Jiang, B. et al. (Eds.) (2025). Proceedings of the 33rd International Conference on Computers in Education. Asia-Pacific Society for Computers in Education

Write or not to Write. Attitudes of Students and Academics towards Written Dissertations in the Light of Artificial Intelligence Development

Ewa DUDA [a*], Ewelina MŁYNARCZYK-KARABIN [b] & Julia WIĘCKIEWICZ-MODRZEWSKA [b]
[a]*Institute of Education, Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland*
[b]*Institute of Special Education, Maria Grzegorzewska University, Poland*
*eduda@aps.edu.pl

Abstract: The written format of bachelor's and master's dissertations in the social sciences has long adhered to established academic conventions, emphasising clarity, methodological transparency, and theoretical coherence. However, the rapid integration of artificial intelligence into academic research and writing is reshaping these traditions, introducing both transformative opportunities and unprecedented challenges. In this paper, we explore the academic community's attitudes towards the traditional dissertation format, addressing a topic that is underrepresented in the literature. Drawing on qualitative research with 332 students and 81 teachers at a university specialising in pedagogy, we examine arguments for preserving or changing the traditional dissertation format in this field, where AI is less popular than in other scientific disciplines. We also present alternatives to the current form of diploma thesis proposed by those involved in the educational process who will be responsible for educating the next generation. Our findings contribute to the broader debate about academic adaptation in the age of artificial intelligence. They highlight the need to equip current and future teachers with technological proficiency and the ethical determination required to navigate complex, human-centred research fields, where the development of artificial intelligence presents growth opportunities and ethical challenges. Given the scarcity of research on the current thesis form in pedagogy, an article addressing this novelty topic is an important voice in the academic discourse.

Keywords: Academic writing, Artificial Intelligence, AI in education, Bachelor's thesis, Ethical use of AI, Higher education, Master's thesis, Students' competences

1. Introduction

In the current era of rapid advancement in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in the domain of generative tools exemplified by large language models such as ChatGPT and Claude, traditional methods of assessing students' knowledge and competencies have become the subject of significant debate (Dempere et al., 2023; Grassini, 2023). One such method is the written dissertation, which has long been a mandatory requirement for completing higher education at both the undergraduate and master's levels in many countries around the world. Serving as both a demonstration of scholarly rigor and a bridge to professional or doctoral studies, the thesis demands the synthesis of theoretical knowledge and methodological competence, as well as critical analysis, and often, empirical research. It must also conform to established methodological and editorial standards (Bereźnicki, 2017).

An undergraduate or master's thesis in the social sciences plays a key role in academic training by cultivating independent research skills, critical thinking, and scholarly communication. The path to completion is fraught with conceptual, methodological, logistical and psychological obstacles. The consequences are tangible: the emerging problem of plagiarism (Pınar et al., 2023), insufficient academic writing competence, the gaps in mentorship (Ge et al., 2024), delayed graduation, uneven quality of theses and lost

opportunities for meaningful student engagement in their chosen fields. Some countries have decided to change the format of final academic work to offer students a more diverse choice. In Germany and Austria, the classic written thesis model still prevails, although project-based or practice-oriented works are increasingly accepted. In the United Kingdom, some universities offer alternatives such as portfolios, practical projects, and even multimedia presentations (EHEA, 2020).

These differences raise the question of whether, in a world where advanced AI tools, are widely accessible, the traditional written dissertation remains the optimal method for verifying a student's academic competence. This article examines the evolving format of social science dissertations in the age of AI. It explores attitudes towards the traditional dissertation format among students and academics, addressing a topic that is underrepresented in the literature. Drawing on qualitative research, it explores arguments for preserving or changing the traditional dissertation form, and the alternatives proposed by those involved in the educational process at different levels. The article also highlights the differences in access to AI tools that may exacerbate the existing inequalities between students at institutions with different levels of resources.

