

## PROBLEMS AND GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF CONDUCTING THESES OF MASTER STUDENTS AT THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LAOS

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### ABSTRACT

The present research was conducted to investigate the problems and guidelines of developing master students' theses at the Faculty of Education, National University of Laos. The research adopted the Delphi technique as a research method and was divided into two phases. Phase 1 examined the problems and Phase 2 investigated the guidelines of developing master students' theses at the Faculty of Education, National University of Laos. The target participants include: 1) master students recruited in the academic year 2024-2025 in total of 73 students, 17 experts for providing suggestions. The research instruments were the close-ended questions and open-ended questions and the evaluation form for appropriacy. The form is five Likert-scale and the data were analysed by using percentage, mean, and median, standard deviation, and Interquartile Range. The findings reveal that the problems of conducting master theses of the students were at the high levels; including main problems and sub problems and indicators for developing master students' theses in total of 4 components and 44 indicators. In terms of the curriculum and instruments, six components and 31 indicators were found. With reference to the supervision, seven components and 34 indicators emerged. Finally, eight components and 39 indicators were identified in relation to the administration of the division and faculty.

**Keywords:** problems, suggestions, thesis writing, components, indicators

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The education sector development plan from 2021-2025 focused on higher education as main priority and this has achieved in outstanding performances such as enhancing the quality of teaching and learning of state and private education sectors. This has focused on fostering human resources development by supporting staff to pursue education in both domestic and overseas institutions. As a result, the staff have been equipped with abilities, knowledge and skills which have contributed to social and economic development of the nation [1]. It can be noted that the government of Laos has played a key role in higher education. Despite the success in fostering the quality of higher education, some challenges remain obstacles and need to be addressed such as low-quality education which might be not comparable to the ASEAN and the world [1]. One of the main elements of higher education is to explore new knowledge and skills; especially in researches which remain a challenge for most master students because conducting research is a long and complex process which requires criticality and innovation. This process not only needs an in depth understand of the theories but also research methodology [2]. The quality of theses reflects several important aspects such as the researcher, supervisor, curriculum, faculties, colleges and education institutions concerned [4]. The Faculty of Education, National University of Laos is one of the higher education institutions which offers master programs in six majors such as Education Administration, Curriculum and Instruction, Education for Local Development, Mathematic Pedagogy, English Pedagogy, and Educational Research and Evaluation. The students who undertake these programs are required to conduct their master thesis. The problems that these student face include student themselves, supervisors, programs, administration. This means that students have difficulty writing their master theses which needs to be explored in order to better understand the problems and provide guidelines to address this issue.

### 2. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed method research and it was divided into two phases. Phase 1 investigates problems associated with conducting master theses of the students. This phase was achieved through synthesizing components and indicators for conducting master these by analysing related documents, textbooks and theses. The data gained were then formatted into questionnaire and validated by five experts in the area and tried out with 30 students to find reliability (Cronbach Alpha 0.95). the target group for data collection was 90 master students in the academic year 2023-2024. They were selected by using a complete table for sample size selection suggested by [3] which had 73 students. The survey questionnaire was used to collect data from the sample group. the questionnaire is a five-Likert scale. The questionnaire was checked to measure its item objectives congruency (08-1.00). The data were analysed using a computer program to find frequency, mean, and standard deviation [4]. The researcher then investigated the guidelines

and indicators for conducting master theses. The target group for these included supervisors and assistant supervisor in total of 17 people. The questionnaire for the second phase was derived from phase 1's results by selecting the item that had mean lower than the total mean of each component. The evaluation focused on appropriacy and consistency of the component and indicators

