Perceptions and Behaviors of BA Sociology Students Related to their Experiences in Doing a Thesis Study

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ABSTRACT

By virtue of the Philippines' Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) Memorandum No. 40, Series of 2017, Directed Research – or more commonly known as the thesis study – has become a requirement for all students of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology programs in the country. This study recognizes that the thesis requirement is often a difficult endeavor for students and sought to look into the thesis-related experiences of students of the discipline now that it has become mandatory. Graduates of a BA Sociology program from a university in Metro Manila during two academic years (A.Y. 2021-2022 and A.Y. 2022-2023) were invited as respondents to a survey that inquired about three aspects of the thesis experience: (1) their perceptions and experiences regarding the importance of their thesis study, its potential for publication, and their readiness in conducting the terminal requirement; (2) their perceptions and experiences with regard to thesis topics, thesis groupmates, and thesis advisers; and (3) the difficulties they experienced during the conduct of the thesis study and their perceptions regarding the thesis as a BA Sociology terminal requirement. The results of the study demonstrate that BA Sociology graduates whose decision-making processes with regard to the different aspects of the thesis-making experience were governed by practical considerations. The results also suggest that the respondents do not possess a strong research culture despite being graduates of a discipline wherewith, by its very nature as a basic science, research should be a vital element. The author suggests that this lack of a research culture is due to (1) socio-economic, (2) curricular, (3) institutional, and (4) societal factors that impede a proper appreciation of the importance of research.

Keywords: BA Sociology; thesis; Directed Research; Philippines; higher education; research

INTRODUCTION

The thesis study is not an easy task. In the Philippines, the perceived difficulty of successfully finishing a thesis study has been recognized in mainstream culture. In a love song by a famous local band, Eraserheads, titled "Ligaya," the band expressed the extent of what they are willing to do just to receive the love of a woman. What's noteworthy about the song is how they used the idea of doing a thesis study as an indicator of how much they are willing to sacrifice: "*Gagawin ko ang lahat pati ang thesis mo. Wag mo lang ipagkait ang hinahanap ko. Sagutin mo lang ako aking sinta'y walang humpay na Ligaya!*" (I will do everything including your thesis. Just don't deny me what I am seeking: Reciprocate my feelings and it will be everlasting joy!). This difficulty of finishing a thesis study has also contributed to a long-standing black market in the country. In the so-called "Recto University" – named after Claro M. Recto Avenue, a main thoroughfare in Manila, Philippines – thesis manuscripts are available for sale to students who wish to graduate but are either incapable or unwilling to go through the rigors of the terminal requirement (Garcia, 2014). Beyond Recto University, thesis manuscripts are also commissioned for a fee that may reach tens of thousands of Philippine pesos – an amount that reportedly attracts student and faculty thesis "ghost writers" alike (Malasig, 2020; Talabong, 2020).

The thesis-making experience has also attracted the attention of the scholarly community. Empirical inquiries that focus on student experiences during the thesis study have taken on diverse pathways. Some studies have looked into the individual characteristics and institutional conditions that predict a successful thesis or dissertation (Wright & Cochrane, 2010; Williams, 2022; Dragomir & Dumitru, 2023; Pranisatari & Maulana, 2022). Another category of inquiry is into the role analysis of the different parties involved in the thesis-making process. An example of this is the analysis of the thesis adviser/ supervisor role and how academics become accustomed to this role (Bazrafkan et al., 2019; Stolpe et al., 2021; Vilkinas, 2008) and ensure the quality of student theses (Krishna & Peter, 2018; Nurie, 2018). There have also been inquiries into how parties involved in the thesis study perceive the adviser and student roles (Adel et al., 2023; Stappenbelt & Basu, 2019; Aldosari & Ibrahim, 2019) and how thesis examiners or assessors conduct theirs (Mullins & Kiley, 2010). There are also studies that looked into how the process of thesis making serves as a platform for interaction among the student, the adviser, and other parties that enable cognitive and epistemological development (Xu & Zhang, 2019; Zheng et al., 2019; Kleijn, et al., 2011; Kleijn et al., 2013a; Kleijn et al., 2013b; Yu et al., 2018; Styles & Radloff, 2010). There have also been explorations into the preferences of students when it comes to the thesis adviser and thesis advisee relationship and how it ought to be conducted (Suciati, 2011; Roberts & Seaman, 2018). Beyond the thesis adviser-advisee relationship, there have also been studies that looked into the collaboration process among groupmates in a thesis study and its inherent challenges (Genareo et al., 2014).

Studies have also looked into student and adviser perceptions about the thesis requirement and the necessary capabilities needed to successfully produce a thesis vis-à-vis their own efficacy and capabilities (Martins & Goss, 2023; Medaille et al., 2022; Hoon et al., 2019; Afful et al., 2022). Some studies also looked into the specific problem areas in the thesis-making process that students have a particularly difficult experience with and how to reduce these difficulties (Abu Alyan, 2022; Sandberg & Fröjdendahl, 2022; Share et al., 2023; Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020; Azmat & Ahmad, 2022; Lobo, 2023; Quinto, 2022; Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Silinda & Brubacher, 2016). These difficulties can be borne from elements beyond the thesis-making process itself. For example, there has been an inquiry which found that doing a thesis alongside other academic works results in deep learning, whereas doing a thesis alongside non-academic works results in mere surface learning (Tuononen et al., 2015). Inquiries have also been made regarding the experiences and strategies employed by students to successfully produce a thesis study (Rahayu & Moesarofah, 2022; Henttonen et al., 2022; Soriano et al., 2022) and how interventions and trainings provided by educational institutions can help ease the challenge (Itaas & Valdez, 2015; Stadler & Conyers, 2020; Sajaril et al, 2020; McCullough & Holmberg, 2005; Hansen & Hansson, 2017). The aftermath of the thesis study – or the actual and perceived chances that the thesis will eventually be published – is also a topic that has been explored in previous studies (Munung et al., 2014; Arriola-Quiroz, 2010).

