Navigating Thesis Completion as Caregivers: Lived Experiences of Student Caregivers

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Abstract. This paper explores the challenges faced by student caregivers, who juggled academic responsibilities while providing care for family members. The dual roles of caregiving and studying often lead to increased stress, potential delays, and a higher risk of academic dropout. The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated these challenges by shifting learning and thesis advisory to remote formats. Through narrative inquiry, this study captures the lived experiences of two student caregivers, highlighting the impact of caregiving on their academic journeys and the strategies they employed to manage their responsibilities. Student A pursued a Master's degree to fulfill her late husband's dream, balancing her studies with raising two daughters and working as a teacher. Despite the emotional and physical toll, she leveraged self-regulated learning, a strong peer network, and a mix of remote and face-to-face advisory to stay on track. Her proximity to the campus and the support from friends played a crucial role in maintaining her motivation and academic progress. Student B faced significant obstacles due to the intense caregiving responsibilities for her chronically ill mother and aunt, coupled with full-time work and a business. The geographical distance from campus resources and the lack of a supportive peer network further hindered her thesis completion. The emotional and physical strain led to academic delays and decreased motivation, highlighting the need for institutional support and effective remote advisory. The findings emphasize the importance of social capital, self-directed learning, and a supportive academic environment in helping student caregivers succeed. Implications of the study include the need for the provision of flexible learning schedules, access to mental health resources, and platforms for peer interaction to support these students. By understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by student caregivers, institutions can help them achieve their academic goals while fulfilling their caregiving responsibilities.

Keywords: Self-directed learning, student caregivers, thesis completion.

1   Introduction

When a student is both a caregiver and a breadwinner, the pressure can become overwhelming, sometimes leading to the difficult decision to drop out. The dual responsibilities of caregiving and academic pursuits can lead to increased stress,

potential delays, and even the risk of dropping out. Avorgbedor (2021) stated caregiving can lead to study delays, increased stress, and a higher risk of dropout. The heavy load of caregiving tasks, such as preparing meals, assisting with daily activities, and managing medical appointments, can make it nearly impossible to keep up with academic demands (Armstrong-Carter, Panter, Hutson, & Olson, 2022). In line with Siskowski (2006) that caregiving students often face challenges such as missing classes and social activities to provide support to family members in need. Balancing responsibilities as a caregiver while trying to avoid dropping out of school is a challenging situation that requires careful planning and support.

Remote learning inclusively gives huge opportunities for caregivers students academically, but distance during remote advisory for thesis completion may be a barrier for students as caregivers because navigating remote thesis advisory requires a high level of critical thinking. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has added complexity to the lives of students who are also caregivers, engaged in remote advisory, and trying to complete a thesis. Thesis completion is not as easy as completing assignments or papers on courses. Students who are not able to meet academic demands they might face stress, commonly referred to as academic stress (Gatari, 2020). Moreover, limited face-to-face interactions with advisors during remote advisory can lead to misunderstandings, slower feedback, and feelings of isolation among students, further complicating the thesis completion process (Dewsbury, 2019).

Without self-directed learning, it can be a cause of late thesis completion, poor concept on proposal, and losing focus in creating critical thinking. Jaldemark (2013) stated that virtual supervision, lacking face-to-face interaction, may lead to passivity and dissatisfaction among students, posing a significant challenge for lecturers. Colbran (2014) thought that the traditional 'hands off' approach to supervision in law may no longer be appropriate, but he also emphasized that it requires strong students' self-directed learning. Students should take control, set agendas, and plan how they are going to complete their research. As Knowle (1975) said that self-directed learning is a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others. These difficulties happened on PhD level, so do undergraduate and magister degree students. Lack of physical meetings, lecturers may face difficulties to juggle learners. As Butcher and Sieminski (2006) agreed that one on one physical meet interaction between supervisor and learners is the vital key to motivate, build confidence, and enhance conceptual knowledge, and virtual supervision may turn passive because of no face to face interaction that caused dissatisfaction for students and huge challenge for lecturers (MacKeogh, 2006). Low motivation and emotion burn out of students can cause lack of self-directed learning. Burnout has been linked to a lack of intrinsic motivation, which can serve as a protective factor against emotional exhaustion (Gérain, 2019).