2. Dissertations in the Light of Artificial Intelligence Development

In recent years, tools based on artificial intelligence have assumed an increasingly significant role across various domains of life, including higher education. Among the most advanced applications of natural language processing (NLP) technologies are large language models (LLMs), which underpin intelligent chatbots capable of generating text, responding to queries, and supporting both teaching and learning processes (Yigci et al.,2024). Within the realm of academic research and thesis writing, LLMs carry substantial implications, as they can be employed at nearly every stage of the research process, from the formulation of research objectives and the development of literature reviews (Schwenke et al., 2023), to the analysis and interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data (Ishaq et al., 2023).

The results of the research conducted by Digital Care in 2023 indicate that AI technology is popular among students, 68% of respondents declared using chatbots while studying, and every fifth student planned to use AI in writing their diploma thesis (Musiał, 2024). The research results indicate an urgent need to regulate these issues at universities. Students indicated that, in addition to using AI for language translation or creating presentations, they are willing to use chatbots to write term papers (34% of respondents). Additionally, the vast majority of respondents declared that they positively assess the use of artificial intelligence in the education process. This poses a specific challenge for scientists and universities, which is to update the methods of verifying students' knowledge. Many research centres are therefore returning to the formula of oral exams, because at the moment this form of checking students' knowledge seems to be the most objective and excludes the use of AI tools.

On the other hand, some of universities are implementing procedures banning the use of AI. The use of chatbots has been banned by public schools in New York, the University of Edinburgh and York University. To counterbalance this, permission to use chatbots in science was issued by the prestigious British University of Cambridge or Warwick University (Musiał, 2024). Therefore, one of the ideas that is increasingly being raised in the academic community is to change the formula of tests and exams in order to value oral exams and exams conducted in a traditional form, because they exclude any possibility of using AI tools. Researchers increasingly emphasise that AI technology has made traditional exams more important than ever and chatbots have undermined the arguments for greater use of test papers in the final assessment (Musiał, 2024).

3. Method

3.1 Procedure and Participants

At the university we affiliate is enrolled 3832 students and employed 282 academics, including 181 who officially declare pedagogy as their research discipline. Among them, we distributed

a survey questionnaire in March 2025. Respondents were informed that the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and that they could withdraw at any time. The questionnaire was developed and distributed in Polish using Qualtrics software. The question asked to participants about whether to retain the written form of bachelor's and master's theses offered only two possible answers (yes or no), and was intended to encourage respondents to give an unambiguous answer. Depending on the response given, respondents were invited to present arguments for leaving the current form or to suggest an alternative, preferred form.

There were 546 participants, including 445 students and 101 university teachers, who took part in the study. As a first step, we discarded data sets that did not have open-ended questions answered. Finally, we included data collected from 413 participants in the analysis, including 332 students (80.4%) and 81 university teachers (19.6%). The sample included 356 women (96.2%, M_{age} = 25.8, *SD* = 9.6, range 18-73), 48 men (11.6%, M_{age} = 34.7, *SD* = 16.0, range 19-77) and 9 (2.2%, M_{age} = 25.1, *SD* = 10.4, range 18-52) of those who preferred not to provide gender information. The predominance of women is due to the typical student structure in education.

Regarding the field of study, the sample consisted of 143 students of pedagogy with a teaching qualification (43.1% of students), 113 students of pedagogy without a teaching qualification (34.0%), 73 students of psychology (22.0%) and 3 other students (arts education, sociology). Regarding the level of study, there were 89 students (26.8%) of bachelor's level (1st cycle), 225 students (67.8%) of master's level (long cycle) and 18 students (5.4%) of master's level (2nd cycle). Regarding the study mode, there were 224 full-time students (67.5%, studying during week days) and 108 part-time students (32.5%, studying during weekends).

For university teachers, the sample included 54 (66.7%) representing the discipline of pedagogy (29.8% of the targeted group) and 27 participants (33.3%) representing other disciplines (psychology - 6 participants, sociology - 10 participants, philosophy - 3 participants, other social sciences - 8 participants). In terms of academic degrees, the sample consisted of 20 participants with a Master's degree (24.7%), 42 participants with a Doctorate (51.9%), 16 with a Postdoctoral degree (19.8%) and 3 participants with a Professor's degree (3.7%). In terms of professional experience, the study sample included 19.8% of academics with less than 5 years of experience in higher education, 22.2% with 5-10 years of experience, 32.1% with 11-20 years of experience and 25.9% with more than 20 years of experience in HE.

