

Mapping Doctoral Research in Library and Information Science at Panjab University, Chandigarh: A Study Based on Student's Perceptions and Expectations

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines doctoral research in the library & information science discipline at Panjab University, Chandigarh, based on student's perceptions and expectations by posing several research questions. This study aimed to gain insight into research scholar's perspectives on earning a Ph.D. Based on primary data from 48 respondents through a structured questionnaire in April 2018, the study tabulated, analysed and interpreted information to draw inferences. As the study is limited to research scholars at the DLIS at Panjab University, the universe of the study is relatively narrow. The study's findings reveal that most respondents had a personal decision to get admitted to the Ph.D. programme. However, there were cases where better job prospects, promotion in career, some practical problems, and the advice of a friend/senior/teacher motivated them to join doctoral research. The Panjab University was the first and last choice for the majority of respondents for doing a Ph.D. Two-thirds of respondents stated that quality of doctoral research accomplished in the DLIS PU is good and applied, and three-fifths believed that the research quality has improved with time. Only one-fifth of respondents found quality of physical infrastructure for doctoral research work in the Department is of the best quality. Several respondents feel that doctoral research at Panjab University and India, in general, still depends on research models applied in Western countries, especially in the UK and USA. However, a group of respondents believed it is either struggling to have its own identity or is a blend of Western and Oriental modes. Researchers will be encouraged to choose regionally relevant and application-oriented topics.

Keywords: Doctoral research; Research model; Theoretical or bookish; Research quality and infrastructure; Panjab University; Chandigarh

1. INTRODUCTION

If viewed from a socio-ecological perspective, the three main components of doctoral research program, namely the research supervisor, the research student, and the institution, are intertwined. The supervisor has a more significant role in shaping doctoral student into a future academician or practitioner. On the other side, a research supervisor has to work within the administrative, infrastructural and policy framework of the institution she/he works. There is always a need to investigate doctoral research ecosystem to take remedial measures. One of the crucial steps in this direction is understanding the psychology and sociology of doctoral research scholars investing six to eight years to earn the highest research degree. Research involves time and effort. There must be some strong rationale for doing it. By delving into the minds of Ph.D. students, one can get answers to these questions and simultaneously assess their views on quality and research standards.

Important issues involved are the factors behind the desire to join a Ph.D. fondness for the particular

supervisor and the institution, views about the availability of and accessibility to physical and human resources, perspective, quality and market value of research work, etc. The study is limited to research scholars of DLIS, PU; hence, the scope of the study is relatively small. It provides a better understanding of why LIS PhDs are pursued. Department of Library and Information Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh, introduced a doctoral research degree program in Library Science in the academic session 1972-73 and then redesignated it as Ph.D. in Library and Information Science from the academic session 1988-89. On average, 3-4 students get registered every year.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

The existing literature already has some studies on different aspects of doctoral research work in LIS. Danton points to the high attrition rates in the few LIS doctoral programs due to a lack of research grants. Whitbeck echoed the same sentiment in his North American LIS doctoral programs survey. Research training consumes the bulk of 'doctoral student's lives and is the one area of their preparation that seems successful. In a study, Haider and Mahmood examined the status of LIS Research

at MS and Ph.D. levels in Pakistan. They noted that Doctoral Programs in LIS suffer from different issues, such as lack of encouragement by the seniors, inadequate financial assistance to candidates and poor output quality. Gardner noted socialisation as an essential factor. Klingler deliberated on the role of teaching faculty in creating a positive student environment.

In another research, Kapusniak, *et al.* noted that challenges or barriers arise from many sources, including socioeconomic and program-specific factors. Guerin, Jayatilaka, & Ranasinghe identified the five broad areas of research motivation: Family and Friends, Intrinsic Motivation, Lecturer Influence, Research Experience, and Career Progression. Partridge and Lisa, in a research project, worked to answer five critical questions regarding the research priorities, its value, the capacity of professionals, practitioners and academic researchers, and the research culture in the LIS discipline in Australia. All the LIS practitioners, students and researchers were invited to participate in the study.

