

# LEARNING TO BE RESEARCHERS: A STUDY OF PEDAGOGICAL STUDENTS IN HANOI, VIETNAM

**Abstract:** *Doing research in colleges and universities is an essential activity since it may provide students a good basis to become professional researcher and teacher in the future. However, few students in Vietnam can recognize the importance of research activities or possess an adequate background of knowledge to participate in these activities, and additionally, the obligatory course of Research Methodology offered in many universities cannot bring enough understanding in doing research to students. This study, thus, aims at investigating the effects of Research Methodology courses (in both of their good and bad sides) on students at a pedagogical university. The study also attempts to survey the attitude of those students toward the activity of doing research and the impact of the attitude on their process of learning to be researchers.*

*Key words: students, pedagogical, Research Methods, attitude, course.*

## 1. Introduction

It is obvious that doing research at university is a very important part of students' learning procedure. The role of research in obtaining new knowledge has been confirmed by Bernstein (1999):

Research is the search for new knowledge, and it is thus distinct from the routine application of known results. The "re" in "research" is a misnomer. When you perform research, your goal is to add to human knowledge by discovering, inventing or creating what was previously unknown.

Bernstein (1999)

Doing research is not an easy activity, as Wernher von Braun has stated: "*Basic research is what I'm doing when I don't know what I am doing.*" The process of doing research is not a straight highway at the starting point of it, and thus, it requires a firm background of knowledge, an unchanged persistency and an enthusiasm to be completed.

Why do we have to do research? This is a very common question raised among students and it somehow shows the attitude of freshmen toward the academic activity. In fact, many students have a listless behavior to research and do not worry about how and why they have to carry it. As claimed by Adams & Holcomb (1986), Elmore & Vasu (1980) and Wise (1985), students at the undergraduate university level, typically tend to view research and research teaching courses with negative attitudes.

One of the main problems of these negative attitudes is that they have been found to *serve as obstacles to learning*.

Wise, 1985; Waters, Martelli, Zakrajsek, & Popovich, 1988

Negative attitudes have been found to be associated with *poor performance in courses*.

Elmore, & Lewis, 1991; Woelke, 1991; Zeidner, 1991

The attitude towards research basically means a detailed study of thinking, feeling and the person's behavior towards research. According to Papanastasiou (2005), it is important to identify the attitudes towards research so that a positive attitude can be developed among students and hence their learning can be facilitated in turn.

Students think that it is tough and dry to study the research (Adams & Holcomb, 1986). They do not understand the concepts of research and its importance in their professional life. Patak and Naim (2012) found that the attitude of students of English as Second Language and English as Foreign Language towards visiting library was very poor. They lack basic research skills ranging from searching and evaluating literature sources to paraphrasing and giving citations.

Assessing students' attitudes toward a research methods course is important in order *to enable instructors to develop instructional techniques leading to more positive attitudes toward the subject*.

Waters et al., 1988

### **Objective of the study**

The objective of the study was to investigate the effects of the course Research Methodology offered to pedagogical students at a university in Hanoi, and evaluate undergraduate students' attitude towards doing research in terms of awareness about doing research, positive attitude in doing research.

### **Hypotheses**

- (1) No significant difference is recorded between male and female students' attitude towards research on their awareness, positive attitude and difficulty in doing research.
- (2) No significant difference in students of different age groups on attitudes towards research on their awareness, positive attitude and difficulty in doing research.

### **Method of the study**

About 33 students from different teacher education cohort responded to the questionnaire. After that 13 students were invited to participated in the interview with the purpose of surveying in details their awareness and attitude towards doing research.

Table 1: *Demographic information of respondents*

Variables		N	%
Gender	Female	32	97%
	Male	1	3%
Age	19-22	33	100%
Program of study	BA	33	100%

### Instrument of study

In the study, attitude towards doing research among teacher education students in Vietnam was calculated using the adaptation of the Attitude Toward Research (ATR) Scale (Papanastasiou, 2005). The questionnaire consisted of 6 sections with different elements to collect data. The 6 sections included in the questionnaire were: scenarios related to research, activities in doing research, affected elements towards doing research, attitude towards doing research, motivation towards doing research, experience in doing research.

