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Challenges Faced by LIS Postgraduate Students in Their Dissertations Writing

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Abstract

The focal objective of this study was to explore the aim of students' interest in postgraduate study of Library and Information Science (LIS) and the challenges being faced by them by while planning and writing thesis. The quantitative research method followed by survey design was used to conduct this study. The data gathering tool was questionnaire that was adapted for data collection. The population of the study was the enrolled M. Phil and Ph. D. students who were perusing their dissertations from the library schools of the Punjab province. There were 72 students who were enrolled in M.Phil programme and 26 were registered in Ph.D. programme. The questionnaires were sent to all the students through emails and 71 (72%) questionnaires were filled out by the respondents. Frequencies, percentage, mean, standard deviation were used for data analysis through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). It was found that the major aim of LIS post graduate students to peruse M.Phil or PhD to achieve better employment. Many challenges were being faced by LIS postgraduate students in process of their dissertations writing. Major challenges included tough schedule of job, family responsibility, language barriers and lack of critical thinking.

Keywords: Thesis writing challenges, LIS Research obstacles, LIS Thesis Writing, intent of perusing higher degree

Introduction

Postgraduate study is very important in any national economy because a postgraduate degree holder is expected to be a knowledge generator, a source of knowledge and an important person with the potential to extend the frontiers of knowledge. The postgraduate degree is an advanced academic degree normally awarded by a university which is considered the higher degree in any academic discipline. At the post-graduate level the Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) and the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) are also considered research degrees. There might be various intentions of doing post-graduate (MPhil) or (Ph.D.) According to Ho and Hong (2012) there are many aims of postgraduate students to study at post-graduate level. The aims are associated with education, promotion in job, future success in career, and interest for professional upgrading and many more. According to Rizwan (2013) Higher Education Commission (HEC), which deals higher education in Pakistan, invests a great number of expenditures for the enhancement of contemporary research. Kaur and Sindhu (2009) reported that the research trend increases day by day in the society due to postgraduate degree holders and are playing crucial role in the development of a national economy. Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (2015) stated that the minimum period for completing the MPhil and Ph.D. degrees varies from one university to another, but it is usually two years program for MPhil and three years for the Ph.D. degree. In some cases, it may be longer or shorter. It can be offered on the full time or part-time basis According to Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (2015) the postgraduate's curriculum Level 7 and 8 demands from students in acquiring research skills and normally assessed by thesis or examination or both and these students are specialized Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.).

In many cases, postgraduate students are also expected to complete some courses relevant to the research discipline, such as advanced research methods, computational analysis, etc. The main requirement for obtaining MPhil and Ph.D. is the submission of a substantial body of the original research report in the field in the form of a thesis, which is assessed and confirmed by external examiners in an oral defense examination.

Khan, Majoka, and Fazal (2015) have given the idea in their study that it is necessary for the postgraduate student to write dissertation or thesis for the completion of

their degree in Pakistan, Therefore, in other words, thesis writing is compulsory to fulfill the criteria of MPhil and Ph.D. degree program. Library and Information Sciences Postgraduate MPhil research program is offered for two years after Master in Library and Information Science degree while Ph.D. research program is offered for three years after Master of Philosophy degree in Pakistani Universities. Ameen & Warraich (2014) stated that the thesis-based program was first time introduced for the Ph.D. degree by the University of Karachi in 1967, the first regular course-work based MPhil and Ph.D. programs with thesis writing were offered from the University of the Punjab Lahore in 2005, Islamia University Bahawalpur, University of Sargodha and Minhaj University Lahore was also offered M.Phil and Ph.D. program for LIS postgraduate students The Superior University Lahore has been started MPhil programs for LIS Postgraduate study in earlier year. The submission of thesis or dissertation is the significant criteria for obtaining postgraduate MPhil and Ph.D. degrees including Library and Information Sciences through original research. It is also expected from such degree holders that they will perform at the superior level and play a key role in the institution of the Public and Private sector. A famous researcher Pearson (2005) pointed out that this is the most difficult process for student is to write up the thesis for the completion and to get postgraduate degree. There are many hurdles faced by Postgraduate students. According to Komba (2015) there are many flaws of among postgraduate students while choosing thesis for their degree completion, these flaws are selection of area and the choice of topic, benefits and implication of thesis. The researcher Collins (2012) stated that thesis writing is technical process, this task can be done with critical thinking which refers those students who faced many challenges in writing thesis for their post-graduate degree program. Olaitan (2009) reported that many students faced many hurdles in thesis writing like selection of topic, lack of knowledge about material, unfriendly and sometime aggressive behavior of supervisors, less motivation from the side of students, less resources, bad health during research project.

