



Relationship between Research Supervisor and Doctoral Students

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Abstract

Higher education in India has transformed and have taken multiple folds, with this the traditional relationship between research supervisor and doctoral students is also changing. Decades ago, this relationship was autocratic but now as time is changing it has become democratic, knowledge and experience sharing. Additionally, the supervisory style adopted by research supervisor has become lassie faire. Various studies revealed that good supervision, clear aims, collaboration, motivation, positive attitude and continual feedback determine strong relationship between both of them. Furthermore, if the relationship between either of them is not sound as a consequence the doctoral students may outsource their research work, lack in originality of the research work, get into depression and finally withdraw from their doctoral work. It would lead to irrevocable breakdown in the working relationship academically, professionally and personally. Thus, for the successful completion of Ph.D. degree both of them should share their ideas, communicate well, accept constructive criticism and give continual feedback. Thus, a cordial relationship between both of them should be maintained in order to connect, inspire and accomplish the aims and objective of a doctoral degree. The present article aims to provide an insight regarding the role, responsibilities and expectations of both the research supervisor and the doctoral students. It also highlights the consequences that would occur when there is a disturbance in this relationship.

Keywords – Higher education, Doctoral Students, Research Supervisor, Effective Supervision, Ph.D. Degree

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Introduction

The formal education that takes place after completing the secondary education is known as higher education or tertiary education. Higher education plays a pivotal role in the overall development of the nation. It aims for the holistic development of the students which includes social, economic, and political developments etc. It also helps in inculcating critical thinking, creative outlook, innovative ideas, focus on constructivism, be thoughtful, develop scientific attitude and become ethically sound. It enables the students to become self-dependent and economically sound so that their lives become more meaningful and purposeful. Thus, it helps in promoting social and human values. The key governing body of Indian higher education which the third largest in the world after USA and China (Sheikh, 2017) and University Grants Commission (UGC) make notable efforts to provide excellence and effectiveness in higher education.

In the contemporary scenario demand for higher education is increasing, more and more young and aspirant minds are aspiring for one of the most prestigious degree i.e. Ph.D. degree. According to All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE), 2018-19, the number of doctoral students were highest in State Public Universities (34.3%) followed by the Institutes of National Importance (21.6%), Deemed Universities-Private (21.6%), and State Private Universities (13.4%). At the Ph.D. level, the maximum number of doctoral students are enrolled in the Science stream followed by Engineering and Technology. At the Ph.D. level, the number of doctoral students enrolled in a regular mode was 146420 and through distance mode enrolled doctoral students were 53 only. Although the demand for a doctoral degree is high but the rate of completion of it is very low i.e. during 2018, the total number of doctoral students successfully received doctoral degree were 40,813 and among them 23,765 were males and 17,048 were females respectively. Multifarious factors play a pivotal role in creating the gap between enrolment and completion at Ph.D. level some such factors are strained relationship

between doctoral students and research supervisor, bad supervision, faulty practices adopted by both doctoral students and research supervisor, the pressure of publishing the unique, creative and authentic articles and research work, confrontation with complex research processes, etc. and these practices pose threat and as well as a challenges in wider research context (Kamler, 2008; Robins and Kanowski, 2008; Aitchison, Kamler and Lee, 2010; Starke-Meyerring, 2011 as cited in Lei and Hu 2019).

In India, higher education has transformed and taken multiple folds, so do the traditional relationships in academic has also changed. Decades ago, this relationship was an authoritative, autocratic, absolutist, and dictatorship based where the doctoral students had to follow all the desires, whims, and wishes or suggestions of the research supervisor (Torralba, 2019). But now the time has been changed with the advent of revolution of Information and Communication Technology where one can access knowledge anywhere and anytime just with a single click, the research supervisor superiority over the doctoral students is experience-based rather than access to knowledge. According to Barnes and Austin, 2009 the student's supervisor may be considered as "one of the most important person - if not the single most critical person –with whom a relationship will be established between doctoral students and research supervisor during the doctoral degree program". This changing scenario demands a healthy, positive and happy relationship between the doctoral students and the research supervisor. Various studies have revealed that good supervision, clear aims, collaboration, motivation, positive attitude and continual feedback are some of the major factors that determine the relationship between the doctoral students and the research supervisor (Tahir, Ghani, Atek, and Manaf, 2012; Heath 2002; Abiddin, Hassan and Ahmad 2009).

