

“Supervising Graduation Projects in Psychology at Shaqra University Using the Grape Bunch Method”

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Abstract:

This research aimed at providing a general overview on the experience of teaching and supervising graduation projects in psychology using the grape bunch method. It also analyzed the difficulties faced by 173 students who conducted 40 graduation projects over three semesters in order to provide a better teaching and supervision experience. Weekly reports of the graduation projects were collected. An analysis was made in the difficulties section of 259 forms. 13 difficulties were reported and divided into three categories (research difficulties, technical difficulties, and student difficulties). The most reported difficulties by students were the presence of multiple responsibilities during the semester and lack of time, paraphrasing skills, feeling lost, the lack of Arabic resources, dealing with study tools, writing their result sections and working in a group setting. Recommendations have been suggested in order to provide better experiences to future students in teaching and supervising their graduation projects.

Keywords: Graduation projects, Psychology, Shaqra University, Final year students, Saudi Arabia, Research.

Introduction:

Graduation projects can be defined as “a requirement for undergraduate final year students in different disciplines over one or two consecutive semesters by a group of students and is supervised by a faculty member in the college. Students are expected to apply, demonstrate and integrate comprehensive knowledge acquired across various undergraduate courses” (King Faisal University, 2020, p. 1) .

Undergraduate students at some Saudi universities (e.g. Shaqra University, King Abdulaziz University, and Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University) specializing in psychology are required to conduct a graduation project (King Abdulaziz University, 2020; Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University, 2020; Shaqra University, 2020) .

Shaqra University is a junior university in Saudi Arabia. It was established in 2009. Students specializing in psychology at the university are required to complete a graduation project which can be completed as an individual or in a group depending on the faculty member supervising the students. The author believes that working in a group setting is better than doing a project individually, especially with a large number of students. Students also may learn more diverse skills in a group setting than in an individual setting. However, the students’ rights should be kept in mind as some may do little or no work to contribute to the group .

Dr. Fawaz Saad, an academic at Umm Al Qura University, stated that “graduation projects are a wasted wealth. Their advantage is that they encourage students and faculty members to orient their creative ideas and research toward the market, trade, and impact creation” (Saad, 2018). The author is a recent PhD graduate from a UK university who developed skills in managing projects and research. She is the supervisor of the Awareness Project using the Grape Bunch Method.

The Awareness Project aims at enriching knowledge and providing the Arabic library with research related to physical and psychological health in the Shaqra governorate at public education schools, universities, and at home. Consequently, it also aims at providing decision makers in the Shaqra governorate and Shaqra University with recommendations for establishing and developing services in a way that matches the needs of individuals and the Quality of Life program 2020, which is one of the programs working toward achieving the Kingdom’s 2030 Vision. “It focuses on improving the lifestyle of the individual and families and building a community in which everyone can enjoy a balanced lifestyle” (Saudi Vision 2030, n.d).

The Awareness Project consists of 40 graduation projects conducted by 173 students over three semesters using the Grape Bunch method. This method was suggested by the author in order to facilitate the high number of students who need supervision. The Grape Bunch method consists of a group of 3–6 students with a representative who received weekly emails and was responsible for submitting the group work every week .

The current graduation project was delivered in multiple ways in order to meet students’ needs, for example through weekly lectures and eight meetings during the semester. Some groups needed extra support, which was provided as appropriate. Samples of outstanding graduation projects were uploaded via Google Drive, and a representative of each group was responsible to contact the supervisor.

Several forms were used to document the supervision. They can be divided into seven forms as follows:

- 1- Group information (i.e., number of groups, names of group members, and representative contact details).
- 2- Ethical forms signed by all group members which can help in preparing the information sheet and consent form for participants .
- 3- Weekly meeting forms which consist of group numbers, days and dates, attendance records, work completed, difficulties faced, recommendations, and signatures of both the students and supervisor. Eight forms were completed during the semester. Some groups needed extra support .
- 4- Self-evaluation forms (i.e., what I have learned so far, what I am going to do in the future, and what grade do I deserve) which were completed twice (in week 6 and week 12) in order to strengthen outstanding students and help others either complete their self-assessment or discuss unrealistic evaluations .
- 5- Peer evaluations (in week 6 and week 12) were completed in order to save each member's rights as some may do little or no work to contribute to the group. This was 5% of the final assessment for each student .
- 6- Task contribution forms (i.e., who did each task) were signed by all students within each group .
- 7- A submission form was submitted at the end of the semester which includes the following elements: confirmation from the students that the work is their own, agreement to reuse data for future research, participation in local or international conferences, and a disclosure that all data has been handed in to the supervisor in order to deal with them according to ethical procedures.

Peer support was provided in the third semester for 52 students by a recent outstanding graduate who came and shared her experience with the students. She also provided online help until the students submitted their projects. She received a letter confirming her total voluntary work hours .

The outcomes of this project were presented through conference presentations and posters (Alfuraih et al., 2019; Almenea et al., 2019; Alotaibi et al., 2019a; Alotaibi et al., 2019b Binhusain et al., 2019).

Aim of this paper

This paper aims to provide a general overview on the experience of teaching and supervising graduation projects in psychology at Shaqra University using the grape bunch method. In addition, it analyzes the difficulties faced by students in order to provide a better teaching and supervision experiences for future students .

