

The role of the supervisor in the development of research project essay sample



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As Maxim says “ All progress is born of inquiry. Doubt is often better than overconfidence, for it leads to inquiry, and inquiry leads to invention” (Kothari, 3) . This means that doubt gives place to inquiry and inquiry to invention. When this inquiry becomes the part of a systematic investigation, is called research. Each research has three basic components: Student, Topic, and Supervisor. All these are basic requirements for any research project and in the absence of anyone of such component no research is possible. This term paper makes an attempt to define the basic features of the research by focusing on a range of issues associated with the role and the responsibility of the supervisor in development of a research project and the relationship between the student and the supervisor.

There is difference between reading and study. We read a novel or a poem in general. But we study, when we have to review or make comments on them. Research is more than study; it has assumed a new meaning in the twentieth century. It is a technical term which means a systematic investigation in a field of knowledge to discover or establish facts or principle. The word “ research” originates from the medieval French word *recherché*, meaning “ to seek closely.” In its most general sense, research involves investigating a topic to learn more about it.

Research, is an academic activity, as Clifford Woody defines “ comprises defining and redefining problems, formulating hypothesis or suggested solutions; collecting, organizing and evaluating data; making deductions and reaching conclusions; and at last carefully testing the conclusions to determine whether they fit the formulating hypothesis” (scribd). The

following definition will give us a clear idea what is research is: 1. Research

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can be defined as the search for knowledge, or as any systematic investigation, with an open mind, to establish novel facts, solve new or existing problems, prove new ideas, or develop new theories. The primary purposes of basic research (as opposed to applied research) are documentation, discovery, interpretation, or the research and development of methods and systems for the advancement of human knowledge.

Approaches to research depend on epistemologies, which vary considerably both within and between humanities and sciences. (wikipedia). 2. D.

Slesinger and M. Stephenson in the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences define research as “ the manipulation of things, concepts or symbols for the purpose of generalizing to extend, correct or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aids in construction of theory or in the practice of an art(Kothari, 1).” A close reading of these definitions leads us to the conclusion that research has the following features: I. Research is a systematic and critical investigation.

II. It aims at the discovery of new facts and their correct information. III. It is also the revision of accepted laws or theories in the light of the discovery of new facts. IV. It can be the practical application of new or revised conclusions, theories or law. Coming to the first feature, the word systematic means that the entire procedure of the investigation is done under certain principles. The word critical means that the researcher takes care of both kinds of facts, one that favours his hypothesis and the other that goes counter to his assumptions. It follows then, that the researcher must not be prejudiced or subjective in his observation, experiment, analysis or

interpretation nor should be erratic in arrangement of facts nor ignores the facts that shatter his postulates or hypothesis.

For example- suppose a researcher assumes that Hopkins is purely a modern poet and entirely different from the other Victorians. Now if the researcher finds that Hopkins is Victorian in his attitude and ideas, he must not ignore this fact and must revise his hypothesis. Secondly, research should be a genuine contribution to knowledge. This is possible only when we discover new fact or interpret a known fact in new way. We all know that Shakespeare has written thirty seven plays. Suppose someone comes with a manuscript and systematically proves it to be the playwright's thirty-eight play, he has discovered a new fact and made a genuine contribution to knowledge.

Likewise Caroline Spurgeon's interpretation of Shakespeare's imagery is a new kind of interpretation and hence a genuine contribution to knowledge. Thirdly, research is also that kind of investigation which examines an accepted theory to revise or modify or sometimes reject it. Copernicus examined the old concept of the universe, found it unacceptable, and after rejecting it posited his new concept. Likewise the linguists of the seventeenth century considered Latin and Greek to be most ancient languages.

Later on, Sir William Jones, after his arrival in India and study of Sanskrit, propounded that Sanskrit was the most ancient language and all the European and, Indian languages have their origin in it. But this theory too, he raised and modified later on. Now the accepted theory is that the Indian and European languages have their source in Proto-Indo-European language.

