemia del COVID-19, la inestable situación económica en Polonia y la guerra en Ucrania. Una muestra de 111 estudiantes de traducción de 13 instituciones de educación superior polacas participó en una encuesta en línea en abril-mayo de 2022. Los participantes fueron clasificados en cuatro grupos en función de su fase de redacción de la tesis y su experiencia. El estudio puso a prueba tres hipótesis clave: (1) la experiencia disminuye la ansiedad, (2) la experiencia reduce la dificultad percibida y (3) los repetidores muestran mejores habilidades de gestión del tiempo. Además, los participantes proporcionaron información sobre estrategias para aliviar la ansiedad relacionada con la redacción de la tesis y recomendaron acciones a los supervisores para mitigar dicha ansiedad. Los resultados ofrecen valiosas orientaciones tanto para los profesores de traducción como para los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Formación de traductores; Redacción de tesis; Ansiedad; Salud mental

1. Introduction

In recent years, more and more young adults have reported mental health issues (Pitchforth et al., 2019). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 further contributed to the worsening of the situation. Lockdown and isolation significantly increased symptoms of anxiety and depression, and those affected the most were adults aged 18-29 (Jia et al., 2021). The subsequent war in Ukraine, which began in early 2022, further reinforced the sense of anxiety and insecurity about the future. Additionally, the economic situation in Poland deteriorated, marked by soaring inflation and interest rates. The 2023 European Language Industry Survey has drawn attention to concerns expressed by language departments, indicating a post-pandemic deficiency in interpersonal skills that need assistance (ELIS Research, 2023). Given this broader context, investigating anxiety among Polish students becomes crucial, as it aligns with the evolving challenges in mental health and the specific needs of individuals navigating societal, economic, and educational changes.

Notably, even during more stable times, young adulthood, typically spanning from around 18 to 25 years old, is a period of "heightened vulnerability to poor mental health" (Jackson & Lee Williams, 2021, p. 1). Vulnerable young people are sometimes referred to as 'snowflakes'. In 2016, *The Financial Times* included 'snowflake' in its Year in a Word list, defining it as "a derogatory term for someone deemed too emotionally vulnerable to cope with views that challenge their own, particularly in universities and other forums once known for robust debate" (Alyeksyeyeva, 2017, p. 7). According to the report by the Polish Patient's Rights Ombudsman (2020), mental health issues within the academic environment in Poland are on the rise. Academic-related problems include low self-esteem, stress, suicidal thoughts, anxiety disorders, depression, adjustment disorders, and personality disorders. Students are also confronted with relationship crises, loneliness, communication problems, familial issues, empathy deficiencies, and discrimination towards persons with disabilities. Many students are diagnosed with serious mental health conditions requiring extended therapy or in-patient psychiatric care. The authors of the report note that only 35% of the surveyed 40 higher education institutions have instituted practical support measures.

A more recent study on the self-perception of Poles in 2022 conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS, 2023), a leading Polish institute of public opinion research, concludes that the situation of Polish students is disconcerting. The authors of the report note that the psychological well-being indicator for this group is significantly below average. Students frequently report experiencing feelings of nervousness and irritability (50%), helplessness (44%), and anger (30%). More commonly than the other analysed groups, they felt discouraged and exhausted (with 70% experiencing this repeatedly), unhappy (46%), and had suicidal thoughts (8%).

The process of writing a BA or MA thesis is challenging even for individuals without mental health difficulties. Academic writing requires students to use higher-level cognitive skills. The perceived difficulty of writing a thesis may stem from multiple factors, including insufficient foreign language proficiency, time management, motivation, and attitude. When these are taken together with anxiety and distress caused by the pandemic, economic situation, and the war, the thesis writing process can become even more overwhelming.

2. Theoretical background

The survey study described in this article adopts a social constructivist research framework to investigate anxiety experienced by undergraduate and graduate translation students during the process of writing their theses. This perspective acknowledges the multifaceted nature of individual experiences and perceptions that shape how students interpret and understand the anxiety related to thesis writing. The study design encourages participants to suggest actions that they and their supervisors can take to manage or reduce this anxiety.

The terms 'anxiety', 'stress', and 'fear' are often used interchangeably. It is thus important to differentiate them. The American Psychological Association defines anxiety as "an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes such as increased blood pressure" (APA, 2023). It is one of the psycho-affective factors, together with fear, language inhibition, language boundaries, personality dimension, self-esteem, motivation and stress (Walczyński, 2021). According to the APA (2022), stress and anxiety share similarities but are differentiated by their root causes and the persistence of the emotional response. Stress is often triggered by external factors, ranging from short-term stressors such as deadlines, to long-term issues such as work problems. Stress results in symptoms like irritability, muscle pain, and sleep difficulties. Anxiety, on the other hand, is characterized by persistent and excessive worry that continues even when the stressor is absent. As regards fear, Walczyński notes (2021, p. 88) that it is a response to objectively existing threats in the real world while anxiety arises from subjective danger perception.

