

Exploration of Different Perspectives on Research By Research Aspirants: A Pilot Study among Research Aspirants of Social Sciences

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Abstract: The paper reports a pilot study that explores the different perspectives on research in the context of Indian public universities and suggests some measures to intervene into the research aspirants. The study relies on data collected through semi structured interview from a small group of research scholars serving in various public universities- available here in Kerala. Thematically coded qualitative data were analyzed quantitatively. In addition to reporting the major findings, the paper is drawing a background plan for an intervention into researchers. The finding and suggestions derived from this study may open new avenue for understanding and the phenomenon of research in the local context.

Keywords: perspectives, intervention, research scholars, public universities, research aspirants.

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities are knowledge based organizations whose functions are largely confined to teaching and research. They are designed to operate to discover and disseminate knowledge by possessing significant and relevant expertise in all disciplines. India has a very vast structure of education and its higher education sector is now highly advanced, compared to its neighbouring countries. "Social sciences deal systematically with the behaviour, status, relationships among people; with the social institutions created and operated by them; and with the social and physical environment in which they function and relate to each other. Social institutions are not simple organisations devoid of their good and bad elements; they all are embodiments of the kind of power structures existing within society. The information made available from the social inquiry could be a powerful tool for further entrenching those in powers as well as for unseating them in favour of others; for increasing exploitation and oppression as well as for getting rid of them. Thus, the use of the findings of social research could have far-reaching consequences for the autonomy, wellbeing and privacy of the individual as well as communities and the society. Indeed, the purpose for which the research is undertaken, the way research is conducted and the manner in which its findings are used; all have a direct relationship, involvement or impact on human beings, and that makes social research the most contested terrain in the research enterprise. Added to that is the fact that the researcher comes from the same society, and despite using seemingly objective methodologies and tools for research, his/her views have great bearing on the what, why and how of the research" (Jesani, 2007). The present study grew out of investigator's personal experiences in research and especially the different perspectives and viewpoints on research by research aspirants in the Indian context.

"There are various reasons for students' failure to complete their doctoral degree. The finding from the literature on students difficulties, indicate one of the main cause, is the lack of preparation in knowledge and skills to conduct research. This often is not the case even though institutions offer various training facilities to equip the students. Libraries offer courses on seeking information, computing centres also provide training on data analysis and supervisors or advisors do provide but may not be sufficient for guidance and training on research. It is necessary to diagnose students' lack of preparation in research so that they will have a smooth path in postgraduate education" (Halim, L, 2010) .Thus, this study was carried out to explore scholars' different perspective for conducting research.

But, Universities have long abandoned the accent on research and have become mere teaching centres. Research aspirants are not properly addressed in the selection process for higher education. An orientation toward research is also lacking in graduation syllabi. Their curriculum is neither research-oriented nor updated. Careful analysis of the situation is necessary for the elucidation of this trend and finding effective strategies for strengthening the quality of Research. In this context, the present study attempts to explore the abilities and skills for doing research and make an attempt to identify research skills, to be used among the upcoming research scholar as an introspective strategy. The context is planned for the research aspirants of Social Sciences.

Objectives

- To explore different perspectives on Research of research aspirants of social sciences
- To compare the perspectives on research of research aspirants with supervising guides

2. METHOD

The study adopted an explorative pattern through descriptive and observation method with some attempt to intervene into Research Culture. For that the investigators used methods like Passive and participant observations of research methodology workshops and seminars, semi structured interviews and focus group discussions with research guides. A Total of 100 Participants were included in the study which consists of research scholars, M.Phil scholars, Project fellows, research guides, final semester Post Graduate students and Students who are decided to do research. Purposive sampling method was used for the participants' selection. For further clarification a few experts in the subject were interviewed and necessary suggestion and advices were collected. Data was collected by assuring confidentiality. The data collected were descriptive in nature, so major themes of the content were derived and percentage analyses were done.

3. IMPRESSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data collected were immersed in the huge information emerged from the discussions and interview. Main focus was given to the different perceptions of research aspirants related to their research field. The study revealed that research scholars possess different perception, which indicates the demand for in-depth study into research process. The thematically coded responses were analysed and discussed with plotted diagrams.

A. Meaning of research

The investigator interviewed and discussed with research aspirants by enquiring about the meaning of research. Different kinds of responses were identified and analyzed. The identified themes were explained in diagram below.

