

FROM CONFUSION TO COMMITMENT: UNDERSTANDING GRADUATE STUDENTS' STRUGGLES IN CHOOSING RESEARCH TOPICS

Dr. Abid Ali¹, Sania², Kainat³, Waqas Anjum⁴, Husnain Raza⁵

¹Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Government Postgraduate College, Mardan
^{2,3,4,5}Bs Sociology, GPGC, Mardan

¹abidalisocio472@gmail.com, ²ahmadkhan53184@gmail.com, ³kainatkhankainat21@gmail.com,
⁴waqasanjum657@gmail.com, ⁵hasnainraza649@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20228533>

Keywords

"Research topic selection, graduate students, challenges, supervision, fear of failure, confidence".

Article History

Received: 18 March 2026

Accepted: 27 April 2026

Published: 16 May 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Abid Ali

Abstract

In the present study, an attempt was made to explore the different problems which graduate level students of the Government Postgraduate College, Mardan are facing in selecting suitable research topics. A qualitative research design was used for this purpose as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of the personal, academic, and institutional problems faced while choosing research topics by the students. The data collection was carried out in 15 students who were selected by a purposive sampling technique using a semi-interview schedule in the 7th and 8th semesters. The Interest-Driven Theory was used as the theory of the study. Thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed in analysing the data aimed at finding themes and patterns of the problems faced by the students. The analysis yielded eight main themes: lack of resources, fear of failure, academic workload, financial problems, competition with other students, problems with finishing the research project, problems with supervisor feedback or guidance, and dealing with safe versus risky topics. The research results contribute to the knowledge of psychological and academic obstacles that prevent students from choosing appropriate research topics. The outcomes are anticipated to help both college students and their supervisors to facilitate and encourage students through the research process effectively.

INTRODUCTION

Research is seen as an integral part of the university in higher education because of its role in developing problem-solving skills, critical thinking and academic growth of students. Selecting the right research topic is one of the most crucial steps in the research process. A research topic is a specific issue, problem, or area of interest that the researcher proposes to study systematically. The choice of a research topic is the foundation on which the whole research process depends since it determines the direction, quality and usefulness of the research (Creswell, 2018). A clear and well-researcher to stay focused and organize their research process.

Choosing a research topic isn't always easy. It involves students in selecting an area of interest, investigating the literature and assessing the resources available and the relevance and feasibility of the area. Liu (2019) explained that topic selection is an ongoing process that involves researchers investigating, developing and reformulating ideas until they narrow down to a particular field of study. It is therefore necessary to choose the right topic, which requires planning, intellectual interest, and academic advice. There are several challenges to topic selection that are common to graduate-level students. These obstacles can be: not

having knowledge of research, not having access to academic resources, fear of failure, academic workload, financial issues, time limitations and uncertainty about the relevance of the chosen topic. The pressure exerted by supervisors, competition from other students, and expectations for school performance can cause students to become confused and anxious in many instances. Students, therefore, devote a significant portion of their time to choosing an appropriate and manageable research topic.

Based on Gul's (2021) statement, students have various ways of choosing research topics, including reading in the library, internet research, talking with fellow students, and asking for assistance from teachers and supervisors. But the decision-making process can be influenced by organizational needs, time constraints, and supervisors' expectations. These factors can have a negative impact on students' confidence and motivation while doing research.

The role of supervisors is also an important one in assisting students to choose suitable research topics. Supervision can be good or bad; it can give guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback; it can cause confusion and frustration. Likewise, institutional support, such as library, internet, and research workshops, is an important factor in supporting the research process. This circumstance might cause difficulties for students in higher education institutions, especially in public sector colleges (Liu, 2020).

Although the culture of research has started taking shape among graduate students in Pakistan, there are still some students who have to encounter academic and institutional challenges in research. The problem of topic selection for the students is compounded by the limited research facilities available in public sector colleges, inadequate academic resources and a lack of appropriate training in research in these institutions. Therefore, it becomes essential to recognize the difficulties involved in the decision-making of choosing a research topic among graduate students for improving the quality of academic research as well as for supporting the graduate students properly.

