

Editorial

Facing PhD Pre-Viva: Suggestions from a Supervisor

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Southwestern Centre for Research and PhD Studies was established in late 2010 in Kathmandu, Nepal to promote academic and applied research activities. The Centre supports qualified individuals in pursuing PhD studies for carrying out higher level research work which helps in promoting strong academic research base in the country. It provides services to the scholars on admission, coaching, supervision, logistics, follow up, networking, academic exercise, writing, publishing etc.

The Centre is now proud to have five of its scholars being awarded the PhD degree. Twelve scholars have recently completed their pre-viva and are in the position to submit the final thesis. In 2016, we expect around 50 scholars to complete PhD study through this Centre. Each year, at least 50 new scholars will be enrolled. The Centre is becoming a major attraction for scholars who want to pursue PhD study in Nepal.

Why PhD?

There may be two main reasons why someone wants to pursue PhD. S/he may have a passion for research, for developing understanding and knowledge or have a desire to be intellectually challenged and guided by an expert in the field. There may be a particular topic, theory or issue that really motivates the person with inquisitive mind.

One needs patience and perseverance to complete the PhD study. It has a lot of opportunity cost too. Pros of having this degree however outweigh the efforts one should put in to achieve the goal. If research is your passion it helps you to quench your thirst for it besides, it may help you get promotion. A PhD is a lifelong dream for many people.

We believe that the PhD, both as a process of learning, and as an internationally recognized credential, offers numerous intrinsic and extrinsic benefits. It provides the opportunity to make a significant contribution to the society. It allows the scholar to pursue research on a topic of their deep personal interest, building on their prior education and experience through self-study. PhD helps them in developing skills in research, analysis, theorising, methodology and communication

PhD Process

PhD process varies from university to university or country to country. However, in India, UGC has suggested a system to make it uniform in conducting PhD research work. The PhD study in India is similar to US system in which class work is mandatory before proceeding to the field work. There is a tough system of entrance examination, synopsis defense and intensive class work. In this context, it is different to the system at TU, in which scholars just follow the supervisor as there are no such steps involved.

While carrying out PhD at Mewar or Dr. K. N. Modi University in India, the scholar has to follow several steps as follows:

1. Participation in Orientation on PhD research
2. Developing Thesis Title
3. Preparing Concept Proposal
4. Preparation for Entrance Test/Interview
5. Appearing Pre RDC (Research Degree Committee)
6. Learning Basic Skills on Computer
7. Conducting Literature Review/Meta Analysis
8. Clarity on APA Style
9. Preparing Synopsis and its Power point
10. Presenting Synopsis and Revising it
11. Attending RDC, submitting the synopsis with the revised topic
12. Submit revised detail synopsis within 3 months
13. Attending classes on research methodology, ICT etc.
14. Preparing Assignments and attending exams
15. Writing the Introduction Chapter
16. Writing Literature Review Chapter
17. Writing Research Methodology Chapter
18. Clarity on Ethical Issues in Data Collection
19. Getting approval from IRB, NHRC etc.
20. Send Progress Report in each 6 months to the University
21. Developing skill on SPSS, NVivo etc.
22. Constructing Instrument for Data Collection
23. Establishing Validity and Reliability of a Research Instrument/Pilot Test
24. Sampling Design/Selecting a Sample
25. Preparing for Field Work
26. Data Collection

27. Data Analysis – Processing and Displaying Data
28. Testing of Hypothesis
29. Data Interpretation
30. Preparing and Publishing research articles
31. Writing Finding and Discussion Chapter
32. Writing Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations
33. Preparing cover page, abstract, acknowledgement, table of contents etc.
34. Preparing Bibliography Chapter
35. Documenting Appendixes
36. Refining the Document
37. Editing the Report
38. Plagiarism check
39. Preparing Power point Presentation of final thesis
40. Pre –viva Presentation of Findings/Thesis
41. Incorporating comments, binding the thesis, submitting for defense
42. External examination of thesis
43. Final viva presentation.

These steps are not followed by all the universities in the same pattern. But they can be supportive for anyone carrying out PhD study through any university around the world.