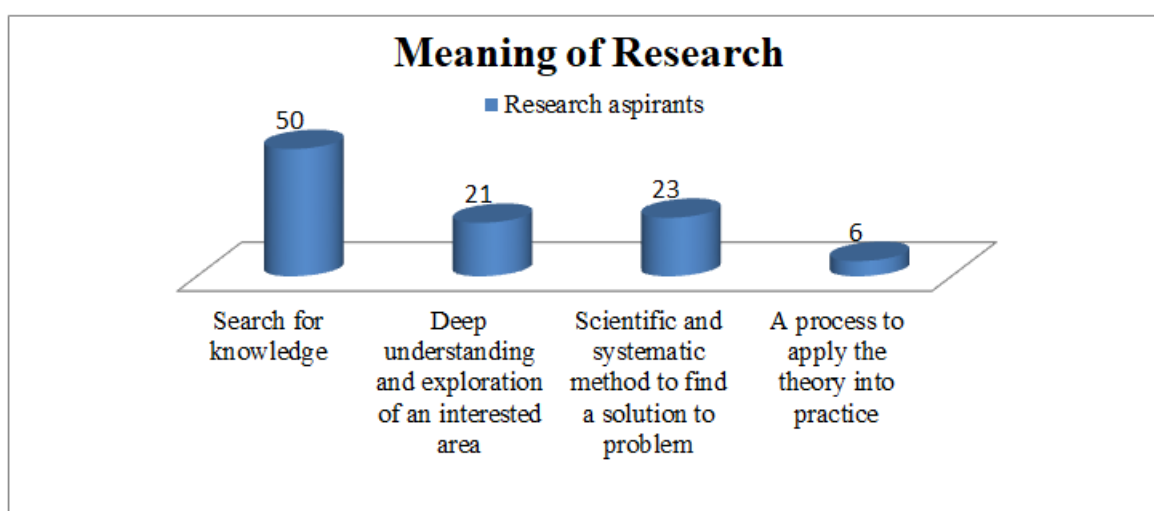


Figure 1. Indicates the response categories of meaning of research by Research Scholars

In the enquiry for the meaning of research, 50% of research aspirants responded that research is search for knowledge. It was with an expectation of deriving new information which did not exist till then. They also reported that, it can be something related to the past information. While, another 23% consider research as scientific and systematic method to

find a solution to problem. For 6% researchers it is a process to apply the theory into practice and for 21% research is deep understanding and exploration of an interested area. In all there a quest for knowledge was highlighted. The background psychological factor was curiosity and it's a movement toward the new finding. A dynamic nature of research was projected in all the different aspects of meaning.

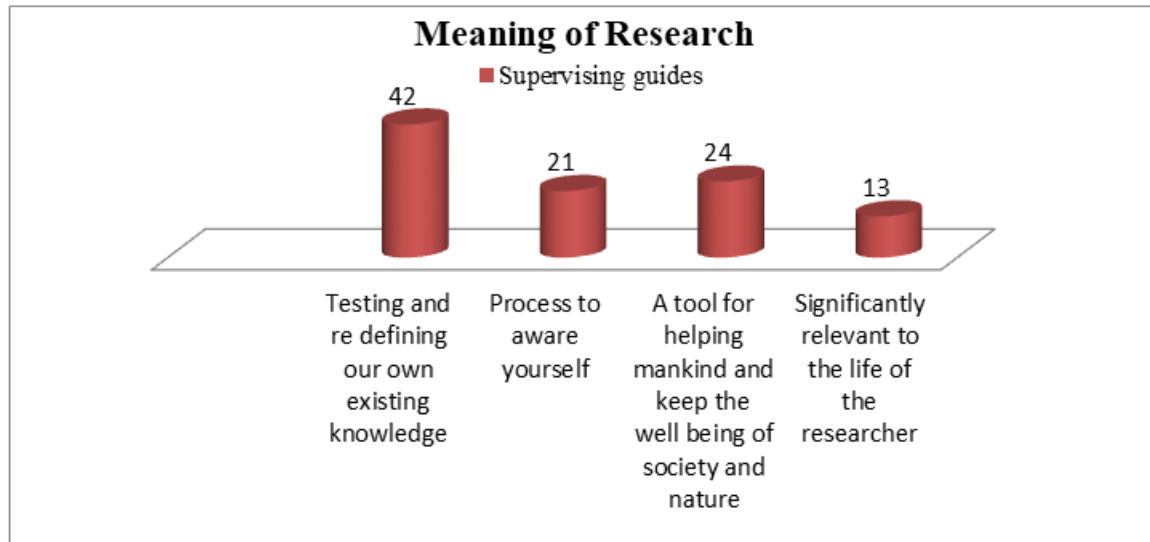


Figure 2. Indicates the response categories of meaning of research by supervising guides

