Problems faced by the University Research Scholars during COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19's explosion has posed a serious danger to global economic activity, and it has made life particularly tough for research institutes. The global spread of corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is continuing to have a significant impact, making it difficult to strike a balance between personal safety and work responsibilities. Most research scientists have had to deal with a variety of unforeseen challenges. This is primarily due to a lack of tools and challenges connected to managing personal security and family obligations during this time. The objective of this research paper was to find out the problems faced by the university researchers during COVID-19 pandemic. The study was qualitative in nature. Social sciences and pure sciences faculties were part of the sample. An interview was scheduled with M.Phil & Ph.D students from the city of Faisalabad for data collection purposes. Simple random sampling was employed. Results of the study shows that there were numerous problems such as data collection, research tools, access to the labs, internet resources, residence in hostels as well as transportation issues that the university researchers face in their research work during COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is the greatest epidemic of the new millennium, and it is known as the "public enemy No. 1." In the blink of an eye, this disaster has altered our way of life. Not only has it put our lives and health in jeopardy, but the harm it has caused might also have an impact on our economic, social, and educational institutions. The first case was discovered in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, and was caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus (SARS-CoV-2). The illness spread so quickly that on January 30, 2020, COVID-19 has been declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the WHO (Viner et al., 2020).

To stop the sickness from spreading, China and many other nations enforced lockdown either countrywide or in areas where the infection was particularly severe. Educational institutions, banking institutions, commercial activity centers, and amusement parks have all been forced to close indefinitely (Viner et al, 2020: Atique et al., 2020). More than 300 million pupils are expected to be affected by COVID-19, April 2020 globally (McCarthy, 2020). Many schools and universities have closed or switched to distance learning throughout the world. To ensure uninterrupted teaching, universities and institutions were shuttered and switched to virtual classrooms. Students were required to complete their studies from their home.

COVID-19 has had such a significant influence on research that most ongoing operations, such as long-term laboratory trials, have been significantly impacted. Due to COVID-19, supplies and equipment purchase may be postponed or terminated. COVID-19 has, in general, led in a slew of unproductive and unsustainable research initiatives. During pandemic university researchers face many problems in their research work. University researchers have no proper access to research equipment, research laboratories, respondents as well as internet protocols. Therefore, the present

study will explore the most emerging problems of university researchers. A wide range of researchers, students, and academics have been affected by the COVID-19 epidemic. Research and training have been hampered because higher education institutions have restricted in-person activities. As a result, many graduate students have encountered new challenges.

Graduate school is a lengthy procedure that includes both classroom instruction and thesis writing. PhD students see their education as a taxing and difficult experience (Anttilla, Lindblom-Ylanne, Lonka & Pyhalto, 2015). Students must usually study for and complete a course before proceeding (Akyurek & Afacan, 2018). As a result, the current research attempts to identify the major difficulties faced by graduate students enrolled in higher education. The goal of this research is to identify the challenges that graduate students face during their studies. These include any conceptual difficulties that students may face over the course of the procedure (Gordon, 2009),intrusive supervisors (Alam, 2013; Styles & Radloff, 2001), personal relationships, family responsibilities, financial issues, work and health problems, participants who do not want to give up their current forms of education, difficulties in obtaining legal permissions, difficulties in obtaining legal permissions (Appel & Dahlgren, 2003; Wright, 2003). These may differ from one student to the next (Yazgan, 2015).

Objective of the study were to:

1. Identify the problems face by the university researchers during COVID-19

2. Find out the effects of researchers problems on their research output.

3. Determine the possible solutions to overcome the problems of future researchers.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Qualitative research approach was used for this study. The study was descriptive in nature and a structured interview was employed in order to identify the problems face by the university researchers during COVID-19. All the public university students of M.phil and Ph.D programs who enrolled in social sciences and pure sciences faculties in City Faisalabad were included in the population. Researchers selected the 80 students from university of Agriculture Faisalabad. Social sciences and pure sciences faculties were selected for sample. M.Phil and Ph.D programs were nominated for data collection purpose. 40 students of M.Phil and 40 students in Ph.D program were selected for interview. Simple random sampling technique was employed for data collection purposes. A structured interview schedule for students was developed.

After reviewing the related literature, researchers developed an interview schedule for students under supervision of the research expert. All the questions of the interview were closely related with objectives of the study. Researchers conducted the interviews personally, telephonically and via zoom meeting with students.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the results and analysis of the data collected for the present research. The analysis has been presented question wise.

Q#1: Prior to the pandemic, what are your prospects regarding your research work?

Most of the university researchers respond that, prior to the pandemic they have planned their work systematically and they are fully energized for performing their research work. They got time

schedule for meetings from their supervisor for research work. They set their minds for regular work. They start thinking about how, when and from where they will start their work. Prior to the pandemic, university researchers think that, research will be proved a fruitful activity for them. They will interact with different peoples and get their view points on their research problem. They will perform experimentation with in a systematic manner and they enjoy the different perspectives of research.

Q# 2: Did the unexpected outbreak of pandemic effect on your research work? How much

During COVID-19, researchers respond that, their pre-planning and work schedule for research work totally gone opposite according to their thinking. Researchers stated that they were psychologically disturbed. They were unable to manage their time frame work of research.

