

Chapter 2

COVID Driven Problems Faced by Indian Research Scholars

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Abstract

The article is centered on the major problems faced by the research scholars and young researchers during the COVID 19 pandemic. The article is unique by the way in which the problems are enlisted as they are a collection of various thoughts shared by such research scholars and young researchers with the author. The thoughts shared with the author have been woven into an article with three major dimensions namely Methodology, Infrastructure and Psychology. Thus, the paper is a humble attempt made to report the quintessential problems faced by the said communities in South Asia, specifically from the Southern cities of India.

Introduction

India is a country of diverse thoughts and high held values which get translated into literary works and academic contributions. However, research in India is always considered as a cumbersome and profitless area to most of the youngsters. The teachers and professors at the Government Universities are paid well, however there are very few vacancies arising every year for thousands of doctorates in the country. Given this clumsy situation, researchers have also witnessed unique situations during the COVID pandemic (Joshi, Vinay, & Bhaskar, 2020). (1) Some of the researchers were able to leverage research opportunities from the pandemic but most of them faced problem in continuing their research projects. This article categorizes the problems into three main heads namely the methodological problems, the infrastructural issues and other psychological problems.

Methodology

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The author has engaged in casual conversations with selected research scholars from his contact list and has woven his thoughts into this article. Some of the conversations took place in LinkedIn and WhatsApp platforms and some of them were face to face interactions.

Methodological Problems faced by the Researchers

i) Revision of Statement of Problem

Amidst of the umpteen problems that are of usual nature, the scholars faced peculiar problems because of the pandemic. Those scholars who have completed their course work right before the pandemic had to consider the pandemic situation also, while framing their 'Statements of Problem'. On the other hand, the scholars who were ready with their 'Statements of Problem' have to reconsider the same, as the situation was unique to any given research context in Social Sciences. New approaches were evolving to cater the needs of such research scholars (Dodds & Hess, 2020). (2) This was creating stress in the minds of those research scholars who were reserved for enacting such changes as it would magnanimously affect the research plan of the scholar.

ii) Reconsideration of Variables

The identification and deployment of dependent and independent variables in a research is inevitable. The very nature of any variable is to change and to create a substantial impact on the conceptual framework which in turn will reflect on the recommendations and suggestions made by the researcher. The process of identifying the variables does not begin separately, in certain cases the variables are identified by the researchers along with the research problem and in other few cases the variables are identified after detecting the research problem and its context. The pandemic brought so many repercussions to various fields and sectors. And, in the field of research, it paved a new avenue of research problems. These research problems introduced new variables and these variables revealed that they have high potentiality to redefine the perceptions of theories, concepts and models in certain fields like Medicine, Humanities and Business.

The research guides were highly distracted by the new variables and were curious to change the conceptual framework of their scholars. Though some of the scholars, who were also equally fascinated and distracted, have agreed to change the variables and the framework, most of the scholars were reluctant. This reluctant nature of some of the scholars was apparently affecting the relationship between the scholars and their respective guides.

iii) Proliferation of Variables

None of us were expecting such a situation where we will be having new

avenues of research, new problems demanding research and new opportunities demanding or favoring research. These new avenues, problems and opportunities were also bringing new range of variables and new faces for the existing variables. For instance, a study conducted in South Korea intended to discover the Korean media's framing of COVID 19 and its impact on the support rendered by the people to the government (Jo & Chang , 2020). (3) Contrastingly, this newness in the world of variables was creating a situation of proliferation. Rather assuring clarity and confidence, the newly born or the newly identified variables were creating a state of confusion. Such a state of confusion can be easily compared to the term proliferation. Proliferation in any environment is a state which refers to overpopulation of an element which will further create an imbalance in the environment. Thus, the overpopulation of variables in umpteen numbers of fields ranging from Medicine to Humanities to Business has created a state of confusion and an imbalance, which in turn has affected the confidence level of scholars and budding researchers.

iv) Hammered Variables

While new set of variables were getting discovered during the pandemic, there were a lot of variables which were conceptually disappearing or displacing. For instance, the scholars and researchers of the tourism management and hospitality domain were finding it difficult to recognize and understand the presence of even major variables as the industry was completely shut. The problems faced by such scholars and researchers in the areas of data collection and field work were easily understood by their research guides and supervisors. However, this unique problem of missing the existence of variables in the industry was not easily identified by the researchers themselves, and even if identified they were not easily accepted as a reason for the lag in research progress by the supervisors.

v) Lack of Scales and Questionnaire Templates

Handful number of scholars in each and every Indian University who agreed to make changes in the conceptual framework, were finding difficult to find suitable scales and questionnaire templates for proceeding with their data collection. Though including the pandemic as a dimension or at least as a variable in the context of research problem statement has created a new avenue and scope of research, finding a suitable scale was cumbersome. The reasons are very obvious, as the country or the world has not seen such a worst pandemic in the recent past. Though the countries have witnessed worse pandemic situations in the past they were of different political, economic, social, legal, environmental and technological setting. Hence the scholars and researchers have to construct new scales or at least have to redefine their questionnaires accordingly.