When discussed with the research guides 42% were of the opinion that research is testing and re defining our own existing knowledge and for 21% as a process to aware yourself. Here also something that contributes to one self in its process was expected. The process of learning that creates a change in the researcher was for seen here. 24% guides consider research as tool for helping mankind and to keep the wellbeing of society and nature when 13% consider it as significantly relevant to the life of a researcher. Researchers, being a member of the society in both of there, social benefits of the work were also pointed in these responses.

B. Reasons for selection of research as a career

Investigator intended to explore the reasons for selecting research as a career. This theme was closely related to the researcher's attitude and motivational attributes to do research. The responses were tabulated below.

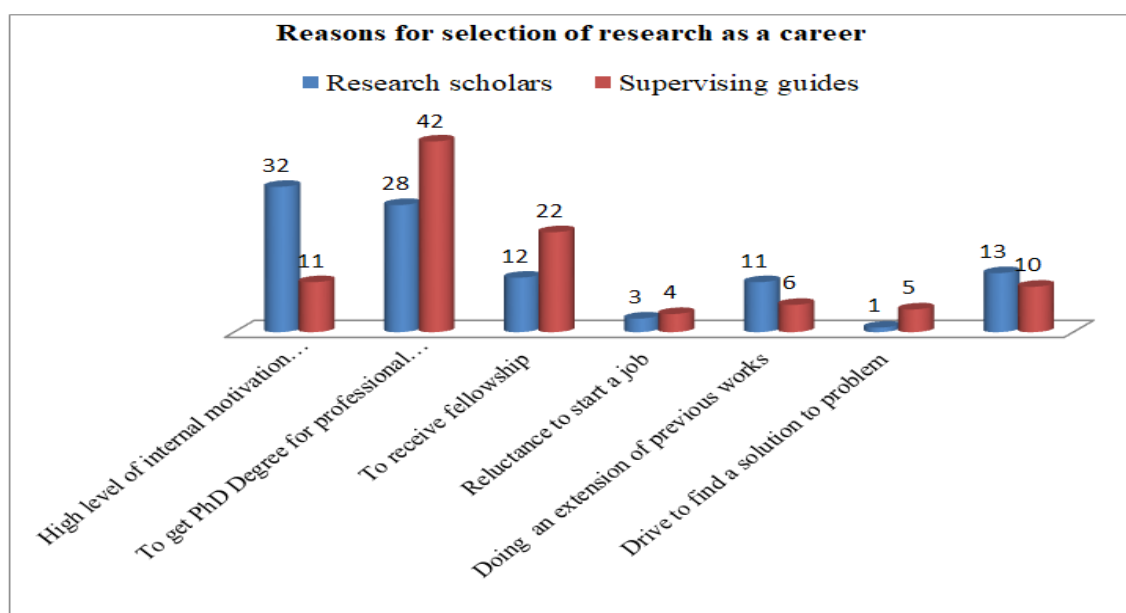


Figure 3. Response categories of reasons for selecting research as a career by research scholars and supervising guides

The reason for undertaking research as a career was the next aspect discussed. 32% research scholars and 11% research guides suggested that of high level of internal motivation and ambition to become a researcher may be the reason for taking a research career. "To get PhD Degree for professional development might be the motivation" 28% research students and 42% guides replied. 12% scholars and 22% guides think people take it for fellowships. There are few more reasons like reluctance to do a job (3% students and 4% guides), drive to find a solution to problem (1% student and 5% guides) which inspired people to the field of research. 11% research scholars and 6% guides think people come to research as an extension of their previous research works. According to 13% students and 10% guides, strong persuasion and compliance by Teachers/ friends/ spouse may be the reason.

