

**Abstract:** *For doctoral students, dissertation writing is an important stage in their completion of the degree. They might face several problems during this stage. The aim of the current qualitative study was to explore doctoral students' perceptions of dissertation writing. Ten participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique from the education department of a private university in Lahore, Pakistan. An interview guide was constructed in light of the research objectives and literature review. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The findings of the study revealed language barriers, insufficient academic writing skills, inadequate supervisory support, and personal factors as problems faced by doctoral students during their dissertation writing. It is recommended that an academic writing course should be offered during coursework. Moreover, effective supervisory support should be ensured at the dissertation writing stage. The concerned department should facilitate and solve the problems of doctoral students during their write-up stage.*

**Key Words:** Dissertation Writing, Doctoral Students, Perceptions, Qualitative Research, Procrastination

## Introduction

During MPhil coursework, I [the first author] met with some doctoral students and became aware of their views regarding the process of dissertation writing. That developed my interest in exploring the field of higher education and the perceptions of doctoral students about dissertation writing. I discussed it with my supervisor and started to review relevant literature on the topic. After reading numerous research articles, it became clear that a lot of work has been done in other countries, and both qualitative and quantitative studies are present in the western context, but in the local and indigenous context, research was scant. Hence, I decided to explore various dimensions of the difficulties faced by doctoral students during the course of their dissertation writing.

## Background

Higher education in Pakistan is under the supervision of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC), which is a government organization to ensure quality education. All public and private universities have to fulfil the HEC requirements, standards, and criteria for research. There are 224 universities in Pakistan offering different bachelors, masters, and doctorate programs [HEC, 2021a]. The HEC monitors all universities, and HEC has a very strict

policy, especially towards the doctorate programs [HEC, 2021b], and recently, they have banned many universities from offering PhD programs in certain disciplines due to non-compliance with HEC standards like extended timelines, non-quality work, and excessive plagiarism [HEC, 2019]. Completion of a dissertation as per defined format without plagiarism, along with the review of the internal supervisor, external reviewers, oral presentation, and viva, followed by any corrections all in the given timeline, are the main requirements of the HEC.

As a result, universities have to adopt strict policies, especially towards doctorate studies, which is beneficial for the overall society as rigorous academic research is flourishing in Pakistan. However, on the other hand, two facts are obvious. First, the socio-economic conditions of Pakistan are not very good, and education is expensive to afford, which creates burden and stress on students. And secondly, English is not the first language, while in all major academic disciplines, dissertations are written in the English language. At the same time, opportunities are also being provided for higher education, especially doctorate studies like HEC requirement to establish "research centers" (for example, ORIC) in all universities, scholarships in

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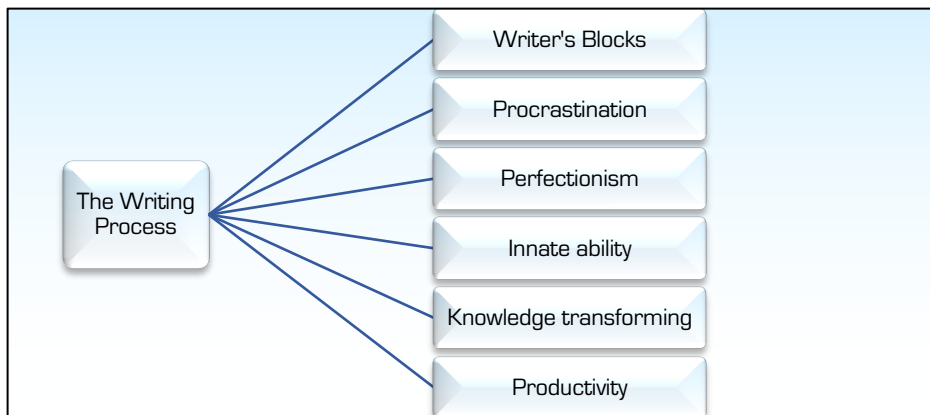
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certain high demand degree programs, and foundation of foreign admissions, career and placement offices in universities.

As doctoral students' come from different socio-economic and academic backgrounds, they go through different personal experiences, which shape their opinions and perceptions regarding dissertation writing, which are different from one another. Hence, difficulties and opportunities both exist for doctorate students, and a genuine need exists to investigate and explore the perceptions of students about the construct of dissertation writing.

