UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

Department of Special Needs Education

Guidelines for the Master's Thesis in Research in Special Needs Education

RSNE4900

(45 credits)

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About the master's thesis

The master's thesis at the Department of Special Needs Education (ISP) is an independent scientific work. The thesis should have relevance to the field of Special Needs Education.

The work should involve planning and conducting a research project and reporting this through a thesis, where you demonstrate insight into current research, theories, and methods based on the research question. The thesis can include an empirical study or be purely theoretical. It may also be linked to a professional development project and/or an evaluation project

The task must be developed as an independent research project, although it can be related to the current research at ISP.

Teaching and compulsory activities:

The teaching consists of lectures and supervision. Some of the teaching takes place in the 2nd semester.

Compulsory activities:

- Research application
- Research proposal
- Course in privacy protection
- Attendance at compulsory lectures

Based on their project application, students are allocated at least one supervisor. Supervision can only proceed in full once the research proposal has been submitted and accepted. To qualify for submission, the remaining compulsory activities must be completed and approved. Each activity remains valid for up to three years after approval.

Collaboration

Two students can collaborate on a project. This can be done in the following ways:

- The students can write their individual thesis, which will be graded independently.
- Students can co-write a single thesis. The students then submit the same thesis individually and receive a joint grade.
- If students are writing a systematic literature review, it is necessary for them to collaborate.

Project planning

In the 2nd semester, students will be invited to submit ideas for their thesis topic. These will be considered by the academic course lead in dialogue with the students and other colleagues. Once the project is deemed viable and a supervisor has been allocated, the students will be informed, at the latest, by the end of May.

- Students will choose their own thesis topic, in dialogue with the academic course lead and potential supervisors.
- The student must then apply to ISP for approval of both the project and the supervisor.
- The proposal must be submitted to ISP by the middle of May, to give sufficient time to allocate a suitable supervisor

Project proposal template:

- How would you approach the project/ theme?
- Include a temporary research question or aim of the project?
- What would you like to find out, or what would you like to research/investigate?
- What method would you use, and how do you think the method should be applied?
- Is there a specific population you would like to address in your research?

Project description

- The project description shall be no more than 2500 words.
- The template can be found here.
- The project description is a compulsory component and shall be submitted in Canvas by week 38.
- The supervisor then considers the description and grades it pass or fail within two weeks of the submission deadline.
- In case the project description is graded as fail:
    - The students shall have two weeks to revise and submit the description.
    - If the revised description is also not approved, the project, and the thesis, cannot go ahead. It will be possible to complete the compulsory activity again the next time the course is offered, with a newly assigned project and supervisor.

Supervisors

- As a general rule, supervisors will be ISP staff members.
- External supervisors might still be necessary in certain limited circumstances.
- A newly proposed supervisor should have a PhD.

- If there are grounds for the student to have multiple supervisors, then one is designated as the primary supervisor and the other as secondary.

Supervision

- Supervisors who are overseeing multiple students are free to organize group sessions.
- Co-writing students are supervised together as a single unit.
- Students are entitled to up to 15 hours of supervision per thesis, where 2 shall be used for preparing the project description.
- Supervision is compulsory. To qualify for submitting the thesis, at least 10 hours of supervision must have been carried out. It remains the responsibility of the student to ensure continuous communication with the supervisor.
- The supervision agreement is completed and signed by both the student(s) and the supervisor(s). The agreement shall be submitted digitally by the student within the deadline of the 1st of September. Students must also take care to alert the study administration as soon as possible in the case of breach of the agreement.
    - Students are advised to closely inspect the details of the supervision agreement.

Format of the master's thesis

The thesis can be submitted in two different formats.

- The traditional format - a comprehensive written work called a MONOGRAPH
- An extended summary and an article manuscript called an ARTICLE-BASED MASTER'S THESIS

The choice of thesis format is determined in collaboration with the supervisor, after the project plan has been approved. Detailed guidelines for each format follow further on in the document.

On the use of AI

In the methods sections, students shall include the following if they have made use of AI.