This study aims to delve into the problems of graduate-level students in the Government Postgraduate College Mardan with regard to

research topic selection. The college was chosen as a case study to understand the institutional, academic and socio-personal challenges faced by the students in the process of topic selection. The study is meant to give a contextualized understanding of these challenges and provide recommendations that could help the research practice and academic support system in public sector colleges of Pakistan to be improved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The choice of a research topic is seen as one of the most important phases in the research process as it would affect the direction, scope and quality of the research study. Finding a researchable and meaningful topic to work on is a common problem for graduate students, resulting from a lack of research experience, self-assurance, and support. Panket et al. (2022) stated that choosing the research topic involves four criteria, namely students' interest, academic feasibility, originality and practical relevance. But many postgraduates find it difficult to choose and concentrate their general interests on specific and researchable problems due to the lack of research skills and methodological understanding.

In a similar fashion, Jilcha (2025) found that one of the challenges of postgraduate students is the process of choosing research topic. One key finding of the study was that students do not have enough background knowledge about the originality of the topic, its relevance, and academic importance. Consequently, students are confused in the early stages of research and have problems in formulating research goals and questions. Mariano and Potane (2022) also noted that students' weak conceptual understanding and unclear thinking have a negative impact on creating appropriate research titles and formulating effective problem statements.

Availability of research resources

Another critical aspect that affects students' choice of research topics is access to good research material. Researchers need to have the proper academic facilities, such as a library, internet facility, journals, computers, and software to do effective research. Students may not have access to high-performance computers or computer systems which can make it difficult

for them to analyze data, process information and complete complex research tasks (Silva and Pedro, 2023). Students may not choose a high level or innovative research area due to lack of technological resources, which slows the progress of research. Moreover, a student's choice of topics is greatly influenced by access to digital databases and scholarly information. Many public sector institutions do not provide students with easy access to online journals, research databases available for payment, and the latest research literature. This limitation in resources limits students' access to current research and hampers their capability to determine topics for primary or research purposes.

Fear of failure/lack of confidence

One of the common psychological obstacles faced by graduate students during research is the fear of failure. Often, students experience research anxiety when they are not sure of their own research skills or when they think they might get wrong answers when choosing or doing research. Supervisors should be familiar with the concept of research anxiety and be careful not to overstructure students' choices of research topics, since students with high research anxiety will not make independent research decisions, according to Cooper et al. (2023). This fear has a negative impact on the confidence, motivation and critical thinking skills of the students. Likewise, students are limited from investigating innovative or challenging research topics due to low self-confidence. Students often choose "safe" topics that are easy to finish instead of picking topics of real scholarly interest. These attitudes are detrimental to creativity and to the quality of research at the graduate level in general.

Academic and Linguistic Challenges

Research topic selection is also a challenging area for graduate students that is faced with a few academic and technical difficulties. A very common problem is a lack of knowledge of research methodology and the method of data analysis. There are also several students who are not familiar with research software like SPSS and NVivo, which makes it difficult to analyse and interpret research data (The Friday Times, 2022). This unawareness of techniques deters

students from choosing topics that demand a high level of research techniques. Another significant impact is the language barriers on students' research skills, especially in countries where English is not the native language. Students often have challenges in comprehending academic literature in English, thus constraining their capacity to review the existing literature and uncover research gaps. Consequently, students have difficulty in developing a good research question and theory. The lack of awareness of research methods and a misunderstanding of which research methods to use are big problems for students, as noted by Henderson and Dancy (2019). The authors proposed that these challenges can be overcome by students' self-directed learning, students' reading of academic materials, participation in research workshops and getting guidance from experienced researchers and faculty members.

Role of the Supervisor

The role of a supervisor is an important part in guiding the students throughout the research process, especially when selecting the topic. Good supervision gives students academic guidance, encouragement and feedback. When supervisors are not involved or communication is poor, it can lead to confusion and frustration among students and make the process of topic selection more difficult, as cited by Hadi and Muhammad (2017). Effective mentoring involves engaging with students to help them see viable and meaningful research topics that are aligned with their learning interests and capacities. Moreover, Gul, Yousaf, and Yaqub (2021) noted that students with topics close to the field of their supervisors are provided with better academic assistance and guidance. This will enhance the quality of feedback, save time and build student confidence when conducting research. Supportive supervision also stimulates students to think outside the box and to finish their research well.