3.2 Data Analysis Strategy

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0.2 software, employing statistics and frequency calculations. For qualitative analysis, the methodology outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was applied, which similarly emphasises frequency-based thematic evaluation. The process began with a comprehensive review of the collected data, after which the lead researcher generated preliminary codes based on recurring themes emerging from participant responses. These initial codes were then collaboratively reviewed by the team to establish consensus on final code assignments. Discrepancies were resolved through iterative discussions until unanimous agreement was achieved. This approach ensured methodological rigor while accommodating the complexity and multiplicity of perspectives inherent in the dataset.

4. Results

The majority of participants believe that the written form of the thesis should be retained, with similar distributions of results in both groups (χ^2 = 0.16, *p* = .900). Among the student group, 222 participants (66.9%) agree with this opinion, while 33.1% believe that the thesis form should be changed. Among teachers, 54 participants (66.7%) would retained current thesis form. In terms of academic degrees, the results were distributed uniformly across the groups, (χ^2 (3) = 1.86, *p* = .601), with all three professors recommending the retention of the written form of the thesis. A parallel distribution of results was observed across the groups based on declared academic disciplines (pedagogy or other social sciences; χ^2 = 0.22, *p* = .638) and professional experience (χ^2 (3) = 0.96, p = .811).

According to the mode of study, the results were equally distributed across the groups (χ^2 = 0.54, p = .461). The proportion of full-time students who believed that the form of the thesis should be retained was 69.9%, while the corresponding figure for part-time students was 64.8%. Among the group of students who already have experience of writing a thesis, who have completed a bachelor's degree, 52.9% of participants believe that the thesis form should be retained, while 47.1% believe that it should be changed, but the difference is not statistically significant (p = .196).

In the next stage of the analysis, the qualitative arguments presented by the participants to justify their positions were analysed. The table 1 shows assigned codes with examples given by students (normal text) and academics (italics). The same thematic codes could be assigned in relation to both groups, but the frequency of occurrence of these codes varies.

Table 1. *The frequency of codes representing arguments for not changing the form of bachelor's and master's theses as perceived by students* N_1=222 *and academics* N_2=54.

Code: Lack of a better alternative	Students (S): 22.6%	*Academics (A): 9.2%*
- Students cannot imagine any other form of thesis work. - There is no other ideal option that would guarantee the independence of the student's work. - The format of the thesis should be retained, but that more emphasis should be placed on talking about the thesis during the defence.		
Code: Current form is a good solution		S: 21.2%; *A: 3.7%*
- This form is transparent. - It has worked well for many years. - It gives students the opportunity to demonstrate their intelligence and creativity, to show their area of interest related to their field of study. - The use of AI should not affect the quality and independence of the thesis. - In addition to writing the thesis, it is necessary to conduct research, and the tasks involved in this process cannot be replaced.		
Code: Verification by an anti-plagiarism system		S: 15.3%; *A: 3.7%*
- Trust in an anti-plagiarism system. - In the creative and generative aspect, an AI is not able to generate anything better than a human		
Code: Tradition		S: 13.1%; *A: 7.5%*
- It has its own atmosphere. - It would be problematic and even unfair to change the form of thesis.		
Code: Confirmation of the work put into thesis' development		S: 9.5%; *A: 11.1%*
- Even it is written with the help of an AI, it still mobilises the student's own work on a particular topic. - V*erification of student's ability to analyse the literature, selection of content, writing skills and, consequently, scientific potential, and, in the context of research methodology, the ability to select a research paradigm for the topic undertaken, which is the essence of the student's own work.*		
Code: Development of important skills		S: 5.9%; *A: 46.2%*
- It is a good way to ensure that people do not completely lose their writing and thinking skills. - Students are already noticing problems with the formulation of more complex sentences or excessive reasoning. - Despite the existence of chatbots, it is very difficult to write a challenging dissertation. *- Whether students use AI or not, they learn to arrange theoretical and methodological content according to the requirements for scientific research, exercise their mind and self-control, and develop editorial competence.* *- The process of preparing a thesis is an important way of presenting one's thinking, planning, as well as understanding the material read, selecting information.* *- With the diligent work of the dissertation supervisor represented by frequent meetings, conversations, in-depth discussions on the knowledge and critical reflection of sources, it is still a very good opportunity to shape the valuable research skills of the diploma student, including analytical and synthetic ones.*		
Code: A form of memorabilia		S: 5.0%; *A: 0%*
- "I would like to write my thesis like my predecessors and hold it in my hands, put it on a shelf in the family home like a trophy"		
Code: Material evidence		S: 5.0%; *A: 7.5%*
- An important document that should be printed on paper for greater security. *- A document that gives a sense of authorship and responsibility for the outcome.*		
Code: Other		S: 2.4%; *A: 11.1%*
- Changing the form of bachelor's and master's theses should be the last point in the revolution of the whole system. - The final form of studies should not be changed when there are no official standardised and regulated rules for the use of AI by students, there are no limits.		