The Bachelor of Arts in Sociology is one of the educational degrees that has a thesis requirement in the Philippines. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) passed in 2017 Memorandum Order No. 40 which set the policies, standards, and guidelines that must be observed by all higher educational institutions in the Philippines should they wish to offer a degree of BA Sociology. Part of the provisions of the CHED policy are the courses that a BA Sociology curriculum should have. Included in this set are 6 units of Directed Research. This course is described by the memorandum as

> *a final requirement [that] will enable students to apply research skills, from conceptualization to report writing and presentation of findings. It is the last component of a 15-unit research program of studies comprised of social statistics, two methods courses, and two directed research courses*.

The aforesaid CHED policy effectively makes the thesis study – recognized by the memorandum as the more traditional term for Directed Research – a requirement for all BA Sociology students in the country as opposed to what has been practiced in some HEIs before where it was treated as a mere curricular option (Quintos et al., 2023).

As a basic science, having the thesis study as a terminal requirement in BA Sociology programs is a logical step. This is because the capability to do research – and therefore contribute to the accumulation of scientific knowledge as basic sciences are supposed to do – is a very important part of a Sociologist's identity. Previously, Quintos et al. (2023) have already conducted a study regarding the theses of Filipino BA Sociology

students in the past four decades. They were able to note how varied the subject matters of the theses are and how the choice of thesis topic seems to be influenced not only by the BA Sociology curriculum but also by external social forces operant during the time such as political upheavals, labor relations, and urbanization. This past study, however, only looked at the product of the activity – the thesis studies themselves. What is needed now is a study that centers on the BA Sociology thesis students. This study sought to contribute to the existing literature on the subject matter by looking into the thesis experiences and perceptions of BA Sociology students from a university in Metro Manila. It is envisioned that the findings of this study can help school administrators and education-related policymakers make better decisions on how to conduct the thesis requirement in accordance with the extant CHED memorandum. To this end, the study was designed to look into the following general aspects of the thesis-making experience:

A. Perceptions and experiences of thesis students regarding the importance of their thesis study, its potential for publication, and their readiness in conducting the terminal requirement.

B. Perceptions and experiences of thesis students with regard to thesis topics, thesis groupmates, and thesis advisers.

C. Difficulties experienced by students during the conduct of the thesis study and their perceptions regarding the thesis as a BA Sociology terminal requirement.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study follows a descriptive research design. Graduates of the BA Sociology program from a university in Metro Manila during the Academic Years 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 were invited to participate in the study. The invitation included an explanation about the nature of the study, the identity of the researcher, the risks involved, and an explicit reminder that participation is on a voluntary basis and no sanctions will be incurred for non-participation. It was also explicitly stated that no reward is provided for participating. The anonymity of the participants was also assured. A total of 26 BA Sociology graduates voluntarily participated in the study. An online self-administered questionnaire was constructed for the purposes of the study. The data for the study were generally obtained through Likert-type questions. For questions that inquired into reasons or considerations, however, open-ended questions were utilized. The raw data from these open-ended questions were subsequently thematically analyzed. The data were analyzed through SPSS and the results were subsequently tabulated. It is important also to note at this point that the authors have served as faculty, thesis adviser, and thesis examiner for several years in the university from which the respondents were invited and the authors, therefore, may be able to provide informed observations and commentaries to the context

of the findings. Some graduates of the program were also consulted to provide a better understanding of the context of the findings from the perspective of thesis students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The succeeding discussions have been organized into three divisions. Each part discusses a general aspect of the thesis-making experience. Prior to these, it is important to first understand the profile of the respondents of the study. Data from the socio-economic characteristics portion of the questionnaire yielded that the respondent BA Sociology graduates are predominantly female (65%) and were 22 years of age (81%) during the time of the survey. Majority of the respondents came from households that have a monthly income of less than PHP27,000.00 per month. Majority of these respondents (65%) were working students. When asked about their academic aspirations, ethic, and capabilities, majority (58%) claimed that they were running for Latin honors. Despite this lofty aspiration for academic honors, majority (65%) claimed that academic and non-academic aspects of their lives are equally important to them (as opposed to the notion that academics is the priority during that point in their life). Almost all of them (92%) claimed that it is important to them that they graduate on time. Majority (73%) also said that they have "just enough" proficiency in the use of English for written communication. They also generally have their own functional device for their sole use during the conduct of their study (62%).

A. *Perceptions and experiences of thesis students regarding the importance of their thesis study, its potential for publication, and their readiness in conducting the academic terminal requirement.*

This part of the study looked into the intrinsic appreciation of the respondents about their thesis and their self-assessment of their readiness in thesis-making during their final year in the BA Sociology program as well as the merits of the theses that they have produced.

The data in Table 1 shows the answers of the respondents when it comes to questions pertaining to the importance of their thesis study. It is clear from the data that majority of the respondents are convinced that they are interested in the topic of their thesis and that their thesis studies have important contributions not only to the discipline of Sociology but also to Filipino society. Despite these positive attitudes toward their studies and the merits of these studies, it is worth noting how majority of the respondents do not really consider the thesis study as something important to themselves.

Table 1

Perceptions of BA Sociology students regarding the importance of their thesis study

STATEMENTS	Attitudes in Percentage			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am interested in the topic of my thesis study.	4	0	31	65
My thesis study is important to myself.	50	4	46	0
My thesis study has an important contribution to Sociology.	4	0	38	58
My thesis study has an important contribution to society.	0	0	39	61

Table 2 summarizes the data obtained from respondents regarding their perceived readiness when they were embarking on their thesis study. The results show that majority of the respondents were not confident that conducting a thesis will be easy for them. They were nonetheless confident that they were financially ready to conduct a thesis study and that they could finish the thesis on time. For context, the respondents were given two regular semesters and one midyear term to work on their thesis. Their thesis-related work usually starts in the midyear term at the end of their third year in the program and they would continue working on their theses until the end of their fourth year in the program. This gives them approximately 12 months of work time. Notably, these twelve months are not devoted to thesis work alone. Instead, they have to work on their thesis while undergoing internship (another requirement of the CHED standards for BA Sociology programs) and taking the remaining coursework in their curriculum. It is perhaps with this reality in mind that the respondents are divided in their attitudes regarding the second statement in Table 2 – their confidence in properly conducting a thesis study while juggling it with other responsibilities. This necessity for multitasking on the part of the respondents during their semesters of doing the thesis study necessitated an inquiry into the number of hours that they were usually able to devote to tasks related to the terminal requirement.