Finally, research can be of applied kind. Here the investigator applies the abstract principles of a theory for practical purposes. Einstein's theory of relativity is applied in space research. In literature, Freud's psychology is being applied in the analysis of a literary text. Chomsky's transformational generative grammar is being applied in computers. Up till now we have discussed research and its features as it is a systematic, genuine, applied, investigation. But a good research project can only be accomplished when it's two major components- supervisor and researcher participate or work collectively . The role of the supervisor is much more important because he the only person upon whom researcher completely depends form the selection of topic and till the submission of thesis. In other words, the research supervisor occupies a unique and key position in the structure of a research project. He is like the cross-roads between the research project and the researcher.

The research supervisor is the major source of instruction, guidance and assistance for the student under his direction. We can say that he is the first step in the process of research because selection of topic is also depends on availability of the supervisor. Thus supervisor becomes more significant in comparison to researcher and topic. Now the questions come, " Who is this supervisor?" " What is his role and how to choose him?" These are some issues which come when a student plans his research. Let us discuss these issues on by one. A research supervisor (often referred to as simply " supervisor") is responsible for the general oversight of an academic research project (wikipedia). In other words, the supervisor is a person who guides the

student in his research project and is fully familiar with the student's research topic and closely monitors the preparation of the thesis.

It is the primary responsibility of the supervisor to play an active role in guiding the student towards appropriate sources, methods and approaches to the topic. At the time of selection of a topic for research only the supervisor can suggest and guide the researcher about the importance of the topic and reason or need of research on the particular topic. Now the issue comes what is the role of a supervisor? A study done at Victoria University of Wellington in 1996 identified the most significant roles played by the thesis supervisor and research student (Lincoln). A supervisor can play many roles in relation to the research project. In many cases these roles are integrated or overlap, although in some cases they may be separate.

According to Polanski, there are five key roles that supervisors can fulfill (Sagepub, 23)- Information Source A supervisor ideally has a range of research experiences that help the student in the completion of his research project. On the most basic level, a supervisor is able to tell the student that where he can find information, knowledge and related material for his topic by which the student can easily collect and utilize them in his research work. Sounding Board One of the most important roles of the supervisor is to act as a "sounding board" that is someone whom we can bounce ideas off and who focuses on our thinking. This guiding role is important in a number of areas. When selecting a topic our supervisor is able to help us to decide that on which topic research can be done and which subject is too broad or narrow for research.

Moreover supervisor is able to assist him in shaping the scope of work, as well as defining the critical issues related to the topic. Educator Though undertaking a research project is a learning process, much of student's learning comes from his own efforts in the research process. But there is also a role for the supervisor to act more directly in bringing about his learning. This frequently takes place in one of two ways. First, the supervisor explains difficult material and second, he can make easy learning through formalized classes. Motivator Another important role, played by the supervisor is of motivator. It is the most difficult role, especially if the student loses interest in the project.

There are several ways that a supervisor uses to motivate and encourage the student, as through establishing a timetable for the project and then reviewing it at regular meetings, by knowing the problems of student and helping him in solving his problems, by telling the student about the importance of research and helping him in developing his confidence etc.

Evaluator In many cases, a supervisor is responsible or partly responsible, for evaluating the research. He verifies at each and every level the progress of research as submitting synopsis, progress report thesis submission etc.

If anything happens wrong, a supervisor is also responsible for it. So it can be said that it the most crucial position for the supervisor. There are some other roles played by the supervisor as an academic advisor and communicator.

An academic advisor is the role about academic structures and processes and using this knowledge to assist the student to make decisions regarding the planning of the research process.. Moreover as a communicator, a

supervisor is expected to communicate information, knowledge and ideas relevant to the different phases of the supervision relationship.

Most difficult situation for the researcher is selecting a supervisor because every supervisor is different in his style. More every supervisor has his own area of study or we can say that expert on specific theoretical issue.

Choosing a supervisor is actually depends the project. There are number of issues that a student needs to consider when selecting supervisor. According to Polanski, a student should select a supervisor by keeping three points in his mind - Firstly, a supervisor should be topic expert. A student should always try to identify a supervisor who has expertise in the topic being researched. The benefit of supervisor having knowledge in the topic area is that the student is able to get strong direction from his supervisor and he is able to discuss issues specific to topic in detail. Secondly, a supervisor should be methodology expert.