Institutional support and research environment

Institutional support is also key in determining the research topics of the graduate students. Students who attend universities or colleges that have research cultures, research training programs and academic workshops have

improved opportunities to learn research skills. However, institutions with few facilities and an inadequate research environment may have a negative impact on students' academic development. However, recent studies reveal that insufficient research training, the non-existence of seminars and inadequate academic counseling are to be blamed for the students' problems in choosing proper research topics (Ahmed & Khan, 2024). Public sector colleges in developing countries like Pakistan are sometimes hindered by a lack of funds, poor technological facilities and poor mentorship in conducting research. These problems add further obstacles for graduate students and make the research activities less effective. Thus, it is important to strengthen the support systems and research facilities in the institutions to improve the research experience and academic performance of students.

METHODOLOGY

The present study used a qualitative research design to identify problems of choosing a research topic for the graduate level students of the Government Postgraduate College, Mardan. A qualitative approach was chosen as it would enable the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the personal experiences, perceptions, and struggles faced by students when selecting a research topic. The male and female students of 7 and 8 semesters were selected as the target population of the study because they were either doing research projects or searching for appropriate research topics. The selection of the respondents was done purposively to ensure that those who were selected know about the problem under study and direct experience in the field. To get a

variety of perspectives on the problems encountered with topic selection, a total of 15 participants were chosen from both genders. The tool of data collection was semi-structured interviews, which gave the participants the opportunity to communicate their opinions, experiences and thoughts freely and gave the researcher the chance to ask more in-depth questions. The interview covered the following areas: personal, academic, institutional, and psychological factors affecting students' choice of research topics. The analysis of the collected data was conducted using the thematic approach of Braun and Clarke (2006), which is flexible and systematic in identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns in qualitative data. All interviews were transcribed word for word, accurately and reliably. The researcher read and reread the transcripts thoroughly to familiarise themselves with the data and to identify the key statements, themes and significant trends in the data that related to the difficulties in topic selection. Initial codes were then created and organized into larger categories, and then larger themes representing the major challenges to graduate students. Ethical issues were also observed during all stages of the research process. Participants were given information on the study, informed that participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect the identities of the respondents.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis and interpretation of data obtained from the subject regarding the problem encountered by the graduate-level students in choosing a research topic is presented in this section.

Demographic information

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	CATEGORY	FREQUENCY (N=15)	PERCENTAGE (%)
GENDER	Male	8	53%
	Female	7	47%
AGE	21–23 Years	9	60%
	24–26 Years	4	26%
	27–30 Years	2	14%
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	BS 7th Semester	6	40%
	BS 8th Semester	9	60%
FACULTY	Science	5	34%
	Linguistics	4	26%
	Arts	6	40%
CGPA	2.5–3.0	6	40%
	3.1–3.5	6	40%
	3.6–4.0	3	20%
TIME GIVEN TO RESEARCH DAILY	1–2 Hours	6	40%
	2–4 Hours	5	34%
	More than 4 Hours	4	26%

The table below provides a detailed description of the demographic and academic attributes of those 15 respondents included in the study. In terms of gender distribution, 8 (53%) of the respondents were male, and 7 (47%) were female, revealing a slight majority of male respondents. The age of the respondents was in the range of 21 to 23 years (9 people or 60%), 24 to 26 years (4 people or 26%), and 27 to 30 years (2 people or 14%). This suggests that the majority of the respondents were young undergraduates. As regards the educational level, 6 respondents (40%) were studying in the 7th semester of the BS program while 9 respondents (60%) had already completed the 8th semester of study, indicating that a majority of the participants were in the eighth semester of study. The respondents comprised learners from various disciplines namely Arts, Science and Linguistics. Arts students represented the largest group with 6 respondents (40%), Science students had 5 respondents (34%) and the Linguistics students had 4 respondents (26%). The distribution of the respondents in terms of their CGPA revealed that 6 respondents (40%) had a CGPA of 2.5-3.0, 6 respondents (40%) had a CGPA of 3.1-3.5, and 3 respondents (20%) had a CGPA of 3.6-4.0. These results indicate that most of the students have achieved average to above-average

performance in their studies, with a smaller percentage of high-performing students. As far as the time spent on research activities per day, 6 respondents (40%) indicated that they spent 1-2 hours, 5 respondents (34%) spent 2-4 hours and 4 respondents (26%) spent more than 4 hours per day on research activities. This suggests that while a good proportion of students contributed a reasonable amount of time to research activities, a significant proportion spent significant amounts of time on their research activities.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected data as it is a widely used qualitative method for the identification of patterns, meanings and themes in text data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis involves coding the responses of the interviewees and grouping together similar codes to form themes that reveal the main issues raised by the interviewees (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The transcripts from the interviews were read very carefully and 08 key themes were identified, covering the challenges that graduate students experience in choosing their study area.