In the academic setting, one of the sources of anxiety for students is often the requirement to write academic texts. Teng and Yue (2023, p. 237) define academic writing as a skill needed "to document scientific knowledge, communicate research processes, describe research outcomes, and outline research implications". This form of writing requires that students synthesise complex information, demonstrate critical thinking, employ analytical skills, and effectively articulate their ideas in a structured and coherent manner. They also have to adhere to specific writing conventions, including proper citation styles, academic language, and formal tone, which requires a deep understanding of the subject matter as well as the appropriate language proficiency. In translation and interpreting programmes, students are typically required to write their theses in a foreign language. This renders the writing task notably more demanding and time consuming. Huerta et al. (2016) rightly observe that writing

anxiety has a negative impact on the quality of academic writing and, as a consequence, on students' grades. For these reasons, students writing their theses in a foreign language may need more support from their supervisors (Paltridge & Starfield, 2019).

3. Literature review

This section focuses on previous studies on anxiety related to writing a thesis in a foreign language. Huerta et al. (2016) investigated writing anxiety, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence (EI) among 174 graduate and doctoral students at a research-intensive university in the United States. Their findings revealed that higher self-efficacy corresponded to lower writing anxiety. In contrast, emotional intelligence did not demonstrate a significant association with such anxiety. The authors found that students who were non-native speakers of English reported higher writing anxiety and lower self-efficacy compared to native English speakers. The study suggests that fostering students' belief in their ability to succeed in academic writing can mitigate writing anxiety and enhance their writing development. It also highlights the importance of providing academic support, such as workshops and writing services, to equip students, especially non-native English speakers, with the necessary tools to alleviate writing anxiety and improve academic writing skills.

The need to provide additional training is also advocated by Boufeldja and Bouhania (2020). In their study of thesis writing anxiety in 30 master students and six supervisors from eight universities in Algeria, the authors found that sociocultural issues (i.e., insufficient support from the supervisors and family members), the students' lack of preparedness (i.e., inadequate academic writing skills and research skills), and psychological problems were the top three factors contributing to the perceived difficulty of writing a thesis in English. The authors highlighted the need for supervisors to balance professional duties and provide timely feedback and called for students to take responsibility for their own learning. It was suggested that universities and English departments should provide more tailored training and workshops for students to cope with thesis writing challenges.

Similarly, Ma (2020) investigated the challenges faced by 27 doctoral students, non-native speakers of English, writing their dissertations. The findings revealed a number of issues at both the linguistic level and the socio-cultural level. The study's practical implications suggested the need for improved language support services and training programmes for supervisors to better aid non-native students in academic writing.

Bastola and Bhandari (2021) reviewed studies on thesis writing, looking at the process from the students' and supervisors' perspectives. The authors observe that students often feel frustrated and alienated due to perceived inadequate support, limited contact with academic staff, and discrepancies in assessment requirements, with some seeking clear guidance and hands-on support at every stage of thesis writing. At the same time, supervisors expect students to be self-regulated and independent in their research, leading to potential distress due to the mismatch of expectations. The authors emphasise the importance of clear communication, effective feedback, and a trustful relationship between students and supervisors.

Sa'adah and Fachri (2022) studied students' perceptions of academic writing anxiety by conducting semi-structured interviews with five English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students in Indonesia. The study identified several sources of writing anxiety among the participants, including different structural components of academic writing, the pressure of writing about a specific theme, and writing under time pressure. Interestingly, the students did not express anxiety about the evaluations and comments given by their supervisors or their classmates, acknowledging and accepting constructive criticism while ignoring negative comments.

Kurniawati and Atmojo (2022) conducted semi-structured interviews with an English education graduate to investigate the link between thesis-related anxiety and delay in thesis completion. They found that factors causing thesis writing anxiety included family and financial problems, work commitments, and unpleasant administrative services. These issues were addressed by the introduction of coping mechanisms like seeking advice from friends, mental health counselling, improving communication with supervisors and the workplace, and maintaining self-motivation.

In sum, findings from these studies suggest that linguistic barriers and sociocultural challenges lead to anxiety among students who are writing their theses in a foreign language. Students face hurdles due to insufficient support, inadequate academic writing skills, and psychological pressures related to thesis topics and time constraints. The authors of the studies highlight the need for tailored support, workshops, and improved communication with supervisors to alleviate anxiety and enhance academic writing skills, emphasising the significance of self-efficacy and cultural sensitivity.

4. Methodology

4.1. Study design: survey

To gain insight into Polish translation students' perspectives on thesis writing, a comprehensive online questionnaire using Google Forms was designed and distributed among Polish translation teachers in the spring of 2022. Matthews and Ross (2010, p. 201) describe a questionnaire as a tool that consists of (1) a series of questions, each with a set of response options, and (2) a format that allows for the systematic collection of relatively standardised data from a large number of respondents.

