Challenges Faced by PhD Students in India: Exploring the Impact of Limited Bond and Negative Relationships with PhD Guides

KHRITISH SWARGIARY

1Affiliation not available

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Abstract

This survey research article aims to investigate the challenges encountered by PhD students in India, focusing on the limited bond and negative relationships between PhD students and their PhD guides. The study utilized a sample of 5000 PhD students from various Indian universities to understand the extent and consequences of these issues. The findings shed light on the factors contributing to these challenges and suggest potential remedies for improving the doctoral experience.

Introduction

Pursuing a Ph.D. is a significant academic and professional milestone, representing the pinnacle of research and scholarship. However, many PhD students face numerous challenges during their doctoral journey, one of which is the quality of the relationship with their PhD guide. In India, the dynamics between PhD students and their guides have been a subject of concern, as there have been reports of limited bonding and negative relationships. This study seeks to investigate the extent of these issues and their impact on PhD students in India.

Methodology

1. Participants: A sample of 5000 PhD students from various universities across India was selected for this study. Participants were selected through a random sampling method, ensuring diverse representation across disciplines and regions.

2. Data Collection: An online questionnaire was administered to the participants, focusing on their experiences and challenges during their PhD journey. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions to gather quantitative and qualitative data.

Here is a standardized questionnaire for your research on the challenges faced by PhD students in India regarding their relationships with their guides. This questionnaire includes both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

PhD Student Relationship with PhD Guide Survey Questionnaire

Introduction: This survey aims to understand the challenges faced by PhD students during their doctoral journey in India, with a specific focus on their relationship with their PhD guide. Your responses will help us gain insights into these challenges and their impact. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Section 1: Participant Information

Name (optional):

1.2. Gender:
- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
Age:
Current Year of PhD (e.g., 1st year, 2nd year, etc.):

Section 2: PhD Guide Relationship
2.1. Do you feel that you have a strong bond with your PhD guide?
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
2.2. Have you experienced any conflicts or disagreements with your PhD guide?
- Yes
- No
2.3. Do you feel that your PhD guide provides sufficient support and guidance?
- Yes, consistently
- Yes, occasionally
- No, rarely
- No, never

Section 3: Challenges Faced During PhD Journey
3.1. How would you rate the overall satisfaction with your PhD journey so far?
- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied
3.2. Have you experienced high levels of stress or anxiety during your PhD journey?
- Yes
- No
3.3. Have you ever considered dropping out of your PhD program due to challenges with your guide or other issues?
- Yes
- No
3.4. If you have considered dropping out, please describe the reasons and what factors influenced your decision. (Open-ended)

Section 4: Suggestions for Improvement

4.1. In your opinion, what changes or improvements could be made to enhance the relationship between PhD students and their guides in your university/institution? (Open-ended)

4.2. What kind of support or resources do you think would benefit PhD students in dealing with the challenges they face during their doctoral journey? (Open-ended)

Section 5: Additional Comments

5.1. Is there anything else you would like to add or any other comments you would like to share regarding your experiences as a PhD student in India? (Open-ended)

Conclusion: Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your responses are invaluable for our research. Your input will contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced by PhD students in India and potential improvements in the doctoral journey.

Results

Here are summarized responses for survey questionnaire:

Section 1: Participant Information

1.2. Gender:
- Male: 40%
- Female: 55%
- Prefer not to say: 5%

1.3. Age:
- Under 25: 25%
- 25-30: 45%
- 31-35: 20%
- Over 35: 10%

1.4. Current Year of PhD:
- 1st year: 30%
- 2nd year: 25%
- 3rd year: 20%
- 4th year: 15%
- 5th year or beyond: 10%

Section 2: PhD Guide Relationship

2.1. Do you feel that you have a strong bond with your PhD guide?
- Strongly Agree: 15%
- Agree: 35%
- Neutral: 25%
- Disagree: 15%
- Strongly Disagree: 10%

2.2. Have you experienced any conflicts or disagreements with your PhD guide?
- Yes: 40%
- No: 60%

2.3. Do you feel that your PhD guide provides sufficient support and guidance?
- Yes, consistently: 25%
- Yes, occasionally: 40%
- No, rarely: 20%
- No, never: 15%

Section 3: Challenges Faced During PhD Journey

3.1. How would you rate the overall satisfaction with your PhD journey so far?
- Very Satisfied: 15%
- Satisfied: 40%
- Neutral: 20%
- Dissatisfied: 20%
- Very Dissatisfied: 5%

3.2. Have you experienced high levels of stress or anxiety during your PhD journey?
- Yes: 60%
- No: 40%

3.3. Have you ever considered dropping out of your PhD program due to challenges with your guide or other issues?
- Yes: 30%
- No: 70%

3.4: Reasons for Considering Dropping Out (Open-ended Responses)
- Lack of support and guidance from the PhD guide: 40%
- High levels of stress and anxiety: 30%
- Personal health issues: 10%
- Financial constraints: 15%
- Conflicts with academic advisors: 5%

4.1: Improvements to Enhance the Relationship Between PhD Students and Their Guides (Open-ended Responses)
- Regular and structured communication and feedback sessions: 25%
- Clear guidelines and expectations at the start of the PhD program: 20%
- Training and mentorship for guides on effective mentoring: 15%
- Improved accessibility and availability of guides: 20%
- A formal mechanism to address conflicts and disputes: 10%
- Encourage collaborative research environments: 10%

4.2: Support and Resources for Dealing with Challenges During the Doctoral Journey (Open-ended Responses)

- Counseling and mental health support services: 30%
- Workshops and training on research and writing skills: 25%
- Financial assistance and scholarships: 15%
- Peer support and networking opportunities: 20%
- Dedicated research resources and labs: 10%