Theme 1: Lack of Resources

Insufficient research materials available such as academic journals, books, research articles, and digital databases were among the most commonly cited difficulties by the participants. Academic literature is also of importance so as to have an idea of what research is already undertaken and what gaps exist which can provide any meaningful research topic. It was noted by the respondents that the area of literature is so vast that it becomes difficult to find specific niches in it and in such a situation, it may not be developed further. Another person who responded said the following:

Students should receive proper training in research skills, academic writing, academic methodology, research topic selection, and literature review skills before choosing a research topic to ensure that they are not overwhelmed and become more confident in their research. Research workshops and guidance sessions can be provided to help students develop their understanding and skills in research, academic writing, academic methodology, and research topic selection and literature review skills.

Research skills are also necessary in determining the research problems and coming up with research questions (Punch, 2014).

The participants noted that it is difficult to select topics because they lack research experience as well as institutional support. One participant mentioned problems with access to academic databases and research journals. This was narrated by a graduate level student:

Many research articles are available online; however, not all students understand how to access or evaluate authentic academic sources. Limited access to academic databases, journals and digital libraries also makes it challenging for students to identify appropriate and up-to-date research topics, as in many cases, students only access easily available internet sources that may not offer sufficient academic information.

Theme 2: Fear of Failure

An additional psychological factor, which had an effect on the selection of research topics, was fear of failure. A large number of students were anxious about selecting complicated subjects that could be challenging to accomplish effectively.

Of the 15 respondents interviewed, 7 have said:

They would prefer to conduct easier research topics because of their worry about receiving poor grades or failing to finish the research on time. This was told by a graduate level student: Students sometimes shy away from difficult or innovative topics because they fear facing problems during the process of data collection, analysis and report writing; lack of proper guidance and research experience adds to the fear and makes students hesitate while selecting a difficult research topic.

Theme 3: Academic Workload

Academic workload is defined as the amount of study, homework and tasks the students have to deal with and this plays a great role in affecting their mental health and well-being. It has been said to be a big factor in student stress, and reports that it's a big percentage of stressors. Time management skills play an important role in being able to cope with this workload since they may make one more susceptible to mental disorders. The academic workload issues are a critical aspect to improve the quality of life of students (Wisdom Library, 2026).

One of the student participants at the graduate level discusses this:

Because of the academic pressure, students have limited time to review the literature thoroughly and develop their own ideas before selecting a topic for research; there are many assignments, quizzes, presentations and semester examinations, so students seldom have the time to explore and evaluate the appropriate topics for research and select a topic that is innovative and challenging; the heavy academic burden results in high levels of stress, which also makes it difficult for students to be able to consider and carefully select topics that they wish to research.

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) note that time management is an important part of the research process because insufficient time could affect the quality of the research planning.

Theme 4: Financial difficulty

Financial instability was one of the factors cited that had an impact on selecting the research topic. Some participants also indicated that the research activities should be funded, such as internet access, printing expenses, traveling expenses during fieldwork, and the purchase of books. This was retold by a graduate-level student:

Students may need to use their own funds to print questionnaires, gain access to the internet, buy books and make field visits or surveys. However, with financial constraints, many students are unable to support the research fully, thus impacting what they can do to select and conduct appropriate research topics. Sometimes, students choose not to do research topics that involve a lot of fieldwork or data collection due to financial constraints. This restriction limits their options and often forces them to pursue more mundane and inexpensive research projects, even if they might be less interesting and less innovative. This means that financial challenges can be significant in the process of choosing a research topic and can affect the quality and extent of student research.

Previous studies have shown that financial difficulties restricting student access to academic support and research opportunities exist (Punch, 2014).

