

Challenges and Issues in Writing a Research Paper: A Case of College Students in a Private School in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the challenges and issues faced by college students at Saint Michael College of Caraga (SMCC) in research paper writing, focusing on the areas of research education, content creation, resource gathering, writing mechanics, plagiarism, and workload management. Employing a descriptive qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with students enrolled in Thesis Writing 1 and 2 for the academic year 2023-2024. Thematic analysis revealed significant challenges, including gaps in foundational research skills, resource limitations, and irregular instructional delivery. Students also reported difficulties with literature reviews, theoretical frameworks, and balancing academic workloads. The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions, such as improving access to updated resources, enhancing mentorship through adviser training, and streamlining the research process to reduce delays and inefficiencies. Anchored in Cognitive Load Theory, this study underscores the importance of optimizing instructional design to mitigate cognitive overload and foster deeper engagement with research tasks. These recommendations aim to elevate the research capacity of students, contributing to institutional goals of academic excellence and research productivity

KEYWORDS: Research Writing Challenges, Research Education, Literature Review, Research Productivity, Adviser training

INTRODUCTION

Research is a sought-after skill in many academic and professional settings. Its importance is emphasized in its inclusion in the curriculum of many universities and colleges worldwide. In the context of the Philippines, research and thesis subject are required across the curriculum from senior high school, undergraduate programs and even graduate school. Often, it is a prerequisite for graduation in every academic degree program (Ballena & Liwag, 2019). Schools engage students in thesis writing courses to acquire hands-on experience crafting scholarly papers and discovering new knowledge through reading and analyzing findings. Despite the noble intention of these courses, students still need help in the research writing process, highlighting the need to investigate this issue to provide more targeted support.

Research writing is an intricate academic endeavor that requires a comprehensive grasp of fundamental skills in both reading and writing. Extensive literature highlights the prevalent issues of inadequate academic writing skills among students (Al-Mukdad, 2019; Moses et al., 2019; Portillo-San Miguel, 2021; Sağlamel & Merve Aydoğdu, 2022). These difficulties are broadly categorized into poor content quality, weakness in writing mechanics, and challenges articulating their thoughts on the topic.

A closer examination of research writing reveals that students encounter overlapping issues with nuanced challenges. Fausan et al. (2022) pinpoint problems like developing coherent paragraphs, noticeable grammatical errors, and inharmonic sentences, all detrimental to the caliber of research papers produced. Moreover, the saturation of linguistic problems has also been documented numerously (Alsied & Ibrahim, 2018; Dwidhandini et al., 2013; Pineteh & Angu, 2014). There is a real need to intervene in the status quo to lessen the problems associated with inadequate writing skills. Intervention programs should be tailored to student's needs and current skills-to help with their grammar and content-writing skills.

Aside from the mentioned difficulties of linguistic insufficiencies, other factors such as sociocultural challenges and lack of preparedness are significant obstacles to thesis writing (Boufeldja & Bouhania, 2020). Given the varieties of problems that students encounter, writing specific parts of the paper is also at play, such as formulating conceptual and theoretical frameworks formulation, selecting the correct methodology, and reviewing related literature (Benavente et al., 2022; Casanave & Li, 2015; Shahsavar & Kourepaz, 2020).

Combating these issues will help academic institutions raise the quality of research. They should take a proactive stance on this. Implementing targeted workshops focused on enhancing academic writing skills and incorporating writing-intensive courses across all disciplines will mitigate these problems. Concentrating on the writing process and strengthening the knowledge of faculty members teaching research can be critical actions in addressing these identified challenges. While studies have already explored the general challenges faced by students in academic writing, the study offers a localized perspective from a post-pandemic Philippine

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institution. The paper intends to shed light on how the writing challenges manifest in regional academic contexts particularly considering pandemic related disruptions, advisor feedback consistencies, and limited access to writing resources. This localized lens gives practical implications for similar institutions looking for enhancement on their research instruction and student support systems.

The role of research in advancing society's knowledge must be recognized (Islam, 2023). It is imperative that academic institutions prepare the learning environment to foster better student achievement. The root causes of research productivity problems are the following themes: lack of research skills, difficulty finding resources, language barriers, and lack of administrative support (Rafikova, 2022; Squires et al., 2020; Ulla et al., 2017). Given the problems associated with research writing, it is necessary to identify these challenges and provide a solution to minimize the risks of underperformance.