From this observation, it is clear that, several motivational aspects are included in the process of research. Investigator identified that, attitude towards research need to be explained in detail and evaluated carefully. The genuine interest for research was not found from 100%, but rather social economics, familial and personal reasons were there. Motivation and persuasion from the teachers worked in somewhere as internal striving was also identified by still others. Beyond the positive and negative attitude towards research, several other sub domains were needed to be explored and discussed.

C. Rating as a researcher

Investigator put a chance of self-rating by research aspirants. The responses were projected for supporting evidence of multi conceptual framework of research aptitude.

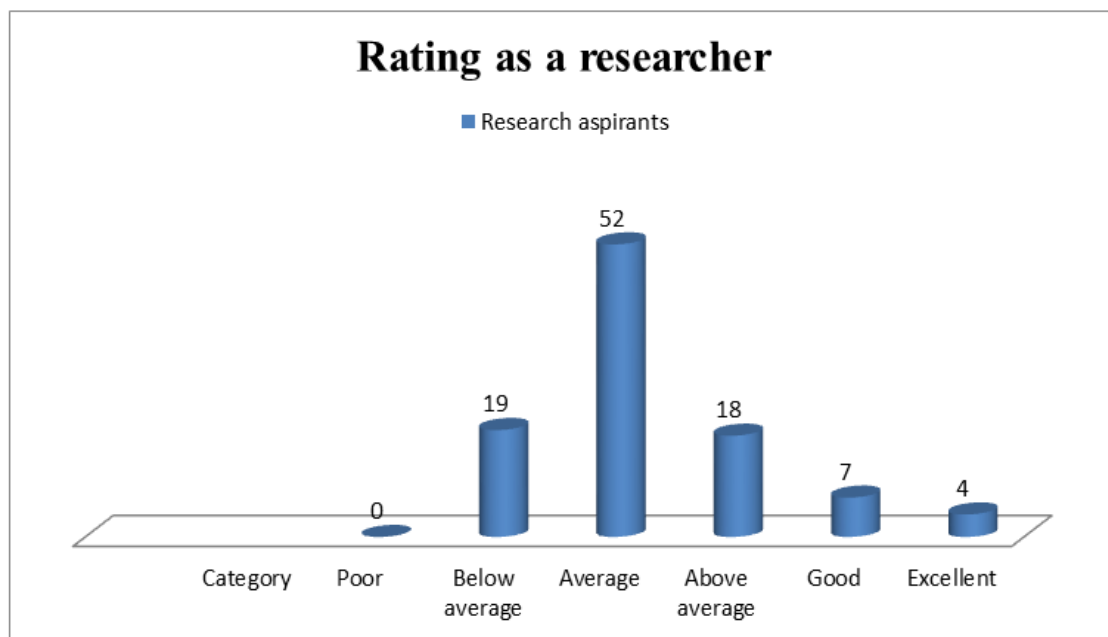


Figure 4. Response categories for rating of research aspirants as a researcher

The research aspirants were asked to rate themselves as a researcher. None of them rated them as poor. 19% rated them as below average, 52% as average, 18% as above average, 7% as good and 4% as excellent researchers. High percentage of rating in average level shows the participants' tendency into middle group. It is found to be a researchable question. Why the research scholars claimed for central tendency, this did not prefer to be answered. Moreover, most of them were not at all aware about them. Some of them, not even think as himself/herself as researcher. These responses projected the importance of self-awareness and self-management by the researchers. As they were participants who couldn't rate them above average the group was missing certain feedback about them. To derive determined behaviors and also to be purposeful in the research movement they were missing an opportunity to look into themselves and see who they are. This signifies the study relevance too.

D. Criteria for Selection of supervising guide

Investigator asked about factors that had considered for selection of research guides. Several expectations, demands, wishes were collected and major themes are discussed below.