The studies also depicted that a disturbed relationship between doctoral students and the research supervisor has its impact on various aspects like completion of research, quality of research, destructive friction and dysfunctional study orientation etc. (Lonka, Sharafi, Karlgren, Masiello, Nieminen, Birgegård and Josephson, 2008; Pyhältö, Toom, Stubb, and Lonka, 2012). The purpose of this paper is to present about the role, responsibilities and expectations of both the research supervisor and doctoral students. An attempt is also made to present the consequences that would occur when there is a disturbance in this relation.

Role and Responsibilities of Research Supervisor

Supervision is an extra responsibility given to the eligible teachers of higher education apart from their regular teaching learning activity. A research supervisor does not undergo any special training for this and hence she/he should have a clear understating about her/his roles

and responsibilities as a research supervisor. A good research supervisor should be approachable, friendly, supportive, optimistic, open minded, thorough, organized and maintain good contact with doctoral students. She/he should have the ability to acknowledge the errors and should be stimulating and enthusiastic for research (Cullen, Pearson and Saha, 1994). A research supervisor should not only be able to know and assess the needs of their doctoral students but have the ability to set proper targets for them. The research supervisor should act as a foundation stone to encourage, motivate and inspire their doctoral students towards quality research work. It is also the duty of the research supervisor to see that their doctoral students develop a sense of attitude towards their department and participate actively in its activities. Apart from this, she/he should be a continuous mentor to them right from writing in the early stage of research work to final production and presentation of the research. She/he should ensure support if academic and personal crises arise to the doctoral students (James and Baldwin, 1999).

Expectations of Research Supervisor

The research supervisor support doctoral students in developing a road map for their research work. An effective research supervisor acts as a paragon to the doctoral students by constantly motivating them, showing an optimistic attitude, be concerned, always expect feedback from the doctoral students, concerned about the past, present, and future aspects of research. In contrast to this the research supervisor also expect doctoral students to have certain qualities, at personal level the doctoral students to be problem solvers, disciplined, innovative, engaged, reflective, motivated, and comfortable to discuss their issues with their research supervisor. At professional level they should work hard, learn all the time, be dedicated, committed, mature as a researcher, independent scientist, accept constructive criticism, and feedback. It is also expected that, they as a researcher should be determined to identify research problem, read the literature, formulate the research question, design the methodology, innovative, and be in scholarship mode as a part of the research process. The research supervisor believe that doctoral students should always update and inform her/he about the progress of their research work. Research Supervisor also expects that in the academic meetings, the doctoral students should publish and present their research work with full clarity and confidence. (Friedrich-Nel and Mackinnon, 2013).

Contents of Effective Supervision

Supervision is an age-old concept (Rudolph, 1962; Veysey, 1970 as cited in Gunnarsson, Jonasson and Billhult 2013). It is a pedagogically challenging task (Handal and Lauvas, 2008

as cited in Gunnarsson, Jonasson and Billhult, 2013). Though the research supervision is a complex process, but the bond and expectations between the research supervisor-doctoral students always remain an exceptional experience of collaborative learning (Friedrich-nel and Mackinnon, 2013). The fundamentals of good supervision require research supervisor to know the principles of doctoral culture, keen observer, in-depth content knowledge, sedulous and inculcate a trusting environment where doctoral students can freely communicate with research supervisor without any hesitation. To be an efficient and competent research supervisor, she/he should have effective supervision skills. A research supervisor should motivate and support doctoral students in tough times, constantly monitor doctoral students research process and provide continual feedback on the status quo of the doctoral students' research and results already achieved. She/he should discuss and plan future research work, assist the doctoral students in structuring the complete doctoral phase and advising them related to career opportunities, additional qualification needs and the appropriate steps towards a better future. Furthermore, good supervision is not only about providing expertise to doctoral students but research supervisor should introduce doctoral students to national and international scientific community which will aid doctoral students in progressing in their research work and updating themselves about the new trends in research (Carmesin, Hoffmann, Huskobla, Huster, Kuster, Neumann & Wegener-Feldbrugge, 2015).

