

**UNDERGRADUATES RESEARCH INTEREST: STUDY BASED ON
BACHELOR OF COMMERCE UNDERGRADUATES OF UNIVERSITY OF SRI
JAYEWARDENEPURA**

Vilani Sachitra

Department of Commerce
Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce
University of Sri Jayewardenepura
vilani3164@gmail.com, vilani@sjp.ac.lk

Abstract

Research in study programmes has become essential to the modern tertiary education, especially in management studies. The present market demands at least minimum research competencies in order to face the technological and human resource challenges. In recent times, it has been identified that undergraduates' interest towards engaging in research studies is getting declined. Thus, the main intention of the study is to investigate the effect of beliefs, self-efficacy, attitudes, and motivation on undergraduates' interests in doing research. One hundred and eighty undergraduates from the Department of Commerce who had completed the research methodology course unit participated in the study by way of answering a structured questionnaire. Undergraduates' responses were analyzed through mean comparisons. The results indicate that undergraduates believe that engaging in research is stressful, complicated and a difficult task; and it was observed that generally they have a negative attitude towards conducting research. Since they possess knowledge and skill required to perform research, English language barrier and lack of academic support need to be addressed in promoting research among them.

Keywords: Attitudes, Beliefs, Mean Comparison, Motivation, Self-efficacy, Undergraduate Research

Introduction

Research and related elements have become essential to the modern tertiary education (Sreedharan, 2012), especially concerning management studies. Hence, research has become one of the most important intellectual possessions for every human being (Oguan, Bernal and Pinca, 2014); thus research is a very significant field in the university academic process. Research is an organized, systematic, data-based, critical, objective, scientific inquiry or investigation into a specific problem, undertaken with the purpose of finding answers or solutions to it (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010, p.3).

A university education system is interrelated with research activity and such a system has to prepare the undergraduates for professional activities and knowledge applications. Hence, undergraduates have to be open for changes, should be creative, and critical-thinkers. It should be noted that conducting research is not an entertaining activity. It

requires a lot of self-independence and ability to bear responsibility (Lamanauskas and Augienė, 2014). Research competence is highly important in the application of acquired knowledge in creative ways and to create new knowledge. Therefore, during bachelor studies, research competence is of the highest value. As demand for research increases, undergraduates require to come up with a research study focusing on problems of their interest. However, recently it has been noted that undergraduates' interest towards conducting a research is getting declined.

The current study focuses on undergraduates of the Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) Degree programme, of the Department of Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJP) and it was identified that undergraduates who selected an independent research study for their degree programme has gradually declined. Table 1 illustrates the number of undergraduates who had selected research as a course of their degree programme in the final year.

Table 1: Students select research study

Academic Year	2003/ 04	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2007/ 08	2009/ 10	2011/ 12	2012/ 13	2013/ 14
Students per Batch	75	75	75	75	125	125	125	125
No. of students select research	04	02	01	02	02	02	01	01

Source: Survey Data, 2016

The Department of Commerce offers the theoretical background of conducting research under the course unit of research methodology in the third year of study with the intention of facilitating undergraduates to conduct research. Table 1 provides evidence that undergraduates' interest towards research has gradually declined. Further, it is noted that, the Department has already decided to make an independent study as a compulsory course unit at the next curriculum review. Currently, an independent study is offered as an elective course unit for final year students. This may cause a severe issue to the Department, if students are not willing to follow research course unit in their own accord. The question of whether a research should be comprised as a major component in management undergraduate programmes has been a debatable issue and is still contentious. Hence, more and more attention has to be paid to undergraduates' research interests.

Russell, Hancock and McCullough (2007) indicate that students were losing their [research] interest because of a lack of engagement with genuine research. Lamanauskas and Augienė (2014) reveal that research activity is not attractive for students due to big time expenditure, effort, stress, delay in feedback, and lack of academic support. As Oguan et al. (2014) mentioned, undergraduates usually tend to view a research course unit negatively and there are negative attitudes of undergraduates towards research such as difficulty of conducting research and poor grades in the course. Oguan et al. (2014) revealed that the students have a positive attitude towards research though most of them display a negative attitude on difficulty of research. The students show anxiousness to

research by confessing that research is stressful. Further, male students are more positive compared to female students. Pacific and Thomson (2011) examined the factors that influence to perform research and expectations of research between premed and non-premed students. The study emphasized four influencing factors about research namely beliefs, attitudes, accessibility and self-efficacy, and motivations and social factors.

The goal of this study is to gain an understanding of influencing factors of the research interests of the undergraduates of the B.Com Degree programme, Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce (FMSC), University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Hence, the study questions what the factors that influence undergraduates' interest towards doing research are and what the differences and similarities of influencing factors of research interest are between male and female undergraduates. With these research questions, the next section discusses the methods employed in this study.

Methods

Participants

The study took place at the Department of Commerce, FMSC, USJP. At the time of study, there were two batches of undergraduates at the Department who had completed research methodology course unit. Accordingly, the third year and final year students of the B.Com Degree programme were eligible to participate in the study to assess the factors influencing undergraduates' interest towards doing research. There was no student registered for research from final year and the majority of third year students were not keen to select research in their final year.

The time line of the study was cross-sectional because current B.Com undergraduates were respondents for the study. There were 110 and 118 undergraduates participated from third year and fourth year respectively. All students voluntary participated and the participants were assured that their responses were anonymous because their names were not recorded in the questionnaire.

The present study is of exploratory and descriptive in nature. Initially the study identified factors influencing undergraduates' research interest from a literature review and based on the identified factors, primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire. Acknowledging the prior studies of Butt and Sahms (2013), Oguan et al. (2014), Pacifici and Thomson (2011), the study employed four influencing factors of undergraduates' research interest such as beliefs, attitudes, self-efficacy, and motivation.

The quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The study administered scaled questions which were devised by Pacifici and Thomson (2011). The scale values ranged from 1 indicating a response of 'strongly disagree', to value of 5 corresponding to 'strongly agree' with also 3 as a neutral point. The belief on research scale consisted of six items, while attitude towards research consisted of five items, then

self-efficacy included six items, and motivation of five items. The questionnaire was reviewed by two senior lecturers in the university and pilot tested on five students in order to ensure the understanding of responses.

Mean comparison between male and female undergraduates was compared with four constructs extracted from prior studies. Independent sample t-test was employed to compare mean value of desired constructs between male and female students.

Results and Discussion

In total of 228 questionnaires, 197 were received. However, 17 questionnaires that had not been properly completed were removed from the further analysis. Finally, 180 useful questionnaires were taken into final consideration, making of a response rate of 79 percent.

The questionnaire items were tested for reliability using Cronbach’s alpha analysis. Cronbach’s alpha measures the reliability in terms of internal consistency coefficient and a moderate cutoff for exploratory research is a value of .60 (Garson, 2010). Items on beliefs, attitudes, self-efficacy, and motivation were found to be reliable above the .60 level.

The gender of undergraduates and year wise breakup illustrates in Table 2. Hence, the total number of female and male respondents was almost equal, and hence there was less inequality and bias.

Table 2: Gender and academic year of student

		Year of Student		Total
		Year III	Year IV	
Gender	Male	42	43	85
	Female	47	48	95
Total		89	91	180

Source: Survey Data, 2016

Undergraduate research experiences provide valuable grounding for students following excellence in their future professional careers and post graduate studies. Hence, the study examined the third year undergraduates on whether they like to conduct research as a subject in their final year. Out of 89 undergraduates, 81 indicated that they do not intend to conduct research, amounting to a percentage of more than 91. Further, there is no gender difference with the research interest of undergraduates.

Mean Comparison

Independent sample t-test was employed to determine the gender difference regarding influencing factors of research interest. In order to examine the undergraduates' beliefs about scientific research, the mean values of beliefs items present in Table 3.

It can be observed from the Table 3 that undergraduates believe that research is stressful, complicated, and boring task and there is no significance difference between male and female student beliefs. Respondents also responded negatively to the relevance of research to academic life.

Table 3: Undergraduates' beliefs about scientific research

Beliefs about research	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Research is essential to undergraduates	2.19	.774	2.26	.686
Research must be a compulsory course unit for undergraduates	2.49	.943	2.38	.767
Research is stressful	3.38	.968	3.28	.852
Research is complicated	3.97	.890	3.86	.661
Research is difficult	3.59	1.205	3.46	.905
Doing research is boring work	3.94	.886	3.99	.730
Average	3.26	.944	3.21	.766

Source: Survey Data, 2016

To determine the undergraduates' attitudes towards scientific research, mean values of attitude items are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Undergraduates' attitudes towards scientific research

Attitudes towards research	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I have no interest at all in research	2.87	1.309	3.04	1.131
Undergraduates can do research	2.67	1.002	2.38	.767
Undergraduates should experience research	2.97	.890	2.99	.730
Doing research is interesting	2.57	.975	2.28	.852
Research is time consuming	3.46	1.268	3.17	1.095
Average	2.91	1.088	2.87	.915

Source: Survey Data, 2016

Looking at the attitudes of the male and the female students on research interest, it can be viewed from Table 4 that the male students are more positive regarding interest in research. Indeed, the study of Oguan et al. (2014) indicated that male students have a positive attitude towards research than female.

Table 5 shows the mean values of undergraduates' self-efficacy on scientific research. According to Table 5, female students' self-efficacy for doing research is greater than their male counterparts. Male students feel uncertainty with respect to their capability

and preparation of conducting a research. Further, male students consider language as a main barrier than females.

Table 5: Undergraduates' self-efficacy on scientific research

Self-efficacy towards research	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I am capable of conducting a research	3.28	.852	3.88	.968
I am confidence in my ability to do research	2.58	.767	2.67	.857
I am well prepared to do research	2.91	.921	3.23	.840
I have knowledge and skill required to do research	3.32	.828	3.53	.755
Research makes me scare	3.46	.921	3.24	.842
Language becomes a barrier to do research	3.97	.890	3.31	.571
Average	3.25	.863	3.31	.805

Source: Survey Data, 2016

Since undergraduates are new to the research, motivation is required to learn about research and to satisfy their curiosity of research. Table 6 represents the mean values of undergraduates' motivation items.

Table 6: Undergraduates' motivation on scientific research

Motivation on research	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
First degree with research makes a value addition to find a good job	2.84	.946	2.93	.964
Lecturers encourage undergraduates to do research	2.76	.881	2.85	.935
I am aware of importance of research	2.66	.891	2.75	.733
My friends do research	2.84	1.130	2.85	1.112
Lecturers influence undergraduates to do research	2.31	1.057	2.25	1.002
Average	2.68	.981	2.72	.949

Source: Survey Data, 2016

Regardless of whether student is male or female, undergraduates did lack motivation with respect to doing research. They did not consider research as a value addition component in the competitive labor market and they did not have significance encouragement or influence from academics as well as their colleagues.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the prior studies, the study identified that undergraduates' beliefs, attitudes, self-efficacy, and motivation about research could influence their interest on doing research. With the outcomes of the study, academics may reinforce their discussion about the importance of conducting research and its relevance on making academic and professional career choices. Identifying factors that encompass undergraduates' interest towards research assist academics to strengthen their discussion about the importance of research activity while modifying students' interest. It is required to the Department to tailor its academic process to address the issues related with undergraduates' research interest.

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