- Describe what the AI-tool has been used for, including the version that was used.
    - Note: analyses involving yellow and red data **MUST** use GPT UiO – UiOs privacy friendly GPT chat
- Describe the rationale for using AI.
- Describe the extent of AI-use
    - Including literature searching, analysis, rewording and formatting, etc.

    - Note: it is not permitted to use AI to write a first draft.
- How you have considered the results and ensured quality.
- An evaluation of how the use of AI may have affected the quality of the final thesis.

If you have used AI, ISP encourages you to describe in the METHODS SECTION which AI system (and which version) you used for which purpose, and to reflect on

Grading

The grading deadline is 30 days, not including public holidays and weekends.

In the case of a failing grade - Revised master's thesis

If your original thesis submission receives a failing grade, it can be resubmitted in a revised form. Follow this link for more information.

Different types of master's thesis

Description of the formal requirements of different types of theses can be found here.

Empirical theses

Empirical theses shall:

- Account for the theoretical and empirical background and framework for the project.
- Have a clear thesis statement and/or research question(s).
- Account for the research design, including overall approach, methodology, data collection, systematization and/or coding, and analysis.
- Discuss relevant questions about reliability, validity and ethical issues.
- Present results in a clear and systematic way.
- Discuss the results and their implications in light of the thesis statement/research question(s), and the theoretical and empirical background.

The data material that is used as the basis for empirical theses is usually *research-generated*, i.e. created as part of the project in question through the use of, for example, questionnaires, interviews or observations. The material can also consist of *existing* documents ((such as curriculums, guides, reports, white papers, or archival records), analyses from previous studies (e.g. forms of systematic reviews), secondary data analyses (e.g. PISA), or other types of sources. The different types of data material can be combined.

Evaluation projects

Master's theses based on an evaluation project will often contain the same requirements regarding research methodology as empirical research. In addition, the following shall be accounted for:

- What is to be evaluated.
- The objective of the evaluation.
- Criteria, values, formulation of objectives or similar evaluation aims considered in relation to the role of the evaluator

Innovation projects/quality development work

A master's thesis can be based on a development project (innovation work). This type of thesis will usually include an evaluation of the quality development work carried out. Therefore, it will often include elements of the evaluation research (see above). Theses based on quality development work shall account for:

- The situation before the quality development work started.
- The objective of the quality development work – the innovative idea.
- Innovation strategy(ies) for the quality development work.
- Planning of the quality development work.
- The implementation evaluation and discussion of continuation and dissemination possibilities.

Literature reviews

The master's thesis can also be conducted as a literature study. A literature study is a research method in which the candidate systematically searches, selects, and synthesizes existing research in order to answer a clearly defined research question.

Literature studies must:

- have (a) clear research question(s)
- account for the search strategy, including search terms, databases, and time period
- apply clear criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of sources
- assess the quality and relevance of the studies included
- critically analyze and synthesize the literature, not merely summarize previous findings
- identify patterns, contradictions, or gaps across the research
- discuss methodological choices and demonstrate source criticism throughout the process

The process should be described in enough detail that it can be retraced and evaluated by others. As with other scientific work, the research question must be clearly formulated and relevant to special needs education.

Theoretical study

The master’s thesis may be carried out as a theoretical study. A theoretical study involves an approach in which the candidate systematically analyzes and discusses existing theories, theoretical perspectives, or concepts to develop an academic understanding of a defined problem.

In a theoretical study:

- theories, theoretical perspectives, concepts, claims, or arguments constitute the primary object of investigation;
- there is a clear and well-defined research question, investigated primarily through theoretical analysis;
- the selection and delimitation of the material are explained and justified; the material may include theories, concepts, academic literature, research, and other relevant sources;
- theories, concepts, claims, and arguments are interpreted, compared, or critically examined, for example through philosophical or conceptual-analytical approaches;
- the material is treated critically, with academic rigor and in light of the research question;
- the study goes beyond merely presenting or summarizing the material and clearly identifies its academic contribution, for example in the form of conceptual clarification, new or more in-depth interpretations, theory development, or critical testing of arguments.

The research question and the theoretical analysis must be relevant to special needs education.