Methodology

Weekly meeting forms mentioned earlier of 40 graduation projects supervised by the author of this paper were collected. An analysis was made on the difficulties section on each report. The difficulties were calculated and divided into three categories (technical difficulties, research difficulties, and student difficulties) .

Results

Difficulties section in 259 weekly report were analyzed and 13 difficulties were reported in table 1. The repetition of each difficulty was also calculated. The remaining difficulties were not reported if they were not repeated. The difficulties were divided into three categories (research difficulties, technical difficulties, and student difficulties). See table 1 page 15, difficulties reported by 173 students who conducted 40 graduation projects .

Table 1 Difficulties reported by 173 students who conducted 40 graduation projects

| Categories | Difficulty | Repetition |
|-------------------------------|--|------------|
| Research Difficulties | Paraphrasing skills | 35 |
| | Lack of Arabic recourses | 28 |
| | Result section (dealing with study tools and writing the result section) | 21 |
| | Small sample size | 8 |
| | Dealing with missing data | 6 |
| | Critical appraisal | 6 |
| Student Difficulties | Multiple responsibilities during the semester and lack of time | 40 |
| | Feeling lost | 28 |
| | Working in a group setting | 12 |
| | Not satisfied about progress | 3 |
| Technical Difficulties | Dealing with SPSS and Excel | 5 |
| | Changing layouts when sending documents to other students | 3 |
| | Laptop damage | 2 |

Discussion

This paper aimed at providing a general overview on the experience of teaching and supervising graduation projects in psychology at Shaqra University. In addition, it analyzed the difficulties faced by students in order to provide better teaching and supervision experiences for future students. Supervising a large number of students while conducting the awareness project using the grape bunch method seemed to be practical. Peer support has been shown to be a good experience for both the students and their supervisor .

Analyzing the difficulties reported by students would benefit both the students and their supervisor. The most reported difficulties faced by students were the presence of multiple responsibilities during the semester and lack of time, which occurred 40 times in the weekly reports. This was followed by paraphrasing skills, which occurred 35 times. Feeling lost and the lack of Arabic resources were reported 28 times. Dealing with study tools and writing their result sections were reported 21 times. Working in a group setting also seemed to be difficult for some students as it was reported 12 times .

Despite the fact that there was a lack of Arabic resources, which was reported 28 times, it is believed that students may not have used the appropriate avenues in searching for the resources. The Saudi Digital Library (SDL) provides databases in Arabic which can be used for university students and staff around Saudi Arabia .

In addition, although the outcomes of this project were presented at conference presentations and posters (Alfuraih et al., 2019; Almenea et al., 2019; Alotaibi et al., 2019a; Alotaibi et al., 2019b; Bin Husain et al., 2019), the author believed that this outstanding research should be published as a journal article. Additionally, publishing with undergraduate students is common practice (Giuliano, Skorinko, & Fallon 2019; Griffiths, 2015; Hartley, 2014). It benefits both students and academic staff. However, Hartley (2014) has discussed the disadvantages of publishing graduation projects: "we have to check the contents, the appropriateness/correctness of the statistics, the citations, and we have to drastically shorten the dissertations" (p. 159). However, this can amount to additional work and be time consuming .

Recommendations:

- Start developing research skills with first year students, for example paraphrasing skills, reading and criticizing the latest studies, using databases effectively, training in dealing with assessments, and writing reports .
- Teach students how to manage their stress and use their time effectively .
- The first month of the semester seems to have less commitments compared with the second and third months. Supervisors and students are encouraged to work hard on their graduation project from the first month of the semester to use their time effectively .
- Encourage students to benefit from the courses developed by the Deanship of Scientific Research at the university to gain experience using databases .
- A cluster with printers is recommended in the psychology department. This would help students work together when they are at the university and to help students overcome any technical problems .
- When supervising students in a group setting, it is important to keep them aware of the importance of working together and give them the right to evaluate other members in the group as some may do little or no work to contribute to the group .
- A practical guide for both students and supervisors is recommended in order to reduce the potential for students to feel lost when working on their projects.

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"الإشراف على مشاريع التخرج في علم النفس في جامعة شقراء باستخدام طريقة عناقيد العنب"

إعداد الباحثة:

هتاف العمار

ملخص الدراسة:

هدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم نظرة عامة لتجربة تدريس والإشراف على مشاريع التخرج باستخدام طريقة عناقيد العنب. كما حلل هذا البحث الصعوبات التي تمت مواجهتها من 173 طالبة واللاتي استكملن 40 مشروع تخرج خلال ثلاثة فصول دراسية لتقديم تجربة أفضل في التدريس والإشراف على مشاريع التخرج. تم جمع التقارير الأسبوعية لمشاريع التخرج. تم تحليل جزئية الصعوبات في التقارير. تم إيجاد 13 صعوبة والتي قسمت إلى ثلاث أقسام رئيسية: (صعوبات بحثية، وصعوبات تقنية، وصعوبات تتعلق بالطالبة). أكثر الصعوبات تكررًا كانت المسؤوليات المتعددة خلال الفصل الدراسي، وقلة الوقت المتاح، ومهارات إعادة الصياغة والشعور بالضياع، ونقص المصادر باللغة العربية والتعامل مع أداة الدراسة، وكتابة جزئية نتائج الدراسة، والعمل بشكل جماعي. تم تقديم التوصيات المناسبة من أجل إيجاد تجربة أفضل لتدريس والإشراف على مشاريع التخرج.