In this paper, the terms 'survey' is used to refer to the study design, and the data collection instrument is referred to as a 'questionnaire', which is in line with Saldanha and O'Brien (2013). The authors note that questionnaires are popular research instruments due to their ability to collect structured data on a large scale efficiently (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013, p. 152). They are considered time-efficient, especially when contrasted with individual interviews. Additionally, questionnaires offer the potential to gather significant amounts of quantitative data, allowing for generalisations about the broader population if the sample is appropriately chosen. As regards the disadvantages of the survey research method, Saldanha and O'Brien (2013, pp. 152–153) note that questionnaires are susceptible to design and administration errors that can compromise data quality, and they are generally better suited for collecting exploratory data rather than explanatory data. They identify four types of errors: coverage error, sampling error, nonresponse error, and measurement error, which can affect the accuracy and completeness of the data. A coverage error occurs when a portion of the population is unintentionally excluded from the survey. A sampling error

arises when certain segments of the population have a higher likelihood of being included in the survey. A nonresponse error transpires when members of the sample either do not complete the questionnaire at all or partially respond. Finally, a measurement error occurs when the responses provided in the questionnaire do not accurately reflect the true or intended responses. The respondents may alter their behaviour due to awareness of being observed (the so-called Hawthorne effect).

In this study, the following strategies were used to address and mitigate these potential issues. By sending requests directly to translation teachers, the study aimed to ensure that the survey reached a relevant and knowledgeable audience. The relatively large number of responses (n=111) indicates a reasonable sample size, which can help mitigate some aspects of the sampling error. Including free space in the questionnaire for open-ended comments allowed respondents to provide additional information or explanations, potentially reducing the measurement error. Lastly, design and administration errors were mitigated by having other researchers review the draft questionnaire.

4.2. Data collection instrument: online questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was conducted online to maximise ease, efficiency, and the automatic capture of data. To maintain anonymity and address security concerns, the questionnaire limited the collection of information to basic demographic questions. The questionnaire was written in Polish to include translation students working with different foreign languages.

The questionnaire consisted of 29 questions, grouped into four sections: (1) Thesis writing stage (2 questions), (2) Thesis writing anxiety (3 questions), (3) Reducing thesis writing anxiety (17 questions) and (4) Demographic information (7 questions). In the first part, the respondents were asked whether they had written a thesis before and how advanced they were with their theses. The second part contained two Likert-scale questions, asking respondents to rate the difficulty and stress on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 signifies a low level and 5 represents a high level, and one multiple choice question: 'What makes the process of writing a thesis stressful?' They could select multiple options that applied to their situation. These options encompassed various stressors, such as language proficiency, time management, mental health issues, motivation, fear of the unknown, and external factors like the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Additionally, respondents could specify any other stressors not listed in the provided options. There was also an option to indicate if they found thesis writing not to be stressful at all by ticking the corresponding box.

The third part focused on ways of reducing thesis-related anxiety both from the student's perspective and the supervisor's role in alleviating anxiety. In the first set of questions, respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of several strategies for lowering anxiety levels. They were prompted to rate each strategy on a Likert scale, ranging from 'not helpful at all' to 'extremely helpful'. These strategies encompassed actions such as discussing ideas with fellow students, finding a suitable and quiet writing environment, creating a structured action plan with defined stages and deadlines, and reviewing theses authored by other students. Additionally, respondents were encouraged to suggest any other strategies they found beneficial and provide their comments. The second set of questions concentrated on the supervisor's potential contributions to anxiety reduction during the thesis writing process. Students were asked to assess the usefulness of various supervisory actions on

a similar scale. These actions included providing a clear thesis writing action plan with stages and deadlines, sharing a thesis template, offering access to sample theses created by other students, assisting in topic selection and definition, recommending relevant reading materials, and providing guidance on using electronic bibliography management tools, among other things. In the final section of the questionnaire, respondents provided key demographic information, including their university, study mode (day or weekend), degree level (BA or MA), the language of their thesis, seminar duration, and their current semester. The questionnaire ended with space for optional comments and reflections.

4.3. Participants

Participants in this study were translation students from 13 higher education institutions in Poland, including Jagiellonian University, University of the National Education Commission, Kraków, University of Warsaw, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, University of Łódź, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, State School of Higher Vocational Education in Leszno, Stanisław Staszic State University of Applied Sciences in Piła, University of Wrocław, University of Applied Sciences in Nysa, University of Zielona Góra, and Jacob of Paradies University in Gorzów Wielkopolski.

The online questionnaire received 111 student responses. The exact total of students who received the survey remains unknown, so there is a possibility that only a subset of students, potentially those already experiencing anxiety, participated. Table 1 below provides an overview of their demographic profile and characteristics:

Aspect		Response percentage	Response count
Cycle of studies	BA	46.8%	52
	MA	53.2%	59
Mode of studies	Full-time	95.5%	106
	Part-time	4.5%	5
Language of the thesis	English	88.3%	98
	Polish	4.5%	5
	Spanish	2.7%	3
	German	0.9%	1
	French	0.9%	1
	Russian	0.9%	1
	Swedish	0.9%	1
	Japanese	0.9%	1
Province and university/ school where they study	Lower Silesian (UWr)	2.7%	3
	Opole (PANS Nysa)	1.8%	2
	Lublin (KUL, UMCS)	7.2%	8
	Lubusz (AJP, UZ)	27.0%	30
	Lodz (UŁ)	5.4%	6
	Lesser Poland (UJ, UKEN)	27.9%	31
	Masovian (UW)	15.3%	17
Greater Poland (UAM, PWSZ Leszno, ANS Piła)	12.6%	14	
Thesis writing stage	Early	69.4%	77
	Advanced	30.6%	34
Experience in thesis writing	First-timer	47.7%	53
	Repeater	52.3%	58

