

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

FACTORS AFFECTING TO CONDUCT RESEARCH BY UNDERGRADUATES. A STUDY RELATED TO UNIVERSITY OF SRI JAYEWARDENEPURA, SRI LANKA

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Abstract

The current study investigates the factors affecting to the research interest of undergraduates in Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce (FMSC) Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) of University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka (USJ). The main objective of the present study is to identify the factors affecting to conduct research by undergraduates in FMSC and FHSS in University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the secondary objective is to identify the problems faced by them when conducting researches. This study has been adopted qualitative research strategy and stratified random sampling method is used to select students from each department. Accordingly, 134 students were selected randomly and primary data were collected using a structured open-ended questionnaire. Gathered data has been analyzed qualitatively. The findings of this study revealed that the factors affecting to conduct research by undergraduates were self-confidence, access to data, proficiency in English, ability to manage the time and the availability of resources. As per the secondary objective, the problems face by the undergraduates when conducting researches were lack of proper knowledge to analyze the data, poor guidance of supervisors and the problems related to the time, money and access to accurate data.

Keywords: Research, undergraduates

1. Introduction

Research can be regarded as a medicine for building knowledge while providing nourishment and exercise for the human mind. Research is "creative and systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge". The data is collected, organized and analyzed to expand the understanding of a topic or problem. An extension of earlier work in the topic may constitute a research study. Undergraduates have been given the opportunity of enhancing their reading, writing, analyzing, and sharing valuable information by engaging a research study in the university. Majority of the state universities in Sri Lanka have made it compulsory for all students conducting the research as a requirement of partial completion of their degree programs considering the benefits gain by a student by conducting a research throughout their lifetime.

Problem Justification

Although conducting researches has an immense importance to both individuals and to the society as a whole, it is witnessed that, the rate of doing researches is very low by the undergraduates in Sri Lankan universities compared to the other countries in the world. To confirm the existence of the problem it was conducted a pilot survey within the randomly selected Universities in Sri Lanka representing the undergraduates regardless of the faculties which they are representing. The number of undergraduates contributed to the pilot study was 56. As per the pilot study it was evidenced that only 12.5% of the undergraduates are interested in conducting a research when the research component is allowed as an elective subject. In that context, the current study has been conducted as a case study to investigate the factors affecting to the research interest of undergraduates in Faculty of Management studies and Commerce (FMSC) Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) of University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka (USJ).

The main objective of the present study is to identify the factors affecting to conduct research by undergraduates in FMSC and FHSS in University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the secondary objective is to identify the problems faced by them when conducting a research. This study will contribute to direct and motivate undergraduates to conduct researches by identifying and addressing the issues which are being faced by undergraduates.

2. Literature review

Undergraduate Research

According to Andresen, (2000), a research is the process of arriving at dependable solutions for problems through planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. As Thiry et al. (2011) described, the undergraduate research experience may be the epitome of engaged learning. Undergraduate research is the exploration of a specific topic within a field by an undergraduate student that makes an original contribution to the discipline.

Factors affecting to conduct research by undergraduates

In terms of choices, there was generally very close agreement between the factors that students rated as highly important and those that the staff expected to be influencing students. This is in line with work by Dohn & Wagner (1999), which demonstrated agreement between staff and student expectations of teaching in the context of lectures and seminars, and indicated that academic staff do generally know their student body quite well. However, there were some aspects where there were statistically significant differences. These results support findings in other areas, for example, Gabb, (1981) who demonstrated differences between staff and students in a department of education concerning their perceptions about assessment, and Dickie & Kato, (1996), who found differences between staff and students' perceptions of learning tasks in physics. Hollingsworth et al. (2004) found several differences between staff and students in different aspects of project work in similar subject areas to those in the current case study. Interest in the subject was the most important factor in choice, as has been demonstrated elsewhere in a variety of subjects (Lightbody et al., 1997).

Issues faced by undergraduates when conducting researches

As per the empirical findings there is evidence of considerable interest in the development of research techniques which seem to be peculiar to the field of English (Heylings & Tariq, 2001). As

stated by Finn & Crook. (2003) proficiency in English has an enormous impact on second language programs in academic context, in which now it is widely accepted that reading ability in English is of vital importance in academic and professional success.

Most of the undergraduates have less interest on conducting researches as it is a growing activity absorbing significant amount of time, money and effort (Elliott & Shin, 2002). Cultural differences, unrealistic expectations, organizational constraints and ongoing ethical and data sharing violations and many demographic variables such as age, gender and family background can be barriers to conduct a research (Thiry et al., 2011).

3. Methodology

This study has been adopted qualitative research strategy and stratified random sampling method is used to select undergraduates from each faculty. Accordingly, 134 students were selected randomly representing all the departments at FMSC and FHSS, University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Primary data for the study were collected using a structured open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed after carefully reviewing the related literature. The questionnaire was disseminated and responses were gathered physically. 13 interviews were also conducted for the purpose of gathering more data for the study. Secondary data were gathered from journals, records from the departments of FMSC and FHSS, internet and empirical researches. Gathered data has been analyzed descriptively following content analysis.

4. Results/Analysis and Discussion

This study was conducted to identify the factors affecting to conduct a research by undergraduates in Faculty of Management studies and Commerce (FMSC) Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) of University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka (USJ). Self-confidence and proficiency in English language were identified as the most influencing factors for conducting a research by undergraduates.

Self-confidence will be important not only for conducting research, but for the success of any endeavors. Therefore, to take the decision of conducting a research undergraduates should have self-confidence. By organizing training sessions and motivation programs the university can enhance the self-confidence among the university students.

According to the respondents' view, another important factor which affect to conduct research is proficiency in English. The students have an average knowledge in English seem struggling and hesitate to take the risk of start a research as they have to take much effort on reading and understanding research papers and also writing the research report.

Majority of the respondents stated that they have problems in incurring cost of conducting research. Although some students have the interest on conducting a research and English language proficiency, they have to step back with the cost constraints. Moreover, some students were unable to manage their time to conduct research with their busy academic schedules.

43% respondents were suffered because of the poor supervision. Some highly performing students have fail to complete their research because of the absence of a proper guidance on research. Therefore, the assigned research supervisors by the university should sacrifice additional time for the betterment of the students and supervisors should be responsible for the quality of the research work of the undergraduates.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study revealed that the factors affecting to conduct research by undergraduates were self-confidence, access to data, proficiency in English, ability to manage the time and the availability of resources. As per the secondary objective, the problems face by the undergraduates

when conducting researches were lack of proper knowledge to analyse the data, poor guidance of supervisors and the problems related to the time, money and access to accurate information. Moreover, respondents suggested to make available financial assistance to the students who conduct researches with the help of the government, continuous guidance of the supervisors, academic writing and research workshops with the intention of enhancing the knowledge on research and minimize the language barriers, training programs, motivation and counselling sessions to improve self-confidence may help for the undergraduates to be succeed in conducting research.

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