Knowledge of methodology is very important for designing research projects. A good research can only be done if it follows all important rules related to research methodology. Since a student is new in this field, for this he depends completely on his supervisor because supervisor is expert so he knows it very well that which methods is appropriate for the particular topic . As Polanski says, " looking for a supervisor with methodological expertise might be something that is more appropriately emphasized when undertaking very advanced research projects (sagepub, 26)." Thirdly, a supervisor should be process expertise.

If the supervisor has a very structured approach to supervising students it ensures that students complete their project within the time limit.

Appointment of supervisor depends on the research topic, situations and university norms. There are three types of supervisor or we can say that there are three levels in supervision and each supervisor has specific responsibility- 1-Principal supervisor: has prime responsibility for overseeing a student's progress and should have the expertise, time and resources to provide ongoing support.

A principal supervisor – * ensures that the candidate has relevant information regarding his own research and professional plans for the period of the candidate's research/dissertation/project; * meets the candidate at frequent intervals to discuss, assess and guide the progress of the work; * advises the candidate on the scope and presentation of the thesis and on any publication likely to arise from the work; * assists the candidate to develop standards of achievement that will result in a thesis/dissertation/project of merit; * links with the faculty;

* keeps in regular contact with the Co-Supervisor (if any); * encourages and facilitates the candidate's participation in conferences where relevant results of the research may be presented; * encourages and assists, where appropriate, the candidate to publish from his research in reputable conferences and/or journals; * evaluates the progress reports submitted by the candidate; * ensures that the thesis/dissertation/project submitted match the rules of UGC norms. 2-Co-supervisor: may be established for a student in lieu of a principal supervisor. Co-supervision occurs where two academic

staff members share responsibility for the principal supervision of a student.

A co-supervisor- * assists the Supervisor in supervising the candidate;

* act as the supervisor in the absence of the Supervisor; * be involved in all stages of the planning of the candidate's research plan; * maintains a level of communication with the Supervisor and candidate so as to allow him to participate in the supervision or act as a substitute for the Supervisor whenever this is necessary; * evaluates progress reports submitted by the candidate;

2-Associate supervisor: supports the principal supervisor and ensures the student has continuity of supervision if the principal supervisor is away. The associate supervisor can be a person external to the University who has specialist knowledge in a particular aspect of the student's research. An associate supervisor- * has a secondary supervisory role;

* participates in all official meetings, including confirmation and progress meetings; * reads confirmation report, progress reports and one full draft of the thesis when the candidate is close to completion; * meets now and again with candidate depending on their particular expertise;

* takes over supervision when the Principal Supervisor is on leave; As we discussed the range of issues related to the supervisor but one thing which is very important and which should be discussed is the relationship between the supervisor and the student. A relationship between the supervisor and the student not only confined into academic level but it is more than that. According to Brown and Atkins (nottingham) this relationship through various

levels- Relationships between student and Supervisor(Brown and Atkins (1990) cited in Murray)| Director| Follower|

Master| Servant|

Guru| Disciple|

Teacher| Pupil|

Expert| Novice|

Guide| Explore|

Project Manager| Team worker|

Auditor| Client|

Editor| Author|

Counselor| Client|

Doctor| Patient|

Senior Partner| Junior professional|

Colleague| Colleague|

Friend| Friend|

The relationship between the supervisor and student actually decides the progress of the research. This relationship is matter of open, honest and trusting communication. According to Lesley A. Harbon, this relationship is a matter of “ negotiating the balance of power between the student and supervisor... Most important is the need for student and supervisor to clarify expectations of each other early in the candidature... (Harbon) ”.

It is very important for both the student and supervisor to maintain healthy and honest relationship in development of research project. Thus it can be said that research is a scientific and systematic search for pertinent

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information on a specific topic. It is an art of scientific investigation. This scientific investigation cannot be achieved if the supervisor does not play his role and responsibility successfully.

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