Literature review revealed that doctoral students all over the globe have varying perceptions about dissertation writing experiences. Six major themes that emerged as a result of a review are

writing blocks, procrastination, perfectionism, innate ability, knowledge transforming, and productivity (Lonka et al., 2013). In the local context, a review of indigenous studies indicates that these constructs have not been explored earlier through any qualitative research study. Most of the doctoral education-related studies have focused on exploring supervision related issues (Saleem & Mahmood, 2017; Saleem & Mehmood, 2018; Hammad, Ahmed, & Zahoor, 2018; Riffat & Muhammad, 2019) and on the lived experiences of doctoral students (Ali, Ullah, & Sanauddin, 2019). There seems a dearth of research studies related to doctoral students' perceptions of writing dissertations in the Pakistani context. This study was designed to fill this gap.



**Figure 1:** Visual representation of the writing process (Lonka et al., 2013).

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of doctoral students regarding their dissertation writing experiences. The research site was the department of education at a private urban university in Lahore, Pakistan. The first researcher wanted to play her part in efforts to improve the problems faced by doctoral students during the process of dissertation writing by conducting this research. This study aimed to explore the perceptions of doctoral students about the dissertation writing process. Six main themes, identified by a literature review (Lonka et al., 2013; Kiriakos & Tienari, 2018; Machin, Clarà, & Danaher, 2019), were explored using six main research questions, and each theme was further investigated by 4 follow up questions in the same session.

The main questions are the following:

1. What are the perceptions of doctoral students' regarding writing blocks that hinder the process of writing a dissertation?
2. What are the perceptions of doctoral students' regarding procrastination that creates hurdles in writing a dissertation?
3. What are the perceptions of doctoral students' regarding perfectionism that occurs during the writing process of the dissertation?
4. What are the perceptions of doctoral students' regarding issues of the innate ability that create obstacles in writing a dissertation?
5. What are the perceptions of doctoral students' regarding knowledge transforming that creates obstacles in writing a dissertation?

6. What are the perceptions of doctoral students' regarding productivity that creates obstacles in writing a dissertation?

## **Methods and Materials**

This study was of qualitative nature as the main intention of the researcher was to explore and interpret the doctoral students' perceptions regarding dissertation writing. The qualitative approach was used because of the very nature of qualitative research, which allows the researcher to explore the inside and sheds light on those corners never explored before. In qualitative research, the researchers try to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences.

Qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant's perspective. Qualitative research is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and a richly descriptive end product ([Lincoln & Denzin, 2000](#)).

This study used an interpretive approach. The qualitative interpretive approach is about understanding the perceptions and experiences of individuals ([Merriam & Tisdell, 2016](#); [Roulston & Choi, 2018](#); [Mason, 2018](#)). This approach assumes that the world has multiple realities upon which multiple perceptions are based. Hence, the reality is not the same for everyone. It's unique and specific for each individual and not fixed or totally agreed upon. As there can be more than one single interpretation of reality, qualitative researchers work in specific contexts to explore and understand the interpretations.

## **Intrinsic case study Design**

The case study is primarily a qualitative method of inquiry, which gives the researcher the opportunity to interpret reality as it is observed in its specific context ([Thomas, 2021](#)). An intrinsic case is a specific particular situation, among many others ([Yin, 2018](#); [Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). For example, there are a number of academic processes that could be explored like teaching and learning process, assessment and evaluation process, data collection and analysis process, and several other processes, but the dissertation writing process emerged as the particular phenomena and case of interest to be studied in this research ([Stake, 1995](#); [Yin, 2018](#)).

An intrinsic case study method is used when the researcher wants to learn about a specific case ([Stake, 1995](#); [Merriam & Tisdell, 2016](#)). A case is a

unique situation, person, group, profession, department, or organization ([Paterson, Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010](#)). The researchers opt for an intrinsic case study when the case is interesting due to its uniqueness, and investigation is required due to that uniqueness and specialty. Findings comprise the sharing of participants' critical stances, perceptions, and experiences about a specific situation or particular phenomena.

This research is not theory-driven as there is no recognized body of knowledge available in the local context yet. It aims to illuminate unnecessary delay of dissertation writing and to overcome the hurdles for the smooth transition of knowledge through different aspects of doctoral students' perceptions by identifying issues. It's more context-driven as the researcher developed a personal interest in the phenomena of dissertation writing upon learning about it through informal discussions with doctorate students and preliminary reviews of relevant and available literature. The researcher felt compelled to explore the process as an intrinsic case study. However, previous concepts ([Lonka et al., 2013](#)) were used to facilitate provisional coding ([Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020](#)) and subsequent development of themes.