Studying research productivity of research conducted in different disciplines at the University of Jammu during 2010-19, Gupta, Rajput and Gul (2021) noted that collaborative research work is the hallmark of the research published in different journals. Only about one-tenth of research papers published had single authorship. Earlier, Teli & Dutta conducted a similar study for Vidyasagar University from 1989-2014, Goswami and Hazarika for Assam University from 2000-2015 and Nagarkar, Veer and Kumbhar for Pune University from 1999-2013. Bruce noted that several library and information science professionals think enrolling in a doctoral program is a great way to research in a supportive environment with others with similar interests. Attrition, supervisor relationship, supervisor quality, and social isolation are the commonly discussed issues in doctoral thesis work.

Jairam & Kahl Jr stated that stress and isolation are prime contributors to attrition and many students exit during their first year in the Ph.D. course due to stress and isolation. Bitzer and Leshem (2021) concluded that doctoral candidates rely mainly on psycho-social support and that particular kinds of such support are crucial at different stages of doctoral journey.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In light of the above statements, the present study investigates doctoral research program in the Library Information Science discipline at the Panjab University, Chandigarh, in light of the following research objectives:-

- Examination of factors motivating the students to join doctoral research in the Department of Library & Information Science at Panjab University, Chandigarh,
- Student's assessment of available research infrastructure in the Department of Library & Information Science,
- Student's perception of the help and guidance they received from their research supervisors during research supervision; and

- To know the market value of Ph.D. degree awarded in Library & Information Science by the Panjab University, Chandigarh.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study used a questionnaire-based survey to collect data. A pilot survey was conducted before finalising the questionnaire and two more questions were added in response to the feedback received. While framing the questionnaire, more than 15 associates from LIS and non-LIS backgrounds were referred. Having finalised it, it was sent to three selective associates out of those 15 people who had originally been consulted for the purpose of experimental trial.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts, Personal Identification and Doctoral Research Work, had sixteen questions. The former seeks personal information, including respondent's name, sex, age, educational level, domicile, occupation, research/teaching experience, and affiliation. The latter focused on motivation to join research, the research environment and quality of research in the Department.

The questionnaire was emailed/posted/shared on the mobile link to 82 respondents. Twenty-one respondents registered for Ph.D. till April 2018; the remaining 61 have already been awarded degrees until 2017. Forty-eight or 59.0 % of 82 selected respondents responded to the questionnaire. They were distributed in the following manner: 15 were presently working, and 33 completed Ph.D. from the department in different years.

On some questions relating to research quality, research infrastructure, and inter-personal relations with the research supervisor, several respondents were hesitant to express their views explicitly. However, some respondents were forthright during informal interactions and shared their opinions frankly. The answers received were tabulated for analysis and interpretation. Before examining the research objectives with the help of data interpretation and analysis, we discussed respondent's demographic, social, and professional backgrounds.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

One of the forty-eight respondents, Professor Ali Jalai Dizaji, is from the Islamic Republic of Iran and completed his doctoral research work in the DLIS PU. The remaining respondents are from India, mostly from states in northwest India in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, NCT of Delhi, western Uttar Pradesh, and northern districts of Rajasthan.

Most of respondents were males (56 %) and mostly belonged to urban areas (75 %). Numerically, twenty-one of the 48 respondents were females, and only thirteen had a rural background (25 %). Further, most students joining the Library and Information Science discipline at the Panjab University, Chandigarh, come from urban areas. In other words, Library and Information Science is most popular among urban people.

Respondents belonged to different age groups ranging from superannuated Professors to young students doing research work in the Department. The average age of respondents was 26 years, and respondents' age ranged from 74 years to 23 years. The senior citizen's age group (60 plus) registered an edge over the younger group (below 30 years). Half of respondents fell in the age group of 40-59 years (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by age-groups

Age-group	Number	Per cent in total
Below 30	6	12.5
30-39	9	18.7
40-59	24	50
60-69	7	14.6
70 & Above	2	04.2
Total	48	100.0

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2018

Most respondents had a doctoral degree in Library and Information Science. Thirty-six, or 75 % of the total 48 respondents, were Ph.D. and the remaining twelve or 25 %, had a postgraduate degree.

The most significant number of respondents was made of librarians (12) and the smallest of Assistant Professors and Deputy Librarians, one each. The research scholars form the second largest group of respondents next to librarians, followed by miscellaneous occupation's with eight and Assistant Librarian with seven. The three each were Professors and Associate Professors (Table 2).