Table 1. Profile of respondents

The respondents in the study primarily consist of master's students (53.2%), followed by bachelor's students (46.8%). The majority were engaged in full-time studies (95.5%), with a smaller segment enrolled in part-time programmes (4.5%). English was the predominant language for thesis writing (88.3%), while a minority opted for Polish (4.5%), and a variety of other languages (less than 3% each). Respondents represented various provinces and universities in Poland, with Lubuskie (27%) and Małopolskie (27.9%) showing the highest representation. In terms of thesis writing stage, most were in the early stages (69.4%), with the remaining in advanced stages (30.6%). Nearly half were first-time thesis writers (47.7%), while the rest had written a thesis before (52.3%), providing a balanced mix of experience levels among the participants. The repeaters could include both students who had written a BA thesis in Translation Studies before or those who had prior BA/MA thesis-writing experience in a different field of study.

4.4. Data collection and analysis

The link to the Google Forms questionnaire was distributed among Polish translator teachers via email, who were asked to share it with their students. The questionnaire remained available for six weeks, and responses were received from 10 April until 16 May 2022. The Google Forms feature is intuitive for users. It automatically generates a summary of the responses, which is quite informative and serves as a starting point for identifying trends. Responses can be stored online in Google Drive or saved in a spreadsheet and analysed in Excel. The latter option was used in this study.

As regards data analysis, originally there were five points in the Likert-scale questions in the second and third sections of the questionnaire. For calculation of the results, responses within the range of 1 to 2 and 4 to 5 were merged for clarity.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Study groups

Responses to the first section of the questionnaire were used to divide the participants into four distinct groups based on two key factors: the stage they had reached in the thesis writing process and their prior experience in writing theses. In total, there were 53 first-timers and 58 repeaters, with 77 participants in the early stage of the thesis writing process and 34 at the advanced stage. The groups were as follows:

1. early-stage first-timers (n = 31),
2. early-stage repeaters (n = 46),
3. advanced stage first-timers (n = 32),
4. advanced stage repeaters (n = 12).

Early stage first-timers comprised the participants who were writing their theses for the first time. Among them, 27 were at the bachelor's level, and 4 were pursuing a master's degree. In the second group, early-stage repeaters, there were participants who found themselves in the early stages of thesis writing and had previously written a thesis. Four of them were at the BA level, while the remaining 42 were pursuing a MA degree. Thirdly, advanced stage first-timers, consisted of the participants who were at an advanced stage of

their thesis writing process. Among them, 21 were at the BA level, and 11 were at the MA level. The last group, advanced stage repeaters, was made up of the participants who were nearing completion of their theses and had previous experience in thesis writing. All of them were MA students.

5.2. Thesis writing anxiety and perceived difficulty

The questionnaire responses from a total of 111 respondents indicate that a significant majority (70.27%) reported feeling anxious about writing their theses. The same percentage of students found the process of thesis writing difficult. In contrast, only 13.51% expressed no anxiety, and 7.21% found it not difficult. A smaller proportion, 16.22%, could not decide about their anxiety levels, and 22.52% were not sure whether thesis writing is difficult. These responses collectively indicate that a substantial portion of Polish translation students finds thesis writing to be a challenging endeavour. The following sections provide a detailed analysis of the findings structured in accordance with three research hypotheses addressed in the study.

5.3. Hypothesis 1: Experience reduces anxiety

It was hypothesised that anxiety levels would be lower in the early-stage repeaters group compared to the early stage first-timers group. The hypothesis was based on the assumption that previous exposure to the initial phase of thesis writing could lead to increased familiarity with the process. Repeating the initial stage was expected to provide a certain level of comfort or confidence, as students might have encountered similar challenges in the past. Figure 1 illustrates the percentage results derived from the Likert-scale question 'Do you feel anxious about writing your thesis?' across the four different groups.