Given the rigid process of undergoing research paper scrutiny from title hearings, plagiarism detection, Grammarly scores, and adviser's endorsements, it is a must to identify the problems that students encounter in order to improve the conditions of faced by those enrolled in research writing courses. In the context of Saint Michael College of Caraga, there is always an ongoing commitment to excel in academics and research as reflected in its vision and mission; understanding the students' unique challenges will help the institution actualize its institutional goal. More importantly, the study aims to answer the following research objectives:

1. Determine the challenges and difficulties faced by students in writing research papers in terms of teaching of research, content writing, resource gathering and citations, writing mechanics and plagiarism, and workload.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the current resources and support systems at SMCC in assisting students with research paper writing.

METHODS

Research design

The research made use of a descriptive qualitative designs which aims to capture participants' perspectives in their own words while remaining close to the data (Sandelowski, 2000). The design allowed the researchers to show the findings in straightforward language without the imposition of heavy theoretical interpretations. The approach was suitable to generate a close account of the experiences of students in research writing classes.

Participants and Sampling

The study's respondents were selected through purposive sampling from the pool of enrolled students for the school year 2023-2024 for the subject Thesis Writing 1 and 2 in Saint Michael College of Caraga. Six students from each college department and a total of 30 were chosen based on the following criteria: enrollment status, academic standing and availability and willingness to participate. This sampling technique was intended to ensure proper representation across all departments to have diversity of experiences related to research writing.

Instrument

Data collected made use of a semi-structured questionnaire, which was subjected to an expert validation to establish content validity. Using the institution's validity assessment tool, a validity index was computed to confirm the instrument's appropriateness with the subject's objectives. The validators collectively affirmed the questionnaire was deemed fit for capturing the intended outcomes under investigation.

Data collection

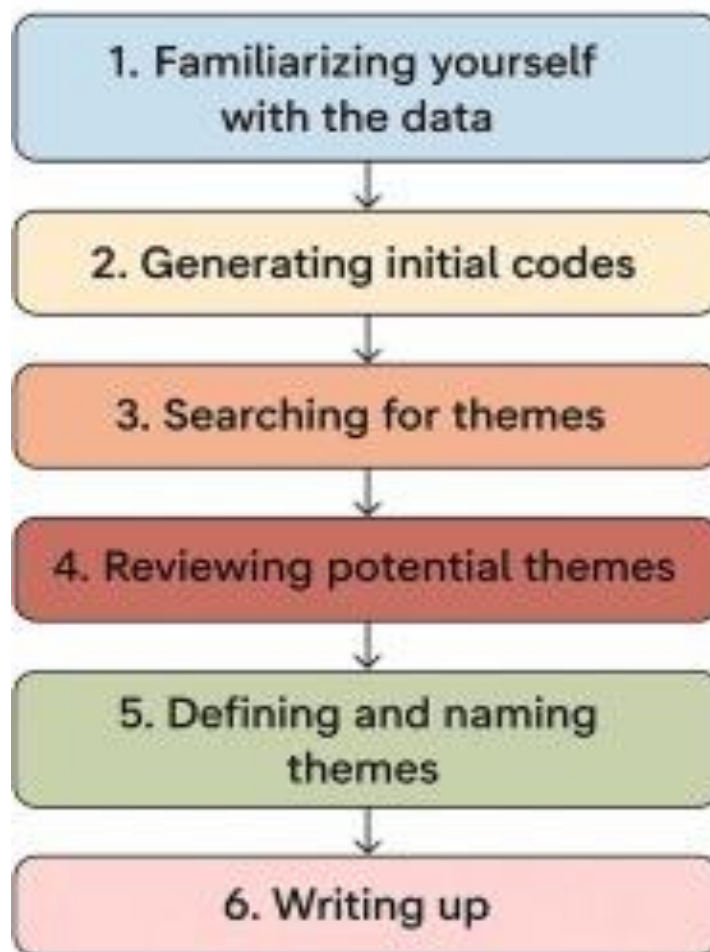
Ethical standards were carefully observed during the conduct of the research. The objectives of the study were explained to the participants prior to the collection of data. Informed consent was obtained ensuring alignment with the National Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. Provisions were made to protect data privacy, including security of all digital files. To protect vulnerable participants, additional measures were taken to make sure confidentiality and prevent potential harm. The findings of the study were reported with transparency, reflecting only participants views and avoiding research bias.