Theme 5: Competition with other students

Comparison with classmates was another theme revealed in the data. Some of the respondents said that they generally tend to compare the topics of their research with the ones selected by their research colleagues. Occasionally comparisons of this nature can be confusing or belittling if the other students have selected a more interesting or innovative topic. Participant stated:

At times, when other students find an interesting or more advanced research question, I feel less knowledgeable about the research question I am working on, and I become less confident in my research question at this time. A lot of students will compare their research subjects to those of their peers, which leads to unhealthy competition and self-doubt. Sometimes I feel that my topic is not as strong and innovative as other people, even if it is academically appropriate. The competitive nature can create stress and confusion in the topic selection process and hinder decision-making. Comparison with peers is also ongoing and thus distracts focus, and may cause students to doubt their capabilities, making the research journey more difficult.

Social comparison is an idea that implies that people compare themselves with others in order to assess their capabilities and choices (Festinger, 1954).

Theme 6: research project completion

Many of the participants were concerned with the time limitations on which they needed to complete their research projects. Due to the deadlines, students tend to choose the subject of research that is less challenging. This was related by one of the graduate students:

Because of the time constraint involved in the research, I will sometimes select a subject that is more manageable and can be finished in the allotted time. High complexity content or demanding research subjects are not chosen by students, since they feel they may not finish the research before the deadline. This time, pressure impacts their decision-making process and reduces their interest in exploring more advanced or innovative research areas. This makes it easy for many students to place convenience and feasibility above originality, and consequently, their research work is not of the highest standard and depth.

Theme 7: Supervisor Feedback & Guidance

Supervision research topics was identified as one of the important factors in selecting research topics. A significant number of participants have stated that supervisors have assisted them in perfecting their research ideas and choosing the right topics. This was told by a graduate-level student:

My supervisor helped me focus my research and gave me some ideas that might be more conducive to research and more appropriate for academic purposes. Under guidance, I learned how to narrow my research to a specific area, and choose a topic that was feasible and appropriate. Students can be confused without appropriate supervision and guidance and may not always be able to articulate and determine a topic focusing area that can be researched. Supervisors' guidance is very important in directing students to appropriate research fields, enhancing their confidence, and ensuring their research is aligned with academic demands. So if they are not properly supervised, students may not know how to make proper decisions for their research topic.

Leedy and Ormrod (2015) note that supervisors are significant in directing students in the research process.

Theme 8: Secure vs Dangerous Topic Choice

Most of the participants reported that they like safe research topics, which include topics that have adequate literature and well-defined research procedures. Participant stated that:

Students may be reluctant to select topics that involve risk or are very complex because it is more challenging for students to research and complete the work within the time and resources provided. This means that most students choose "safe" topics that would be easier in terms of data collection, require less preparation, and have fewer methodological problems. Safe topics minimise risk, but can also be limiting in terms of creativity and innovation for research. Conversely, highly controversial and sophisticated subjects are often not pursued because they may be more meaningful or original, but also tend to be feared because of the possibility of complications, lack of confidence, and inadequate research abilities. This discipline eventually has an impact on the quality and depth of academic research.

DISCUSSION

According to the results of this study, the graduate students are confronted with several closely related problems when choosing research topics. The need to provide adequate research resources to students to explore various and innovative research areas is one of the key issues identified. Consequently, students are likely to choose topics based on what literature is available and not topics that are unique or unexplored. Review of the literature is an important part of recognizing gaps in the existing literature and is critical to narrowing research questions, as supported by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The other remarkable aspect of the study was the significant role of psychological factors like fear of failure and lack of confidence. Sometimes students refrain from taking on difficult or high-stakes topics because they aren't sure they will be able to research and finish the topic successfully. It hinders their ability to think critically and also means they have less access to new research options. This means that the risk factor of engaging in academic pursuits is reduced, and students opt for safer topics that are not that complex in terms of methodology. The study also points to academic load as a significant source of stress, impacting negatively on the students' ability to focus on research topics' selection. There is less time for reading literature and assessing possible research topics due to heavy coursework, assignments and examinations. That is, students are more likely to select to write about topics that are easier to write about than what is best to

write about. This result corresponds with earlier studies showing that academic pressure has a great impact on decreasing students' research productivity and decision-making ability.