Table 2

Perceptions of BA Sociology students regarding their readiness and confidence in doing a thesis study

STATEMENTS	Attitudes in Percentage			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
During the course of thesis-making...				
... I was confident that I am financially ready to conduct a thesis study.	8	23	61	8
... I was confident that I can properly conduct a thesis study while juggling it with my other academic and non-academic responsibilities.	12	38	38	12
... I was confident that I can finish the thesis requirement of the curriculum on time.	4	12	61	23
... I was confident that finishing the thesis requirement of the curriculum will be easy for me.	15	58	27	0

It was also necessary to ask the respondents whether they were willing to delay their graduation to ensure that their thesis was conducted properly and written to the best of its potential. The answers of the respondents are summarized in Table 3. The data in Table 3 shows that the respondents substantially differed in the number of hours they devoted per week to their thesis, with the highest proportion of respondents essentially devoting less than 2 hours per day in a week for the terminal requirement. Furthermore, while all of the respondents eventually managed to graduate on time, most of them indicated that they would have been unwilling to delay their graduation even if it meant that they would be able to ensure that their thesis would be conducted and written to its best potential. Even among those who indicated that they are willing to be delayed, the biggest proportion of respondents indicated that they are willing to be delayed by only one semester at most.

Table 3
Responses of BA Sociology students to temporal questions related to their thesis study

Question	%		%
In a typical week, how many hours did you usually devote to tasks connected to your thesis study?		*Were you willing to be delayed from graduation in order to make sure that your thesis is conducted and written to the best of its potential?*	
<1 to 5 hours	4	Yes	19
6 to 10 hours	34	No	81
11 to 15 hours	12	*If yes, how many semesters were you willing to be delayed for your thesis?*	
16 to 20 hours	12		
21 to 25 hours	19	1 semester	44
26 to 30 hours	0	2 semesters	33
31< hours	19	3 semesters	22

Beyond questions of confidence, the study also asked the respondents to assess their level of preparation or training provided by the curriculum for the production of each of the major parts of the thesis manuscript. Data from Table 4 indicates that majority of the respondents' assessment of preparation leans more toward being prepared than being unprepared when it comes to the ten specific parts that may possibly make up their thesis manuscript. There are, however, two notable general observations about the data: first, the respondents generally considered themselves to be slightly prepared in these ten parts of the manuscript instead of being very prepared. It is only in the preparation of the (1) background of the study, (2) significance of the study, and (3) bibliography that majority of the respondents assessed themselves to be very prepared. Second, it is worth paying attention to the parts of the thesis manuscript where a substantial proportion of the respondents assessed themselves to be slightly and very unprepared. According to the data in Table 4, at least 1 in every 5 of the BASOC graduates under study felt that they were unprepared when it came to doing five parts of the thesis manuscript: (1) the research hypothesis, (2) the theoretical/conceptual framework, (3) the research methods, (4) the results and discussion, and (5) the conclusions and recommendations. The lack of preparation is especially salient among some respondents when it comes to the research methods, results and discussion, and conclusions and recommendations parts of the thesis manuscript.

Table 4

Perceptions of BA Sociology students regarding their thesis writing readiness

Parts of a Thesis Manuscript	Perceived Readiness			
	Very Unprepared	Slightly Unprepared	Slightly Prepared	Very Prepared
Background of the Study	4	0	31	65
Research Questions	0	0	54	46
Research Hypothesis	4	15	50	31
Significance of the Study	0	4	31	65
Review of Related Literature	4	12	50	34
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework	4	15	69	12
Research Methods	15	8	39	38
Results and Discussion	12	27	35	26
Conclusions and Recommendations	12	35	27	26
Bibliography	4	8	23	65

The respondents were also asked about their interest and confidence in the publication-worthiness of their thesis manuscript. The data in Table 5 shows that the respondents are divided on the question of interest in having their respective theses published, with only a little more than half indicating an interest on the prospect. The same divide is observable on the question of confidence in the publish-worthiness of their thesis, with a little more than half indicating a lack of confidence on the chances that their thesis can be published in a scholarly journal.

Table 5

Perceptions of BA Sociology students about the potential of their thesis study for publication in a peer-reviewed journal and their interest in having their work published

STATEMENTS	Attitudes in Percentage			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am interested in having my thesis published in a scholarly journal.	4	42	42	12
I am confident that my thesis study has a high chance of being published in a scholarly journal.	0	53	35	12

B. *Perceptions and experiences of thesis students with regard to thesis topics, thesis groupmates, and thesis advisers.*

This part of the study looked into the experiences and perceptions of the respondents on matters related to the thesis subject matter and two other parties involved in the thesis-making process: their groupmates and their thesis adviser. The first question in this part of the study inquired about the reasons behind their choice of thesis topic. The themes that emanated from an analysis of their answers to this open-ended question are presented in Table 6 (note: respondents were allowed to provide more than one answer). It is salient from the data that the considerations are often governed by four things: (1) individuality of the participants as reflected by the prevalence of personal interest as a reason, (2) practicality as reflected by accessibility and perception of an easy workload as another prevalent reason, (3) disciplinal merit as reflected by the emphasis on trending and unique topics (for the purposes of the study, trending or new phenomenon are topics that are based on new events or stimuli in society, whereas unique topics may be old but understudied phenomena), and (4) interpersonal considerations as reflected by the prevalence of acquiescing to group decisions as a reason for their choice of thesis topic. Albeit small in frequency, it is also worth noting that some of the respondents chose their topic to conform with the interest of their preferred thesis adviser. The implication here is that some respondents prioritize the choice of adviser over the choice of thesis topic.