Of the subgroup of participants who identified the need to change the current format of diploma theses, nearly one quarter (24.6%) reported finding it difficult to propose an alternative assessment method. The next thematic clusters concerns alternatives for written format of thesis. Students (22.7%) indicated that an exam or test would be the most appropriate form of assessment. Another students (22.7%) prefer oral presentations, demonstrating their knowledge and ability to defend own arguments. Another suggested form of thesis are projects prepared either individually or collaboratively (12.7%). They provide a multidimensional picture of competencies, including planning, execution and presentation of results. Students (10.9%) preferred also a practical examination involving teaching simulations and questions from an examiner mimicking typical or unforeseen school scenarios, in order to verify pedagogical flexibility. Finally, a small group (6.4%) considered written work to be an acceptable form of assessment, provided that new requirements or conditions were introduced, such as 'written work produced during class under the supervision of a tutor'.

On the other hand, majority of teachers (40.7%) regard examination-based proposals to be the most versatile and authentic form of assessment. They would replace or supplement theses with exams, favouring oral formats and a combination of written and oral verification. University teachers (37.0%) also value projects tailored to a specific discipline and real-world contexts. Teachers emphasise projects that mirror professional and research practices, engage students collaboratively and result in tangible outputs and presentations. Some of teachers (14.7%) have not formulated specific ideas, or they doubt the effectiveness of current processes without new verification tools. A minority (3.8%) believe that the conventional dissertation is still valid, provided safeguards such as plagiarism detection or an oral defence ensure integrity of authorship. One teacher proposes a case-study format to simulate workplace decision-making and assess the application of theory to concrete problems.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the conducted research indicate that the majority of respondents believe that the thesis should remain in written form. A key argument is the preservation of a long-standing tradition. Furthermore, it is difficult to ensure that another form would guarantee the independence of students' work in the current circumstances. The current thesis preparation process allows students to select their area of interest and present it in a creative way, while also enabling them to practise their writing skills, acquire new knowledge, and develop editorial skills. Teachers also emphasised that, when preparing their theses, students acquire new skills and learn to organise theoretical content and conduct scientific research in accordance with current methodological concepts. Additionally, as mention other studies (Ge et al., 2024) this form of work empowers students and fosters a sense of responsibility for their work.

The traditional method of preparing theses enables teachers to evaluate students' ability to analyse literature and select content, and to assess their academic potential. For students, the traditional thesis-writing process also has a symbolic dimension, marking the culmination of an important stage in their professional development. As in the research by Schwenke et al. (2023), both students and teachers believe that using ChatGPT does not negatively impact the key educational and assessment functions of the traditional thesis-writing process. This tool does not diminish valuable academic elements such as the independent processing of literature, the formulation of arguments, or the conduct of analyses. Instead, artificial intelligence can increase productivity by enabling students to complete the various stages of their thesis more quickly and efficiently.