Role and Responsibilities of Doctoral Students

Doctoral Students are considered torchbearer for society, through their research and innovative practices. For the successful completion of a doctoral thesis research supervisor guidance is necessary but it's also the duty of doctoral students to work independently, manage their own learning and achieve a Ph.D. degree. The doctoral students should plan, discuss research problem and timeline for the research with research supervisor. They should not hesitate in communicating problems or difficulties with research supervisor. It is the foremost responsibility of Doctoral students to maintain a systematic progress report of work in accordance with the stages agreed with the research supervisor, and sufficient time to allow for feedback and discussion before proceedings. The doctoral students should keep in mind that prior to formal meeting about the progress of work its agenda, supporting documents and minutes of meeting should be drafted and circulated in advance with their research supervisor for the smooth functioning of research work in future. Also, the final draft of the thesis should be shown to research supervisor and due account of their opinion should be taken before final submission (Finn, 2009).

Problems Encountered by Doctoral Students

The doctoral student-research supervisor relationship is intricate and multifaceted, where both of them have high expectations from each other. The relationship grows and develop over several years and is, therefore, emotionally and intellectually demanding (Thompson, Kirkman, Watson and Stewart, 2005). As Ph. D. degree continues for several years, during the process of attaining it doctoral students face numerous problems like absence of inadequate level of feedback, poor quality of communication, occasional argument, clash of personality which hampers the quality of research work. The doctoral students may also face a problem when the research supervisor is not much interested in their research work, lack knowledge about the requirements of the Ph.D. degree and has inadequate experience both as a research supervisor and researcher. These challenges become more severe where research supervisor publish the doctoral students work without acknowledging them as an author and treat them as resourceful or specialized researchers, thereby depriving them of full training to be an independent researcher. Sometimes the problem gets intense when doctoral students become the victim of bullying, intimidation or sexual harassment from the research supervisor (Finn, 2009).

Students expectation from Research Supervisor

Just like a research supervisor has some expectations from their doctoral students, in the similar way doctoral students also have some expectation from their research supervisor. However, there are variations in these expectations (Delamont, Atkinson, and Parry, 1997). For the successful completion of a doctoral degree, the doctoral students expect research supervisors to support, encourage, guide, advise, give constructive criticism, always be accessible and available at suitable times. Doctoral Students expect research supervisor to read and comment on written work within an acceptable period of time. They contemplate from supervisor that she/he should assist, advice on progress reports and encourage them to work progressively in an optimistic manner. They believe their research supervisor must have underlined qualities of being enthusiastic, committed, knowledgeable and approachable when required. Most importantly it is expected from research supervisor to help doctoral students with academic and personal problems, which may pose hinderances in the smooth running of the research work (Wright, 1991; Sheehan, 1993; Hockey, 1995; Holloway and Walker, 2000; Thompson et al, 2005 as cited in Gill and Burnard, 2008).

Consequences of Disturbed Relation Between Research Supervisor and Doctoral Students

Doctoral students and research supervisor relationship is a complex one. The bond between both of them should be strong both professionally and personally because their relationship is not just during the process of Ph.D. but it should be long lasting. There is no one formula for the good relationship between both of them. It is highly reliant on the attributes of the individuals involved, disciplinary differences in the way knowledge is advanced, and the different learning tasks facing doctoral students due to the demands of their field (Abiddin, Hassan and Ahmad, 2009). A disturbed relationship may lead to many consequences on the part of doctoral students like, they may adopt the practice of outsourcing their research work, lack in original contribution to the research work, opt for substandard publishing, go for highly plagiarized content, get into depression and finally withdraw from their doctoral work. It would lead to irrevocable breakdown in the working relationship and may lead to untimely completion of work. Such disturbance may also lead to low confidence in doctoral students when presenting their research work in various academic forums.

Conclusion

This article provides an insight about the relationship between doctoral students and their research supervisor. It's a complex relationship. It's not a one-way process rather it's a two-way process where both the research supervisor and doctoral students are involved in the successful completion of a doctoral degree. Thus, they should maintain a cordial relationship in order to remain connected with each other, develop both personally and professionally, inspire each other and accomplish the aims and objective of doctoral degree. Furthermore, they should respect, motivate and supportive to each other, be open-minded, prepare to acknowledge errors, provide continual feedback, accept constructive criticism, share apprehensions, be enthusiastic, energetic, diligent, have clear aim about the research work, develop a friendly environment, communicate, express each other about their thoughts and future planning.

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