## **The Research Site, Population, and Sample**

The research site for this study was a private sector co-educational urban university located in Lahore (Pakistan). The population of this study was all the doctorate students who were pursuing a Doctorate in Education and were in their dissertation writing stage. As qualitative studies are highly rich in their specific settings, unique and engraved in their contexts, the sample for this study was the doctorate students of the department of education who were in their dissertation writing stage at the research site. Ten participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique from the research site.

The following were the criteria the researcher used to determine whether an interviewee was eligible to take part in this study: The interviewee was a doctoral student of the Department of Education at the research site. The interviewee volunteered to be interviewed for this research, and the interviewee agreed to respond to follow-up interviews if required.

## **Data Collection**

The data for this study was collected using semi-structured interviews, institutional documents, and field notes ([Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011](#); [Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015](#); [Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018](#)). Since this study was focused on exploring doctoral

students' perceptions of writing dissertations, semi-structured interviews were the main source of data, and other sources of data were used only to develop researchers' understanding of the phenomenon and for corroborating evidence gleaned from interview data (Yin, 2018).

The interview data were collected by the first author (TA) through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the ten participants. The semi-formal conversation provided a basis for alerting to areas that deserved further investigation. The questions of the interview follow a general to a specific pattern (Seidman, 2019). Initially, questions were aimed at identifying how students defined themselves, and they perceived dissertation writing. Questions then turned to how students formed specific strategies for the purpose of tackling obstacles that exist either intentionally or accidentally and may or may not impact the writing of a dissertation.

An interview guide was constructed in the light of research questions and literature review (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016; Fujii, 2017). The work of [Lonka et al. \(2013\)](#) was useful in this regard. Six themes developed from the literature were explained to participants to investigate the several styles in which scholars tried to explore perceptions of dissertation writing. The first dimension is that its purpose is to develop academic writing and the means that are designed to support that writing. The second dimension of designing the research is its

## Data Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using coding. Provisional, descriptive, and pattern coding was done for the analysis of qualitative data. It begins with establishing overarching impressions of the data by reading and re-reading interview transcripts. A predetermined framework was provisionally used to approach data. The first author identified common themes as she searched the materials gradually. The goal was to find common patterns across the data set ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)).

Coding is the process of labelling relevant words, phrases, sentences, or sections with codes, which help identify important patterns. Labels can be about actions, activities, concepts, differences, opinions, processes, or whatever the researcher thinks is relevant. Coding helps to organize data for dissemination. In this study, the researcher used highlighters and sticky notes for this purpose. The researcher conceptualized the data by creating categories by combining or merging codes created during descriptive coding. A coding table was also created to quickly identify what the codes are

procrastination nature. The third dimension is that the research design has perfectionism in assembling the written task. The fourth dimension is creative writing is an innate ability or can be developed the skill by different means. The fifth dimension is knowledge transformation has to do real work. The sixth dimension is productivity and authentic addition to knowledge.

Along with the 25 open-ended questions, the first researcher probed the participants for additional information related to dissertation writing. The probing assisted members in recalling the content and strategies that they have employed; however, they failed to understand at some stage in the interview.

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim (Tracy, 2020). Transcription is the procedure in which the researcher carefully listens to the recorded interviews and writes them down ([Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018](#); Tracy, 2020). It is considered the first step in qualitative data analysis. For this study, the researcher transcribed ten interviews of about 30 minutes each, and it took several hours to note those interviews. First, all interviews were transferred from the cell phone to the laptop; each audio file was given a separate name for identification. The original audio recording files were saved in a new folder. Headphones were used to listen to the interviews. Simultaneously, the researcher used to take notes. It was a long and tiring process.

referring to. Then all transcription data were entered into a Microsoft Excel software spreadsheet to analyze data and to create themes and results. The researcher labelled the categories to describe the connections between them by using the spreadsheet. Important variables were mentioned in the columns and responses in the rows in relation to each individual participant.

## Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Findings

The validity of a study is based on the accuracy of the research findings, and the reliability is based on obtaining the same results in the case of conducting the study at different times. Internal validity was established as the descriptions made in the data analysis provide the basis for the comments and explanations, and external validity was established by defining the perceptions of the sample to allow for comparisons with other samples. Internal reliability was obtained through providing information about the sample, data collection tools, and process of data analysis, and external reliability was achieved through in detail defining the sample group, data collection

and analysis methods, the conceptual framework used in the analysis of the data.

In order to provide safety to participants, their privacy was protected by providing participants with an alternate identity and by controlling access to the original data. Efforts were made to reduce and eradicate potential consequences for the participants. They were reminded that the study is for academic purposes only. Participants were allowed to quit the study at any time. The researcher wanted to minimize potential stress. Doctoral students were approached through the program coordinator. Interviews were conducted in a conducive environment. All interviews were recorded with prior permission. All transcripts were transcribed honestly and faithfully in a precise way and also re-checked in a meeting of all authors of the current study.

## Findings

### Writing blocks Hinder their Dissertation Writing

Most of the participants believed that writing a dissertation could be a difficult and frustrating activity as a result of its quality standards and additional efforts needed in writing analysis. Participants had to deal with their family matters, they were required to be on time at their workplace, and they were expected to conduct their research activity. Besides family responsibilities, participants faced many academic challenges, e.g., tutorials, writing standards, and most importantly, write-up work ranging from the basis of analysis proposal to writing up the final manuscript. They believed that it was the requirement for the completion of their specific degree that they were registered in. The participants reported that they learned many new things and had to control their temperament by writing the dissertation, which helped them to attain their future goals.

Most of the participants believed that dissertation writing was not an easy task, but they also found it a fruitful activity. They found it frustrating, and at times jading because of the sustained efforts. Most of the participants had done their Masters's degree a few years ago. Thus, students were dubious about revising their skills in their degree. Another difficult part of writing was their inability to operate the latest technologies, finding appropriate articles, and giving productive output by writing the authentic research material was sort of a matter of exasperation. A number of participants believed that writing a dissertation gave them an advantage in an exceeding number of ways. They are linking and associating with the newest data, enhancing their writing skills. They conjointly

believed it as an inventive, fruitful activity that leads them to attain their magnificent future goals.

Most of the participants believed that there were not any barriers that are arduous to beat in the process of dissertation writing. However, sometimes exploring and giving words to verbal, intuitive thoughts became seriously difficult. Also, once they felt stuck at some point, it was troublesome to manoeuvre. For that, they needed to sit down with their supervisors, visited libraries, and skimmed a great deal of literature from various sources. Among issues, the key issue was language; students lacked writing skills and the incompetence of being communicatory in English. They had doubts concerning their linguistic skills; their vocabulary was not enough for dissertation writing. Furthermore, they believed that their text was always full of grammatical mistakes.

*Most of the time, it happens to me while writing a text, and whenever I am stuck in such a situation, I leave it. I start my rethinking process. I have to consult some literature again, the library and my supervisor, and then again come with new ideas, and I have to start again. [Participant 2]*

A number of participants believed that maintaining continuity in writing was difficult because they had other responsibilities, too, particularly involving work and family. As one of the participants stated,

*I often get completely stuck because there is much thinking of other matters and to translate their thinking and my thinking into writing is almost difficult. [Participant 4]*

All of the participants believed that they found expressing, exploring, and speaking about the facts really easy, but since in dissertation writing, the language must be very formal, to the point, stating all the facts in a specific manner that the meaning is communicated in an authentic way, they found it difficult. Very few believed that writing, exploring, and expressing is the same as speaking to someone or sharing experiences. However, having produced a text, they always felt joy in their writing activity and felt proud of tackling the problems with confidence.

All of the participants believed that a peaceful atmosphere is very necessary for dissertation writing since devotion is very much needed. However, if the atmosphere was loud, mismanaged, discontinuous, or with no discipline, it was evident that the researcher could not concentrate upon the work entirely, and his/her potential power to finish the task is distributed to nonsensical things.

## Procrastination Creates hurdles in Dissertation Writing

Before starting PhD study, a number of the participants believed that they did not feel afraid, reluctant, or hesitant to write something. In addition, they felt that in PhD study, they would study most and that writing something would not be difficult for them. Expressing their views and explaining the facts would become abundantly easier with plenty of academic expertise. However, most participants reported that it became terribly exhausting to write the dissertation, particularly in academic discourse. Most of the participants reported similar problems and difficult states of affairs even after they were engaged to write any task connected to their coursework.

