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Exploring the Challenges and Strategies in Conducting Research Dissertation at M.Ed Level

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Abstract

This study investigates the significant challenges faced by Master of Education (M.Ed) students at Kerala University while preparing their research dissertations and proposes strategies to overcome these obstacles. The qualitative research design involved interviewing 15 M.Ed students to gather insights into their experiences. The analysis revealed several key challenges: time management issues, difficulties in formulating research titles, inadequate supervisory guidance, etc. To address these challenges, the study recommends structured time management workshops, specialized seminars on research design, a restructured curriculum integrating statistics and research proposals early on, flexible data collection options, comprehensive training on standardization and instructional design, investment in modern technological resources, integration of statistical software training, and thorough instruction on citation practices. By implementing these recommendations, institutions can better support M.Ed their research projects, thereby improving the standard of instruction and future educators' professional growth.

Keywords: Challenges, M.Ed students, Research Dissertation, Comprehensive training, Professional growth.

Introduction

Research is an essential component of education because it develops critical thinking skills, influences instructional strategies, encourages lifelong learning and gets students ready for advanced professional responsibilities. It calls for thorough planning, dedication, and comprehensive subject understanding (Muneer et al., 2020). Researches in the field of teacher education are carried out to identify answers to a range of issues pertaining to curriculum, teaching methods, students, and teachers (Pingle, 2013). Students pursuing Master of Education (M.Ed) make contributions to the area of education and enhance their own efficacy as teachers through research. For a project to be productive, selecting the appropriate research path requires strong investigative skills, access to procurement norms, excellent interpersonal abilities, and a willingness to offer constructive feedback (Kamalakaran, 2024). For aspiring teacher educators, a research dissertation at the Master of Education (M.Ed) level is a critical turning point since it offers a chance for professional growth opportunity and an academic challenge. Even while research plays a crucial role in shaping educational practices, many aspiring teacher educators face substantial challenges that hinder their development and lower the caliber of their work. This study examines the various obstacles they encounter during completing their dissertations.

Need and Significance of the study

Engaging in research encourages critical thinking, reflective practice, and by contributing to the body of knowledge, it influences educational reform and innovation, ultimately enhancing the quality of education at all levels. Research projects present challenging problems because research projects cannot be simple and easy, and students are forced to deal with them as a requirement for their degree (Rizwan & Naaz, 2022). Even though master's students had studied research at the undergraduate and graduate levels, they still come across challenges (Sitompul & Anditasari, 2022). By giving researchers the tools and assistance they need, we can get over these obstacles and promote a culture of creativity and innovation (Kamalakaran, 2024). It is strongly recommended that the university take prompt action to assist students in overcoming these obstacles and turning them into significant possibilities (Diocos, 2022). The research could not be completed by students independently. It is difficult to understand every research technique. Thus, more assistance is still needed for students to undertake research as well as motivation to act (Phan Canh My Duy, 2017). Recognizing the challenges prospective teacher educators face throughout their M.Ed research projects is crucial for several reasons. First and foremost, recognizing these challenges facilitates the development of resources and networks of support that enable students to overcome obstacles and raise the standard of their academic work. It ensures that students build confidence when working on scholarly assignments and learn critical research skills. Addressing these concerns can help teacher education programs improve their curricula in order to better fulfill the needs of their students and better prepare aspiring teachers for the challenges of the real world. By identifying and resolving these problems, students' stress levels and attrition rates can be decreased, which raises completion rates and enhances performance. In spite of challenges, the investigators will continue working for their degree, fulfill personal interests, and expand their knowledge while gaining more experience conducting research investigations (Balbag et al., 2024).

Research Questions

The present study tries to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the challenges that M.Ed. students face while writing research dissertation?
- 2) What are the strategies to overcome the challenges they encounter during completing their dissertations.

Objective

- 1) To know the challenges that post-graduate level students face while writing a research proposal.
- 2) To suggest strategies to overcome the challenges that students face in their M.Ed. dissertation writing.

Materials and Methods

The research design of the study is qualitative. The population of the study is M.Ed. students of Kerala University. The purposive non random sampling techniques used in the study. The sampling size of the study is 15 students of M.Ed. Level. Interview is used as the data collection tool in the study.