Researchers from pure sciences respond that their experimentation needs treatments for a specific time period. They have no proper lab access for long experiments. They were assigned research work in pairs but due to the pandemic pair of researchers meet hardly in university for doing their work with collaboration. The burden of all work is sometimes put on one researcher. Quality of work also affected due to the unexpected outbreak. Researchers stated that there were some learning gaps in their work due to the unexpected outbreak.

Q#3: What kind of problems do you face in your research work during COVID-19?

University researchers face many problems in their research work during COVID-19 such as one of the most challenging problem for the researchers is to collection of data from the respondents. University researchers respond that they feel hopeless at the time of data collection procedure because respondents not respond them appropriately. Researchers uses both ways for data

collection (Manual, electronically). Many respondents not respond them on electronic tool; in this situation researchers approach them physically. For collecting data physically, researchers have to travel in other areas. Travelling was also a major problem of university researchers because there was no transport available during COVID-19. Travelling consume their precious time. On the other hand, the researchers who belong from far flung areas face the residence problem in hostel because they were not allowed to stay in hostels. They use private hostels for living. It increased the researcher's expenses and effect on their budget.

Q#4: How much your research expectation comes true during COVID-19?

Researchers respond that, little bit their expectations comes true. The time period they passed in research work very awful for them. They worked only for completion of the task. Their planning totally disturbed. Learning gaps not covered due to the extreme SOPs.

Q#5: How much your supervisor supports you & shows his/her responsibility towards your research work during COVID-19?

University researchers showed positive response toward their supervisors. They indicated that, they have full support from their supervisors. Their supervisors provide them time to time feedback on regular basis. Their supervisors took special permission for their students for lab experimentation from higher management in once a month. Supervisors call their students in small groups and different shifts by following the SOPs. On the other hand the students from social sciences respond that their supervisors conduct their online meetings via zoom application. Their supervisors guide them through recorded video clips and YouTube links.

Q#6: How you conduct your research practical/field work during COVID-19? eg. access on gadgets, internet, respondents, Labs for practical work and paid websites for your research work.

Researchers stated that they have no proper access on paid websites and internet protocols at their homes; they were unable to justify their research problem with relevant literature. Researchers from pure sciences respond that they have no proper infrastructure at their home for experiment. Sometimes they need some chemicals or other needed apparatus from other cities. They were not received their experiment tools delivery on time and they get late in their work. Researchers respond that they have no access on library books. They were unable to consult their research problem with their seniors, class fellows and other experts due to the social distancing issues and other COVID-19 SOPs.

Q#7: During COVID-19 as a researcher, what type of difficulties you feel in your research work without any departmental training, seminar and workshop?

University researchers from social sciences responded that they feel difficulty on many steps of their research work. Specially in writing thesis they have no training and practice on how to write the different chapters of the thesis? How they can analyze the numerical data? They have no idea about thesis format; they need a training session for thesis format. They need training for writing citations and bibliography. Moreover, researchers from pure sciences also reported that, they need training about how to use the different lab tools for multiple purposes.

Q#8: According to you, how we can overcome these problems? Give Suggestion?

University researchers suggest that, futuristic students should have IT expertise. Universities should allow the research students for residence in hostels therefore researcher's feels security and mentally satisfaction. In future flexible Time frame should be designed and followed for research work. One supervisor should be allowed maximum 5 students for supervision at a time in M.Phil and 2 students for Ph.D. Therefore supervisor can provide maximum time to each student for guideline. Laboratory access should be open for all students by following the SOPs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Above results of the study shows that university researchers faced many problems in their research work during COVID-19 such as data collection issues, travelling, hostel residence, access on science lab, internet protocol, paid websites, lack of departmental trainings, and shortage of research instruments, less knowledge of ICT tools as well no expertise in academic writing skills. These problems badly affect their research performance and research experience. However, there are several solutions for dealing with these issues in the future. Finally, it was discovered that the participants encountered a variety of issues when conducting scientific research as graduate students, but that they acquired experience in the process and that this experience will lead them in the future. In light of these findings, it is reasonable to conclude that the difficulties encountered by university researchers during the scientific research process aided in the development of their research talents. The COVID-19 epidemic has been by far the most significant issue that education and research has faced this century. The pure and social sciences research aspects of research have both been significantly impacted. To address the knowledge gaps about the impacts of COVID-19 on university academics, a variety of techniques have been used.

The following suggestions have been made: (1) university researchers should develop good relationships with their potential subjects or responders; (2) time management should be incorporated in the discussion of the subject so that students are more aware of the importance of time management and can better build routines and set objectives, (3) The subject Research Method should be offered in all semesters rather than one semester to give student-researchers reasonable time to complete the required research output with high quality; (4) supervisors should be assigned a minimum number of students; (5) open access to labs should be allowed to students for experimentation. It would be helpful for university supervisors to be trained on how to prepare future researchers with the essential research capabilities. As a result of this research, it is possible to guarantee that academics are aware of potential difficulties that graduate students may experience before they arise. Those interested in pursuing postgraduate study should be aware of the challenges they may face.

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