Library and information Sciences postgraduate students in Pakistan are facing several challenges in thesis writing. Thus it is very essential to explore the intention of doing post-graduates degrees within Pakistan as well as to identify the challenges which are being faced by Library and information sciences postgraduate students in thesis

writing phase. Sulehri, Najmi and Chaudhry (2017) prescribed in their study that LIS professionals face time related hurdles, domestic hurdles and workload while majority of LIS professionals conduct research for promotion in their jobs.

This study is also important as it covers the gap in literature regarding Pakistani context because limited research has been conducted in the past although. So it is imperative to hurdles which are being faced by the LIS post-graduate students in Pakistan so that endeavors many be suggested for overcoming these hurdles.

Objectives of the study

There were two major objectives of the study which were intended to congregate.

- 1) To determine the purpose of LIS students' interest in postgraduate study
- 2) To identify challenges being face by LIS postgraduate students in thesis writing
- 3) To examine the difference in opinions at gender and degree level.

Research questions

- 1) What is the purpose of LIS students to do postgraduate study?
- 2) What are the challenges being faced by LIS postgraduate students in dissertation writing process?
- 3) Is there any difference in facing hurdles by male and female LIS students?
- 4) Is there any difference in facing hurdles by M.Phil and PhD LIS students?

Literature Review

Postgraduate Study refers to advance level of learning, share of high-level study and it exists at two stages of Postgraduate study. One stage is associated with Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) degree and second one Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree. The postgraduate study consists of coursework and thesis writing for attaining the degree in relevant discipline or subject. The researcher Teowkul (2009) revealed that many postgraduate students want to gain education for respect in the society, the transfer from the job and prove their self at a new place and side by side enjoy the comfort at the new place by completing their higher study. That's why to complete this whole process thesis writing is required which was the main subject of the study.

Thesis writing is a mental and cognitive activity since it is a product of the mind. According to Burke (2010) "The image of an individual working alone in a quiet environment has furthered the view of writing as a mental and cognitive activity, however, it has been pointed out, writing can be understood only from the perspective of a society rather than a single individual". Sulehri, Najmi and Chaudhry (2017) also pointed some challenges faced by LIS researchers which include unavailability of mentor and considering research as a difficult task.

Thesis writing is expected to address an intellectual community in which the students engage in active learning. The researchers Pyhalto, Stubb, and Lonka (2009) revealed that postgraduate students get learning environment through thesis writing which is associated knowledge about the topic, learning on writing skills, Coordination with supervisors, expertise about Research and evaluation of Practices. Ameen and Warraich (2014) revealed that low degree completion rate in this field is due to certain challenges in thesis writing that are improper infrastructure, low standard quality research educational programs, improper guidance from faculty members, supervisory role, internal politics, the absence of ICT competencies, lack of critical thinking and language barrier.

According to Golde and Dore (2001) described in their study and shared the experience with postgraduate students that 40% of students select the topic of their own choice if their mentors supported them, whereas 30% of students reported that, they selected diverse topics for their dissertation writing. Kearsley (1998) stated that postgraduate students faced difficulty to writing their thesis due to lack of coordination and complete guideline from their supervisors because they were overloaded with work and lack of qualification.

According to Taylor and Beasley (2005) that students faced challenges and need additional support from the supervisors for the enhancement of other skills such as recognition of the problem, creative thinking, validation, summarization, documentation, and reproduction. While many students face difficulty in using search engines and databases because they are not able to find appropriate literature such as books, articles, papers, abstract, thesis and dissertation in their relevant field. The researcher Williams et al. (2005) identified that some of the postgraduate students delayed in their thesis writing

process, not for the reason of any academic difficulty whilst failure to acceptance and respect from their supervisors.