Data analysis

The analysis followed a six-phase process using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis facilitated in the qualitative analysis software called ATLAS.TI. The method was chosen in order to provide flexibility and compatibility with descriptive qualitative research which enables identification of explicit patterns in the participant's narratives. The six phases are illustrated below: All recorded interviews both audio and with videos were transcribed verbatim and a translation of their original language using a customized AI from ChatGPT was employed to speed up the process. A human grammarian was also tapped for verification and validation of translation. Themes then were refined, reviewed, and defined to capture the patterns that are recurring in the data analyzed. The emphasis on the consistency of the narratives across all data points were observed in the explicit experiences of the participants. The themes served as the basis of the reporting of findings.

Steps of Thematic Analysis

(Braun & Clarke, 2006)



RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Challenges and difficulties faced by students concerning writing a research paper.

Looking at the challenges experienced by students in writing a research paper, the researchers were able to construct 3 significant themes that best illustrates the aforementioned areas to be covered.

The table shows the areas of concern and the themes generated from the transcripts:

Research Education, Content	<i>Missed Opportunities In Research Teaching and Learning of Students</i>
writing, Writing Mechanics,	
Resource Gathering	<i>Current Skillset of Students In Writing Research</i>

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Workload	<i>Quality Harmed Due to Juggling Multiple Responsibilities and Other Problems</i>
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Missed Opportunities In Research Teaching and Learning of Students

To maximize students' learning opportunities, it is essential to create an environment that effectively address and support the needs of different individuals. Given the participants of this study, research writing has been difficult for the participants because of the lack of skills they have in their foundational years in high school. Accordingly, most of them have experienced the pandemic wherein classes in research writing were not properly delivered due to the restrictions and limitations in the delivery of instruction. As one of the students has said:

"During the pandemic, we weren't able to continue with our classes. Good for them; they were able to proceed with their proposal. But for us, we couldn't because it was like it got cut off." - 10:40 ¶ 105,

The missed opportunities during the pandemic have significantly impacted the skills needed in research, leaving many to feel that their lack of proficiency will make them incapable. As supported by the succeeding statements:

"I am not confident to write because I do not have experience in doing research in our school before" - 4:¶ 144,

"It's not that simple, sir. I just felt a bit out of my comfort zone with the writing style here at SMCC, unlike in my senior high school, where the standards were quite different. So, I felt a bit overwhelmed, sir, and found it challenging here. But I think the outputs we produce here are really great, sir." - 2 ¶ 35,

Most of us are new to research, and we all know that we went through the pandemic, which created a gap in learning about research. Some students didn't have any prior experience, so I think that made others feel anxious. 10:3 ¶ 26

Indeed, given the students' lack of experience and prior knowledge in Thesis Writing 1 for the school year 2023-2024, there is a need to bridge the knowledge gap and enrich their experience.

Students additional challenges in the research writing classes, particularly the complexities of certain topics and the effectiveness of instructional delivery. Research writing classes are always technical since formatting and content writing are regularly scrutinized for correctness and appropriateness. The table below shows the areas or topics that are considered to be difficult and lacking mastery among students:

Difficult topics	Textual Evidence
Results and Discussion, Conclusion	<i>"In Chapter Four, our objectives should have been addressed in the results and discussions. However, we didn't fully expand on them in that chapter, sir. We only focused on presenting the results, but we realized that the objectives should also be discussed and answered there. It turns out they should be included as well. The course was quite challenging, sir, especially in terms of the literature. We were expected to base everything on the specific area, but we weren't properly informed about that, so we felt we lacked guidance."</i> - 11:10 ¶ 88

