

Perspective of a Thesis Guide in Allotment of Thesis Topic



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A thesis may be defined as a statement of the writer's opinion (or judgment) on a limited topic, a clearly stated view that can be supported by REASON and CONCRETE EVIDENCE. In present circumstances, the spectrum of thesis work ranges from a formal document with repetition of previous ideas to a research work with potential of formulating a guideline. With increasing importance of research work done by a medical professional, particularly for strengthening the curriculum vitae of the researcher, thesis activity during the course of post-graduation and later has become the subject of interest once again. This article will enlighten upon the point of view of a thesis guide upon formulation of a thesis topic.

A thesis is more than just a long paper. It requires a great deal of time and understanding from the researcher. It is an unfortunate circumstance to see that the purpose of dissertation is limited as a statutory document for the sake of eligibility for the qualification attainment. The main purpose of any thesis is different from any research. A purpose of a research is to “answer the unanswered”. A thesis whereas is a learning process for the student on which he not only aims to obtain answer for a particular question but also learns the process of formulation of a research topic, execution of the methodology, knowledge of the entire spectrum of the topic in question & derives at a conclusion out of own personal experience. It also serves as a tool to skill development in the form of specific procedure to be performed. It goes unsaid that thesis topic is individual's understanding to its highest level than any other concept/topic, in his lifetime.

The postgraduate guide is rightly the “mentor” for the student. He serves as a guide for learning in all aspects, right from becoming a researcher to gaining practical experience clinically to developing skills. “Dissertation” is not just a subject of learning between the guide and the student, but practically serves as a niche for development of bond between the two. As a thesis guide, the teacher has huge role to play. It starts right from selection of a thesis topic, right up to the publication of the same. He acts as a constant qualified, skilled supervisor for the smooth ongoing of the study. He not only directs guidance to the researcher for the difficulties the researcher faces but also provides a timely feedback for him to make appropriate modifications in the research process when required.

How does one opt for a dissertation topic? A highly vague and non-standardized subject with a huge spectrum of factors! However, from the point of view of a research guide, there are many factors taken into account while finally concluding upon one. Even after years of practice in the field of Orthopaedics, the Orthopaedic doctor faces with certain situations in practice as a clinician or surgeon, the questions to which there is no answer available to, either in the reference textbooks, internet or any of the guidelines. Such questions act as a catchment most commonly for the purpose of research topic. To summarize, “answer the unanswered”. The Question that is to be answered at the end of the research cannot be vague. It has to be very specific with less number of variables involved, so as to avoid confounding. Thesis is not a perception of a researcher but Evidence based scientific medicine. So the topic of a dissertation has to specifically put forward a query that can be answered. If too many variables are involved, the conclusions become less reliable affecting statistical significance of many variables.

Not only the question, but also the choice of answers to be obtained from the research shall be specific and non-overlapping. For e.g., in comparison between two methodologies of treatment for a particular condition say Treatment A v/s B. The following outcomes are acceptable: A better than B or B better than A or A equivalent to B. The grey area of “Slightly better”, “little” is excluded when we apply a statistical test of significance over those variables. This forms the basis of the evidence-based medicine. Needless to say, this virtue is the most magnetic of all in selection of a dissertation topic. Any form of new diagnostic procedure, surgery, implant, treatment protocol, drug etc. serves as a hotspot for researchers to opt it as a research topic. This provides them with an opportunity to adopt something new and advanced, compare it with the previous modules & extrapolate the results to their population. This also provides the researcher to incept an original work on a topic in which not much work has been done earlier. The drawback associated with it is that not much of literature is available for the researcher to review and may pose some hindrance in ethical approval.

No dissertation guide will want the study to be like the same old stuff packed in a new outfit. The true satisfaction of researcher and the guide is in when something significant is being contributed to the existing knowledge pool. It not only helps making a

study unique but also helps other practitioners in refining their existing knowledge, which ultimately helps in improving patient care. In existing circumstances, where an orthopaedic surgeon's success is quantified by the number of papers he has published and upon the impact factor of the journal in which it is published, every researcher opts for a topic of study, which has high chances of future acceptance in a journal for publication. Considering This factor in mind, the topic is selected in most circumstances. The trend is shifting more towards the fate as publication than towards the inquisitiveness for a particular concept in question.

No guide is interested to suggest a topic, which answers a common question about a common problem. There are hundreds of studies already available all over the globe. So, the topic of interest is most commonly either an uncommon query about a common problem or an uncommon problem in the first place. The latter is less preferred by most journals. It is highly undesirable to select a topic/disease that is not very common in the study population involved. It will not only be difficult on the part of the researcher to find the number of cases for the study, but also the study wont prove beneficial later for the study population later as the problem in the first place is not the priority problem of that study population.

It is natural that a surgeon who has an inclination or practice of a particular subspecialty is more likely to allot a topic of that particular field. It helps in candidate having an in-depth exposure to knowledge as well as practical experience under that guide. However, it restricts the researcher from other fields. It is mandatory on the part of the guide as well as the researcher to foresee that the topic involved is well within the boundaries of ethical law. No study should ever be done which has a potential risk of causing harm to the patient. Sometimes, the topic itself might be unintentionally ethical. However, it can be well avoided by doing an appropriate review of the literature and by scrutiny carried out by Institutional Ethics Committee.

Pilot study is a very helpful tool in assessing the correctness, feasibility of a study. Whether or not the topic selected for study is likely to be useful can be pre-judged by doing a pilot study. It helps in saving time, cost and energy significantly. It usually always involves reviewing literature by the student on various topics suggested the guide or by self-exploration. After reviewing a certain number of topics, the student can participate significantly in contributing inputs while selecting a particular topic for dissertation. A newly joined postgraduate student is not a professional researcher to begin with. Therefore, it is obligatory on the part of the guide to regulate the financial costs and expenditure, a study is likely to incur. A study requiring research funds from various organizations has to be pre-planned and funds should be well utilized. The feasibility of the study should be focused upon.

There are various practical limitations in selection of a thesis topic. These include disinterest on the part of researcher due to lack of knowledge, motivation & time, lack of training in research methodology, ease of availability of ready-made material online (Plagiarism), disinterest on part of the research guide, limited specialization of the research guide.

Dissertation, the concept primarily designed to train the post graduate students in research methodology, to develop leadership, to develop expertise in a particular field is losing its importance as a tool to add to the pool of knowledge in orthopaedics. It's either treated as a document of statutory importance for sake of academic completion or as means to improvise curriculum vitae by means of publication. Its time that we recognize it as means of improvising skills, knowledge & research methodology qualities in the student & by keeping the above mentioned virtues in mind, add significantly to the knowledge pool which helps in patient care.

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