Table 6

Reasons provided by BASOC students for their choice of topic

Reasons for choice of thesis topics	%
Personal interest in the topic	58
Trending or new phenomenon	46
Accessibility and perception of an easy workload	38
Conforming with the decision of groupmates	31
Perceived uniqueness of the topic	27
Personal advocacy related to the topic	19
Preferred adviser is interested in the topic	8
Personal wealth of knowledge regarding the topic	8

It bears noting that all but one of the respondents indicated that they have considered other thesis topics before arriving at their final topic. When asked about the number of topics they have considered and eventually rejected prior to their final topic, the answers yielded an average of 4 topics (ranging from 1 to 11 topics) which they considered but eventually rejected. The respondents were asked about their reasons for rejecting their previous topics. Their answers are provided in Table 7.

The data in Table 7 corroborates those observed in Table 6: first, practicality is a very salient reason for rejecting possible thesis topics. Practicality here is manifested in three reasons: (1) perceived difficulty and lack of confidence in the feasibility of the study, (2) actual or perceived difficulty in accessing potential participants/subjects for the study, and (3) perceived ethical issues that can potentially impede the study. The first reason pertains to topics that were rejected mainly because the respondents believe that such thesis topics will require a lot of time before they can be accomplished – possibly more than the 12-month temporal window that is available in the curriculum without delaying the students' graduation. The second reason pertains to the difficulty in finding participants for the study – a situation exacerbated by the limitations in mobility and opportunity brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic which, in turn, may result in delays in the completion of the thesis study. The third reason pertains to the perceived troublesomeness of having to defend the ethics of the study before the university's ethical review board. From the perspective of the respondents, this will cause unnecessary delays and they would rather opt to avoid topics that may have potentially unethical aspects.

Second, the importance of personal interest as a basis for choosing a thesis topic is also salient given that change of interest in a thesis topic has been shown in Table 7 to be one of the more prevalent reasons for rejecting previous thesis topics. Third, disciplinal merit also remains salient. The respondents clearly want to make sure that their thesis study will add something new and relevant to Sociology and the Philippine society. This "uniqueness" of a topic is likely their measure of relevance, hence the decision to reject topics which they have found to be too common in the scholarly literature or with the topics of their fellow Sociology majors. Fourth, it has been noted in the discussion of the results in Table 6 that some of the respondents apparently chose their topic to conform with the interest of the thesis adviser. The data in Table 7, albeit infrequent, also suggests that respondents reject a topic if the said topic is not preferred by their thesis adviser. While this lends further credence to the notion that some thesis students prioritize the choice of thesis adviser over the choice of thesis topic, the data in Table 7 adds further nuance to this: it is not necessarily that the students choose a topic because they prefer a certain thesis adviser. Sometimes, students choose a topic because it is a topic that has a faculty member willing to advise on the subject matter.

Beyond the aforesaid parallelisms in the results of Tables 6 and 7, it was also notable in Table 7 that one of the more prevalent reasons for the rejection of thesis topics is due to a lack of confidence and clarity on how to approach the topic. The students explained that there are some topics that fall under the realm of sociological inquiry that they are interested in but they do not know how to turn those topics of interest into a concrete empirical study. It was also often mentioned that they are unsure of how best to approach the topic methodologically. There was also an observable aversion towards the methods necessary to conduct the study properly, with students opining that they would rather not pursue a quantitative study that requires rigorous statistical treatments.

Table 7

Reasons provided by BASOC students for their rejecting previously chosen thesis topics

Reasons for rejecting previous thesis topics	%
Topic of the study is too common in literature or with other thesis students	50
Actual or perceived difficulty in accessing potential participants / subjects for the study	50
Perceived difficulty and lack of confidence in feasibility of the study	35
Change of interest in thesis topic	35
Lack of confidence and clarity on how to approach the topic	31
Perceived ethical issues that can potentially impede the study	27
Problem of relevance and relation to Philippine society and Sociology	27
Lack of adviser willing to advise on the topic	15
Rejected by preferred thesis adviser	4

Beyond concerns over the subject matter of their thesis study, the respondents were also asked about their choice of groupmates for the conduct of their study. For context, it is important to know that the BA Sociology curriculum that the respondents were under allow students the option to accomplish the terminal requirement either individually or by groups of two or three. Among the respondents of the study, only one chose to proceed with the thesis without any groupmates. Table 8 provides a summary of the reasons given by the respondents. The results once again emphasize the practicality of the students' decision-making: the main consideration of the majority of the respondents to conduct the thesis as a group is because of the perception that the tasks related to the terminal requirement are too much for just one student to handle.

A close second in terms of prevalence, and possibly connected with the first, is the consideration that the thesis will require a varied set of skills, and there is prudence in having more students who can supply these skills. Interpersonal relations were also salient as a consideration. Based on the students' explanations, they find it more motivating to continue doing their thesis alongside other students. This is due to two reasons: (1) integration – where the students find morale support from their groupmates and (2) regulation – wherein the students claimed that it was easier to control their tendency to procrastinate when there are groupmates that pressure them to provide outputs in a timely manner.

It should also be noted that considerations related to bureaucratic limitations of the degree program – while least in terms of prevalence – were also given as a consideration in the decision of students to do their thesis as a group. The respondents explained that they were encouraged by the department offering the program to work as groups instead of individuals because there are not enough faculty advisers to cater to the students in the event that many of the students opt for an individual thesis.

Table 8

Considerations in the decision of BA Sociology students to conduct the thesis study as a group

Reasons for doing the thesis requirement as a group	%
Perceived enormity of the tasks related to the thesis study	56
Considerations related to skills needed to finish a thesis study	48
Motivation derived from interpersonal relationships	44
Shared interests with other students	36
Considerations related to time management and graduating on time	32
Considerations related to finances needed in doing a thesis study	20
Considerations related to bureaucratic limitations of the degree program	12

The functional-practical importance of having groupmates is also salient when the respondents were asked about their considerations for their choice of groupmates. The results in Table 9 show that the most prevalent consideration for their choice of groupmates is the perceived academic ethic of their would-be groupmates. The respondents explained that they prefer groupmates who are as "diligent" and "meticulous" as them. This implies that there are desired personality traits when it comes to their choice of groupmates. Parallel to this is the third most prevalent consideration: desirable/complementary skills. According to the respondents, they prefer groupmates who can bring to the partnership skills that they are lacking in. For example, respondents who assess themselves to be weak in terms of statistical knowledge prefer to have someone in the group who can provide this skill, just like how those who do not consider themselves very proficient in English prefer to have groupmates who can compensate for this weakness with their own English proficiency. It was also noticeable that respondents gave more emphasis to a shared interest in the thesis topic – the second most prevalent reason – instead of giving importance to friendship and rapport with their BA Sociology classmates.