The shift to remote learning and remote thesis advisory during the COVID-19 pandemic has shown some benefits. Remote learning can be more inclusive and provide flexibility for students who are away from campus or have started other positions. Richardson (2023) and Barber et al. (2021) stated that remote learning provided student caregivers with greater flexibility to manage their dual roles. The ability to attend classes and complete assignments from home allowed caregivers to better balance their academic responsibilities with caregiving duties. This flexibility was particularly beneficial for those who had to manage unpredictable caregiving schedules. However, remote advising can present challenges, especially for students who rely on in-person interactions for motivation and guidance. Communication delays and the lack of spontaneous, informal interactions with advisors can slow down progress. Students may also feel isolated and less supported, which can

impact their overall academic experience. In line to (Barber, 2021) that communication delays and the lack of spontaneous advisor interactions can impede progress and foster feelings of isolation among students, influencing their academic journey.

Feeling isolated during the advisory thesis can indeed present significant challenges, impacting motivation, clarity in research direction, and overall well-being. The pressure of thesis completion combined with isolation can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy. Hanreddy (2023) stated that Student caregivers often feel isolated due to the demands of their dual roles and the lack of support networks. The shift to remote learning during the pandemic exacerbated these feelings, as they lost access to in-person study groups, peer support, and on-campus resources. Without a study buddy or peer group, it is challenging to exchange ideas, receive peer feedback, and feel part of a supportive academic community. This isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness, decreased motivation, and limited perspectives on the research. In line to Schumacher (2017) the isolation can lead to decreased motivation, difficulty staying connected to their academic community, and increased stress and burnout. Related to the emotional hardship and feeling isolated, students may seek help from social capital.

Social capital may help students to overcome emotional burdens in completing a thesis. This theory examines the value and benefits derived from social networks and relationships in supporting student academic achievement, including thesis completion. Social capital refers to the resources available to individuals through their social relationships, including information, ideas, support, trust, and cooperation. Kuranchie (2017) found that students need both human capital (skills/knowledge) and social capital (resources from relationships) to complete their education successfully. For doctoral students, social capital plays a crucial role in accessing resources, gaining legitimacy, and navigating the challenges of thesis completion. For students, these resources can come from bonding social capital (strong ties with family and close friends), bridging social capital (weaker ties with peers and community members), and linking social capital (connections with faculty and administrators) for thesis completion. In short, social support, particularly from peers, plays an important role in thesis completion and academic achievement. Study buddy systems and peer review activities have been found to provide valuable emotional and academic support for students, especially in online/distance learning environments (Madland, 2014)

While social support is commonly beneficial for students during Covid-19, they have to take initiative and responsibility on their own learning process or self-directed learning (SDL). Self-directed learners are typically more adaptable, so in the face of unexpected changes or challenges like the shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, students with poor SDL skills may struggle to adjust, leading to delays. struggle to maintain motivation, especially during long-term projects like thesis writing. Students may wait for explicit instructions or guidance from supervisors, rather than proactively seeking information or resources. They struggle to break down large projects into manageable tasks, leading to feeling overwhelmed and subsequent delays. They may have difficulty setting realistic deadlines, prioritizing tasks, and allocating appropriate time for different aspects of their studies. This can lead to procrastination and missed deadlines, ultimately causing delays in their academic progress.

2   Research Methodology

This paper uses qualitative methods which research requires an understanding where the researchers create a holistic picture, complex, report detailed information, analyze word, and conduct the study in a natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, this paper focuses on collecting data that reflects the students as caregivers' experience of thesis writing and remote advisory in regard to their challenges and barriers in the midst of the Covid-19.

Data collection and analysis Interviews in narrative inquiry are typically semi-structured and conversational, aiming to elicit detailed stories and experiences from participants. The analysis involves re-storying and identifying themes across narratives, focusing on temporality, sociality, and place as key dimensions.

In narrative inquiry, the researcher is seen as a co-constructor of the narratives, not an objective observer. Reflexivity is crucial, as researchers must examine their own biases and how they shape the research. Researchers often position themselves within the inquiry, sharing their own related experiences, and emphasizing relational ethics and collaboration with participants.

2.1   Researcher Positioning

As a researcher conducting a narrative inquiry into the experiences of student caregivers, the corresponding author positions herself as both an insider and an outsider. Her own experiences of balancing academic responsibilities with caregiving duties provide me with a deep understanding and empathy for the participants' stories. However, she remains aware of my unique perspective and strives to approach each narrative with openness and curiosity. The lived experience she had as a student caregiver started in early 2022 while she was having a full-time job, getting pregnant, and working on her thesis proposal. Moreover, her husband and she struggled on the infertility issue for 2017-2022, so she had to deal with the procedure of trying to conceive and how to sustain pregnancy such as laparoscopy, hysteroscopy, and intrauterine insemination (IUI), the procedure to enhance the chances of pregnancy.