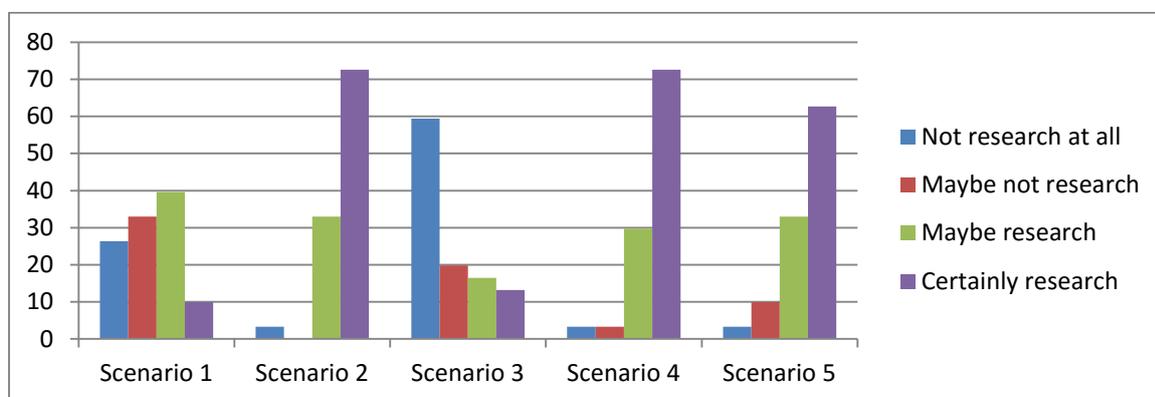
To determine the research attitude of undergraduates towards doing research, questionnaires were delivered to the students of different cohort in the faculty of English at a pedagogical university. They were guaranteed that their responses will be kept confidential.

Among these respondents, 13 students were selected for interview. The interview questions cover the awareness of undergraduates about research, their knowledge about doing research, their difficulty in doing research and their attitude towards research. The interviewees were invited to take part in the interview face-to-face or online and the interviews were recorded, and then transcribed to serve the data analysis of the study.

### Results

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Firstly, the questionnaire responses were synthesized to investigate the cognition of respondents towards research.

Table 2: *Research awareness*



It presented a surprising fact that about one third of respondents are unaware of what is “research” and cannot decide if each situation in scenarios is research. Interestingly, most of these participants have less experience in doing research.