Table 9

Considerations in the decision of BA Sociology students on the composition of their groupmates in doing their thesis study

Considerations in choice of thesis groupmates	%
Academic Ethic	48
Shared interest in the thesis topic	44
Desirable / Complementary skills	40
Friendship	36
Positive working experiences in previous academic requirements	28
Rapport	24
Convenience	16
Similarity in level of skill	12

The emphasis on practicality is also observable when the respondents were asked about their reasons for their choice of thesis adviser. The results in Table 10 show that almost all respondents emphasized the research specialization of the thesis adviser: they prefer to choose someone who specializes in their chosen thesis topic – though previous discussions in this study also imply that some students choose their thesis topic in accordance with the research interest/specialization of their preferred adviser instead. While there is a huge margin in prevalence between the first, second, and third most prevalent reasons for choosing the thesis adviser, the data shows that students also give importance to the mentoring style of their thesis adviser – they prefer someone who is often available for consultation online and someone who is "hands-on" or capable of micro-managing their thesis progress. Students also put value in their previous experience with the thesis adviser – thereby choosing someone whom they have had the opportunity to meet before as professor during their Sociology major courses.

It is also worth noting that some students reported that their reason for their choice of thesis adviser is simply because the adviser is still available to advise students whereas other advisers have already refused to take in more thesis advisees.

Table 10

Considerations in the decision of BA Sociology students on their choice of thesis adviser

Considerations in choice of thesis adviser	%
Research specialization of the thesis adviser	92
Mentoring style of the thesis adviser	35
Rapport and previous experiences with thesis adviser	31

Considerations in choice of thesis adviser	%
Adviser's interest in the thesis topic and willingness to serve as adviser	27
Availability	23
Expertise of the thesis adviser in research methods	15
Positive perception toward thesis adviser's personality	12
Recommended by either older students of the program or by other faculty	12
Thesis adviser's social network	4

The last question for this part of the study inquired about the experiences of the respondents that are related to their working relationship with their thesis adviser. The results in Table 11 show that majority of the respondents have positive experiences while working with their thesis adviser. Among those who expressed some discontent, the main problem is because they do not believe that their adviser was able to devote enough attention to them during their thesis study. Secondary to this are those who do not believe that their adviser truly understood their vision for their thesis study and those who do not believe that their thesis study was an effective learning exercise under their thesis adviser.

Table 11
Reported adviser-advisee experiences of BA Sociology students during
the thesis-making process

STATEMENTS	Attitudes in Percentage			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
During the course of the thesis-making…				
… I believe that my adviser has the expertise necessary in guiding me with the conduct of my thesis study.	0	4	31	65
… I believe that my adviser is devoting enough attention in guiding me with the conduct of my thesis study.	8	12	42	38
… I believe that my adviser truly understands what I want to do with my thesis study and is helping me achieve my vision.	4	4	27	65
… I believe that I can freely speak my mind with my thesis adviser.	0	4	35	61
… I believe that the thesis requirement was an effective learning exercise under my adviser.	4	4	27	65

C. *Difficulties experienced by students during the conduct of the thesis study and their perceptions regarding the thesis as a BA Sociology terminal requirement.*

This part of the study focuses on the actual experiences of the students during their thesis – particularly the problems that they have encountered and their subsequent assessment of the thesis experience in the context of the thesis being the terminal requirement of the BA Sociology program. The thematic analysis of the answers of the respondents yielded 8 different categories of problems, the most prevalent of which is the difficulty of gaining access to the subjects/participants of their study – an experience shared by the majority. This is despite the fact that their choice of thesis topic was already largely directed by considerations of how best to access these subjects/participants. This is often a variable in the thesis experience that is largely beyond the control of the students - especially when one considers the need to persuade participants to cooperate, adjust to their time and geographic availability, and deal with the issues of remuneration and ethical considerations. In several cases, the respondents also partly attribute these difficulties to miscellaneous external difficulties such as intermittent internet connection and limitations on opportunity and mobility brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic – an impediment especially felt by the respondents who graduated in 2022.

Secondary to the problem involving subjects/participants are difficulties related to the "persons of authority" involved in the thesis process including the thesis adviser, the Directed Research faculty, and/or the thesis examiner. According to the participants, these difficulties often come in the form of lack of communication or delayed responses. Beyond communication issues, the students also explained that they sometimes do not understand the instructions of these persons, either due to ambiguity or conflicting instructions from the different authorities.

It is also worth noting that some respondents reported encountering problems related to groupmates and their teamwork. It is interesting to note that this is despite the fact that the respondents generally chose their groupmates (except, perhaps, those who were essentially made to work as groups due to the lack of advisers available should they work on their theses individually). According to the respondents, these groupmates-related difficulties are often in the context of finding common times to meet, though there are also some cases of unresponsive groupmates.

The respondents also noted that they encountered problems related to the production of the manuscript content. This category pertains to difficulties on how to execute and write the different parts of the thesis manuscript. The discussions in the previous part of the paper and the results shown in Table 4 corroborate and make sense of these reported difficulties.

Table 12

Problems encountered by BA Sociology students during their thesis study

Problems encountered	%
Difficulty in recruitment and access to participants/study subjects	88
Problems related to thesis adviser, examiner, and/or directed research faculty	46
Time constraints and time management difficulties	38
Difficulties related to the production of manuscript content	31
Difficulties related to groupmates / teamwork	27
Miscellaneous external difficulties	27
Financial constraints related to the conduct of the thesis study	23
Lack of motivation	4

The final part of the study also asked the respondents about their perceptions regarding the thesis requirement in light of their experiences as students who have already finished the terminal requirement. Table 13 summarizes their answers.