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Creating schematic diagrams	<i>“It’s okay, sir, but there are parts that we really couldn’t understand, like the schematic diagram. We really struggled with that, even during class.” -1:1 ¶ 22</i> <i>“...and the schematic diagram — our expectation, sir, was that we would see examples in the book. But when it came to the schematic diagram, we just ended up guessing how to do it.” - 2:11 ¶ 88.</i>
Identifying variables	<i>“We had a hard time finding variables, sir, because most of them were from 2018 and earlier, like 2010 or 2007. That’s why they didn’t fit well with what we needed. That’s where the challenge came in, sir.” - 4:14 ¶ 77</i>
Literature Review	<i>It really needs to be accurate, sir. For the supporting study, you have to find something that aligns well, especially in the Review of Related Literature (RRL). It’s very difficult to find relevant sources- 1:5 ¶ 87</i>
Statement of the Problem	<i>“When it came to the statement of the problem and the schematic diagram, our expectation, sir, was that we would see examples in the book, like how the schematic should look. But we just ended up guessing how to create it.” - 2:12 ¶ 88 – 89</i>
Theoretical Framework	<i>“It was okay, sir, since gathering literature was manageable. But the hardest part was probably the theory — figuring out what theory we should use for our research.” - 1:3 ¶ 60</i>

The table highlights the missed learning opportunities in research teaching, reflecting the gaps in the instruction and the lack of sufficient examples provided to the students. Instructional support is insufficient as it hinders the proper understanding of the concepts. Key challenges stem from gaps in instructions, insufficient examples, and inadequate materials. Similarly, it can be noted that schematic diagrams were difficult as students were not given specific processes on how to formulate the diagram. This forced students to rely on guesswork. Identifying variables also posed challenges due to resource problems and inadequate data-sourcing training.

Moreover, this also affected their literature review, where students struggled to align sources with the research focus. Research problem formulation and theoretical framework were considered the most challenging, as students received limited guidance on applying theories to their potential topics in research writing. The recurring problems in the instruction led to confusion, reduced confidence, and missed learning opportunities.

Talking about the delivery of instruction in the Thesis Writing courses, students have noted that the class sessions were irregular and that most of the time, they were asked to work on their papers after limited sessions, as expressed in the following lines:

No, sir. Like, during the first semester, we only had class maybe twice. (2:6 ¶ 49–51)

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At the beginning, the teacher told us there wouldn't be regular classes. On the first day, they just gave us instructions on what to do. But we didn't realize what the content really involved until we got to the defense stage, where we found out there should have been connections, relationships, and links related to the schematic diagram. (2:7 ¶ 55)

No, sir, we didn't have regular classes. In our research subject, we only had a few sessions, mostly during the first semester. (3:2 ¶ 30)

Our classes went smoothly at first, sir, but once we started working on research, specifically Chapter One, the classes stopped altogether. (3:3 ¶ 34)

My main concern, sir, is that we only had a few classes. It felt like all subjects were squeezed into one, making everything overwhelming. (4:2 ¶ 21)

Given the irregularity of class sessions, it is imperative that the regular class hours of the research courses be monitored. It was also worth noting that the students perceived the reason why there is an irregularity that exists is due to teachers' workload of their busy schedules, as cited in the following lines:

"...There were also times when we were supposed to have class but didn't because our teacher was busy. Other subjects that needed proper management were also affected."-4:2 ¶ 21

"The instructor was really busy, sir, but she still made time for us. She even scheduled make-up classes — I remember, she gave us a make-up class before."- 10:7 ¶ 64

Despite the effort to offer make-up classes, most respondents talked about irregular class sessions. To help the students in their research classes, monitoring and aiding instruction with suitable materials are necessary. Additionally, students have noticed that other topics need more depth in their discussions. Most have encountered problems with overgeneralizing research discussions and that are not tailored to the needs of the different courses that the students are enrolled in. There is less discussion on major topics as well, which is reflected in the following quotations:

"There were some parts, sir, where she really taught the step-by-step process. But there were also parts where she didn't explain much, so we just had to figure things out on our own or ask questions when needed."- 6:8 ¶ 108

"That's true, sir. There wasn't much teaching, so it was hard to start working on a chosen title when we didn't have prior knowledge about it..." 2:15 ¶ 121

On the brighter side, most students appreciated the research guides provided by the research department's staff. These guides provided helpful tips on arranging and filling the void in the current instructional process.