### 3. ANALYSIS

In terms of phase 1, the data were analysed by using a computer program to seek frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Results were interpreted by using the following measurement scale [4]. 4.51 – 5.00 means the most problematic, 3.51 – 4.50 mean problematic, 2.51 – 3.50 means moderately problematic, 1.51 – 2.50 means less problematic, 1.00 – 1.50 means least problematic. A content analysis was used for the open-ended section. To analyse Phase 2's data, descriptive statistics and content analysis was used [5]. The results were interpreted according to the following scale [5]. 1.00 - 1.79 means that the suggestion is least appropriate, 1.80 - 2.59 means that the suggestion is less, 2.60 - 3.39 means that the suggestion is moderate, 3.40 - 4.19 means that the suggestion is appropriate, and 4.20 - 5.00 means that the suggestion is highly appropriate. In terms of the consistency, the researcher applied the concept of interquartile [6] and [11] by using the criteria  $IR \leq 1.50$

### 4. RESULTS

The problems of conducting research were at the high level. When considering from the highest to the lowest, it can be ranked as follows: supervision, administration of the posgraduate division and faculty, student characteristics, and curriculum and instruction. In terms of the student characteristics, the findings reveal problematics, especially in terms of dedication, paitence, attentioin, and responsibility. With reference to the curriculum and instruction, this also reveals problematic such as content of the curriculum, process of conducting theses. The findings also reveal problematic in terms of supervision, particularly the qualification, supervision and attentioin and relationships between the student and the supervisors. Regarding administration of the program, the findings also reveal high problem, especially staff behaviors, providing advice and expertise of the thesis defence committees. The result of developing guidelines for master thesis writing, in terms of components and indicators, include 30 sub components and 148 indicators such as 9 sub components and 44 indicators for student characteristics; 6 sub components and 31 indicators for the curriculum and instruction; 7 sub components and 34 indicators for the supervision; and 8 sub components and 39 indicators for the adminstration of the division and faculty. In terms of evaluating the components and indicators for master thesis writing, the findings reveal that the sub components are aligned with the criteria, meaning that all sub components and indicators are appropriate and consistent for master thesis writing. With reference to dedication, attention and patience, it includes honesty, attention, relationship with supervisors, activity, responsibility, independent discovery, and clear goals. For the thesis writing responsibility, it includes planning, making plans for each steps, time management, self esteem, and setting goals. Time mangagement consists of working closely with supervisors, setting tasks, following academic calenda, and following the plan. Regarding health issue, students should stay healthy, before studying the students should provide health certificate, spare time for exercise, and paying attention to health. For choosing the topic of research, students should study problems and issues about the topic, understand work situations and related theses, understaning education policy, findings out information about the topci and the topic should be consisten with current situation and can be applied in the real work situation. In terms of supervisor meeting, the students should be well prepared such as understading the thesis and being able to idnetify and explanation the thesis. In addition, the students should have a meeting schedule with supervisors. With reference to curriculum and instruction, the findings show that some courses are overlap with others, lack of clear focus, curriculum should be localised and appropriate with the region and the world and should focus on anlaysis. Additionally, the curriculum should focus on innovation, project, reports, and new methodology for research, detailed research, research components and steps, supervisor selection based on the topics and skills. In terms of the supervisors, the findings reveal that supervisors should pay close attention to supervision in terms of making appointment, providing feedback, working with students and proofreading thesis. Regarding having student appointment, supervisors should have a clean plan for each phase, identifying where to meet whether onsite or online. The supervisors should motivate students, provide feedback, have moral and ethical insigts, have qualified degree to supervise students. The relationships between the students and supervisors are crucial for the success of the students. This means that if they have good relationships, it is helpfull for students to complete their study. Regarding the administration of the faculty and related division, it is important to privde clear suggestins, regulations, associated forms for the students. Also, there should be thesis writing manual and themplate for the students because this will help them follow the step easily. The sub-components about manerism consists of politeness, friendly action, and being helpful. For copy-editing, the person who revises or edits the thesis should be knowledgelable including English and Lao language and these people should be appointed to work on these areas. It can be noticed that these guidelines are crucial