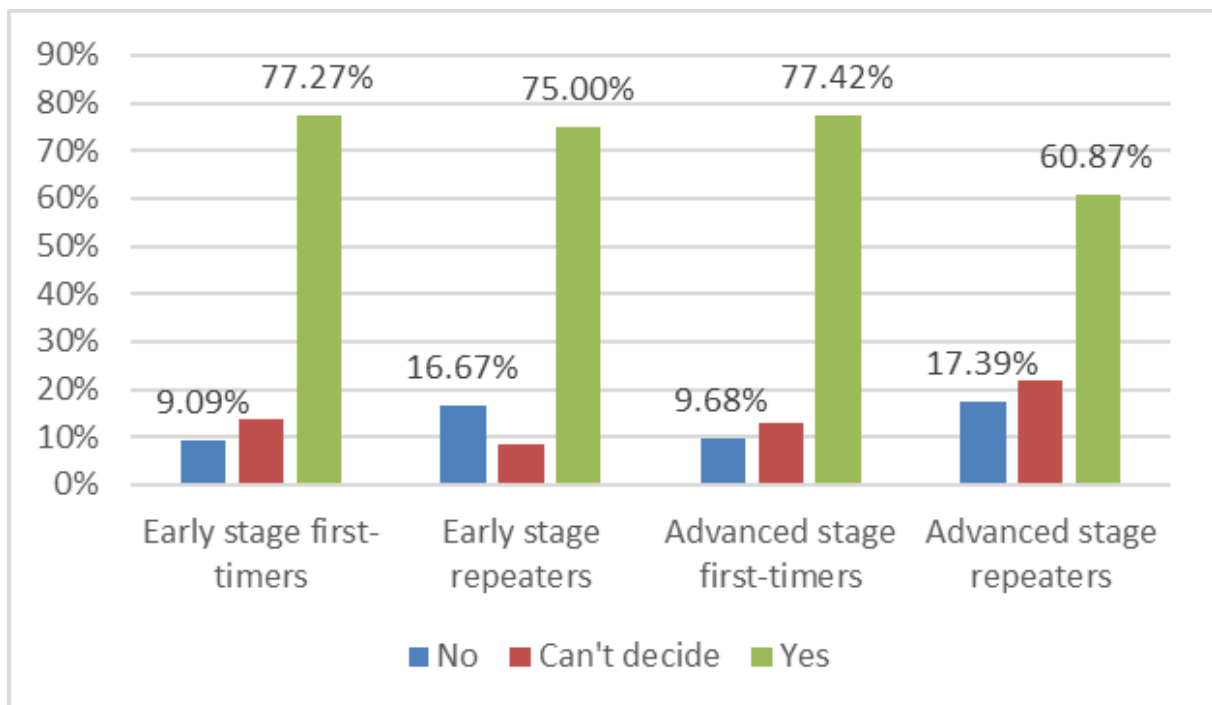


Figure 1. Perceived anxiety across four study groups

Unlike hypothesised, prior experience seems to have little influence on anxiety levels, as only a marginal decrease was observed between early stage first-timers (77.27% reporting anxiety) and early-stage repeaters (75% reporting anxiety). One explanation could be that personal circumstances, individual learning styles, or the complexity of the specific thesis topics might have limited the expected reduction in anxiety. An alternative explanation is that the individuals who completed this survey may be those for whom writing in English is an activity that induces considerable anxiety.

The difference in anxiety levels is more prominent in the advanced first-timers and repeaters groups (77.42% versus 60.87%). The decrease could be attributed to factors other than previous experience. At the time of data collection, students in the latter group were nearing the end of the thesis writing process, which might have led to increased confidence and reduced anxiety.

5.4. Hypothesis 2: Experience reduces perceived difficulty

It was hypothesised that the early-stage repeaters group would perceive the process of writing a thesis as less challenging. The hypothesis was rooted in the idea that experiencing and navigating through the initial phase of thesis writing might render the early-stage repeaters more familiar with the tasks, requirements, and potential obstacles involved. Their prior exposure and experience in this stage may lead to increased confidence and competence, which, in turn, could result in a perception of reduced difficulty in comparison to those encountering this stage for the first time.

The results shown in Figure 2 indicate that although the perceived difficulty of the thesis writing process was lower at the advanced stage in both first-timers and repeaters than at the early stage, it was still considerably high (72.73% and 66.67% respectively).