vi) Lack of Expertise in Exploratory Research

This article has already discussed the arrival of new set of variables or the change in the role of existing variables in the fields of Medicine, Humanities and Business. Some of these variables were paving way for multidisciplinary researches also. Though the scholars and researchers were showing curiosity and enthusiasm towards this new set of variables, most of them were lacking expertise in leveraging these variables for their research projects(Bora, 2020).(4) For instance, the new range of variables can be associated with the existing variables to formulate a new research problem, but for which the scholars and researchers were not having prior exposure to such leverages.

On the other hand, the scholars and researchers were lacking expertise to explore and identify the newly born variables. Indeed, most of them were not used to these kinds of situations ever before in their life. However few researchers who were able to explore new variables had opportunities to construct new sub-domains in their respective areas of research.

Infrastructural Issues faced by the Researchers

i) Inaccessible Laboratories

When the pandemic was at its peak the scholars were not able to continue their experiments at their designated workstations and laboratories in almost every university(Bakker & Wagner , 2020).(5A) Even after the pacification of COVID cases, and even when most of the other sectors have resumed, the researchers are finding it very difficult to find subjects for their experiments. In my own case, where I need to conduct a neuropsychological experiment with 30 to 40 subjects, I am facing certain problems which are mainly evolving around the COVID protocols and other related safety norms. And because of which, I had to change my research design. This has caused inordinate delay in the execution of subtasks of the research.

Generally, the subjects are still skeptical about the safety arrangements existing at the laboratories as they are visited by hundreds of students in a given day. The researchers are also feeling helpless as they cannot afford such equipments and laboratory arrangements at another exclusive and secluded place for conducting their experiments.

ii) Unreachable Work Cubicles

Most of the researchers and scholars in India have cultivated a habit of spending their quality research time at their work cubicles or laboratories. If laboratories are ensuring research mindset for a researcher in Science, it is the work cubicle for a Social Science researcher or a Linguistic researcher. The ambience, serenity and the positivity that is rendered by a work cubicle cannot be replaced by any other infrastructure for a researcher. For most of the scholars their cubicles are the

places where their brains have been tuned for research related thought processes.

iii) Dilution of Institutional Support

The wholesome support that was rendered by the institutions was not continuing to the researchers in the same way it was (Bakker & Wagner, 2020). (5B) The institutions and the apex management authorities themselves were finding it tougher to cope up with the pandemic situation and they have stopped rendering their usual support to the researchers. Some of the institutions in South Asia were not able to pay the research stipend for their research scholars and salary for their researchers and research assistants. Research scholars who were solely dependent on the institutional libraries were left abandoned when the universities and colleges closed their libraries (El-Hamed Diab & Elgahsh, 2020). (6)

Psychological Challenges faced by the Researchers

i) Work from Home Issues

Most of the homes in India do not come with an exclusive space for office chores or research chores. Because of which, the researchers were having a lot of hindrances in pursuing and continuing their research chores from their homes. The hindrances primarily include the acoustic issues, lighting and ventilation related issues, lack of exclusive space, and mismanagement of time, lack of power backup facilities and lack of strong internet connectivity. The researchers like any other pool of employees were not able to differentiate between their office and domestic chores which was creating mental stress to them. The stress was also provoked by the slope of the COVID related statistics and anxiety.

ii) Lack of Moral Support

Face to face interactions with the guide was implicitly providing moral support to the scholars and to the budding researchers. The accountability on the part of scholars was also high during such interactions and delegations. The scholars were more connected to their research guide and their department which held this accountability at heights. But the online meetings and interactions have resulted in less accountability which was indeed a major resultant of poor moral support rendered from the research mentor's end (Gautam & Sharma, 2020). (7)

iii) Sense of Anxiety, Insecurity and Depression

When every other corner of the World was bothered about the pandemic, we cannot expect a researcher to sit and work on his operational definitions and hypotheses. Every sphere of the economy was affected by the pandemic and every institution in the educational industry was also hit. Such economic repercussions

further affected the monetary pays of the employees, teachers and especially the research scholars and assistants. This was creating anxiety, job insecurity and mental depression in their minds(Prasad , Vaidya , & Mangipudi , 2020). (8) Few organizations stopped paying their salaries and few other organizations had pay-cuts. The stipends feeding the families of research scholars were also stopped by most of the institutions which have turned their lives miserable (Prasad , Vaidya , & Mangipudi , 2020). (8)

Conclusion

The article makes a humble attempt to enlist the problems faced by the research scholars in India. These problems shall be immediately addressed by the research guides and other authorities of the institutions for effectively handholding the budding researchers, who are indeed the future faces of the academic world.

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