They were successful procedures. She got pregnant, but unfortunately had miscarriage. In early 2022, she had her thesis proposal done, but not for data collection. Shortly after the proposal, she got pregnant. As it was her most waiting moment, she highly maintained the protocol to sustain the pregnancy. So, she postponed the data collection and had some bedrest because of a high-risk pregnancy issue. Although she did her best to sustain the pregnancy, her first daughter, Kha, arrived 6 weeks earlier than her due date. Her fingers turned purple caused by low oxygen and liquid on her lungs, so she got some multiple tubes on her body. Caring for a premature baby was not easy, and it became worse when accidentally Kha got Covid-19 and dengue fever two months in a row. Kha was hospitalized for half a month due to her trombosit shock and drop. Shortly, in the next semester of her study, she got hospitalized for a month for leaky gut syndrome and chronic diarrhea. She kept postponing her studies. She felt exhausted and afraid to lose her baby. Thus, she kept enrolling in her study and wishing to finish it, but the responsibility as caregiver made her put little energy into restarting the writing of her research.

The positioning statement from the corresponding author as researcher above articulates a thoughtful and reflective approach to narrative inquiry. It highlights the researcher's commitment to building trusting relationships with participants, understanding the contextual influences on their stories, and upholding ethical research practices. By integrating personal experiences with a rigorous analytical framework, the researcher strives to honor the diverse and complex narratives of student caregivers, contributing to a more inclusive and empathetic understanding of their experiences during and post Covid-19. Research by Avorgbedor & Velime (2021) supports the condition above as they find that caregiving during Covid-19 situation led to difficulty in finding childcare, a drop in GPA for some, fear of delayed graduation, and financial distress.

3   Finding and Discussion

3.1   The Workload of Students as Caregiver

The workload of students who also serve as caregivers can be intense and multifaceted, impacting their academic, personal, and emotional lives. Students who are also caregivers face a unique and challenging set of responsibilities that can significantly impact their workload. The student caregivers often experience a dual role during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to heavy workloads, role discomfort, and increased stress (Avorgbedor & Velime, 2021; Hernesniemi, et al., 2017).

> Student A:
> I continued my Masters because this was my late husband's dream and will. This is what strengthens me to graduate on time. Unfortunately, when I went to college, it turned out that God had other plans. God took him. My husband died a few months after college started. This is not easy, but it must be done as well as possible, finishing college on time, working and taking care of the children.
> After my husband's death, I became a single mother and a breadwinner. In my house, I also manage household chores such as cleaning, cooking, and shopping. As a mother of two teen daughters, I monitor their participation in clubs, sports, or other school activities. Moreover, I handle my personal finances, I work as a teacher to support my needs and family. Last, as a student, I completed homework, essays, group projects, and other coursework. It is difficult, but I hope what I did inspires my two daughters.

The main reason for student A's way of keeping her husband's dream alive and show her love and respect for him. She believes by completing study and keeps moving forward, so her husband would be incredibly proud of everything she is accomplishing. He is the biggest reason for her having self-directed learning. It is related to Shaala et al. (2018) that self-directed learning is the degree to which the student possesses the attitudes, abilities and personal characteristics necessary for self-directed learning.

The second reason is her will to be a role model for her two daughters, as her commitment extends to actively monitoring and engaging in their daughters' educational and extracurricular activities. She wants her determination and hard work to set a powerful example for her daughters. They can see how she overcomes challenges and strives to achieve her goals, inspiring them to do the same in their lives. This finding is related to study by Choemue (2020) that at least three motivational factors were influencing students in pursuing a Master's Degree, namely personal, environmental, and profession-oriented factors. Building on Geiger's (2023) emphasis on the importance of children's needs, well-being, and future prospects as key motivations for single mothers pursuing college degrees, several researchers, including Freeman (2016), Hill et al. (2007), and Holyfield (2002), have advocated for a two-generation approach. This approach aims to empower low-income single mothers to pursue their education while simultaneously ensuring their children receive a quality educational environment.

Last, she should focus on personal growth in order to have financial stability as a single mother and breadwinner. The student A committed to their goals, driven by the desire to honor their husband's memory and provide a better future for their daughters. She hopes to inspire their daughters through their efforts, showing them the importance of perseverance and hard work in the face of adversity.

> Student B:
> I found it difficult to complete my studies due to taking care of my parents, aunt, and also the distance from Palembang to Baturaja. Furthermore, I also have to work as a full-time teacher at school and manage a cassava chip business. The hardest obstacle for me was being a caregiver since the start of college in 2020, I had to accompany my aunt who had a breast tumor. I took care of my aunt back and forth every week from Baturaja-Palembang. This is exacerbated by the Covid-19 situation which makes access difficult. Not to mention, I have to go to Singapore and Malaysia to get better treatment for my aunt. My most difficult peak as a caregiver, in 2023 or semester 6, my mother was chronically ill with a stroke & breast tumor. So I decided to take a semester off in July 2023.
> Taking care of two people at once makes me tired. Moreover, my mother didn't sleep well. She wakes up every hour asking to be scratched, massaged, accompanied to the toilet, and other requests. So, I don't sleep enough, even though during the daylight I still have to teach and manage my business. Physical and mental fatigue makes my body and mind out of sync, I even had an accident 3 times in the same week. My car hit an NMAX, the next day I hit an Avanza, and ran over a Vixion motorbike.