The master's and bachelor's theses are intended to demonstrate students' ability to conduct and report on research. If a thesis is written with AI support but represents good quality and cites reliable sources, it still demonstrates this ability. The only difference is that it takes advantage of the opportunities offered by modern technological developments. The ability to write is a civilisational achievement that should not be abandon just because modern technologies have been invented. They should be incorporated into in the process of writing papers, set rules for their use, and they should be used to best express students’ thoughts and goals. Our study shows that university teachers still emphasise that preparing a written thesis is an important and formative part of the study process. It is a time for developing a

methodical approach to the subject matter and considering the ethics of action. Therefore, despite concerns about the unauthorised use of AI by students, the ethical context and values inherent in creating one's own work and text should be preserved.

When talking about social science dissertations, AI can primarily be used as a tool to improve the writers' language skills, as many students struggle to write properly. Improving writing style is one of the most challenging aspects of supporting graduate students. Providing an indication of the extent to which AI can be used in a paper, alongside consistent mentorship from the supervisor, should give students the opportunity to learn how to conduct research and write a scientific paper. This is a useful life skill. AI can and should be helpful in thesis writing, too. However, the thesis should clearly indicate the extent to which a chatbot was used. As with anti-plagiarism software, there should be an upper limit for admitting work.

The findings of this study are subject to certain limitations. The research was conducted at a single public pedagogical university in Warsaw, meaning the results are inherently shaped by the institutional context of the participants and may not be generalisable to students in other settings. Replicating the study across pedagogical institutions in different cities or within private universities could yield divergent trends. To strengthen the validity of the conclusions or identify patterns in the use of AI tools in higher education, expanding the research to include students from diverse academic institutions is recommended.

In conclusion, the dissertation in the AI era must remain a rite of passage that cultivates not only technical competence but also the intellectual courage to question, adapt, and innovate. By reimagining, rather than resisting, AI's role, the social sciences can preserve their humanistic ethos while equipping future scholars to tackle complex societal challenges with both technological fluency and ethical resolve. The path forward lies not in dogmatic adherence to tradition but in a dynamic synthesis of innovation and integrity, ensuring that the dissertation remains a testament to the enduring value of critical, compassionate inquiry in an increasingly automated world.

References

Bereźnicki, F. (2017). *Praca licencjacka i magisterska z pedagogiki, psychologii i socjologii. Poradnik dla studentów*. Impuls.

Dempere, J., Modugu, K., Hesham, A., & Ramasamy, L. K. (2023). The impact of ChatGPT on higher education. *Frontiers in Education*, *8*, 1206936. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1206936

EHEA (2020). *National Qualifications Frameworks across EHEA countries*. European Higher Education Area.

Ge, Z. G., Zhao, Y., & Liu, Y. (2024). Exploring quality issues in academic master theses of education majors and corresponding countermeasures. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, *8*(4), 30-47. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.202428171

Grassini, S. (2023). Shaping the Future of Education: Exploring the Potential and Consequences of AI and ChatGPT in Educational Settings. *Education Sciences, 13*(7), 692. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13070692

Ishaq, K., Jhatial, S., & Parveen, F. (2023). Enhancing Statistical Understanding: A Brief Discussion on the Role of ChatGPT in Business Management. *Journal for Business Education and Management, 3*(2), 59-76. https://doi.org/10.56596/jbem.v3i2.50

Musiał, A. (2024). Sztuczna inteligencja w służbie nauki. Gdzie są granice wykorzystania AI w pracy naukowca? *Progress. Journal of Young Researchers, 14*, 44-57. https://doi.org/10.26881/prog.2024.14.03

Pınar, Y., Gür, D., Pınar, N. K., Demir, K., Iltar, E. K., Songören, S. A., & Özenici, S. (2023). A comparative study of postgraduate theses in pedagogy and preschool education in Austria and Turkey. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 1051923. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1051923

Schwenke, N., Söbke, H., & Kraft, E. (2023). Potentials and Challenges of Chatbot-Supported Thesis Writing: An Autoethnography. *Trends in Higher Education, 2*(4), 611-635. https://doi.org/10.3390/higheredu2040037

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). Basics of qualitative research : Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Yigci, D., Eryilmaz, M., Yetisen, A. K., Tasoglu, S., & Ozcan, A. (2025). Large language model-based chatbots in higher education. *Advanced Intelligent Systems*, *7*(3), 2400429. https://doi.org/10.1002/aisy.202400429