Wisker, Robbinson, and Shacham (2007) found that problems sometimes occur when the expectations of the student regarding the supervisory relationship and research experience do not match. According to Hofman and Berg (2000) described that fewer amounts of funds were the major issue to conduct the research. Numbers of personal difficulties of postgraduate students such as health and financial issues also have challenges in thesis writing process. There are several challenges, which affect the success in postgraduate degree and thesis writing that are the enrolment system, politics, academic issues, guideline, knowledge and information, and assessing the quality of writing a dissertation as well as personal problems. This is the reason where postgraduate education will be checked by different aspects. Therefore, previous research revealed that most of the postgraduate students of social sciences complete their course-work in time but specifically delayed in thesis writing phase due to many challenges and dropout rate of social sciences significantly higher than others disciplines.

Methodology

The population of the study was the enrolled LIS post-graduates students which are engaged in their thesis writing from four universities (two public and two private) of the Punjab province of Pakistan which are offering post-graduates (M.Phil and PhD) degrees in the field of LIS. A quantitative research approach was opted by following the survey techniques. For obtaining reliable target population the researcher contacted to heads of departments, and obtained lists of enrolled students who are also engaged in thesis work. Finally, the questionnaire was sent to all the listed students through emails. There were 98 students in total including M.Phil and PhD, from 72 were enrolled n M.Phil and 26 were enrolled in PhD. For checking the reliability of instrument a pilot testing and Cronbach's alpha test was performed to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The value of Cronbach was 0.91 which is considered as reliable. After waiting a reasonable time received 71 (72 %) with responses. The analysis is based on the 72 percent of the responses.

Data analysis and findings

Following sections show the results of data analysis, discussion and major finding in form of conclusion of the study. The demographic information includes the information about gender, program, age, sector who participated in this study. There were 50 (70%) males and 21 (30%) females who responded the questionnaire.

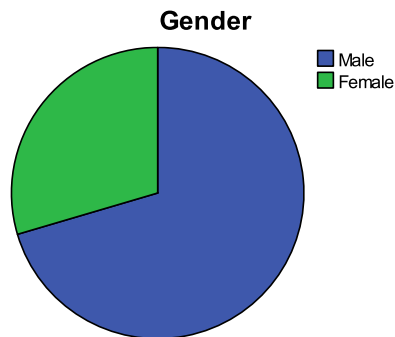


Figure 1 Gender Distribution

Table reveals the frequency and percentages of participants' characteristics that 52 (73%) students were enrolled in M. Phil degree while 19 (27%) students were in enrolled PhD. The result shows that the participation of 39 (55%) students was associated with the Private sector and 32 (45%) students from Public sector universities. According to collected data, the outcome provides the details of respondents that were significantly participated in the research 23 (32%) postgraduate students from University of Punjab, subsequently 22 (31%) students from Superior, 18 (26%) students from Minhaj and 8 (11%) students from IUB. The collected data also described about study-based distribution by age group 30 (42%) respondents was less than 30 years while 26 (37%) respondents between 31-35 years and 15 (21%) respondents were greater than 36 years.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Levels	f	%
Program	MPhil	52	73
	PhD	19	27
Sector	Public	32	45

	Private	39	55
Age (years)	<30	30	42
	31-35	26	37
	>36	15	21
University	Punjab	23	32
	Superior	22	31
	Islamia	8	11
	Minhaj	18	26

Note: f=frequency, %=percentage

Purposes of doing post-graduation

The figure 1 represents that there are 45 (63%) respondents who possess the aim of the postgraduate study as “to get better employment” while 16 (23%) respondents responded that their intention of doing post-graduation if for “upgrade their qualification”, and only 6 (8%) respondents replied their intent of doing M.Phil/ PhD “to gain knowledge”. A few 4 (6%) respondents said that they adopt it as for their personal satisfaction.

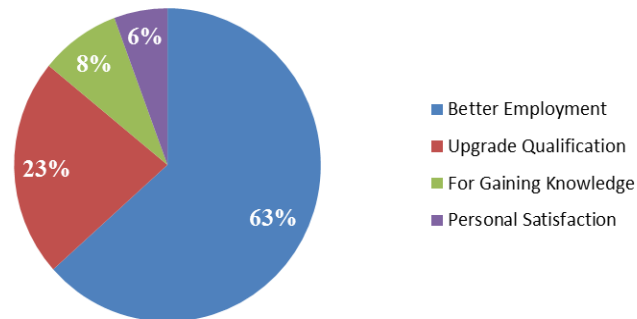


Figure 2 Aims and Interests for Postgraduate Study

Hurdles faced by LIS students in dissertations writing

There were many types of hurdles which were asked from the respondents an they responded them. The researcher made categories of the hurdles for the better understanding and in the following passages these hurdles are presented category wise.