However, most participants believed that delaying the task, not being serious, lost in the bundle of articles were frustrating for a researcher. Thus if deadlines were not given, they would feel lazy and feel dreamy so as to finish the task in the given time. For example, two participants stated,

*This is a self-imposed compulsion for me. When I was thinking that the time is delaying aimlessly, uselessly due to my negligence, then I put myself under the restrictions that I have to complete at this time to this time. [Participant 2]*

*Deadlines are always helpful. I also always set deadlines for myself, as well. So, it is not that others have to decide on that. I sometimes do it myself as well. [Participant 8]*

Only a few students believed that they need their own artistic means of doing and managing things; they felt dedicated to their task and never delayed their work. All of the participants believed that so as to try and do the dissertation work, the deadlines were important; otherwise, they felt lost, agitated towards finishing the task, and put off their work. They devotedly performed their task within the given time with deadlines. In addition, they reported feeling evangelistic in writing down their thoughts, their concepts and place thoughts or views into words; they additionally got pleasure from writing a dissertation.

## Perfectionism Hinders Dissertation Writing

Most of the participants believed that the topic itself had a critical effect on the researchers' minds, whether they need to analyze or judge something openly. They believed that the critical attitude was part of their personality, and their sceptic concepts made them dwell into critical aspects of thinking about odd facts or negative theory; hence, they felt a bit shaky off the grid while expressing their views

firmly and writing about it. As one of the participants stated,

*I guess it is a little bit because I have a very critical mind, and I see in everything that multiple aspects. That's why it becomes a little bit difficult for me. [Participant 2]*

Very few participants believed that they were fearless when it comes to being expressive about anything, and they did not feel hesitant while laying out the facts in their own judgments they courageously give critical analysis upon the facts, and it never hindered their power of being critical about anything in their personal or educational life. As one of the participants stated,

*No, I don't fear. As I told you that if I feel I write about any topic. So, I just write that. The writing becomes critical. At this level, you have to be critical. For example, if I am writing and jotting down so many points, I have to be critical as a researcher. [Participant 6]*

Most of the participants believed that their self-analysis and critical thinking often brought them to the point where they felt confused and jumbled with too many thoughts. The massive exploration brings them to the nature of diversity among the concept to produce the idea of criticism about general facts. As one of the participants stated that:

*Obviously, there are ideas behind the writings because, without these ideas, you cannot produce writing. It isn't an essay of any sort, and neither can you gather ideas from different websites and copy-paste it as your writing. Basically, you take different ideas and see to what extent they match your research. You compare and contrast, and with logical reasoning, conduct this process. [Participant 9]*

All of the participants reported that they often read their previous written text in order to gain some previous knowledge, learn from past experiences, and tried to initiate better ideas of creativity while writing in the present. As one of the participants stated,

*Yes, of course. As I said before as well, you need to do a revision of your work. For instance, I started my thesis a year ago, and now, when I look back at it, I can identify grammatical errors. With the passage of time, you improve your academic writing. With different readings, you also check the style of your references, which you do not know before that. Obviously, revision provides you with new perspectives. [Participant 9]*

Most of the participants believe that it is necessary to re-read the text before submitting it to a supervisor in order to correct the mistakes, like spelling or punctuations in the text, the checking of

language, the improvement of tenses, all are precautionary steps to take before submitting the final report. As one of the participants stated,

*Before submitting, I do re-read and thoroughly study through it. I look for mistakes, e.g., references, etc. My supervisor is very critical about mistakes or loopholes. After revising and revisiting my task, I submit it. After that, I have a meeting with him to discuss my text. [Participant 9]*

### **Writing Skill is not an Innate Ability**

Most of the participants believed that language might be a skill that could be learned with myriad reading, learning proverbs and new vocabulary, and expressions of theoretical literature. They believed that there was forever an area for improvement in learning to write a dissertation. The skill gets improved owing to a researcher have to be compelled to browse a great deal and grasp the theoretical literature. For example, two participants stated,

*Yeah, obviously, I don't believe that it is innate quality though the reading gives you the pushing force and gives you the collection of good words and sentences. It's a practice, but somehow it is, I personally believe, an innate quality as well. [Participant 1]*

*No, I think that the skill of writing is not born with a specific person. It can be learned. Practice makes the man perfect. [Participant 4]*

Only a few participants believed that English was not our native language; thus, it would forever be laborious for them to develop quality skills in writing.