Table 3: *Elements of research*

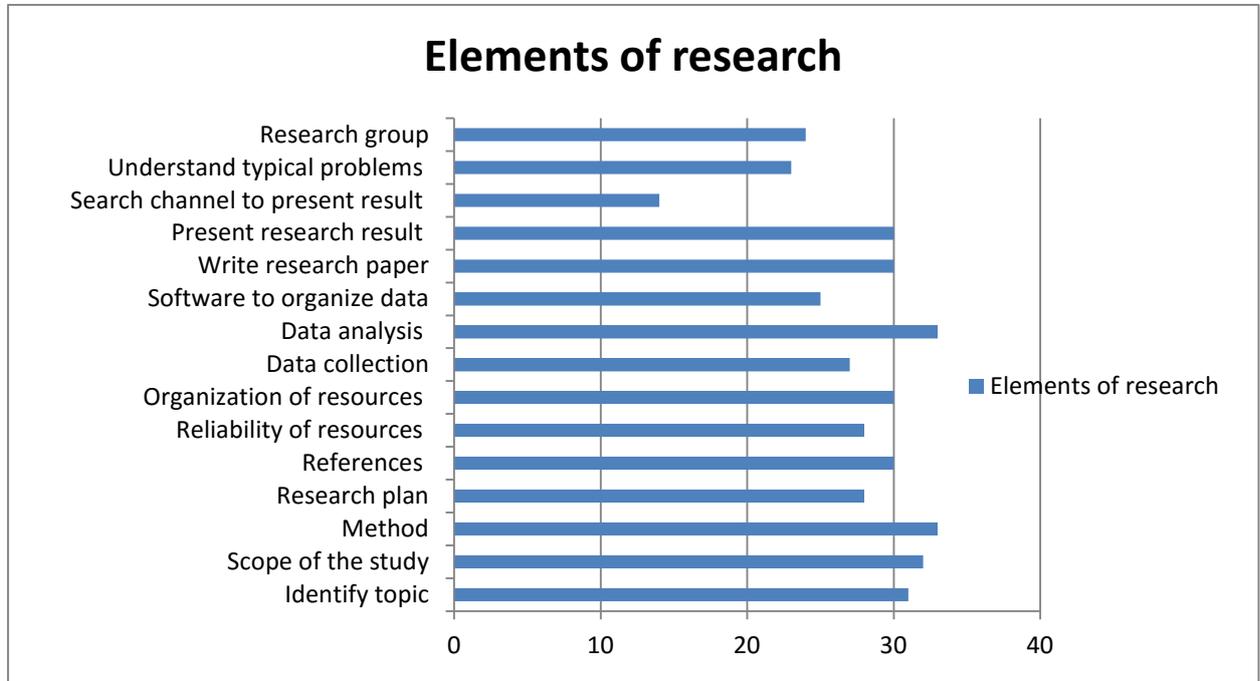


Table 3 presents some activities researcher may do to conduct a research and most of respondents shared the common thought among these activities, such as identify topic based on available materials, select suitable methods to study. However, the interview which recorded an insight into the actual procedure of their doing provides a variety of ideas towards the issue.

Table 4: *Difficulty in doing research*

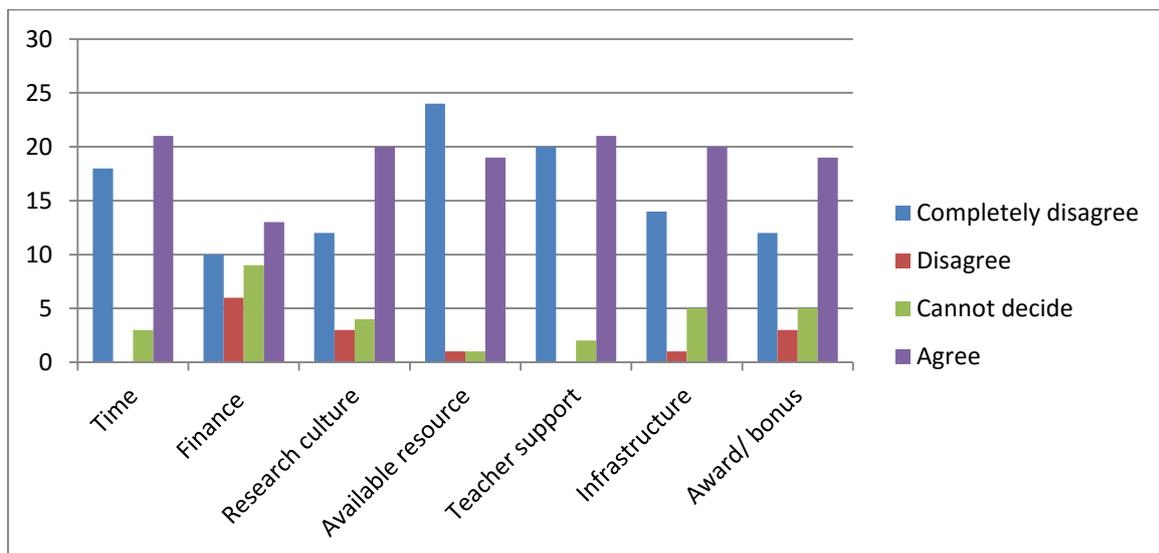


Table 4 covers the elements affecting the process of doing research and the availability of those elements in the research environment investigated. It is shown that time constraint, support from classmates are not of great importance in doing research, while research environment, infrastructure and record for achievement are considered more essential.