Student B's role as a caregiver began with taking care of their aunt, who was diagnosed with a breast tumor. This responsibility required weekly travel between Baturaja and Palembang. The situation worsened in 2023 when Student B's mother became chronically ill with a stroke and a breast tumor, leading to frequent nighttime caregiving and significant disruption to their sleep. Similar to the results by Wang et al., (2021) that the caregiver students' workload results indicated a high prevalence of caregiver depression, stress, and anxiety. Academic success among students is shaped

by multiple factors, such as their mental health, stress levels, and the support they receive (Mohamad, Baidi, N, Mohamad, & Subhi, 2018).

The overwhelming responsibilities led Student B to take a semester off in July 2023 to cope with the demands of caregiving, work, and their studies. During this period, they experienced extreme physical and mental fatigue, contributing to impaired judgment and reduced concentration. This fatigue resulted in three car accidents in a single week, highlighting the severe impact of their stress and exhaustion on their safety and well-being. However, caregiving duties that demand considerable time, emotional energy, or financial resources can be highly stressful for college students who lack adequate support (Hooper, L'Abate, Sweeney, Gianesini, & Jankowski, 2013) in 2022 (Armstrong-Carter, Panter, Hutson, & Olson, 2022)

Student B without adequate support and resources struggle to complete her study while providing care for her loved ones. She had too much workload which is time consuming, so she was neglecting responsibilities in completing study by submitting a stop out. Her emotional state is constantly under strain that results in her having three accidents due to factors such as reduced concentration, physical exhaustion, and impaired judgment. Despite their efforts to balance these roles, the time-consuming nature of their workload often led to the neglect of her academic responsibilities.

3.2   How Students as Caregiver Regulated the Thesis Completion and Advisory

Self-regulated learning is an essential component of thesis writing, as it involves actively controlling one's own learning process through setting goals, monitoring progress, and adjusting strategies to achieve those goals in thesis writing. Implementing SRL in thesis writing can significantly enhance the quality and efficiency of the work.

> Student A:
> As a breadwinner, If I do not graduate on time the consequences will be financial trouble because I have to pay for my two daughter's school fees. Even though my children are teenagers, I still have to manage my time. In daily, I work on my thesis per section at 9 pm after my child goes to sleep or during the day, 2-4 pm, after picking up my child from extended courses. Then, I actively communicate with my comrade how to submit journals and seek the information related to the administrative format of the thesis process. So, weekly I can track my progress for thesis revision, journal submission, and administration.

Student A clearly defined what motivates her to achieve her thesis completion, and she has clear strategies such as time management, thesis progress checking, active communication to supervisor, and weekly check. Furthermore, she sets clear time bound and schedule for long-term goals (e.g., completing the entire thesis) and short-term goals (e.g., writing a specific chapter or section). She was able to break down the thesis into smaller manageable tasks that she can monitor or track in a weekly checklist.

Recognizing the financial consequences of not graduating on time, student A meticulously manages her time by working on her thesis at night after her children go

to sleep and during the day after picking them up from extended courses. She breaks down her thesis into manageable sections to maintain steady progress and regularly communicates with peers to discuss journal submissions and gather necessary administrative information. By setting weekly goals and tracking her progress in thesis revision, journal submission, and administrative tasks, she stays on schedule and addresses issues promptly. Through these methods, she demonstrates a strong commitment to balancing her dual roles, supporting her family while progressing academically.

> Student B:
>   Not only do I barely have the eagerness to open my laptop to work on my thesis, but also, I have difficulty taking care of myself because I am exhausted as a caregiver of two elderly. Almost every day I am sleepless, less enthusiastic, and anxious because I am chronically afraid that my mother might also be exposed to COVID-19.
>   My daily activities as a teacher, entrepreneur and caregiver become a distraction every time I want to continue my thesis. I struggle to create and stick to a study routine and mapping. So, I keep postponing the thesis writing. The anxiety makes me keep delaying or avoiding the writing process. I have an inability to create a stick schedule and time because I feel overwhelmed and unmotivated by my circumstances. I am clueless what to do because I barely have thesis advisory to get direction and feedback.