Despite the difficulties that the respondents have encountered, they all agreed that the thesis study, as the terminal requirement for the degree program, has a significant contribution to the production of competent graduates, and that it should remain as terminal requirement for all BA Sociology students. The respondents also generally agreed that the thesis requirement helps prepare BA Sociology students into well-rounded persons and that the thesis is a useful preparatory exercise for Sociology graduates' professional lives and plans for further studies. BA Sociology graduates from another university also signified similar appreciations to the thesis requirement in Quintos and Iwayama's study (2018).

While majority of the respondents are content with the thesis requirement, there is a notable proportion of the respondents who have some discontents with the BA Sociology curriculum and its capability to prepare its students adequately for the rigors of the thesis requirement. Around a third of the respondents disagree that the structure (i.e. arrangement and schedule of courses taken by the students) of the BA Sociology curriculum provides sufficient preparation for the thesis, while 15% of the respondents opined that the content of the program (i.e. courses included in the curriculum) does not adequately prepare the students. Both of these issues on content and structure have been noted in previous studies that looked into a BA Sociology program in the Philippines. Nelson and Quintos (2013) found that BA Sociology graduates considered the limited content of the program and its defective arrangement of courses – i.e., where courses on research methods are taught too late into the program – as two of the primary weaknesses of undergraduate Sociology. Similar results on content and structure weaknesses have also been reported in another study into a BA Sociology program in the Philippines by Quintos and Iwayama (2018).

These curricular discontents, however, are secondary in comparison with the discontents observed when it comes to the pool of faculty of the BA Sociology program: almost half of the respondents do not believe that the current pool of faculty of the BA Sociology program is sufficient in terms of both competence and variety of research specialization to effectively guide students for the thesis requirement.

Table 13

Perceptions of BA Sociology students on the thesis requirement

STATEMENTS	Attitudes in Percentage			
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The thesis study has a significant contribution in producing competent graduates in the BA Sociology program.	0	0	46	54
The thesis should remain a requirement for all students of BA Sociology program.	0	0	15	85
The current curricular **content** *of the BA Sociology program sufficiently prepares its students for the thesis requirement.*	0	15	58	27
The current curricular **structure** *of the BA Sociology program sufficiently prepares its students for the thesis requirement.*	8	23	58	11
The current pool of faculty of the BA Sociology program are sufficient in terms of **competence** *in effectively guiding its students for the thesis requirement.*	4	39	39	18
The current pool of faculty of the BA Sociology program are sufficient in terms of **variety of research specialization** *in effectively guiding its students for the thesis requirement.*	0	43	42	15
The thesis requirement is important in preparing BA Sociology students for their **professional lives** *after graduation.*	4	0	42	54
The thesis requirement is important in preparing BA Sociology students for **further studies** *after their undergraduate training.*	0	0	19	81
The thesis requirement is important in preparing BA Sociology students into well-rounded persons.	0	4	42	54

D. *Synthesis of Results*

An introspection into the amount of data shown in Tables 1 to 13 as well as the socio-demographic profile of the respondent BA Sociology graduates of the study allows us to make an informed attempt at describing the social reality of the BA Sociology students during their thesis experience. This social reality can be captured in the following statements:

1. *The BA Sociology graduates under study undertook the thesis requirement with a very practical approach.*

A recurring observation in the study is that the respondents decision-making process in matters related to the thesis requirement are often governed by practical considerations. This practicality approach can be seen in the choice of a thesis topic and rejection of other potential topics (Tables 6 and 7), their decision to conduct their thesis as a group and their consequent basis for choosing groupmates (Tables 8 and 9), and their choice of thesis adviser (Table 10). This suggests that the respondents were able to adopt an approach to thesis-making that is least likely to cause them any delays that may be brought about by forces external to them.

2. *The BA Sociology graduates do not possess a strong research culture.*

The data in Table 1 showed that majority of respondents do not really consider the thesis study as something important to themselves. This is despite their recognition of the importance of their thesis to both the discipline of Sociology and to the Philippine society. This may imply that the act of doing research – one of the core role expectations among sociologists – is not something that the respondents consider personally important: research is something that must be done for compliance instead of a sense of passion or meaning. The data in Table 5 corroborates this. The data suggests that there is limited interest in being able to publish in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal – a feat often hyped as an important accomplishment for students of the discipline. Indeed, the students have often been told by some senior faculty members that the basis or rite of passage of being a "Sociologist" – there being no licensure exam associated with the program – is the act of publishing in a peer-reviewed journal: *"You are not a Sociologist when you graduate; You are only a Sociologist once you publish a work of yours,"* the students have often been told especially during their core theory and method courses. Despite this socialization on the part of the faculty, passion for research and aspirations for publication remain less than desirable.

At this point, the authors would like to provide a commentary about the observations. The two authors are products of both undergraduate and graduate Sociology programs in the country. As a sociologist and educator, the first author has had the privilege to teach BA Sociology students from four different universities in the Philippines in a cumulative span of more than a decade. The second author, on the other hand, has taught BA Sociology students in three universities in a cumulative span of half a decade. Cumulatively, the two authors have taught at seven different BA Sociology degree-offering universities in the country. They have had the opportunity to observe the issues that persist in the discipline and the manner it is taught. The authors suggest that this lack of a research culture is due to (1) socio-economic, (2) curricular, (3) institutional, and (4) societal factors that impede a proper appreciation of the importance of research. This lack of a research culture is a glaring problem that involves not only the degree program or the department and university offering it but rather the whole social system – the Philippines. Using the structural-functionalist perspective, the authors integrate the issues persisting in the program with the issues persisting in the Philippines as the whole social system.

In structural-functionalism, it is posited that the parts of the system such as the family, religion, economy, education, and politics, each have a function to play in the continued optimal operation and survival of the social structure, and that these parts – also called social institutions – are all interconnected and interdependent with each other. The premise of this perspective is that weaknesses or problems experienced by society are due to dysfunctions in at least one of its parts, and these dysfunctions produce problems for and experienced by, the system as a whole. This perspective is aptly captured by Talcott Parsons' AGIL Framework (Ritzer, 2008) wherein the different parts of the system and what they contribute to the continuous operation of the system are identified. In this framework, four functions are identified: (1) Adaptation, (2) Goal-attainment, (3) Integration, and (4) Latency.