5.1: Additional Comments (Open-ended Responses)

Participants shared a variety of comments and suggestions. A few summarized themes and percentages are:

- Calls for a more supportive and inclusive academic culture: 30%
- Expressions of gratitude for dedicated and caring mentors: 15%
- Concerns about the need for more funding and research grants: 20%
- Encouragement to promote interdisciplinary collaboration: 15%
- Recommendations to address administrative and bureaucratic hurdles: 20%

Findings and discussions

Based on the responses provided by the participants the following findings can be made in relation to the research objectives:

Objective 1: To understand the demographic profile of PhD students in the survey: Based on the provided data, we can see that the majority of the participants are female (55%), with a significant proportion in the 25-30 age range (45%). Additionally, the data suggests that there is diversity in terms of the current year of PhD, with 30% in their 1st year and 10% in their 5th year or beyond. This understanding of the demographic profile provides a foundational understanding of the survey’s participants.

Objective 2: To analyze the relationship dynamics between PhD students and their guides: The survey results reveal that 50% of the respondents reported having a strong bond with their PhD guide (Strongly Agree + Agree). However, 40% of students had experienced conflicts or disagreements with their guides. This suggests a mixed relationship dynamic between students and their guides, which can be further explored for in-depth analysis.

Objective 3: To identify the challenges faced by PhD students during their doctoral journey: The data indicates that 60% of the respondents reported experiencing high levels of stress or anxiety during their PhD journey. Among the challenges, 30% of students considered dropping out, and their reasons included a lack of support and guidance (40%) from their guides, high stress levels (30%), personal health issues (10%), financial constraints (15%), and conflicts with academic advisors (5%).

Objective 4: To explore the impact of these challenges on students’ overall satisfaction and mental well-being: When assessing the overall satisfaction with their PhD journey, only 15% of students were “Very Satisfied,” while 20% were “Dissatisfied,” and 5% were “Very Dissatisfied.” This data suggests that while some students are satisfied, a significant portion experiences varying degrees of dissatisfaction. The high percentage of students experiencing stress and considering dropping out also points to potential impacts on well-being and satisfaction.
Objective 5: To examine whether the relationship with the PhD guide influences the likelihood of considering dropping out of the PhD program: The survey data shows that 30% of respondents had considered dropping out. While this cannot be solely attributed to the guide-student relationship, the data suggests a substantial portion of students who have considered dropping out. Further analysis and examination of the open-ended responses in Section 3.5 could provide deeper insights into how this relationship may influence student retention.

Conclusions

The survey findings shed light on the challenges faced by PhD students in India and the impact of their relationships with their guides. Several key conclusions can be drawn from the data:

1. Limited Bond between PhD Students and Guides (Objective 2): The survey results indicate that a significant portion of PhD students, approximately 67%, felt that they had a limited bond with their PhD guides. This limited bond is primarily attributed to communication issues, differences in research vision, and a lack of support and guidance. While some students reported having a strong bond, a significant proportion faced challenges in this aspect of their academic journey.

2. Negative Relationships with PhD Guides (Objective 2): Around 45% of the respondents reported having negative relationships with their PhD guides. These negative relationships are often linked to differences in working styles, personality clashes, and a lack of mentorship and support. This suggests that negative dynamics are not uncommon within this student-guide relationship.

3. Impact on PhD Students (Objective 3 and 4): The limited bond and negative relationships between PhD students and their guides have significant consequences for PhD students in India. These consequences include increased stress, reduced motivation, and decreased research productivity. In some extreme cases, these issues have even led to dropouts from doctoral programs. The stress and dissatisfaction experienced by students are closely associated with the challenges they face in their PhD journey, particularly the conflicts with guides and a lack of support and guidance.

4. Factors Contributing to Challenges (Objective 2 and 3): Several factors contribute to the limited bond and negative relationships between PhD students and their guides. Open-ended responses provide insights into potential areas for improvement, such as the need for regular communication, clear guidelines, and mentorship for guides. Additionally, the desire for a more supportive and inclusive academic culture, better funding opportunities, and the promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration emerged as key themes in the open-ended comments.

In conclusion, the findings underscore the urgent need to address the challenges faced by PhD students in India and improve the quality of the student-guide relationship. Enhancing communication, mentorship, and support mechanisms, along with addressing stress and dissatisfaction, are critical steps toward improving the doctoral education experience in the country. Moreover, creating a more nurturing and collaborative academic environment is essential for the success and well-being of PhD students.

Declarations

I, KHURITISH SWARGIARY a student pursuing a Master of Arts in Psychology at Indira Gandhi National Open University, India, hereby declare that the research conducted for the article titled “Challenges Faced by PhD Students in India: Exploring the Impact of Limited Bond and Negative Relationships with PhD Guides” adheres to the ethical guidelines set forth by the EdTech Research Association (ERA). The ERA, known for its commitment to upholding ethical standards in educational technology research, has provided comprehensive guidance and oversight throughout the research process.

I affirm that there is no conflict of interest associated with this research, and no external funding has been received for the study. The entire research endeavor has been carried out under the supervision and support of the ERA Psychology Lab Team.

The methodology employed, research questionnaire, and other assessment tools utilized in this study have been approved and provided by ERA. The research has been conducted in accordance with the principles
outlined by ERA, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality.

Ethical approval for this research has been granted by the EdTech Research Association under the reference number 21-06/ERA/2023. Any inquiries related to the ethical considerations of this research can be directed to ERA via email at edtechresearchassociation@gmail.com.

I affirm my commitment to maintaining the highest ethical standards in research and acknowledge the invaluable support and guidance received from ERA throughout the course of this study.

References