Student B struggles with self-directed learning, leading to frequent delays and last-minute rushes in thesis writing. She has difficulties in accomplishing it. In relation to this case, Zamnah (2017) describes self-regulation as a behavior where individuals can navigate challenges, possess confidence, and accomplish tasks independently without relying on others. Caregiving responsibilities for her chronically ill mother and aunt, coupled with her full-time teaching job and cassava chip business, leave Student A physically and mentally exhausted. This makes it difficult to focus on academic work and maintain motivation.

Student B's over-reliance on advisors and inability to access academic resources due to frequent travel between Baturaja and Palembang further hinder her progress. The stress and anxiety from caregiving, especially the fear of COVID-19 exposure, negatively impact her mental health, resulting in low enthusiasm and sleeplessness. These overlapping demands prevent her from establishing a consistent study routine, leading to procrastination and lack of structured progress. Additionally, isolation from the academic community limits her access to peer support and academic networking, crucial for motivation and progress.

By comparison, student A has good self-directed learning, and she graduates on time while student B struggles with self-directed learning, and she delays the study completion. This is related to research by Hallberg & Olsson (Hallberg & Olsson, 2017) and Sotvoldievich (2023) emphasizes the importance of self-regulated learning in thesis writing, noting that monitoring and managing one's writing process significantly enhances writing competence. Furthermore, studies by Pravita & Kuswandono (2022) and Kurniawati & Atmojo (2022) address the challenges of writing anxiety, procrastination, and time management in completing a thesis, highlighting the

critical role of self-regulation in overcoming these obstacles and advancing in academic writing tasks. In short, a student with good self-directed learning can complete her study earlier or on time.

3.3   How Distance Impacted GPA and Thesis Completion of Students as Caregiver

Distance and remote thesis advisory can be beneficial for students who cannot be physically present at their institutions due to caregiving responsibilities or other commitments. However, it can also pose challenges that may lead to study delays due to various challenges unique to the remote learning environment. These challenges can include lack of structure, distractions at home, and reduced accountability.

> Student A:
> For guidance, I have two supervision modes--remote and face to face. Mostly, with the first supervisor mostly via WhatsApp and email, only a few times face to face. In contrast to the second lecturer, I often meet face to face. I find virtual tutoring helpful because it doesn't hinder my writing, especially when I can't match my schedule with the lecturer. Even though virtual guidance helps, I am more comfortable with offline guidance because I can better see where I went wrong. The feedback given is even deeper. If via email and WhatsApp, I feel less free to respond or ask more in-depth questions.
> The most important thing is because my house is near UNSRI, and my house is often used as a base camp or transit point. Almost every day Geye, Rana, Putri, Nia, Mariadi, Arik, April, etc. stop by the house to rest   and   prepare for exams. Even when proposal seminars are conducted online, they are at my house because they want to support each other. Their presence greatly influenced my motivation to work on my thesis. For me they are the best support system. Long before the seminar proposal, my house was often used as a place to breakfast with campus friends and *halal bihalal*. We never met in classroom, but we always have idea to hang out in my house. So, even though I have never experienced offline lectures, I still feel there is a bonding because of our several quality times and moments of celebration in my house.

Student A balanced both remote supervision and direct supervision. Furthermore, she prefers face-to-face meetings with her second lecturer to offer a richer, more comprehensive form of guidance. These in-person interactions allow for a more detailed examination of my work, where mistakes can be identified and addressed more clearly. The immediate feedback and the ability to ask follow-up questions in real-time make these sessions highly productive. She feels more at ease and confident during these face-to-face meetings, knowing that she can delve deeply into complex issues and receive a thorough explanation

In balancing both remote and face-to-face supervision, student A found virtual tutoring helpful as it allowed her to work around her caregiving schedule without hindering her writing. However, she preferred face-to-face meetings with her second lecturer for more detailed and in-depth feedback.

Living near the campus provided her with a strong peer support system, which significantly influenced her motivation and academic progress. Her home often served as a base for study sessions and gatherings, fostering a sense of community and support despite the lack of offline classes. This support system extends beyond academic endeavors.

Student B:

Balancing virtual and face-to-face guidance has provided me with a comprehensive support system. While virtual tutoring offers convenience and efficiency, face-to-face interactions provide clarity and depth, essential for thorough understanding and progress. Coupled with the strong support system from friends and the strategic advantage of living near campus, I am equipped to navigate the challenges of my academic journey effectively. This blend of guidance and support has not only facilitated my studies but also enriched my personal and social life, making my time at UNSRI a profoundly transformative experience.

Not to mention because the distance between Palembang and Baturaja is far, I cannot access or utilize the library or writing center--where it can be a proper place to start writing and find enough resources. This distance makes me even more lost in time management.