Table 5: *Attitude towards doing research*

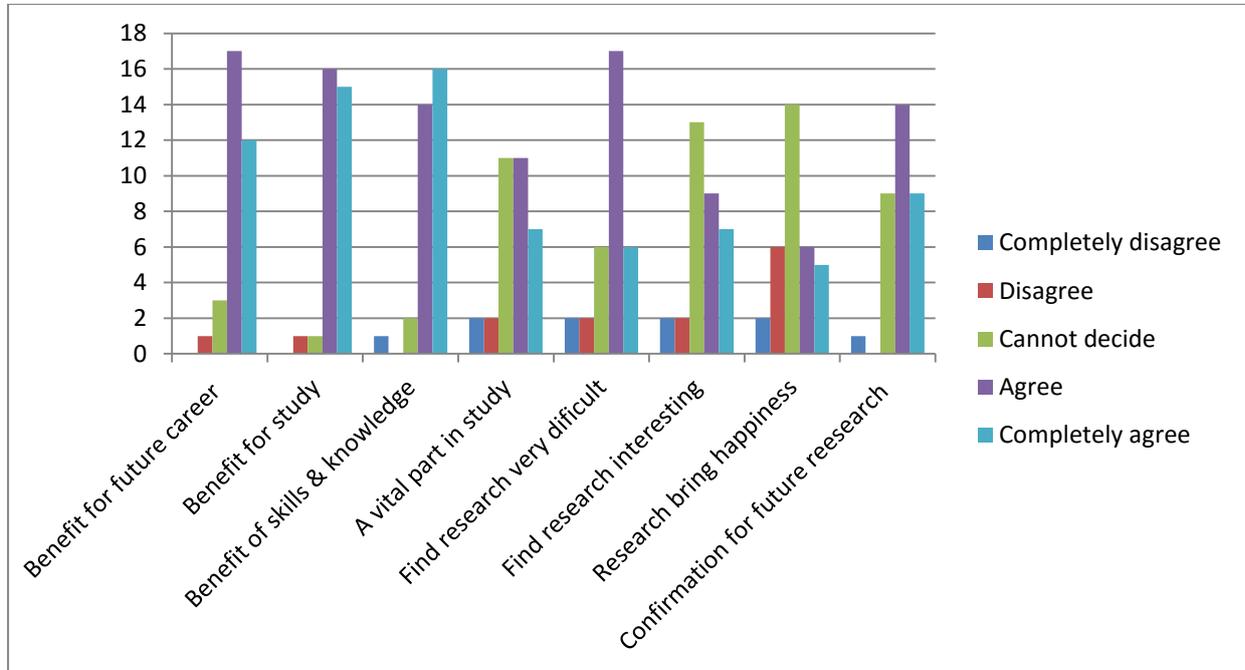


Table 5 experiences an agreement on the positive attitude of research students towards the benefits of doing research. However, the lack presence of motivation when doing research is illustrated in part five of the questionnaire leads to a clear vision to explain the involvement of students in research work. Last but not least, the last part shows the experience of research students in terms of their number of works, time devotion, frequency, goals and so on.