These respondents work in universities/organisations in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, NCT of Delhi and Chandigarh (UT). Eleven respondents were doing their doctoral research

Table 2. Distribution of respondents by position/occupation

Profession/occupation	Number	Per cent in total
Librarian	12	25
Research Student	11	22.9
Miscellaneous occupations	8	16.7
Assistant Librarian	7	14.6
Professor	3	06.2
Associate Professor	3	06.2
Professor (Retd.)	2	04.2
Deputy Librarian	1	02.1
Assistant Professor	1	02.1
Total	48	100.0

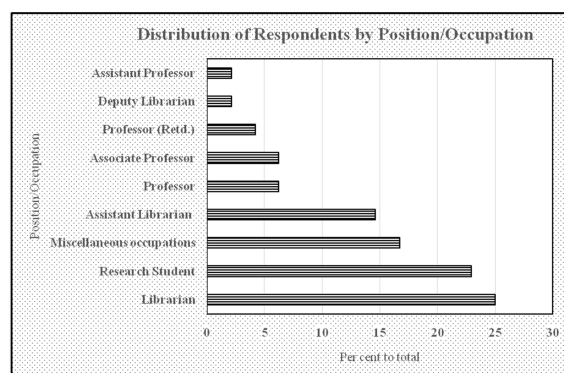


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by position/occupation.

work in the DLIS PU. Another eight were engaged in different occupations like documentation work.

Their research/teaching/working experience varied widely, ranging from less than one year to 38 years. As stated before, two were superannuated as Library and Information Science Professors. More than one-fourth had a working/teaching of fewer than five years, while more than one-third had an experience of more than 15 years (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by their teaching research work experience

Experience (in years)	Number	Per cent in total
Below 5.0	13	27
5-10	09	18.8
11-15	09	18.8
16-25	10	20.8
More than 25	07	14.6
Total	48	100.0

Briefly, the majority of respondents were males belonging to urban areas. They belonged to different age groups and were engaged in various occupations associated with the library and library science discipline.

They were highly educated and had vast professional experience. Three-fourths of 48 respondents had Ph.D. degrees in the Library and Information Science field, and more than one-third had working experience of more than 15 years.

6. MOTIVATION TO JOIN THE DEPARTMENT FOR PH.D. DEGREE

In response to the question, what motivated respondents to join doctoral research in Library and Information Science at Panjab University, Chandigarh? A variety of responses were received from respondents. Their answers ranged from 'personal decision' to 'clearing of UGC-NET or Entrance Test' organised at Panjab University, Chandigarh. However, more than three-fourths of respondents stated it was a personal decision. The foreign national from the Islamic Republic of Iran

stated that the Iranian Embassy Office in New Delhi cleared his admission under the Indo-Iranian Cultural Exchange Programme. The four respondents indicated that they decided on advice from one of their former/present teachers. Another two respondents (P2 and P6) said that seniors/friend's advice influenced their decision. In a study conducted on Southeast Asian students joining private universities in Japan, Tsuneji found that the recommendation of families, relatives, friends, seniors, professors, and Japanese teachers made the second most popular reason to join doctoral research degrees.

One of respondents stated that since he was already working with the Central Library, Panjab University, Chandigarh, it was convenient and advisable to join doctoral research here in the DLIS PU. Another respondent (P46) said that a Library and Information Science doctorate could get better job opportunities than other sister disciplines in social sciences (Table 4).

Notably, respondents' responses differed widely by their work/occupation. For example, while the overwhelming majority of Librarians, Research Students and others stated that it was a personal choice, the Deputy Librarian, Assistant Professor and Associate Professor said they joined either on advice from their former/present teachers or their practical problems.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents by motivational factor to join Ph.D. in DLIS PU, 2018

Motivational factor	Number	% in total
Personal decision	37	77
Advice of Former/Present Teacher	4	8.3
Advice of Friend/Senior	2	4.2
Cleared UGC-NET Test of PU	2	4.2
Already working at PU	1	2.1
Admitted under Indo-Iranian Exchange Program	1	2.1
Better Job Opportunities Chances	1	2.1
Total	48	100.0

6.1 The Choice of Institution to Enrol for a Ph.D.

The students enrolled for the Ph.D. degree at the Department were asked to choose where they had registered for the Ph.D. degree in LIS after clearing the UGC-NET JRF Test. Options included the University of Delhi, Delhi, University of Madras, Chennai, Bangalore, Bengaluru, Panjab University, Chandigarh. The dominant majority mentioned Panjab University, Chandigarh, followed by the University of Delhi, Delhi, University of Madras, Chennai, and Bangalore, Bengaluru. However, it must be noted that the overwhelming majority of students enrolled for Ph.D. in LIS at Panjab University, Chandigarh, belong to neighbouring Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir states.