On Adaptation.

Adaptation refers to the ability of the system to meet the basic needs of its constituents in order to survive. This function is fulfilled by the economic institution by providing a system wherewith people are given enough monetary reward in exchange for their labor to have access to their needs. One of the glaring reasons why there is a lack of a research culture is due to *(1) socio-economic factors* that impede a proper appreciation of the importance of research. As shown by the results of the study, the BA Sociology graduates have a practical approach when it comes to their thesis-related decisions. It is also possible that all of these are to an extent rooted on the socio-economic and academic contexts of the typical students of the program. According to senior faculty members who are often tasked to facilitate the registration process of new students into the program, the usual students of the program did not necessarily have BA Sociology as their first choice of degree program – a pattern also noted in another university's BA Sociology program

by Nelson and Quintos (2013). Instead, they were enlisted into BA Sociology because the program has available slots. The students still opt to continue with the program because it is what the university – a state-owned higher educational institution – can offer for free and what is important is to finish a four-year bachelor's degree. This bachelor's degree is needed by the students – who are reported to often come from the lower socio-economic strata (a fact also corroborated by the socio-economic data of the study) – to have easier access to work opportunities in the country which often require a bachelor's degree as a condition for hiring. It is also worth bringing to fore that the data also showed that the majority of students are working students who are not confident that they will be able to finish the thesis on time – likely because they are not confident that they can easily juggle the demands of the thesis requirement with their other responsibilities which they consider to be as important as their academic life (see Table 2) and who are only able to spend limited time on their thesis in a typical week (see Table 3). To this end, the findings of Tuononen et al. (2015) that doing a thesis while juggling it with non-academic work results in non-meaningful, mere surface learning might be relevant.

The operant premise among the students, therefore, is that the important thing is to graduate on time (a fact also corroborated by the data of the study) and the thesis – often being a source of delay among students – must be approached in a practical manner to maximize the chances of finishing their undergraduate education without delay. Discussions with BA Sociology graduates about their plans after graduating also indicate that the priority is to seek employment – often in industries that do not put prime value in thesis or research work. The thesis, therefore, is likely primarily viewed as a terminal requirement that needs to be done instead of an opportunity to make a mark and contribute to the discipline just like how, as Nelson and Quintos (2013) observed, the BA Sociology program itself has oft been treated as a mere "*stepping stone*" to other opportunities.

Hence, applying the first function, it can be said that the main motivation for the constituents of the BA Sociology program to apply, qualify, continue, and eventually finish the program is to adapt, to have their basic needs (to enter tertiary education and to graduate on time) met in order to survive a system where obtaining a tertiary education is necessary for gaining a more economically rewarding employment to have better access to their needs.

On Goal-Attainment.

Goal-attainment refers to the ability of the system to set the goals of society and identify the appropriate steps to achieve these goals. This function is fulfilled by the political institution. Applying the second function to the two key branches of the Philippine government; in terms of the executive branch, the chief executive and its cabinet identify the key thrusts/agenda of the government; meanwhile, the legislative

branch passes statutes and appropriates funding to various governmental pursuits. The unfortunate reality, however, is that science does not get enough support from the state, and this has led to a lack of scientists in the country. To this end, the government enacted into law a Balik Scientist program that aims to encourage Filipino scientists to return to the country and apply their expertise here. In a recent discussion about the government's Balik Scientist program, the chairperson of a group of Filipino scientists and advocates pointed out that the concept of Balik Scientist is due to the unfortunate circumstances that forced Filipino scientists to leave the country in the first place, noting a "*historical neglect of Filipino scientists burdened by pay delays, job insecurity, and lack of opportunities forcing them out of the country*" (Baclig, 2023). One of the most powerful political figures in the country, a senator, even publicly chastised a government body for having a "*crazy obsession with research*" (Bonquin, 2019).

Having this as a reality in the realm of polity has contributed to the lack of a research culture brought upon by the *(2) curricular factors*. It has repeatedly been observed in the data that there are issues and discontents experienced by the respondents that are related to the BA Sociology curriculum and how it has been delivered. Data from Table 13 indicates that there are discontents in the way that the BA Sociology program is delivered. When graduates of the program were interviewed about their usual academic exercises/ requirements in their major courses, the graduates explained that it is not a norm for them to be asked to conduct empirical studies. To quote one graduate, "*parang wala. Wala po akong maalala na pinagawa kami ng empirical study*" (None. I don't remember any instance when we were required to conduct an empirical study). This lack of an empirical paper requirement in their Sociology coursework might have unintentionally impeded the development of the research skills and pro-research attitudes among the graduates. Data from Table 4 corroborates this: the respondents' answers indicate that while they know how to deliver the parts of the thesis manuscript that is also often seen in typical non-empirical papers (e.g. term papers, simple essays, and library research papers), they are less confident in their level of preparation in delivering the parts of the manuscript that is often only seen in empirical papers. It is possible that this lack of confidence in their capability to deliver certain parts of the thesis manuscript is related to their lack of confidence in the chances that their thesis is publish-worthy (see Table 5), and in the basic social psychological phenomenon of ego-defense, they also do away with much of their interest on the prospect of research publication. Thus, the above results indicate the absence of a norm for the conduct of research which has already become a reality in an academic institution. It can be said that there is a lack of research culture in the country because socio-politically speaking, science does not get enough support from the state.

On Integration.

Integration refers to the ability of the system to incorporate or integrate the members of society into a cohesive whole. This involves aligning the social activities and

social roles and people, and making sure that these roles and activities are coordinated into the fulfillment of societal goals. In the case of the study, this includes the educational institution and its bureaucracy.