"Interviewer: Ahh, but did the guidelines help you?

Interviewee: Yes, sir. They were more of a step-by-step guide on what should be included and what to put in each section. We really followed them, sir."- 2:14 ¶ 99-101

Good instructional materials are needed in research writing courses. Solving the current skills gaps among students, strengthening the monitoring system, and developing the instructional process can solve the current problems and missed opportunities in research.

Current Skillset of Students In Writing Research

The students' writing skills reflect their ability to navigate the components and meet expectations of research projects. Ideas on how to formulate research problems, conduct literature reviews, and what to write in each part are discussed in this theme. In the content writing part, most students struggled to clearly express their ideas on the topic.

"Interviewer: When it comes to writing mechanics, we can also consider how you express your thoughts, right? Do you encounter any problems with that?

Interviewee: We have ideas, sir, but sometimes it's hard to express them properly because of English — finding the right words to use in English can be challenging." -8: ¶ 216

"Interviewer: Yes, but the readers are professionals. Aside from that, what other challenges did you encounter? Did you have trouble expressing your ideas or thoughts in writing?

Interviewee: That's really the case, sir. It's something that can't be avoided." - 9 ¶ 189

Difficulty in expressing one's idea is one of the most common struggles of students in writing activities. Given the difficulty on the topics mentioned, there is a need to bridge the knowledge gap of students in proper formulation and creation of these identified concerns. Moreover, it will also be beneficial for students to be developed in priority areas such as constructing thesis statement, organizing paragraph, and writing coherent and combining ideas in to grammatically correct sentences (Saprina et al., 2021). Problems on writing are also rooted in their inability to conduct a proper literature review on their research project. There should be understanding on the thesis topic coming from read literature to have more insights. Accordingly, the root causes of research

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productivity problems are seen in the following : lack of research skills, difficulty finding resources, language barriers, and lack of administrative support(Rafikova, 2022; Squires et al., 2020; Ulla et al., 2017). Most of the students have highlighted their problem on this area:

“...Another challenge was finding related RRLs (Review of Related Literature) for a specific topic, especially since the RRLs needed to be within a specific time span — only from 2018 onward.”- 2:15 ¶ 121

“ ...we started doing researching and finding resources in the topic. And just get the lines from the studies and put in our paper. Rephrase it, and add citation”- 6:15 ¶ 97

Extensive knowledge on the topic is one problem. Indeed, there is a need for researchers to do extra reading about their topic. Observation show that students simply copy phrases from studies without conducting an annotation of a paper makes it problematic. It will harm the content of their study and much more their understanding of the topic. A proper method of processing a paper should be adopted in order to help students acquire more knowledge on their topic by doing a proper review of literature.

Moreover, as to the other parts of the research paper some students have difficulties on what and how to write some parts of the paper like the background of study, review of related literature, and definition of terms. These are expressed in the following lines: *Yes, sir, especially when it comes to composing and linking ideas, particularly in defining terms. It's challenging because we can't just rely on literal definitions. We have to interpret and explain them in a way that connects to our study, which makes it even more difficult.- 2:23 ¶ 304*

When it comes to writing the background of the study, sir, we struggle with how to start the introduction and what to include. Sometimes, we just write randomly, but what we come up with doesn't align with our study, which makes the process challenging for us.- 8:10 ¶ 159

You gather information, sir, then copy it and add a citation after getting the relevant details. This way, it won't be considered plagiarism.- 8:4 ¶ 71

From the transcript, students have expressed how they write the parts of their paper. Indeed, many expressed struggles on how to do it rightly especially in the area of processing information and applying the right citation. Given the nature of this problem, content knowledge is essential in the writing process as it helps develop expression and determine what to write. (Myhill et al., 2023). A good understanding of doing a literature review and reading articles about the topic can help students express more about the topic.

In the area of grammar and writing mechanics, students do not find it difficult because of the use of software that helps them with their writing. Students are already using Grammarly and other grammar-checking applications. Similarly, plagiarism was also avoided using the same application and use of Artificial Intelligence or Large Language Models.

Interviewee: Yes, sir, we use Grammarly.