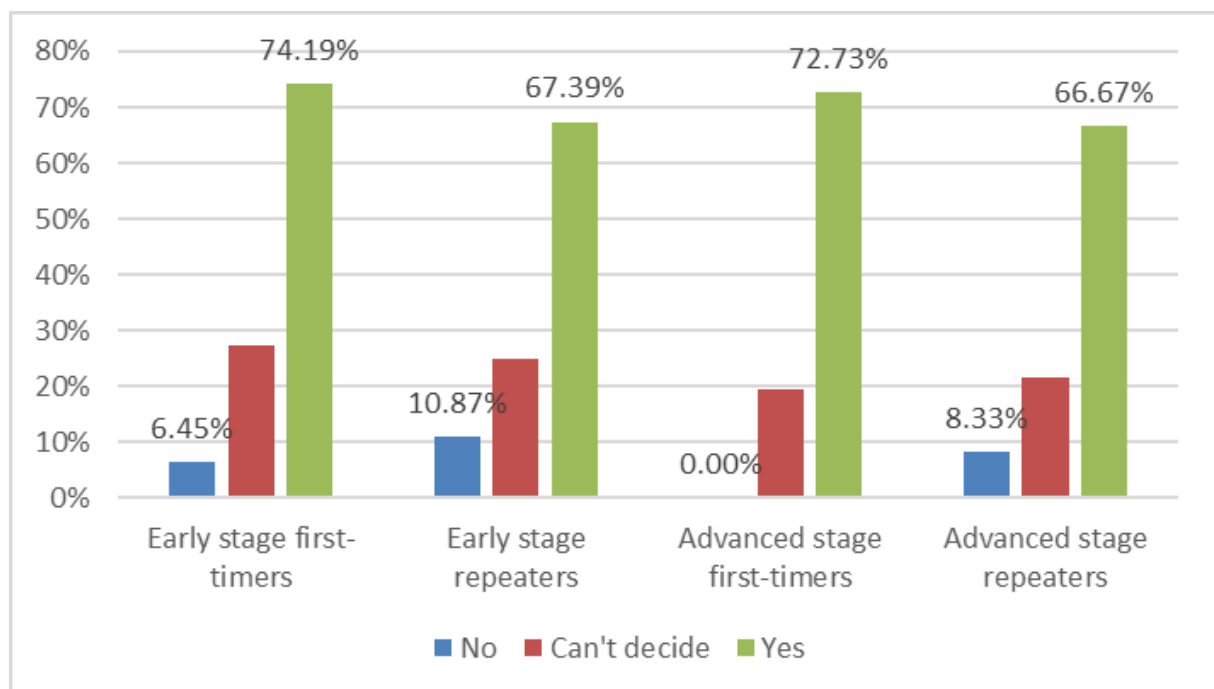


Figure 2. Perceived difficulty across four study groups

The high percentages indicating difficulty in all four groups could stem from various factors inherent to the thesis writing process. Writing a thesis is a comprehensive and demanding task, requiring extensive research, critical analysis, and the synthesis of complex ideas. Moreover, individual differences in writing skills, research capabilities, and the specificities of the thesis topics could further contribute to such universally high percentages.

Since a number of diverse factors could contribute to high levels of anxiety and perceived difficulty, the survey asked respondents to consider the causes of their anxiety. Table 2 shows the most common sources of thesis writing anxiety reported by the participants.

Cause of anxiety	Total (n = 111)	Total (%)
I find it difficult to manage the time needed to write the thesis	67	60.36%
I have other priorities (e.g. work, family)	58	52.25%
I am not motivated to write the thesis	56	50.45%
I am afraid of the unknown (a new type of text, I don't know what to expect)	49	44.14%
I have not written such a long research paper before	48	43.24%
I have mental health issues (e.g. I am depressed)	32	28.83%
I am stressed by the war in Ukraine, so I can't focus on writing my thesis	17	15.32%
I don't know the language of my thesis well enough	12	10.81%
Other	10	9.01%
I do not get support from my supervisor	5	4.50%
I am stressed by the pandemic, so I can't focus on writing my thesis	3	2.70%
None of the above, because writing the thesis is not stressful for me	2	1.80%
I have limited contact with my supervisor (e.g. the seminar is held online)	0	0.00%
	111	100.00%

Table 2. Causes of thesis writing anxiety (all respondents)

Time management emerged as the predominant factor contributing to thesis writing anxiety, with competing priorities, lack of motivation, and unfamiliarity with the task also significant, while factors like mental health concerns and the impact of the war in Ukraine were less frequently mentioned, by 28.83% and 15.32% of respondents respectively. Limited proficiency in the language of the thesis, lack of supervisor support, and pandemic-related stress were additional factors, albeit less commonly cited. Interestingly, only 1.80% marked 'None of the above', indicating that writing the thesis was not a source of anxiety for them.

Comparison of the top causes of anxiety between first-timers and repeaters (see Table 3 below) reveals that both groups identified time management as a major anxiety-inducing factor, with high percentages: 49.06% for first-timers and 70.69% for repeaters. The higher percentage of repeaters identifying time management as an important anxiety-inducing factor could be attributed to their previous experience, leading to a greater recognition of its importance and perhaps the added pressure to manage it better in subsequent attempts.

Cause of anxiety	First-timers (n = 53)	Cause of anxiety	Repeaters (n = 58)
Not written such a long research paper	71.70%	Difficult to manage the time	70.69%
Difficult to manage the time	49.06%	Other priorities (e.g. work, family)	60.34%
Afraid of the unknown	47.17%	No motivation to write	56.90%
Other priorities (e.g. work, family)	43.40%	Afraid of the unknown	41.38%
No motivation to write	43.40%	Mental health issues	29.31%
Mental health issues	28.30%	Stressed by the war in Ukraine	18.97%

Table 3. Top six causes of thesis writing anxiety (first-timers vs. repeaters)

It comes as no surprise that in the group of first-timers, a substantial 71.70% expressed anxiety due to the lack of experience in writing lengthy research papers. It seems first-timers, lacking exposure to this kind of extensive academic writing, would naturally find the task daunting and anxiety-inducing due to the novelty of the experience.

Certain patterns emerged from group comparison of the reported causes of thesis writing anxiety between the early and advanced stages, both including first-timers and repeaters (see Table 4).