6.2 Employability and Ph.D. Degree in LIS

Respondents were asked to tell us about their job prospects after receiving a doctoral research degree from the DLIS PU. One-fifth of them were sure of getting a good job soon after the research degree award, about one-sixth were not sure of getting a good job, and more than two-fifths opined that a Ph.D. degree is helpful in promotion (Table 5). Perhaps, the UGC career promotion policy has made Ph.D. degrees compulsory in promotions from low to higher levels of hierarchy in teaching or libraries. The majority of respondents in both groups, i.e. unemployed freshers (8.33 %) and working librarians/faculty (77.08), think that (77.08), think that earning a doctorate will increase their chances of promotion. (Table 5.1)

Table 5. Distribution of respondents by their response about employability chances after awarding of Ph.D. degree in LIS, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Employability chance	Number	% in Total
Bright soon after award of the degree	10	20.8
Bright sometimes after having the degree	08	16.7
Not Sure about employment chances	09	18.7
Good for promotion	21	43.8
Total	48	100.0

Table 5.1 Distribution of respondents unemploye Vs. working librarians/faculty by their response about employability chances after awarding of Ph.D. degree in DLIS, PU

Employability chance	Unemployed freshers (% in total)	Working librarian/faculty (% in total)	Total (% in total)
Bright soon after award of the degree	3 (6.25)	7 (14.58)	10 (20.8)
Bright sometimes after having the degree	2 (4.17)	6 (12.50)	8 (16.7)
Not Sure about employment chances	2 (4.17)	7 (14.58)	9 (18.7)
Good for promotion	4 (8.33)	17 (35.42)	21 (43.8)
Total	11 (22.92)	37 (77.08)	48 (100)

6.3 Researcher and Research Supervisor's Bond

Respondents were asked to state their satisfaction with their research supervisors. They were asked: Given the opportunity, would you or had you changed your research supervisor? This question explicitly addressed the supervisor and student's bond via indirect questioning with one research supervisor. 97.92 % of respondents

were happy with their supervisors and did not want to change them. Undecided respondents accounted for only 2.08 % of the responses. It indicates good interpersonal relationships and a healthy trend toward high research productivity (Table 6).

Table 6. Distribution of respondents by their response about researcher and research supervisor's bond during Ph.D.in DLIS, PU

Change of supervisor	Number	% in total
Yes	0	0
No	47	97.92
Undecided	1	2.08
Total	48	100.0

6.4 Quality of Doctoral Research at Deptt. of LIS, PU

More than two-thirds respondents stated that doctoral studies in DLIS PU are of applied value. Another less than one-tenth were of the view that it is theoretical. A few noted that it was bookish and about one-sixth made no comments (Table 7).

Table 7. Distribution of respondents by their answers regarding quality of doctoral research in DLIS PU

Research quality	Number	% in total
Applied	33	68.8
Theoretical	04	08.3
Bookish	03	06.3
Can't comment	08	16.6
Total	48	100.0

6.5 Quality of their Own Doctoral Research

A question was posed to respondents to state quality of their doctoral research work to counter-check their responses on quality of doctoral research in the Department. About three-fifths of respondents indicated that their studies are of applied nature. This claim by three-fifths of respondents is quite close to their comment on doctoral research produced in the Department. Interestingly, about 30 or three in each ten stated that their doctoral research work is path-breaking. While about 5 % indicated that it is theoretical, less than 10 % said that it is routine/traditional (Table 8).

Table 8. Distribution of respondents by their answers regarding quality of their doctoral research in DLIS PU

Research quality	Number	% in total
Path breaking	14	29.1
Applied	28	58.3
Theoretical	02	04.2
Routine/traditional	04	08.4
Total	48	100.0

6.6 Quality of Research: Then and Now

More than three-fifths of respondents believed that quality of Library and Information Science research has improved. In their view, now there is greater use of quantitative methodology and scientific explanations than in earlier periods. However, more than one-third of respondents refrained from making any direct answer to this question. The remaining stated that they knew about it (Table 9).