I studied during Covid-19, online learning, and never met my classmates at lectures. Remote helps my study process, even though I am overloaded with work, my GPA is still good. Unfortunately, due to distance learning, I have never face to face interaction with peers that makes me unmotivated and isolated.

Student B has a high GPA although she struggles on thesis completion. Her GPA achievement is also related to researches by Suaco Mangaliag, & Gadgad (2023). Almanar (2020) and Lapitan et al. (2021) indicate that distance learning has a substantial effect on students' academic performance, enhancing their critical thinking skills, fostering interpersonal interactions among students, and leading to a significant improvement in grades. She was juggling caregiving responsibilities and academic pursuits, and has faced significant challenges due to the geographical distance between Palembang and Baturaja. The shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed Student B to continue their studies despite a heavy workload, maintaining a good GPA. However, she delayed her studies due to caregiving responsibilities and felt isolated, and it is related to Orellana (2016) in distance supervision, the supervisor-student relationship becomes crucial as students often feel isolated.

The impacts of distance supervision she feels are limited resource access and time management. The far distance from campus facilities means that Student B cannot easily utilize the library or writing center, crucial for finding resources and creating a conducive writing environment. The inability to physically access these resources exacerbates time management problems, making it more difficult to balance academic and caregiving duties.

The lack of face-to-face interaction with classmates led to feelings of isolation and decreased motivation. It leads to misunderstandings and a lack of clarity in guidance. This can delay the research process as students may not receive immediate or clear feedback on their work (Zaheer & Munir, 2020). Students and supervisors may have diverse backgrounds and varying levels of comfort with technology, which can affect the efficiency of remote supervision. The combined effects of limited access to resources, isolation, and communication challenges can lead to frequent delays, inadequate revisions, and last-minute rushes in thesis writing. These factors can significantly impact the quality and timeliness of thesis completion for students in caregiving roles.

Moreover, related remote thesis advisory, like shown by student B, is similar to the pandemic study by Casado-Lumbreras (2014) and Bengtsen (2015) that was not showing a positive result. Casado-Lumbreras (2014) stated there is no meaningful difference between traditional and remote supervision. Bengtsen (2015) found that online supervision needs extra effort and attention rather than face-to-face supervision. In other works, Augustsson (2013) and Crossouard (2008) give positive results related to remote supervision. Augustsson (2013) supports supervisors to embrace their utterance awareness in supervising, while Crossouard (2008) designed an alternative model for remote supervision alternative practices. In summary, the practice of online supervision has been an opportunity and challenges in higher education

3.4   How Students Network Impacted the Thesis Completion

Social Capital refers to the network of peers who provide emotional, academic, and logistical support to a student throughout their academic journey. This system is particularly crucial for students balancing multiple responsibilities, such as caregiving and work, alongside their studies.

The social capital support offers words of encouragement and positive reinforcement to help peers stay motivated. Increased social support for students leads to better academic achievement (Khan, Athar, Mehmood, & Khan, 2023). Study buddies share knowledge, resources, and insights relevant to each other's research topics. They sometimes provide constructive feedback on each other's work, helping to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Furthermore, encouragement and positive reinforcement can keep students motivated throughout the process. Students network hold each other accountable by setting deadlines and regularly checking in on progress.

Seeking support from family, friends, or caregiver resources can also be beneficial in managing the responsibilities associated with being a student and a caregiver simultaneously. Balancing these roles requires careful planning and organization, but it is possible with the right support systems in place. The role of student networks in enhancing study motivation is significant, especially in distance learning environments. Peer networks provide social support, enhance engagement, foster accountability, and create opportunities for collaborative learning. A classmate support system involves peers providing emotional, academic, and logistical support throughout their academic journey. This system is crucial for students balancing multiple roles, like caregiving and studying.

Student A:

For me, my classmate is one of my biggest support systems. I am in a supportive circle of students who want to graduate quickly. They support each other and motivate me like "Come on, let's hurry. We shall graduate as soon as possible." I acquired my circle of friends by similar thesis topics and the same advisors. Moreover, I got the student network from the seminar proposal preparation WhatsApp group. After the seminar was finished, our communication continued in the WhatsApp group. We asked and shared with each other when we would like to collect revisions, submit journals, and propose seminar results. Having a student network makes me more aware of the direction, because as an older student I get a lot of information from younger friends. They mostly tell me about the correct administration format, so that the exam application process runs smoothly.