Challenges related to supervisor

There were large majority 80 % respondents who disagreed that “there was a conflict between their supervisors on selecting or approving the topic” for thesis. Large number of participants 66 % cumulatively agreed that the “supervisor has less time to assist them in thesis writing” while 27 disagreed with it. There were 53 % respondents who cumulatively agreed that “their supervisor or seminar body delayed to modify their topic” while 36 % disagreed completely. The majority of responses of respondents 57% were disagreed with that “bitter politics among supervisor during proposal and seminar disturbed me” while 37 cumulatively agreed with it. A majority of participants 76% opinioned that there was “lack of communication between supervisors and me” which causes the delay in thesis writing process while 14 % cumulatively disagreed. Majority of participants 80 % indicated that “there was no gender discrimination as an obstacle in accomplishment of thesis writing” from supervisor while cumulatively agreed 10 % disagrees with it. Following table 2 shows the reduced data representation.

Table 2

Challenges related to supervisor

	Statements	SDA %	DA %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
1	There was a contradiction between my supervisors and me before selecting /approving the topic.	39	41	12	7	1	1.90	0.96
2	Supervisor has less time to assist me in the thesis writing.	31	35	7	21	6	2.35	1.28
3	My supervisor or seminar committee delayed in modifications of my topic.	28	25	10	28	8	2.63	1.38
4	Bitter politics among supervisors during proposal/seminar frustrated me.	34	23	7	24	13	2.59	1.48
5	Lack of communication between supervisor and me delayed the thesis writing process.	32	44	10	13	1	2.07	1.03
6	Gender discrimination from supervisor is	49	31	10	7	3	1.83	1.06

the cause of hinder to accomplishment of thesis writing							
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SDA=Strongly Disagree, DA=Disagree, N= Neutral, A =Agree, SA= Strongly Agree

Challenges related to topic selection

Challenges that are faced during the topic selection are depicted. A majority of respondents 73% were agreed that “They faced difficulty to select a research topic” while 23 % disagreed with it. The 31 % respondents agreed that “They feel problem to recognize and administer the connection of thoughts with topic” while 59 % respondents completely disagreed with it. There were 29 % respondents who agreed that their “Approved topic is complex” while 55 % respondents cumulatively disagreed with it. The 35 % respondents agreed that “Approved topic has inadequate literature” while 53 % respondents completely disagreed with it. There were 32 % respondents who agreed that their “Unable to develop interest in approved topic” while 57% respondents cumulatively disagreed with it.

Table 3

Challenges related to Topic Selection

	Statements	SDA %	DA %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
1	Difficulty to select a research topic for thesis writing.	7	16	4	52	21	3.65	1.18
2	Having problems/issues to understand and manage with the relationship of concepts in the topic approved for me.	21	38	10	24	7	2.58	1.26
3	Approved Topic is complex.	18	37	16	25	4	2.61	1.18
4	Approved topic has inadequate literature.	21	32	11	28	7	2.68	1.28
5	Unable to develop interest in the topic that my supervisor(s) approved for me.	25	32	10	24	8	2.58	1.33

Challenges associated with library & ICT skills

The table 4 shows that there were 19 % participants who cumulatively agreed that “They have no library card or password to access the library” while 74 disagreed with it. The 9 % respondents agreed that “I am not computer literate to access digital libraries” while 90 % disagreed with it. There were 11 % participants who cumulatively agreed that “Lack of knowledge about tools and techniques for literature searching” while 77 disagreed with it. The 25 % respondents agreed that “Use of citation management software i.e. Endnote or Mandalay or others is not easy for citation/reference” while 64 % opposed it with disagreement. There were 52 % participants who cumulatively agreed that “difficulty to use data Analysis software or tools i.e. SPSS or NVIVO” while 34 disagreed with it.

