

Dissertation Writing: Challenges faced by University Students from South Eastern University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The undergraduates of Bachelor of Arts Honours degree have to write a dissertation in their fields. When they write it, they have been facing challenges. Therefore, this research sought to investigate the challenges of writing a dissertation as a requirement of the specialisation Bachelor Degree in the Arabic Language among those who are speaking Tamil as a mother tongue and who learning Arabic as a foreign language. This research is a qualitative study through the descriptive methodology. The researchers selected 30 dissertations randomly from the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language, the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka and analysed them. The review of the documents focuses on students' abilities to write dissertations. Also, 25 students who submitted their dissertations were selected randomly to fill the questionnaire to reveal the challenges they faced. Writing a dissertation in a foreign or second language is difficult than writing in a native language. As pointed out in the previous sections, there are challenges in writing dissertations such as the influence of the Tamil language, Lack of knowledge in research writing, Selecting a new topic, Lack of reading, Experience of using the software. At the same time, findings of the review of the dissertations reveal that language fluency and data analysis are the common errors observed in the dissertations.

Keywords: Challenges, Dissertation, Undergraduates, Bachelor honours degree, Foreign language, and Thesis

Introduction

A language contains four skills Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. They help to learn a language fluency. Listening and reading are receptive skills. The other two are productive skills. According to this, speaking builds upon listening; likewise, fluent writing comes from deep reading. The writing skill from them is the most difficult in language. It depends on several characteristics such as correct grammar, the choice of an appropriate lexicon, and appropriate linking words. It becomes challenging when one is supposed to write in a foreign language, i.e., English in this case. Academic writing is a vital language skill to get an academic degree (Odena & Burgess, 2017). As one form of academic writing is the graduate thesis which is valued to evaluate the comprehensive abilities of students (Liu, 2015). However, the process of thesis or dissertation writing is hard to follow as students may confront a wide variety of troubles, including language-related problems, the difficulty to find a topic, supervisor-related problems and cultural issues. As several doctoral students have to write a thesis in English to attain a degree (Gurel, 2011), This research deals with the students selected for the degree program in the Arabic Language at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. The students who have followed Bachelor of Arts degree as specialisation have to write a dissertation in their fields. Those who followed honours degree for four academic years have to write a dissertation in the Arabic language. When writing it, they have been facing challenges in writing their dissertations. Because they want to write it in a foreign or second language, this research tries to find the challenges of writing a dissertation in the Arabic Language among Tamil native speaker students.

Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative study through the descriptive methodology. The researchers selected 30 dissertations randomly from the Faculty of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language, the South Eastern

University of Sri Lanka and analysed them. The review of the documents focuses on students' abilities to write dissertations. Also, 25 students who submitted their dissertations were selected randomly to fill the questionnaire to reveal the challenges they faced.

Literary Review

Erbay Cetinkaya, S., & Yilmaz, S. (2017). How BA Students Perceive Graduation Thesis Writing Process: A Qualitative Inquiry. Abstract of this research says that the undergraduates of Bachelor of Arts have to write a thesis in the English language in the North Eastern State University of Turkey. This research is a qualitative study with in-depth interviews with 12 BA candidates. The researcher finds that the undergraduates face obstacles related to language, writing and style, research methods.

Komba, Sotco Claudius, (2016). Challenges of writing theses and dissertations among postgraduate students in Tanzanian higher learning institutions. This research deals with the challenges of writing theses and dissertations among them. The main challenge faced by them is a lack of academic writing skills. According to the findings of the research, the researchers recommend that the universities have to offer research methods courses. Findings and Discussion

The researchers reviewed thirty dissertations. These things were concerned in the review process to identify whether the dissertations contain the elements of writing a dissertation or not. The parts of research such as introduction, research problem, objectives, and the importance of it, research methodology, research background, research gap, literary review, and discussion of data analysis, presentation of finding, conclusion, and references should be included in the research. According to this, the following chart (1) describes the aspects of the dissertation.

Language Fluency

Academic writing is essential to write a dissertation. When the dissertations were reviewed, 27% of students had language efficiency in writing of the Arabic language. Because of they learnt the Arabic language at Arabic colleges 5 to 7 years. 50% of dissertations were in average level in language fluency. On the other hand, 23% of them did not have enough fluency in the language. Even these students learnt Arabic at Arabic colleges; they couldn't write in Arabic fluently as they told in the questionnaire.

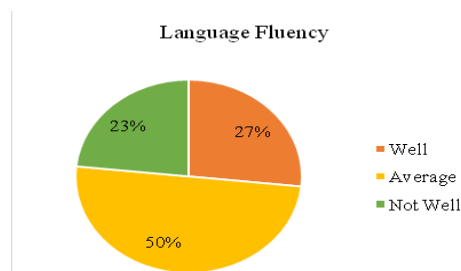


Chart (1) Language Fluency Data Analysis

It is the main part of a dissertation. It analyses the data that the researcher collected from primary and secondary data. If this part is not well, the research will be worth the work. According to this, 43% of dissertations were analysed well by them. 30% of them were in average level. 27% of them were not well

in data analysing because of lack of knowledge on how to analyse the data and lack of previous experience of doing research. At the same time, the students used to collect the data. But they didn't know how to interpret.

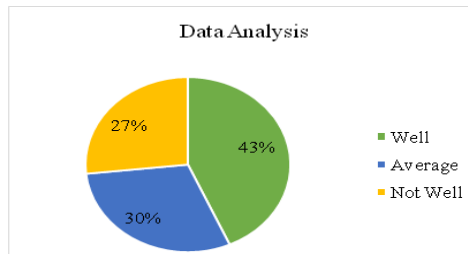


Chart (2) Data Analysis

The researchers asked the students about the challenges of writing a dissertation; they noted these challenges:

Influence of Tamil Language

They were from Tamil native speakers who followed their bachelor degree program in Arabic Language and selected an honour degree program in the second year. They used the Arabic language for educational purposes, such as attending lectures, sitting exams, writing assignments. Even they face difficulties when they write a dissertation by the influence of their mother tongue.

Lack of Knowledge in Research Writing

Students are careless writing research papers to the symposiums and conferences during undergraduate periods. In this case, they will be trouble at the end of the final year.

Selecting a New Topic

They noted that selecting a new topic is a challenge among them. They feel that there are no topics to find new things. That's why they face an obstacle in it.

Lack of Reading

It is the main issue that makes hard into easier. They read Arabic books and research papers rarely, which affects their education. From lack of reading, they couldn't write accurately.

Experience of Using Software

Most of the students don't know to use MS Excel, SPSS to analyse the data of quantitative. This situation drives them to write the analysis part worthy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Writing a dissertation in a foreign or second language is difficult than writing in a native language. As pointed out in the previous sections, there are challenges in writing dissertations such as the influence of the Tamil language, Lack of knowledge in research writing, Selecting a new topic, Lack of reading, Experience of using the software. At the same time, findings of the review of the dissertations reveal that language fluency and data analysis are the common errors observed in the dissertations.

The researchers recommend that it is essential to offer research methodology courses in the universities

through practical sessions. If this is done, above mentioned weaknesses by students are likely to be minimised. The universities should strive to train all undergraduate students in academic writing training, focusing on how to write dissertations (Komba, 2016). Proper guidance should be given to learners of a second language. The students will know how to rewrite the text from books, articles, and websites to prevent plagiarism among the researchers.

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