The most important thing is because my house is near UNSRI, and my house is often used as a base camp or transit point. Almost every day Geye, Rana, Putri, Nia, Mariadi, Arik, April, etc. stop by the house to rest and prepare for exams. Even when proposal seminars are conducted online, they are at my house because they want to support each other. Their presence greatly influenced my motivation to work on my thesis. For me they are the best support system. Long before the seminar proposal, my house was often used as a place to breakfast with campus friends and *halal bihalal*. We never met in classroom, but we always have idea to hang out in my house. So, even though I have never experienced offline lectures, I still feel there is a bonding because of our several quality times and moments of celebration in my house.

Student A has experience having supporting systems with her classmates that sounds truly inspiring. It is related to the research Zhu (2024) that finds students who perceive strong peer support often exhibit higher academic self-efficacy and increased motivation to learn. It is clear that her circle of friends, who share similar thesis topics and advisors, has become a significant source of motivation for her. The WhatsApp group that started during the seminar proposal preparation has evolved into a vital communication channel where they all share updates on revisions, journal submissions, and seminar proposals. This ongoing interaction helps the student A stay informed and on track, especially with the administrative aspects of your academic journey.

Her proximity to UNSRI has turned her house into a base camp for study sessions and gatherings. Her friends frequently stop by creating a collaborative and supportive environment. Even though she has not experienced offline lectures, the time spent together at her house has fostered a strong sense of bonding and camaraderie. Hosting proposal seminars online from her home and using it as a venue for breakfast and *halal bihalal* events has enriched their student life, making these moments of celebration and quality time crucial to her academic success. Overall, her classmates and her strategic use of your home have provided her with a robust support system, greatly influencing her motivation and drive to complete her thesis. It is impressive how she managed to maintain such strong connections and support each other throughout this journey as a caregiver student.

Finishing a thesis can be challenging, but having a study buddy can make the process more manageable and enjoyable. Creating a supportive and positive environment, setting clear goals, and leveraging available resources are key to successful peers. Study buddies may exchange useful resources, articles, and references that can aid in their research. Moreover, they provide emotional support and encouragement to each other and celebrate small victories.

> Student B:
> I didn't feel any bonding with my classmates. I have tried asking several of my friends who have research development topics, but because there is no bonding, I have never met in person, so communication is limited. So, I no longer feel the atmosphere of being a student, and this is made worse by daily activities.
> I wasn't helped by the student network, but it was really helped by the academic network such as lecturers and admin. Administratives work by the academic team, study program admin, is also very helpful and communicative. Even at that time, the administration of seminar proposals only required the digital signature of the lecturer's approval, and the submission was via WhatsApp and email. Apart from that, my first supervisor was very supportive in providing materials, materials and networks for journaling. I also received emotional support from several other lecturers, although they did not specifically ask about my condition.

Student B's experience underscores the challenges of limited peer interaction, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Despite efforts to connect with classmates sharing similar research topics, the lack of bonding has resulted in minimal communication and a diminished sense of being a student. This absence of peer support makes it difficult to stay motivated and cope with academic challenges, often leading to procrastination and difficulty in maintaining self-discipline. Caregiving duties have been linked to decreased social interaction, elevated stress levels, and depression among college students, potentially hindering their academic progress (Trujillo, Perrin, Elnasseh, Pierce, & Mickens, 2016).

However, Student B has found significant support within the academic network, particularly from lecturers and administrative staff. The admin team's efficiency in handling seminar proposal submissions through digital signatures and communication via WhatsApp and email has been immensely helpful. Additionally, the first supervisor has provided substantial academic and emotional support, offering resources and networking opportunities for journaling. While the strong academic support is invaluable, the lack of peer connection remains a significant hurdle.

Student A and B's experiences show that joining or forming study groups with peers can create a collaborative environment where they can share ideas, discuss challenges, and provide mutual support. Moreover, having supportive peers as study groups is needed to collaborate on tasks such as data collection, literature reviews, and proofreading. Friends and colleagues can provide resources such as books, articles, or software that are crucial for research. Through study groups, peer review, workshops, and the use of technology, students can provide valuable emotional, academic, and practical support to one another. When students support each other during the

thesis completion process, it fosters a collaborative environment that can enhance both the quality of the work and the overall experience.

In summary, students supporting each other during the thesis completion process can create a strong, collaborative community that enhances academic performance and personal well-being. It is in line to Cohen (2020) which informs that social support and community networks can boost the process by providing emotional, instrumental, and informational support. Leveraging these networks can lead to a more collaborative, motivated, and resource-rich environment, ultimately contributing to the successful thesis completion.

3.5   The Implementation of Thesis Advisory

Price and Money (2002) actually classified thesis supervision into remote, traditional, and semi-remote. Research supervision in distance (Zaheer 2020) found that students' attitude and supervisors' mindset are the key success factors in distance research supervision.