Table 4

Challenges associated with library & ICT skills

	Statements	SDA %	DA %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
1	I have no university library card or password to access digital library.	42	32	7	14	5	2.12	1.15
2	I am not computer literate to access digital libraries	56	34	1	6	3	1.63	.89
3	Lack of knowledge about tools and techniques for literature searching.	37	44	8	11	0	2.07	.98
4	Use of citation management software i.e. Endnote or Mandalay or others is not easy for citation/reference.	34	30	11	24	1	2.49	1.22
5	Having difficulty to use data Analysis software or tools i.e. SPSS or NVIVO for data input and interpretation.	6	28	14	44	8	3.25	1.09

Challenges related to student and institutional requirement

The Table 5 represents the Challenges which were asked related to student and institutional requirement the responses are as follows. There were 72 % respondents who were cumulatively agreed that “Nature of job or tight schedule of my work place tied me down” while 18 % opposed with this statement. There were 55 % respondents who were agreed that “Domestic and family responsibilities are hurdles” for thesis writing while 27 % opposed with it. There were 40 % respondents who were agreed that “High-priced cost of obtaining research materials” is a hurdle in the way of thesis writing while 48 % disagreed with this statement. There were 39 % respondents who were agreed that “English language is an obstacle” for thesis writing and 46 % disagreed with it. There was less number of respondents who accumulatively 18 % respondents agreed that “Insufficient academic staff” is a hurdle for them in thesis writing while majority of respondents 63 % disagreed with this statement. There were 35 % respondents who were cumulatively agreed that “Lack of research atmosphere in the institution / University” is an obstacle in their thesis writing while 52 % disagreed. There were 63 % respondents who were cumulatively agreed that “Lack of critical thinking” is a hurdle for them in their thesis writing while 25 % disagreed with this season.

Table 5

Challenges related to student and institutional Requirement

	Statements	SDA %	DA %	N %	A %	SA %	M	SD
1	Nature of job or tight schedule in my place of work tied me down.	3	15	10	45	27	3.77	1.10
2	Domestic or family responsibilities held me down.	3	24	18	41	14	3.39	1.09
3	High-priced cost of obtaining research materials	14	34	11	32	8	2.87	1.25
4	Difficulty in English language is an obstacle.	11	35	14	35	4	2.86	1.15

5	Insufficient Academic Staff	18	45	18	14	4	2.41	1.08
6	Lack of research atmosphere in the institution / University	27	25	13	25	10	2.66	1.37
7	Lack of critical thinking	7	18	11	49	14	3.45	1.16

Difference in opinion

To examine the difference in opinion regarding hurdles faced by male and female LIS post-graduate students, a new variable named “Major Hurdles” was transformed using compute variable option through SPSS in which six major hurdles were integrated and then *independent t-test* was performed. The results of the test indicated as p value is .938 ($p > .05 = .398$) so there is no significant difference in the opinions of male and female students regarding hurdles faced by them.

Group Statistics

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MajorHurdles	Male	50	3.5400	.73540	.10400
	Female	21	3.3905	.49990	.10909

Independent t-test was performed to examine the difference in opinions on the basis of M.Phil and PhD programmes and the results shows that as p -value is .435 ($p > .05$) so, there is no significance difference regarding hurdles faced at M.Phil or PhD levels.

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
MajorHurdles Equal variances assumed	4.561	.036	.851	69	.398	.14952	.17569	-.20097	.50002
Equal variances not assumed			.992	54.502	.326	.14952	.15072	-.15259	.45164

Discussion

Descriptive and inferential results indicate that LIS M.Phil and PhD students are facing some hurdles in the way of their thesis writing and timely completion. Category wise various types of hurdles were asked from the respondents but a few of these hurdles are confirmed by the respondents as hurdles which are being faced by them during thesis writing process. Selection of topic for thesis is the main problem face by LIS students. The results of this are inline and supportive to some of the previous studies like Sulehri, Najmi and Chaudhry (2017), Teowkul (2009), Golde and Dore (2001), Hofman and Berg (2000). This study indicates the Pakistani context which would be helpful for the concerned personalities for the betterment of research as well as the problems can be defeated with mutual cooperation of students, supervisors and the institutions. This will lead towards the quality and timely produced thesis of LIS students.

Conclusion

It is noticed that a significant majority of LIS students are doing their post-graduate degrees (M.Phil & PhD) for sake of promotions in their ranks and to get better employment opportunities in the profession. While they are facing six types of major

hurdles regarding thesis writing which are 1- to select a research topic for thesis writing (*M 3.65*); 2- Using data analysis software like SPSS and Nvivo (*M 3.25*); tight schedule or nature of jobs (*M 3.39*); domestic or family responsibilities (*M 3.39*) and lack of critical thinking (*M 3.45*). Further, statistical test pointed out that there is no significant difference in facing hurdles gender wise or degree wise (M.Phil & PhD).

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