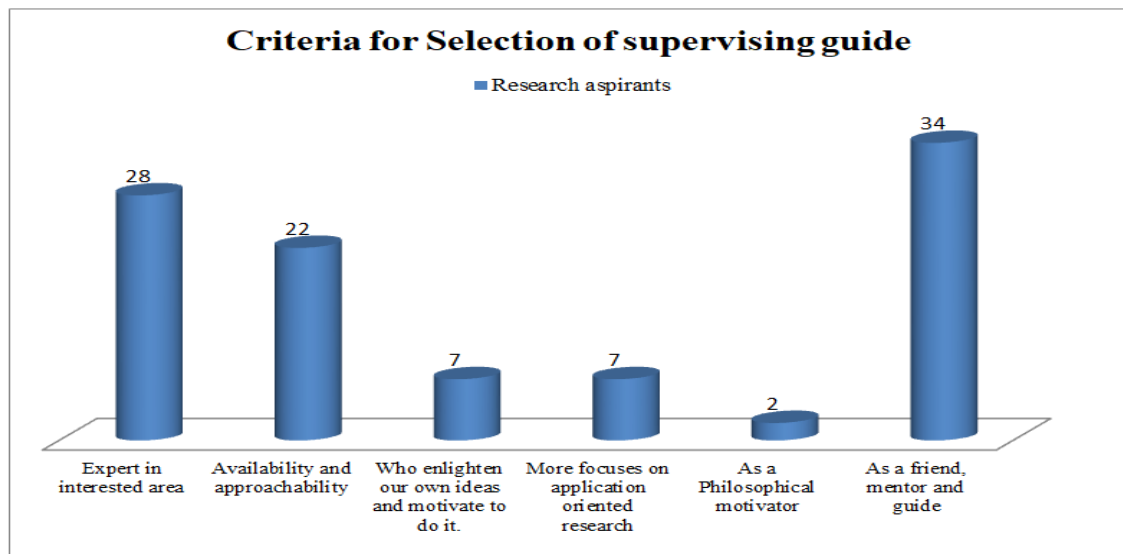


Figure 5. Response categories of research aspirants about factors related to selection of supervising guide, along with percent of response

The next task was to analyze the criteria for considering a research guide. 28% responded that a person who is expert in interested area can be considered as guide. Availability and approachability (22%), person who enlighten our own ideas and motivate to do it (7%), those who give more focus on application oriented researches (7%) were the other considerations. 2% suggest that guide should be a philosophical motivator and 34% as a friend, mentor and guide. Expertise in the concerned subject was checked out by a large percent, which individuals are their initial decision making whereas the highest percent was taking into consideration, the personal nature, warmth, support and guidance like a mentor. An affective kind of decision was formed to be dominating, here which can also negatively influence the works, unless supported accordingly with the subject expertise of the person.

These different responses proclaimed the knowledge and planning skills that need for the research. From this perspective, it could be clear that interest and personal qualities of the researcher, desire and wishes were influencing the selection of supervisor.

E. Qualities of a good researcher

This part mainly contributed to the core theme of the research aptitude conceptualization. As per the questions of investigator, several characteristics were obtained. Most of them were overlapping. Overlapped data were identified and prominent number of responses was considered for classification and categorization. With the help of experts, investigator coded the whole data and considered into important themes of research aptitude. They are clarified below in the table.



Figure 6. Response categories of research aspirants about qualities of a good researcher

The next part was the assessment of qualities need for a researcher to do research. Among research aspirants 20% considered subject knowledge, 10% considered research methodology knowledge, 25% critical thinking, 8% intellectual curiosity, 8% divergent thinking and creativity, 2% Drafting skills and presentation, 5% Application oriented thinking, 4% passion towards research. 3% Patience and 4% considered perseverance, planning and data collection skills (13%), self-awareness (8%), and accept criticism (2%) as the essential qualities.

Investigator suggested that research will tax the ability to sustain an intellectual interest in a topic through particularly interesting and different phases. Some of the attributes that needed are: competence, motivation, the ability to manage the process and the creativity to problem solve and gain insights. The research is influenced not only by the love for the topic, but also the motivation to succeed. Every researcher views and interprets the research from their own perspectives. These aspects will directly contribute to the conceptualization of perspective for doing research.

4. CONCLUSION

Scientific knowledge helps human in the development of rational thought, creative thinking, critical thinking, problem-solving skills. Science as a culture in the modern world is dreaming a knowledge-based society. For that researchers need to understand about research as thinking processes and meaningful for the experience. Thus research management must be focused on the research process and provide the opportunity for aspirants to describe it by themselves. Moreover, from the responses of research aspirant, it was clear that, the way of thinking or thinking style has a key role in explaining research perspectives. His skills, personality attributes, previous experiences, abilities, interests, values etc were equally contributed to form this perspective. So the investigator found that research perspectives conceptualization would be an integrated approach of these different characteristics.

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