Result and Discussion

The data is collected by taking 15 interviews from the M.Ed. students of Kerala University. The thorough analysis of interviews as follows:

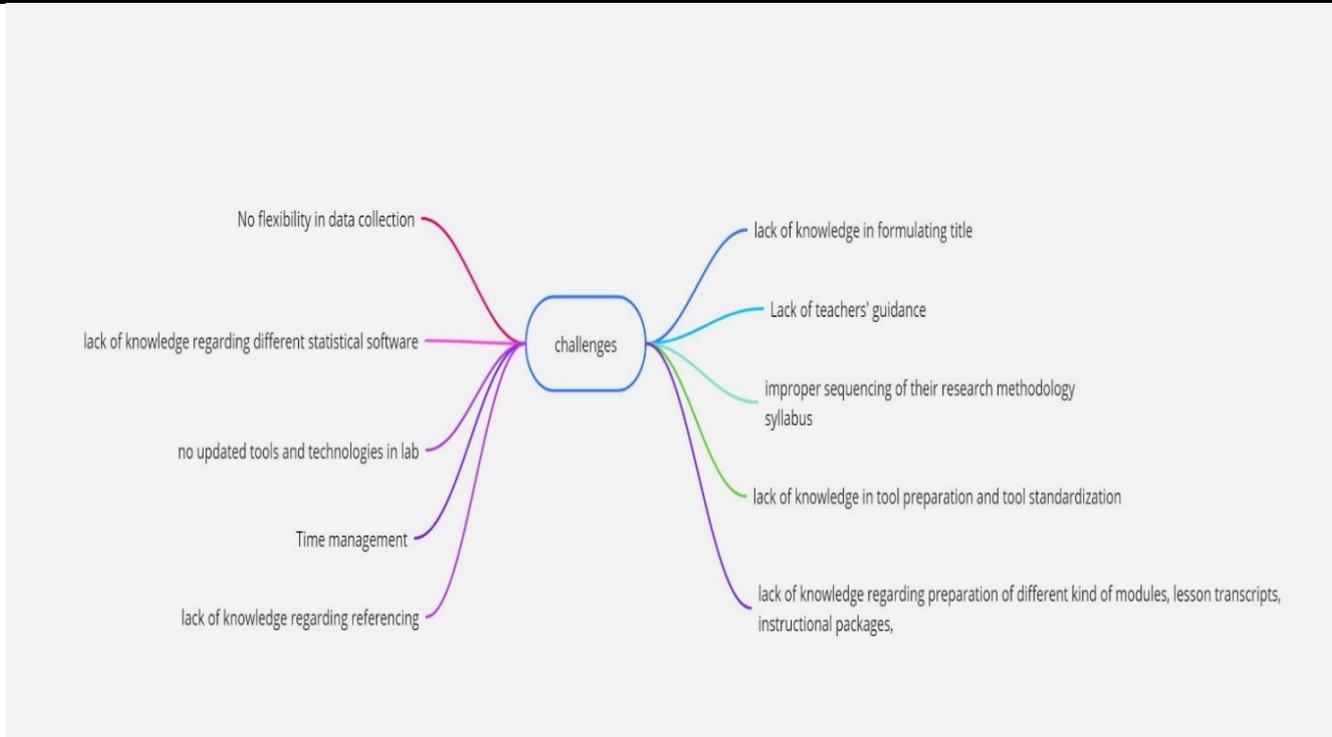


Figure 1: challenges faced by the M.Ed students during preparation of their dissertation

- **Time management** was one of the most common challenges M.Ed students had when prepared their research dissertations. It was difficult to juggle the demands of research initiatives internal assignments, and semester exam preparation in a single semester. As a result, many students felt that they could not give their research full effort, which left them feeling that their work was not up to standards even if they were able to finish it.
- One more difficulty that a lot of M.Ed students encountered was **not knowing how to formulate titles**. Despite having a variety of ideas, they were confused of how to structure their research title for the topic they had selected. When they started their research, this uncertainty presented a big obstacle. A few students even found it difficult to come up with a coherent title in the final week before their research project was due.
- Students frequently mentioned that they were **not receiving adequate guidance from their supervisors**. Numerous pupils who came from a variety of disciplines and had little in-depth understanding of research procedures discovered that they needed a great deal of assistance. Nevertheless, their supervisors often couldn't provide the time necessary to answer all of their questions and help them through every stage of the inquiry. Due to the confusion caused by the absence of clear instructions, many students were obliged to finish their dissertations hastily and carelessly at the last minute.
- One of the main challenges that M.Ed students had to deal with was **the arrangement of their research methods syllabus**. In the second semester, they learned the fundamentals of statistics and had to draft research proposals at the same time. Advanced statistics were introduced in the third semester when they were required to submit their theses. Due to this overlap, students found it difficult to manage internal tasks and regular classes for other disciplines while still learning and using research procedures for their dissertation work.
- **The lack of flexibility in collecting data** was one of the biggest issues faced by M.Ed. students. Some schools did not permit data collection, while others were in the midst of exams. These challenges made it extremely difficult for students to collect necessary information and finish their academic work on time.
- The majority of M.Ed students stated that they were **unaware of the standardization and tool preparation procedures**, which are essential to any research undertaking. Even while many had done research in their post-graduation before, they were not familiar with these techniques. They consequently encountered difficulties in acquiring these crucial abilities and finishing the work on schedule.