Cause of anxiety	Early stage (n = 77)	Cause of anxiety	Advanced stage (n = 34)
Difficult to manage the time	66.23%	Other priorities (e.g. work, family)	50.00%
Other priorities (e.g. work, family)	53.25%	Difficult to manage the time	47.06%
No motivation to write	51.95%	No motivation to write	47.06%
Afraid of the unknown	46.75%	Not written such a long research paper	44.12%
Not written such a long research paper	42.86%	Afraid of the unknown	38.24%
Mental health issues	32.47%	Stressed by the war in Ukraine	20.59%

Table 4. Top six causes of thesis writing anxiety (early stage vs. advanced stage)

In the early-stage group, time management was the most prevalent cause, followed by other priorities and lack of motivation to write. Fear of the unknown and lack of experience in writing lengthy research papers were also substantial contributors. Mental health issues accounted for a third of responses in the early-stage group. In contrast, the advanced stage group showed a slightly different pattern. The primary cause was other priorities while time management and lack of motivation to write were close contenders, each identified by nearly a half of participants. Interestingly, one fifth of respondents in the advanced stage group reported being stressed by the war in Ukraine, which was not a prevalent factor in the early stage group.

5.5. Hypothesis 3: Experience leads to better time management

It was hypothesised that time management issues would be less prevalent in the experienced groups (both early-stage repeaters and advanced stage repeaters), leading to lower anxiety levels compared to the early stage first-timers and early-stage repeaters groups respectively. As shown in section 5.4, difficulties with time management were an important anxiety-inducing factor, with high percentages: 49.06% for first-timers and 70.69% for repeaters. Comparison of the results presented in Tables 5 and 6 below clearly shows that students who

were not new to thesis writing (i.e., repeaters) exhibited higher levels of concern regarding effective time management regardless of the writing stage.

Cause of anxiety	Early stage first-timers (n = 31)	Cause of anxiety	Early stage repeaters (n = 46)
Not written such a long research paper	77.42%	Difficult to manage the time	71.74%
Difficult to manage the time	58.06%	Other priorities (e.g. work, family)	58.70%
Afraid of the unknown	54.84%	No motivation to write	56.52%
Other priorities (e.g. work, family)	45.16%	Afraid of the unknown	41.30%
No motivation to write	45.16%	Mental health issues	30.43%
Mental health issues	35.48%	Not written such a long research paper	19.57%

Table 5. Top six causes of thesis writing anxiety (early stage first-timers vs. early-stage repeaters)

Cause of anxiety	Advanced stage first-timers (n = 32)	Cause of anxiety	Advanced stage repeaters (n = 12)
Not written such a long research paper	63.64%	Difficult to manage the time	66.67%
Other priorities (e.g. work, family)	40.91%	Other priorities (e.g. work, family)	66.67%
No motivation to write	40.91%	No motivation to write	58.33%
Difficult to manage the time	36.36%	Afraid of the unknown	41.67%
Afraid of the unknown	36.36%	Stressed by the war in Ukraine	25.00%
Stressed by the war in Ukraine	18.18%	Mental health issues	25.00%

Table 6. Top six causes of thesis writing anxiety (advanced stage first-timers vs. advanced stage repeaters)

Contrary to expectation, the data indicate that time management is the predominant cause of thesis writing anxiety among both early and advanced-stage repeaters. The data from both repeater groups (early and advanced stages) indicate that this factor was their most frequently reported cause of thesis writing anxiety. This result could be influenced by the accumulated pressure or past challenges these students may have encountered in their earlier attempts, leading to a heightened awareness and concern about effectively managing their time during the thesis writing process. The learning curve from prior experiences might have caused these students to be more vigilant and cautious about handling their time efficiently, consequently marking it as a major anxiety-inducing factor.

5.6. Ways of reducing thesis-related anxiety – the students' perspective

This and the following sections focus on potential methods to reduce thesis-related anxiety, initially exploring actions within students' control, followed by their expectations concerning their supervisors. As mentioned in section 4.2, respondents were asked to rate four strategies for lowering anxiety levels and suggest their own (see section 5.7). Analysis of the responses of the entire pool of participants shows that reading sample theses was considered the most helpful strategy (87.39% found it helpful, while only 5.41% found it not helpful), followed by creating a structured action plan (78.38% found it helpful, and only 6.31% found it not helpful). Locating a suitable place to work on their theses was regarded

as important by 60.36% of the respondents, while discussing ideas with peers was seen as moderately helpful (52.25% found it helpful, and 23.42% found it not helpful).

Examination of the data by group indicates that early stage first-timers expressed the most interest in exchanging ideas with other students (64.52%). The other three ways to reduce anxiety were most popular with advanced stage repeaters, who preferred having a structured action plan with deadlines (91.67%), reviewing sample theses (91.67%), and finding a suitable place for writing (75%). These findings underscore the differing priorities among various groups in mitigating thesis-related anxiety, suggesting that tailoring support strategies to distinct stages of the thesis writing process could better address the specific anxieties of students.

5.7. Ways of reducing thesis-related anxiety – the supervisor’s role

The next section of the survey focused on evaluating the impact of a supervisor’s actions on reducing anxiety among students writing their theses (‘What can your supervisor do to help to reduce the anxiety?’). Participants rated the helpfulness of various approaches using a Likert scale. The results for the entire pool of respondents are shown in Table 7.