for improving the quality of thesis writing of the master students. Attention to these should be the primary focus of the program in order to ensure the effective administration of the program in the Lao context.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The discussion of this research was drawn from the main and consistent findings. The discussion here was done in relation to the theories and related studies. First, the problems of conducting master thesis perceived by the students at the Faculty of Education, National University of Laos were at high level. This might be because of students had less dedication, patience and responsibilities in writing the thesis. Conducting research or thesis requires not only an in-depth understanding of the issue under investigation, but also commitment. From this research, it can be pointed that most of the students seem to lack of the research skills and attention. In addition, the content of the courses plays an important role in helping students succeed in writing theses. A well designed course can be a tool for helping students in completing their thesis. Also, supervisors' skills and knowledge in thesis supervision plays a role in ensuring the quality of master theses. Supervisors should be knowledgeable and provide meaningful feedback for the students. Thesis committee should also be appropriate in reading and providing comments for the students. The findings here are consistent with [7] who investigated factors contributing to thesis writing of students in Thailand which focused on five components such as student characteristics and preparation, academic skills of the students, supervisors characteristics and learning and teaching and the administration of the university. The results here are also related to [8] who examined the success of master students in conducting their theses and found that the main problems of conducting master thesis were related to a lack of implementing plans, ineffective time management, document filing skills, curriculum implementation, lack of time for research, not enough staff and lecturers, lack of data sources, and lack of publication which is consistent with [9] who investigated problems and guidelines for conducting master thesis at one of the universities in Thailand and found that the problems of thesis writing are concerned with students knowledge, processes, instructions, and support from the concerned parties. To be specific, the discussion begins with the components about 'student characteristics'. In this aspect, students play an important role in completing their thesis. Without proper commitment and attention, it is difficult for them to complete their thesis writing. This is consistent with [10], [11], and [12].

With reference to 'curriculum and instruction', the findings reveal that the students had a lot of problems because the content of the program still lack important skills such as criticality, problem solving skills and research skills. This is related to [14] and [13] who pointed out in their studies that the content of the program contributed to the success or problem of students' theses. In terms of master theses supervision, the findings reveal a high degree of problems. This might be because of the qualification and experience of the supervisor in assisting and motivating. Also, the relationships between the student and supervisor play a role in this regard which is in consistency with [14], [14] who conducted similar studies and found the same problems in Thailand. The results here are also related to [15] who reported similar problems in conducting master theses. Regarding the administration of division and faculty, the findings also reveal a high level of problems. This is due to the manner of the staff and abilities which are not appropriate which is consistent with [15] who examined and found similar results and [24] who investigated a similar issue and revealed the consistent findings to this research as well as [16] who found out the same issue in the context of Thailand.

Looking at the guidelines for conducting master thesis, the findings reveal that the components and indicators of the guidelines appropriate and the findings are consistent with [15] who found similar results in terms of selecting topics, thesis processes, paperwork, textbooks and other materials, information resources, supervisors should dedicate time for supervision and give feedback which is consistent with [13] who examined the guidelines of administration such as selecting the topic that is appropriate. Also, the students should be motivated to study and work with supervisors to plan the thesis and study the template. The process of approving and defending master theses needs to be focused, clear and transparent and the supervisor and students should plan the process well in advance in order to complete the process within time duration. This is consistent with [16] who explored factors influencing the success of conducting master theses in Thailand which focused on three aspects such as planning, commitment, responsibilities, and patience.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The present research investigated problems and guidelines for developing master theses of master students at the Faculty of Education, National University of Laos employed a mixed method research and is divided into two phases. Phase 1 examined the problems associated with conducting master theses and phase 2 investigated the guidelines and appropriacy, and consistency of the suggestions. The target group was master students and supervisors and the data were analysed by using descriptive statistics and content analysis. The findings reveal a number of problems associated with conducting master thesis such as student themselves, supervision and administration. In terms of the suggestions, four important components, 30 sub components and 148 indicators were found. These are vital for improving and ensuring the quality of master theses in this context.

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