- The fact that many students conducted experimental investigations and produced modules, lesson transcripts, and **instructional or self-learning packages without any prior expertise** was another significant barrier. One of their biggest challenges was learning how to create these materials and use them for experimentation in a classroom setting.
- **The absence of modern equipment and technology** in the lab posed a serious problem for students as well, making it hard for them to obtain relevant materials for their learning goals. The majority of the books and published resources in the library's collection needed to be updated and suitable to the modern context of learning. The psychology lab's outdated equipment and testing materials made it even more difficult for students to get the materials they needed and finish their coursework on time.
- A major obstacle students encountered while finishing their M.Ed. dissertation was their **unfamiliarity with statistical software** used for data analysis. Since most students had to start from scratch when learning these tools, their progress could have been improved.
- For M.Ed. students, **failing to properly reference and cite sources** has become a major obstacle to successfully completing research projects. This challenge arises from a lack of expertise with citation styles, including APA, and the nuances of properly using it. Students faced the risk of unintentional plagiarism and a lack of academic integrity in their work.

Strategies to overcome the challenges

- The study offers the following suggestions to help students overcome the challenges they encounter when writing their research dissertation:
- Students may improve their time management issues by attending organized time management workshops that emphasize setting priorities for tasks and creating effective study schedules. Institutions should consider having supervisors check in with their students frequently to ensure they stay on track and get timely feedback.
- A lot of students lack the basic skills and knowledge needed to form concise titles that effectively summarize the goals of their research work. Universities should provide specialized seminars and workshops on study design and title form to address this. Early in the program, these workshops ought to be included in the curriculum to equip students with the abilities they need before they start working on their dissertations.
- The module of the course should be restructured to address both advanced and fundamental statistics in the first semester, giving students a strong basis before starting to write research proposals. Offering a research proposal development session that is specifically designed for the second semester, which is complemented by intense tutorials. Furthermore, setting aside the last semester for thesis preparation and submission in addition to offering flexible scheduling options and frequent guidance can help students become proficient at time management and concentrate on their dissertation work without the stress of simultaneous assignments.
- Various investigation situations can be accommodated by offering multiple choices for data collecting, such as virtual surveys.
- Standardization and tool preparation methods are not well known to a large portion of M.Ed. students. The research techniques courses can close this gap by including in-depth training sessions on these subjects by being given access to templates and exemplars of standardized tools.
- Institutions should provide workshops on instructional design and study material preparation to assist the prospective teacher educators. The quality of these resources can be further improved by mentorship of instructors and availability to educational technologies.

- Effective research is hampered by the lack of contemporary tools and technologies. Universities should make investments in modern equipment and guarantee that students have access to the required tech resources. All students should have access to training sessions on the usage of these instruments and software.
- Institutions should incorporate statistical software training within the research program. Students can learn how to use these tools for data analysis by being given access to software installation and participating in practical workshops.
- Lastly, precise citation is essential for maintaining academic integrity. It is recommended that universities offer thorough instruction on reference and citation formats. This could be achieved by utilizing internet resources. Students can keep up good citation practices throughout their studies with the support of citation management tools at their disposal.

Conclusion

The research dissertation preparation process presents a number of significant problems for M.Ed. students of Kerala University, as revealed by the study of their interviews. Overall, this investigation concludes that M.Ed. students confront a variety of difficulties. A comprehensive approach is needed to address these problems, which include curriculum redesign, improved supervisor assistance, improved technology and resource accessibility, and targeted instruction in academic writing and research procedures. For educational institutions to effectively assist their students, they must have a thorough understanding of these challenges. This study aims to offer insights that may result in focused interventions and support systems by pinpointing the specific challenges that aspiring teacher educators must overcome. This can therefore improve the general standard of educational research and better equip upcoming professionals to make scholarly contributions. This study attempts to shed light on the way to a more supportive and fruitful dissertation process for M.Ed. candidates through a thorough analysis.

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