According to the interview, all of participants have done at least one research paper during their academic years at tertiary level, and ten our of them have more than two studies of all fields, namely teaching methodology, linguistics such as semantics, discourse analysis. Most of the respondents consider research as a tool to apply new ideas, deeply understand about some terms and only a few ideas relate research with practice what they have learnt or find a solution for current situations. The data collected from the interview also shows that most of participants could name some basic steps in doing a research such as finding a topic, generating research questions, writing literature review, selecting proper research methods, collecting and analyzing data; however, what really happened in their procedure of doing research presents differently. The rest only listed out steps they could remember without order, and most of their work was completed with supervisor’s assistance, especially in the

topic selection. The participants, despite their completion of research methodology course at 2<sup>nd</sup> year, found it hard to follow all the steps learnt from the course. In contrast, steps they listed out seem different from what they really conducted in their research. For example, participant 3 mentioned these following steps in her study: propose topic to her supervisor, search for materials and sources of materials for theoretical background, acknowledge which she later explained she would like to refer to reference list and then write the paper. Furthermore, although all the respondents were certain about the first step of finding a topic of their interest, one fourth found it difficult to deal with what is a feasible topic to conduct a study. As a result, about half of them confirmed the hardness of doing research and only about one fourth of participants possess confidence in conducting a research.

### **Discussion**

The study was conducted to uncover the effectiveness and limitation of the course Research Methodology at university level at a pedagogical school in Hanoi as well as attitudes of undergraduates on doing research. The presence of the course Research Methodology offers students definition, concepts, and necessary steps about conducting a research in general. However, what research students need to apply in research practice does not come from the content of the course but assistance of their supervisor and other sources of academic materials. In details, students know the first step is to find a topic but what to cover and where to search for it is still misunderstanding. The materials and related works to support the research procedure are only found on the Internet and from supervisor but not commonly from the faculty library, previous theses. Although the course-book provides a clear view on types of methods students can apply, the procedure of research in practice and their own experience answer the question of suitable research instruments.

In this study, positive attitude towards doing research is dominantly shown. Most of the participants find research useful for their studying and relevant to their professional career later. William & Cole (2003) found the relation between research attitude and research experience. The more experience students have in research, the more confident they feel about their research skill. Students conducting more than two research papers have belief in their academic than freshmen with only one paper and little experience. Moreover, most of participants have positive response towards further research as they have received previous academic training and commitment for higher education like master degree.

Evaluating student's attitude toward doing research is indeed necessary to reveal their interest, their awareness about research, and their attitudes about it. This paper concluded that the students' attitude towards research is commonly positive as 11 out of 13 interviewees

confirm their future involvement in doing research and one is considering the matter. They recognize the importance of doing to their study and future career and the studies they have done benefit them theoretically and practically.

About the course Research Methodology, thanks to pluses it offers, students can acquire the concept of research, what to research and steps to conduct a research. However, the course only can meet a small demand on background knowledge, while the skills and techniques to carry out a research do not come from the book but from the practice when students learn from the research procedure and their supervisor. Seven out of 13 participants worked with a big support from supervisor in identify problem for research, generating research questions, finding out materials for literature review, and so on; four of them took time reading a lot of previous studies in library to learn about what have been done to learn about applicable methods, data selection, quotation and reference arrangement for their research. This may result in the time consumption and limitation of the quality in students' studies.

It is necessary to have more frequent research practice for students to empower their ability and their interest. In addition, the role of supervisors and teacher trainers must have adequate knowledge, useful techniques and pedagogies for encouraging students' positive attitude toward research. With the result of this study, teacher educators are expect to emphasize the importance of research among their students and to assist the learning of research.

### **Implications for further studies**

Due to the sample size of this study was inadequate, thus, the attitudes of students towards research at tertiary level may not commonly confirmed, and this leads to restricting the generalization of the findings. There is a need for another study with larger number of participants to generalize the result. In addition, it is necessary to have an insightful investigation to assess the effectiveness of the course Research Methodology in order to have suitable solution or further training so that research students can confidently apply what they acquire into research practice. Another limitation is related to changes in students' attitude over times, which could be addressed by pre-test and post-test research design to provide rich evidence in the beginning phase and completion of their own study. Therefore, further studies are expected to be more practical, which can help students to improve their real experience and skills in doing research through small research simulations.

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