	Helpful
Help you to find the books and articles you need to read	94.59%
Give you a thesis template (a properly formatted text document)	93.69%
Help you to specify the topic you have chosen	93.69%
Show you sample theses written by other students	92.79%
Tell you which books and articles you need to read	87.39%
Introduce you to research methods used in Translation Studies	87.39%
Teach you how to write academic texts	81.08%
Give you a plan of action at the beginning of the seminar (stages and deadlines)	80.18%
Teach you how to use a reference management tool	73.87%
Give you the books and articles you need to read	72.07%
Choose the topic of your thesis (41.44% not helpful; 37.84% can't decide)	20.72%

Table 7. Supervisor’s role in thesis writing anxiety reduction

A first important observation is that a remarkably high majority of the respondents reported that they would like their supervisors to provide most of the forms of assistance, such as guidance on obtaining essential reading materials, the provision of a thesis template, and aid in refining the chosen thesis topic. However, only one action received a comparatively low rating: the choice of the thesis topic by the supervisor, with around 41.44% finding it not helpful and 37.84% expressing indecision.

These quantitative results are confirmed by responses to two optional open-ended questions which prompted respondents to suggest other ways in which they and their supervisors could alleviate thesis writing anxiety. Analysis of 35 responses in the ‘How to reduce anxiety’ section shows that they wanted less pressure from family or supervisors and fewer household chores and homework assignments to be able to focus on the thesis. Some wrote they would need psychological support or guidance from the supervisor and more understanding from their family members. Other suggestions included mandatory classes focusing solely on writing the thesis and more approachable supervisors who would respond to their emails. The students also highlighted the need for regular feedback from

the supervisor to avoid feeling that a wasted effort was put into whole chapters. While some participants expressed resignation to the inherent difficulty of thesis writing, others stressed the importance of mental readiness, support, clear instructions, and effective teaching regarding the essential aspects of the thesis.

As regards the supervisor's actions (23 responses in the 'What can your supervisor do to help to reduce the anxiety' section), respondent suggestions ranged from improving feedback quality and communication, establishing clear deadlines, and providing constructive support to reducing overall pressure on the student during the thesis-writing process. Interestingly, the majority of students focused on external assistance that would facilitate the thesis writing process, i.e. what others could do to help them. Only one respondent expressed a more self-reliant perspective that the process of writing a thesis is a challenging yet inevitable part of their academic journey. This individual advised against complaining and advocated a resilient, self-motivated mental approach to the writing task rather than lamenting its difficulties.

6. Conclusion

This study employed the survey research design to investigate the perceptions of Polish translation students at undergraduate and graduate levels on the process of writing their theses. Over one hundred students from 13 higher education institutions in Poland participated in the study (n = 111). The majority of students reported thesis-related anxiety regardless of the writing stage or their prior experience. The study's hypotheses regarding the impact of experience on anxiety levels and perceived difficulty were not entirely supported. Surprisingly, time management worries persisted, contradicting the hypothesis that experienced groups would manage it better. Notably, an overwhelming majority of the participants expressed a preference for their supervisors to offer most of the suggested forms of assistance to reduce the anxiety related to writing their theses.

In this study, approximately 30% of respondents identified mental health concerns as linked to their thesis writing anxiety, emphasising the need to address these mental health aspects amidst academic challenges. This finding echoes previous concerns about the mental well-being of Polish university students expressed in the reports by the Patient's Rights Ombudsman (2020) and CBOS (2023). While the results offer potential methods for reducing stress during thesis writing, focusing on student-driven actions, the students' expectations to receive psychological support from their supervisors may seem unrealistic. It was found that students prefer supportive and understanding guidance from their supervisors to ease pressure during thesis writing. It may be argued that compassionate coaching and psychological assistance are beyond the capabilities of translation teachers who might not be qualified to provide mental health support.

This study is not without its limitations: the number of survey participants may not be large enough to generalise the findings; the total number of students who received the survey is unknown and it is possible that only a portion of students, especially those already dealing with anxiety, participated; only eight out of sixteen provinces in Poland were represented; and respondents were mostly full-time translation students writing their theses in English. Further research is thus needed to confirm the results of this study. Future studies could usefully extend the sample to include students studying different language-related fields of study, e.g. foreign language teaching, literature, etc., or focus on students writing theses in their native language. Last but not least, the findings from this study could be used to develop a tool to check students' thesis writing anxiety level at the start of their seminar course to provide their supervisors with information as to what kind of support their students need.

In considering the implications of the study findings, it is evident that the prevalence of thesis-related anxiety among Polish translation students underscores the importance of addressing mental health aspects within the academic setting. Going beyond the recognition of anxiety, it is crucial to delve into actionable steps that institutions, programmes, and individuals can take to alleviate this challenge. Institutions may contemplate integrating mental health support into academic programmes, recognising the impact of thesis-related stress on students' well-being. Programmatic interventions could involve incorporating supportive measures within the curriculum or developing workshops to enhance coping strategies. On an individual level, supervisors may consider adopting more empathetic approaches to alleviate student pressure during thesis writing. Additionally, recognising that mental health concerns are linked to thesis anxiety suggests the need for collaborative efforts between academic and mental health professionals.

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