Most of the participants believed that writing is a skill that can be learned with effective steering and multiple possibilities to understand the mistakes. A number of the participants believed that writing skills ought to be taught at the college level. They were also of the view that if schooling was not smart, particularly within the follow of a people language writing, it would never be learned by following at any higher level of studies. Most of the participants believed that writing might be a skill that forever has the area for development. They stated that when you are in higher studies, it is essential that students focus upon writing keenly and observe the challenges and changes around them. Moreover, They stated that the learner should generate new concepts from their previous data and experiences, and this would permit them, for instance, the habit of criticism upon the environment and everything they browse.

Very few participants believed that they were not learning something new; for them, it was like a continuance of the concepts of somebody else and

simply paraphrasing them as per the requirements of the supervisor. They believed that generating innovative concepts desire a great deal of following, as well as difficult their temperament and talent to know the concepts of knowledge.

All of the participants believed that writing skills develop thinking patterns, build a vivid image, offer to build intellectual ideas, and generate the ability to be artistic and choose things from a completely new perspective. They believed that writing is learned through deep study, experience, and grasping ideas and thoughts into words. It needs a good potential ability to evoke the abilities buried within the minds of an author.

### **Knowledge Transforming Enhances Productivity**

All of the participants believed that transforming the text is sort of natural, as a result of it develops the understanding that creates new concepts, helps in learning from mistakes. All of the participants believed that writing and re-writing might be a creation, and it creates the flexibility to understand the ideas and provides the potential to initiate the thoughts, creates ideas, provides words to an individual innovative mind. For example, a participant stated,

*Yes, of course, you have to write again and again, and when you re-write, rephrase and re-check it, you'll see a lot of mistakes. When one is writing, at that time, he thinks that he's writing correctly, but with the passage of time, you reflect on it and edit the flaws like this sentence shouldn't be phrased like this, etc. And with the passage of time, the scholar learns like initially, I didn't have any idea about topic sentences and supporting details. The good readers just read the topic sentences, and they can get an idea about the content of the paragraph. So, re-writing is important to improve the quality of the text. [Participant 10]*

Most of the participants believed that human minds are completely different from each other, and it is nice to get feedback on your work from others too. It provides an immense opportunity for the writer to rethink and rebuild the ideas. Self-analysis is sweet. However, the feedback of others might bring a new perspective and what it means. The participants believed that ensuring the readability of the text is essential. The language must be formal with an appropriate choice of words and vocabulary. Because by ensuring they may have known their lacking zones and places where improvements are required. For that, sometimes the comments and opinions of others, particularly the experts, are necessary.

## Other Responsibilities Hinder Productivity

Some of the researchers declared that they were not able to write a large chunk of text in a day. They had a lot of other responsibilities to meet and many alternative things on their hands to do, so they solely concentrate on the selected tasks. As one of the participants stated,

*I think, as far as my case is concerned, if I talk about myself, so not all the time, you know the frequency changes, and it is not the same all the time. (Participant 1)*

The utmost priority for the participants was to acquire data and to finish the dissertation or write articles for the sake of a degree. All of the participants stated that whether they preferred to be a prolific author or not, they needed to write down on a daily basis in order to finish the dissertation.

All participants reported that they got upset and felt low in energy when heavy assignments were allocated to them. Sometimes they got interested in writing, reading, and grasping the ideas, but according to the need, they had to write on a daily basis in order to accomplish the task before the given time. Only a few acknowledged that they loved and enjoyed expressing their ideas and putting in words their thoughts aside from research articles and dissertations. They wrote journals to make the writing part of their regular routine.

Most of the participants believed that it was not about the opportunities they had, but it was about the priority and task to accomplish before the given deadlines, for that they had to study, discover, put in writing, and communicate accordingly. For example, two participants stated,

*No, it's not about the chance. When I set a target for myself or when I see that I need to do this, then I write. It's not about the chance. When I need to achieve a task, initially, I read for it, and then I regularly do it. (Participant 5)*

*The researcher needs to set priorities. If my priority is writing, I cannot write immediately. I have to read, think, and then write. It's not about getting a chance. If you're on the writing stage and you've collected the data, then obviously, whenever you will get the chance, you'll be able to write it, but for that, it's important to have a collection of material/data. (Participant 10)*