Defending PhD Viva

Submitting the PhD thesis is a time consuming and tiresome task, but it is still not the final stage. There is a long way to go to prove your hard work. Once you've submitted, you'll need to prepare for the next intellectually tiring tasks: pre viva and final viva. This viva is the oral examination which is a chance for scholars to discuss their work with experts. The main aim of this step is to ensure that there is no plagiarism involved, and that the scholar is clear about his/her thesis. It involves lots of penetrating and probing questions and sometimes become conceptually complex debate.

After submitting the draft thesis, the next step is to face the pre viva or oral examination. This is the most important step before the final defense of the thesis. It may be carried out in public or in closed doors. Normally before submitting the thesis for pre viva, the scholar should prepare well and make oneself ready to respond series of questions from the examiners.

There is no doubt that your study will have some weaknesses and the examiners may pivot around such issues. One might be exposed to harsh comments and criticisms from the panel. But, such criticisms should not shake your commitment and confidence towards the work.

One should not get confused that all examiners are equally cooperative or competitive. Many of them may just try to prove their competency or superiority by asking irrelevant and absurd questions. As a scholar, one should not be offensive to them. It is obvious that the examiners have different personal styles and wide experiences; they ask absurd questions or harass scholars based on their background.

The scholar should ask clearly if s/he is not clear about the question/s raised by the team. Viva is a communication between the scholar and the examiners, so one needs to have good communication skills. It is a tough exam, so rigorous preparation is a must.

Prepare Yourself

PhD study is not just a study; it is way of transforming the life of an individual. Throughout this process, the scholars have to pass through several steps, some painstaking and time consuming too. As a scholar, before going to the viva defense you need to be clear that you conducted this research yourself and you should be very confident about the content of your thesis. The scholar must be able to claim that s/he knows more about research than his/her supervisors and even more than his/her examiners.

To equip yourself as a competent scholar, you need to go through several competent processes. The scholars should carry out following activities as well.

1. Use library and online facilities for massive literature review
2. Publish articles in Research Journals
3. Attend national and international conference on research issues
4. Attend national and international training on research issues
5. Attend seminars
6. Present your work among others
7. Participate in exposure visits.

Preparing and presenting at the viva

1. Find out the viva process in your university
2. Re-read your thesis several times
3. Think from the perspective of supervisors/examiners

4. Prepare a list of questions that might be asked by the examiners/externals
6. Do not forget to have enough copies of your power point slides for the examiners.
8. Sometimes it is good be silent.
9. Never mention about your weaknesses
10. Follow professional way of presentation
11. Enjoy your presentation.

Some potential questions at viva

Normally the panel chair or examiners welcome the scholar and ask to introduce themselves to the board. One of the examiners particularly from the same university explains the viva process.

Then the scholar may be asked to explain the panel about the title of their thesis as it will be the easiest one. Their intention will be to create supportive environment for the scholar. Then, the examiners will ask the scholar a series of questions, sometimes all the scholars may ask you questions together. Some of the major questions could be as follows:

1. You may start by summarising your thesis.
2. Can you explain it briefly?
3. What prompted you to conduct this research study?
4. What are the main issues in this subject area?
5. What is the fundamental question in your research area?
6. What are the most recent developments in your area?
7. How did your research questions emerge?
8. Are your hypotheses in line with objectives? Please explain.
9. What were the conclusions you made?
10. Why did you use this research methodology?
11. What is the logic behind taking 10 schools or 100 respondents? Why not more or less? (Rationale of selection of districts, respondents).
12. Who are your respondents? Why did you select them?
13. What are the ethical aspects of your work?
14. How do you validate your findings?
15. How can you generalize your findings?
16. Who will benefit from your work?
17. How can other researchers benefit from your work?
18. Can you explain your key findings?
19. Which of these findings are the most interesting to you? Why?
20. What is the originality of your research work?
21. What new things did you learn from this work?

22. What advice would you give to a research student entering this area?

Suggestions from an external:

Rejecting or disproving a Null hypothesis does not automatically prove that the alternate hypothesis will be accepted. For final result Null and alternate both hypotheses need to be developed and stated and if one is rejected it should not automatically lead to assuming that alternate is acceptable. For accepting a hypothesis it should be specifically tested and categorically stated as proved and accepted.

While presenting your work, you have to be mindful of your language of presentation. For example, do not say 'I have found...', say, I have tried to ...

The scholar needs to be fully confident and be ready to respond to all the queries raised by the supervisors and externals.