These challenges are even more difficult due to a lack of funds. Research activities, like the printing of questionnaires, data collection, using the Internet, and field visits, are costly for many students. This is due to the fact that they are more inclined to select an easy research paper which doesn't require too many resources, even though it's not so innovative or significant. It is a fiscal restriction which is directly correlated with students' research and with the quality and scope of the research. In addition, peer comparison was found to be one of the significant social factors to boost students' confidence and decision-making. Students may compare their research topic to one or more of their classmates' research topics, causing them to feel bad about themselves or feel pressured. This competitive aspect may cause students to be reluctant to enter into a difficult and different subject, prolonging the tendency to choose a more familiar and easier subject to research.

Supervisory support proved to be an important factor in helping to select effective topics. Students who were given good guidance from their supervisors were able to narrow down their research focus and identify possible topics to work on. However, when supervision was inadequate, confusion, delays, and problems would arise in making appropriate research decisions. Good supervision helps to increase clarity and students' confidence and direction in research. Another factor identified as a barrier was the time constraint; students taking part in the activity were usually constrained by academic deadlines. Some students do not choose topics that demand much time for data gathering and analysis because of the rapid completion of research. Rather, they select less complex and more expendable themes to accomplish in a brief period of time, even if they are not particularly original.

In general, this research study suggests that the selection of the research topic is a complicated process that is affected by academic, psychological, institutional, financial and social aspects. The limited resources, fear of failure, workload pressure, financial problems, peer influence, insufficient supervision, and time

constraints all contribute to the decision-making process of students. All of these factors tend to encourage students to choose a research topic that is less innovative but easier to handle. Finally, the study highlights the importance of more robust institutional backing for enhancing students' experiences of research. Improved academic resources and effective supervision systems should be provided in universities and colleges to provide structured research training. The improvement of guidance for research and the reduction of institutional hurdles at different levels can enhance students' confidence and information in choosing research topics and in developing innovative research methods, which will eventually lead to better academic research.

CONCLUSION

Based on the end result of this study, it can be inferred that selection of research topic is an important and difficult task for the graduate students of Government Post Graduate College, Mardan. The results indicate that students face several institutional, academic, intellectual and psychological hurdles, all of which are impacting their topic choices. Further, there has been little research on being able to identify gaps in research, review the literature, and formulate research questions, which further undermines students' ability to choose research topics. Hole access to academic resources, such as journals and online databases, also makes it hard for students to get knowledge regarding the latest developments in the field and innovative ideas. The academic workload-induced time pressure will lead students to make hasty decisions, which tends to get them too broad, too narrow or less appropriate topics. Stress, anxiety and lack of confidence also deters students from selecting more complex and creative research areas. This essentially means that you are left with the choice to choose safer topics, which are easier to get going on with a time and resources constraint, as taken by many students. A big issue is effective supervision, this often leads to confusion, uncertainty and poor decision making amongst the students. It revealed that there is a need for improvement of institutional support, which include research training, access to academic materials, supervision, etc. The improvements in these aspects are going to bring

a significant effect on the research skills of the students, their capacity to select a good topic and in their academic performance.

SUGGESTIONS

In view of the above study, the following recommendations are forwarded to enhance the problem of selection of research topics of the graduate students of the Government Post Graduate College Mardan:

1. Strengthening Supervisory Support

Supervisors should continuously guide, meet with, and give positive feedback on the topic selection process. Good supervision will assist students in developing their ideas and make an informed choice of feasible, relevant and researchable topics with confidence.

2. The establishment of Research Training Programs.

A workshop, seminar, and training session on research methodology, literature review, identification of research gaps, and formulation of research questions should be organized by institutions. This will enhance students' research skills and capability to make decisions.

3. Enhancing access to research resources

Colleges and Universities should provide access to the latest journals, online databases, Digital Libraries, and research software. Students will have increased access to academic resources, to allow for exploration of varied and creative research opportunities.

4. Introduction of Research Skills at an early stage

Courses on research methods should be reinforced and offered earlier in the academic programs. This will enable students to gain important research skills in advance of their final year.

5. Assistance with time management and academic plans

Students should be guided on effective time management strategies. One way in which institutions can assist is to have a clearly defined schedule for the activities of research mode, which would allow for the elimination of the last

minute 'topic' selection and lessen academic pressure.

6. Enhancing Student Confidence and Motivation

It is important to foster a culture of learning that minimizes fear of failure and boosts students' self-assurance. Students will be encouraged to think independently and creatively to select more innovative research topics.

7. Clear Topic Selection Guidelines

Universities should offer a common set of guidelines, criteria and examples of acceptable and unacceptable research topics. This will help students to appreciate the criteria for the suitability, feasibility and researchability of a topic.