## Conclusion

The current study aimed to explore doctoral students' perceptions of dissertation writing. The researcher interviewed ten information-rich participants from the department of education at a private university. The findings related to writing

blocks suggest that most of the participants believe that writing a dissertation is a hectic and sometimes frustrating activity since they have to focus on their other jobs like looking after their families, be punctual at work, managing personal business, etc. Most of the participants believe that writing a dissertation is no joke; it is tough and frustrating, not due to insufficient literacy skills or intellectual capacity but because of the circumstances. The findings related to procrastination suggests that most of the participants believe that delaying the task, not getting serious, lost in the bundle of articles makes things frustrating for the researcher to be devoted towards writing a dissertation. Therefore, deadlines are necessary for writing a dissertation. In addition, constant insistence on a perfect product—perfectionism—play a significant role in the writing process. Most of the participants do not consider writing as an innate ability. Moreover, they consider the writing process as a way of exploring and developing their research ideas.

The following are the limitations of the study: The results of the study are not generalizable as the study is of a qualitative nature. The population and sample of this study consist of students from the Education Department of a private urban university in Pakistan who had completed their coursework and started writing their dissertations. The scope of the current study was limited to only ten respondents' views on dissertation writing—doctoral students from other departments.

Perceptions are explored through both quantitative and qualitative inquiry but as generalizability was not the goal of this study and the prime intention of the researcher remained to unveil the personal experiences and collect the in-depth information about the perceptions of doctoral students regarding dissertation writing at the urban private university of Pakistan; therefore, a qualitative method was used. It was assumed that the results would be helpful to university management, fellow researchers, and government—policymakers to devise ways to help out students to produce better quality theses.

## Implications of Research

### Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This study was not intended to correct the irregularities; it uncovered the strengths and weaknesses in the processes of doctoral students' writing and exposed various dimensions of the phenomenon. Based on the findings of the current research study, the following recommendations for policy and practice are made:

1. This study has revealed an area of doctoral students' perceptions of dissertation writing. The findings of the study suggest that delaying the task, not getting serious, and lost in the bundle of articles make things frustrating for the researcher to be devoted to writing a dissertation. Therefore, they believe that deadlines are necessary for writing a dissertation. Therefore, it is recommended that the university administration should ensure proper defining milestones in order for the successful, timely completion of doctoral dissertations.
2. Academic writing courses can be introduced in the department so that doctoral students can be supported with specialized instructions for dissertation writing skills.

A number of participants believe that maintaining continuity in writing is difficult. They need to attend to other responsibilities too, particularly involving work and family. Therefore, this study recommends some scholarships for doctoral students who are unable to sustain their efforts for doctoral writing with full devotion.

### **Suggestions for future research**

In light of the study's findings and limitations, several avenues for future research studies are suggested below:

1. Many areas of relevance to this study remained uncovered since these areas were not targeted by the research questions which we explored in this study. Therefore, it is suggested that future researchers can explore those areas, or they can deepen what has been investigated here in the current study. For example, this study did not include the perspectives of supervisors much as they would have enriched the findings. Future research studies can design to explore supervisors' perspectives on the issues explored in this study.
2. Future researchers can broaden current knowledge of perceptions of doctoral students of dissertation writing by exploring various aspects of dissertation writing such as how to write the introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, and conclusions of a study. Future researchers can expand the current study by designing a survey study to measure perceptions of doctoral students of dissertation writing from a larger sample. This study was designed to do an in-depth study of the issues and did not aim to generalize the study.
3. The use of semi-structured interviews was useful in gaining insights into the current circumstances of doctoral dissertation writing. However, future studies may consider carefully designing and conducting a survey study to produce results that can be easily generalized to the population of doctoral students in Pakistan.
4. There is a need for researchers to closely examine perceptions of doctoral students regarding knowledge transformation that creates obstacles in writing a dissertation. Though the current study's findings have highlighted many aspects of this issue, there is much to be learned about it. Since this knowledge transformation plays an important role in doctoral students' experiences in dissertation writing, there is a need to explore this aspect of this study through an in-depth qualitative study.
5. Researchers interested in the intricacies of procrastination itself may want to dig into it through the perspectives of supervisors and supervisees. Other researchers may want to investigate further those aspects of this study, which engendered and encouraged the issues discussed in this study—in order to replicate the findings in different university contexts.

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