As earlier mentioned, there is a lack of research culture due to the *(3) institutional factors*. It was observed in the data that certain aspects of the thesis experience are hampered by factors related to the higher educational institution offering the BA Sociology program. For example, data from Table 8 indicated that some students had to take the thesis requirement as a group because of the limitations in the number of faculty-advisers available to handle the whole BA Sociology thesis student population. Table 7 also indicated that some students had to reject topics they were planning to focus on for their thesis because there is a lack of faculty-advisers who are available to mentor them on that topic. Table 10 also indicated that some students had to settle with whoever was left available among the faculty-advisers when they were choosing their adviser – a possibly problematic situation since the students are deprived of an opportunity to make a meaningful thesis study based on their preferences which Quintos and Iwayama (2018) noted as one of the strengths of the thesis course in another BA Sociology degree-granting university. In terms of experiences, Tables 11 and 13 indicated that the respondents felt some discontent with the competence and variety of research specialization of the BA Sociology pool of faculty as well as the amount of time that their adviser can give them. Ultimately, these translated to problems with the pool of faculty being one of the more common difficulties reported by the respondents in Table 12.

This is not to blame the university and the department offering the BA Sociology program or its faculty-advisers. Based on first-hand observation and conversations with the faculty, the recruitment of more faculty members who can consequently serve as thesis advisers is hindered by the low pay associated with the teaching positions. In the few cases that a new faculty is recruited, these personnel are often young and are still pursuing a graduate degree (and are therefore, willing to accept lesser remuneration). This means that whoever are recruited are still either learning the ropes of mentorship and research or are busy with their graduate school requirements, while the more senior faculty are burdened with non-academic bureaucratic responsibilities on top of their teaching loads. The faculty-advisers also have to deal with the bureaucratic treatment of the thesis adviser position: The role of being a thesis adviser in the university from which the respondents are from is not treated as a formal teaching load. Instead, it is something that thesis advisers must voluntarily assume – and their thesis advising can be used as points for future promotion but not for actual and immediate remuneration. Combined, these factors lead to an understaffed and less-motivated pool of thesis advisers burdened with the gargantuan task of mentoring students who, themselves, are not well-acquainted with the whole research process and will therefore likely require more hands-on supervision. To resolve the issue, the department has resolved to allow their students to take an adviser from other universities as long as they are considered

experts in Sociology. This did not prove to be very effective. Advisers from outside the department are not very committed to pouring large amounts of time and effort into the task because of the lack of remuneration. Furthermore, being outside of the formal employ of the department, there is no legal means to compel them to commit to the task.

On Latency.

Latency refers to the ability of the system to establish and renew the motivations of the members of the system in abiding with the cultural patterns, norms, and values of society and continue to transmit these to the succeeding generations.

Parsons' concept of latency or pattern maintenance can explain why *(4) societal factors* may impede a proper appreciation of the importance of research, which then results in the lack of a research culture. Socio-culturally, Philippine society has often been criticized as anti-intellectual in general and anti-science in particular. Intelligent discussions are immediately countered with comments about *"dugo ilong"* and attempts to communicate facts are silenced with "*edi ikaw na magaling*" or "*edi wow*" commentaries (Sison, 2015). For social scientists, scholarly endeavors about society are often responded with ambivalence (Mangahas, 2023) or, worse, demonization and red-tagging. When social scientists gather data in the field, normal citizens suspect them as scammers and thieves, whereas politicians view them with suspicion as paid agents of political rivals.

Moreover, there is a belief among Filipinos that you have greater chances of "*pag-angat ng antas ng buhay*" or rising the ranks and increasing the quality of your life as well as your family's life once you obtain a college diploma. In essence, the cultural value is on "education" (which translates here to having a diploma as proof of having undergone formal schooling) rather than "quality education" (which translates here as actually having sufficient mastery of skills and knowledge). Thus, instead of focusing on research skills development, which is a fundamental necessity to a practicing Sociologist, many of the student constituents of the BA Sociology program are more driven to simply finish their studies in the shortest possible time than to obsess with the quality of learning that they have obtained. As earlier mentioned, the students attracted by the program are often those whose goal is to simply qualify for any degree program with available slots, as long as it will allow them to study at the State University that offers a free tertiary education. Once they qualify for the program, the quality of education becomes secondary to the necessity of obtaining a college degree in the shortest time possible to qualify for a higher-paying employment that requires "at least a college graduate" as a minimum requirement. In the process of doing so, matters such as research skills development and learning are often not prioritized, if not neglected.

Moreover, the honing of research skills is given little significance because being a researcher is not an attractive career path in the Philippines. In terms of subsistence, data from popular online job search engines, Jobstreet.com and Indeed.com, indicate that the average starting salary of researchers ranges from PHP20,000.00 to PHP22,000.00. These rates are roughly less or equal to the amount that working students are already earning in BPOs wherewith they are usually working during their undergraduate studies. Being a researcher, therefore, is not lucrative. All these eventually contribute to the premise that being good at research and doing research may not be worth the trouble. This translates to students and their families who are more likely to just opt for the easiest way to graduate and not be willing to devote extra effort and time (such as being delayed from graduation) for the thesis requirement.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study paint a picture of BA Sociology graduates whose decision-making processes with regard to the different aspects of the thesis-making experience were governed by practical considerations. The results also suggest that the respondents do not possess a strong research culture despite being graduates of a discipline wherewith, by its very nature as a basic science, research should be a vital element. The author suggests that this lack of a research culture is due to (1) socio-economic, (2) curricular, (3) institutional, and (4) societal factors that impede a proper appreciation of the importance of research. To stem this unfortunate trend, the curriculum of the BA Sociology program must be reviewed in terms of its pedagogy and its structure: the seeds of a research culture must be sowed in the student body by requiring them to engage in more empirical research. These empirical studies are both skill-building and identity-defining – the latter being very important in a discipline that struggles with its worth and relevance both in the academe and in the wider community. In accordance with the report of Quintos and Iwayama (2018), however, these empirical research requirements must be reinforced with a proper curricular structure that trains the students early on with the methodological skills befitting of social scientists. The Sociology faculty must also be motivated and strengthened with more recruits bearing diverse research specializations to help guide students and their varying research interests. These steps will help alleviate the curricular and institutional factors that have been suggested to cull the blossoming of a research culture in the BA Sociology program. Systemic socio-cultural changes are needed to happen in the Philippines to make research more relevant both as an endeavor and a career-choice in order to resolve the socio-economic and societal factors that have been mentioned in the study.

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