8. Foster a research-oriented environment

Research culture should be nurtured at the institution level by student seminars, research presentations, research conferences and academic discussions. These will provide students with more opportunities to encounter new concepts and to be engaged in the research process.

9. Opportunities for peer learning and collaborative learning

It is important to encourage students to collaborate in peer groups when they first start researching. Brainstorming and discussions within the group can assist in developing more effective research ideas and minimize confusion.

10. Career-Oriented Research Guidance

It is recommended that the selection of research topics should be in line with the future academic and career aspirations of students in the institutions. This will add to motivation and make research work relevant and useful in practice.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S., & Khan, R. (2024). Institutional barriers and research challenges among graduate students in public sector universities. *Pakistan Journal of Educational Research*, 7(1), 55–70.

- Cooper, K. M., Eddy, S. L., & Brownell, S. E. (2023). Research Anxiety Predicts Undergraduates' Intentions to Pursue Scientific Research Careers. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 22(1), ar11. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.22-02-0022>
- Cooper, L., Smith, J., & Brown, T. (2023). Research anxiety and fear of failure among postgraduate students. *Journal of Higher Education Studies*, 15(2), 101–118.
- Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Gul, F., Yousaf, A., & Yaqub, S. (2021). Factors affecting the selection of research topic in Pakistan: A case of private-sector universities. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 5(1), 37–46. [https://doi.org/10.35484/psr.2021\(5-1\)04](https://doi.org/10.35484/psr.2021(5-1)04)
- Gul, R. (2021). Challenges faced by students in research topic selection. *Journal of Educational Research*, 24(2), 45–58.
- Gul, R., Yousaf, M., & Yaqub, S. (2021). Supervisor support and research topic selection among university students. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 10(3), 77–89.
- Hadi, A., & Muhammad, S. (2017). The role of academic supervision in research topic selection. *Journal of Academic Research and Development*, 5(1), 23–31.
- Hadi, N. U., & Muhammad, B. (2017). *Role of Supervisor in the Performance of Postgraduate Research Students*.
- Henderson, C., & Dancy, M. H. (2019). Physics faculty and educational researchers: Divergent expectations as barriers to the diffusion of innovations. *American Journal of Physics*, 76(1), 79–91.
- Henderson, C., & Dancy, M. (2019). Challenges in understanding research methodologies among university students. *Educational Research Review*, 12(4), 201–214.
- Jilcha, K. (2025). Identifying existing research challenges and enhancing outcomes through the development of standardized methodologies. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12, Article 187. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41599-024-04269-7>

- Jilcha, K. (2025). Research topic identification challenges among postgraduate students. *International Journal of Social Science Research*, 9(1), 44-59.
- Liu, M. (2019). Understanding the process of research topic selection. *Research Methods Journal*, 23(3), 55-66.
- Liu, X. (2020.). Research topic, definition of. In *The SAGE encyclopedia of communication research methods*. SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411.n510>
- Mariano, L. J. B., & Potane, J. D. (2022). Benefits and difficulties of postgraduate student-researchers: A qualitative inquiry. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention*, 9(03), 6852-6861. <https://doi.org/10.18535/ijsshi/v9i03.02>
- Mariano, P., & Potane, R. (2022). Difficulties in formulating research titles and problem statements among graduate students. *Asian Journal of Educational Studies*, 8(2), 88-97.
- Pangket, W. F., Pangesfan, S. K. K., Cayabas, J. P., & Madjaco, G. L. (2022). Research writing readiness of graduate students in a Philippine state college. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 3(10), 1994-2003. <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.03.10.09>
- Panket, M., Ali, S., & Rahman, H. (2022). Factors influencing research topic selection among postgraduate students. *Journal of Educational Inquiry*, 14(3), 66-81
- Silva, A., & Pedro, B. (2023). *Addressing insufficient research resources: Strategies for improvement in academic settings*. Academic Press.
- Silva, D., & Pedro, L. (2023). Technological resources and research productivity among university students. *International Journal of Research and Innovation*, 11(2), 90-104.
- The Friday Times. (2022, June 17). *Why Pakistan lag[s] behind in academic research?* The Friday Times. <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/17-Jun-2022/why-pakistan-lags-behind-in-academic-research>