Table 9. Distribution of respondents by their answers regarding improvement in research quality in DLIS PU.

Change in research quality	Number	% in total
Improved	30	62.5
Not too sure	17	35.4
Can't comment	01	02.1
Total	48	100.0

6.7 Quality of Physical Infrastructure for Research

Respondents were also asked to give their opinion about quality of physical infrastructure in the Department for the research students. Less than one-fourth replied as the best quality, more than half stated that quality is good, and another-sixth said it is average.

One respondent stated that it is below the average, and another said it is poor (Table 10). It indicates satisfaction with the physical Infrastructure available for research students in the DLIS PU.

Table 10. Distribution of respondents' answers regarding quality of physical infrastructure for research students in DLIS PU

Quality type	Number	% in total
Best	11	22.9
Good	26	54.2
Average	9	18.7
Below average	1	02.1
Poor	1	02.1
Total	48	100.0

6.8 Research Replicates Western Model or has its Own Identity?

Respondents interpreted/understood these questions differently. The majority of respondents skipped this question. Only fourteen respondents, making up less than 30 per cent of all respondents, replied to this question. In the following, respondents' answers have been summarised in tabular form.

Half of the fourteen respondents commented on this question. They stated that research in the LIS discipline in India is still following the mode of research inquiry or models developed in the University of the Western World, especially in the UK and the USA (Table 11). Another five stated that it has moved toward blending the Western and Indian modes of research inquiry.

One respondent noted that doctoral research in the LIS discipline in India is struggling hard to have its own identity.

There were general comments on this issue. One of the comments was that “doctoral research has to be innovative and must serve the interests of the society at large”. Another comment was that “doctoral research must imbibe a holistic approach and supportive culture, encouraging all”. One respondent said, “the researchers should stop copy-paste culture”, and the research supervisors must also be careful about this”. Another stated, “research themes like Space Management in Libraries, the role of Public Libraries, the Acquisition of Documents should be the priority. Another stated that the physical infrastructure “quality is satisfactory, but emphasised the need for strong physical facilities relating to ICT and research and scientific trends movement towards new themes going around the electronic and virtual systems to access and gain a better position at the international level. For example, fields of study include scientometrics, knowledge management, digital library, intelligent systems and services, social networks, cloud processing and retrieving, etc. Yet another observation states that “research focus should be on the cutting edge of the subject and must move in the right way on a sustainable basis”.

Table 11. Respondents’ answers about the research enquiry model in DLIS PU

Research inquiry model type	Number	% in total
Western	7	14.6
Blend of Western-Indian	5	10.4
Struggling to have own identity	1	02.1
North Indian	1	02.1
No comment/response	34	70.8
Total	48	100.0

7. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that most respondents made a personal decision to get admitted to the Ph.D. programme. However, there were cases where better job prospects, some practical problems, and the advice of a friend/senior/teacher motivated them to join doctoral research. DLIS PU was the first and last choice for doing a Ph.D. for the most respondents.

More than two-thirds of respondents stated that quality of doctoral research done in the DLIS PU is good and applied. However, about one-seventh of respondents found it theoretical or bookish. About 30 % of respondents found their doctoral research work path-breaking, another about 60 per cent applied, and the remaining felt it was theoretical/routine.

Three-fifths of respondents believed that quality of research has improved with time in the Department, while the remaining two-fifths were either unsure or preferred to skip the question. Only one-fifth of the total respondents found quality of physical Infrastructure for doctoral research work available in the Department

of the best quality. Almost an equal percentage share of respondents found it below average or poor quality. For the majority of respondents, it is of good quality.

Most respondents feel that doctoral research at Panjab University and India, in general, still depends on research models applied in Western countries, especially in the UK and USA. However, a group of respondents believed it is either struggling to have its own identity or is a blend of Western and Oriental modes. Unfortunately, the dominant majority of respondents skipped this question. Hence, it is difficult to form an opinion about this issue. One-fifth respondents opined that they had joined Ph.D. for bright chances of getting a good job, and one-fifth stated that they were not sure about employment chances, while more than two-fifths found that the worth of a Ph.D. degree in getting a promotion in the career. The study has raised a few questions based on respondents’ answers. Western models dominate research, which should be addressed, and local/regional issues should be prioritised.

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He helped in data analysis and drawing conclusions.