> Student A:
>
> I have thesis advisory with the first supervisor mostly via WhatsApp and email, only a few times face to face. I find virtual tutoring helpful because it does not hinder my writing, especially when I cannot match my schedule with the supervisor. As the circumstances of Covid-19 and social distancing protocol, I feel the flexibility in maintaining communication with the supervisor. My first supervisor gives feedback through sharing or collaborating by one file in Google Docs which supports our dialogue despite physical separation. By google doc, the draft can be tracked by me for her comments, suggestions, and instructions.

Based on Michael G. Moore's Transactional Distance Theory (1997), remote education encompasses more than just physical separation; it includes pedagogical aspects as well. The theory consists of three key components: dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy.

The interactions between student A and her supervisor via WhatsApp and email represent the dialogue component. The flexibility and immediacy of these exchanges help reduce transactional distance by enabling frequent and effective communication despite the physical separation. Structure refers to the design of her learning experience including how her supervisor giving feedback through Google Docs. Last, remote thesis advisory gives learners an autonomy to manage schedules, seek assistance, and maintain progress.

> Student B:
>
> I find remote advisory difficult. I had some difficulty translating the meaning of the supervisor's instructions during virtual guidance via WhatsApp and email. I think remote thesis advisory does not fit me, but it is more suitable for smart people because it requires more critical thinking to translate directions from the supervisor. I felt that a lack of in-person supervision can reduce the pressure to stay on task. Due to my absence in remote thesis advisory, I have

slower feedback cycles that hinder the thesis writing process and reduce my motivation. Direct guidance in offline thesis advisory makes me more motivated, directed and driven.

My mother died at the end of 2023 when I stopped out. Early 2024 will be the 8th semester which will be my last chance to complete my studies. Gratefully, I also feel that I have received many blessings from serving my mother at the end of her life, so that I was able to pass PPPK. Financially, I have more certainty because I have passed PPPK, so I have the courage not to accept private students so I can focus on completing my studies. During this last semester, I also applied for leave at work, handed over my aunt's care to an elderly nurse, and delegated the business to my family. I took the initiative by renting a house near campus for a semester.

Student B face challenges with remote advisory, personal loss caused grief, financial stability, and academic focus. The student B found how difficult it can be to translate feedback from virtual communications. Graduate students often write their thesis manuscripts in solitude, receiving limited feedback from advisors and committee members, leading to a frustrating and unproductive environment (Copenheaver, 2015). This mode of advisory often requires more nuanced interpretation and critical thinking, which can be challenging without direct, face-to-face interaction. Her preference for offline guidance makes perfect sense as it provides more immediate feedback and clearer direction, helping to maintain motivation and drive. In the same way, grieving while managing academic pressures is incredibly tough. Fortunately, passing PPPK and achieving financial stability is a significant milestone that allows her to concentrate fully on her thesis. Her decision to take leave from work, arrange care for her aunt, and rent a house near campus demonstrates her commitment and strategic planning to create an environment conducive to academic success.

Student B in distance advisory feels challenged to build strong relationships and foster a sense of community. Without face-to-face interactions, students feel disconnected from their advisors and peers. As Easton (2003) clarified, the supervisor should facilitate discussions and provide feedback to students, fostering a sense of community and supporting student learning.

Student A has difficulty in following instructions while having remote thesis advisory. She believed that remote advisory required high critical thinking as an essential for developing a strong, independent research mindset, which is particularly crucial when working remotely with limited direct interaction with advisors. At the last minute, she gave up on remote thesis advisory and decided to move near campus for a semester because her mother had passed away.

4   Conclusion

The study explores the challenges faced by students as caregivers, particularly in thesis completion during and post Covid-19. The narratives of Student A and Student B highlight the importance of resilience, self-regulation, and support systems in balancing caregiving responsibilities, academic demands, and personal well-being.

Student A successfully completed her thesis due to her commitment to her late husband's dream, using self-directed learning and time management. However, Student B faced significant challenges due to geographical distance, heavy caregiving duties, and lack of a strong peer network. The findings emphasize the importance of self-directed learning, social capital, remote learning, and institutional support in helping caregiver students navigate their dual roles.

Self-directed learning skills are crucial for completing studies on time, while social capital provides emotional, academic, and logistical support. Remote learning presents challenges such as reduced accountability, communication delays, and feelings of isolation. Institutional support should be tailored to address these unique challenges. Personal resilience and strategic planning are also essential for caregiver students to navigate their dual roles successfully. In conclusion, understanding these dynamics and providing targeted support can help academic institutions better assist caregiver students in achieving their academic goals while managing their caregiving responsibilities.

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