Interviewer: Do you also use the premium version?

Interviewee: No, sir, just the free version. But actually, one time we availed the premium for 50 pesos, and it was really advanced in suggesting words and other features like that.

Overall, students' problems on research writing are more on the content writing and the familiarization of the right process on how to conduct research. Hence, there is a need to improve instruction on these areas to attain efficiency.

Quality Harmed Due to Juggling Multiple Responsibilities and Other Problems

Student researchers experienced difficulties in attaining quality because of the time and multiple responsibilities. Students have expressed concerns on heavy workloads particularly in managing performance tasks from other subjects.

“In other subjects, we can handle the tasks individually, but when it comes to research, we really need to dedicate an entire day to focus on it as a group, sir. That's the only thing we work on for that day so we don't divert our attention elsewhere. Research is the heaviest task for us compared to other subjects that we can manage simultaneously. For instance, when the three of us meet, we can multitask — one person works on research while another handles a different task.”- 2:32 ¶ 473

“Yes, sir, it really affects us, especially when there are so many performance tasks with tight deadlines. It takes a toll on us, and sometimes our research ends up not being done well because we prioritize other tasks or responsibilities first.”- 3:34 ¶ 453

Currently, the students carry a 24 unit load per semester. The Thesis Writing 1 subject is equivalent to 3 units and the kind of responsibility is too big for other students. In fact, the overwhelming responsibility is warrying them down:

“Research involves a lot of tasks, sir. For example, we still need to route the questionnaires, and on the other hand, tasks from other subjects aren't limited to just one. They're also numerous. It's really not easy because we also have to do demonstrations, lesson planning, and on top of that, we still have this extensive research work.”- 2:34 ¶ 530

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“There are really times, sir, when I feel like this research is too much. You’d think that way because all the submissions pile up at the same time, sir. For example, this week, we have submissions for various academic subjects, and on top of that, there’s research. We’re told we need to catch up, especially when the workspace posts updates like, “This is your defense schedule” or “You need to submit Chapters One to Three.” It gets really overwhelming, sir, because everything happens all at once. It’s so stressful that you just feel like crying..”- 6:29 ¶ 439

Given the overwhelming tasks and other responsibilities, it is worth noting that the workload of students enrolled in Thesis Writing 1 needs to be examined. Workload is a contributing factor to the quality of outputs produced. Several studies have found that it negatively impacts individuals' well-being and leads to stress, dissatisfaction, and other mental health issues. (Janib et al., n.d.; Yangdon et al., 2021).

Another issue the students raised was the problem with the paper routing. Accordingly, the most experienced problems were the delays in the release of the papers.

Regarding checking the manuscript, sir, there were times when we wanted to speed up the process, but it would take weeks before we could get feedback, even after multiple follow-ups.- 6:21 ¶ 324

There were days, sir, when we tried to have our work checked, but it would be inconvenient because we needed to go through several steps or people before proceeding. For instance, ma’am wouldn’t entertain queries for an entire week.- 8:27 ¶ 361

Given that the comments come in late or during the routing process, it is essential to lower the curing time of the papers in the hands of the panelists. This will help solve the quality and delay in the improvement of the student research papers.

Overall, the quality issue can be addressed by reducing the workload, eliminating the problems of juggling multiple responsibilities, and reducing the waiting time of the routing process. This will ensure an improvement in the quality of the papers produced by the students.

2. Effectiveness of the current resources and support systems at SMCC in assisting students with research paper writing.

Resources refer to the academic tools provided by the institution to support the educational process. This includes learning materials, devices, classrooms, books and other tangible items intended to support students educational needs. On the other hand, support systems refer to the mentors and staff that provides guidance and assistance to the students’ needs in research writing. In this study, there were two major themes drawn from the data as shown in the table below:

Current Resources	<i>Troubles with the Current Resources</i>
Support Systems	<i>Navigating the Dynamics of Research Advisership: Challenges, Hesitations, and Strengths</i>

Troubles with the Current Resources

Students always find problems in identifying the right source for their research topic. The default action done was to go facilities and resources available in the school. Currently, the institution provides numerous resources that help students with this problem. However, areas that need to be improved are the following services: internet use, computer, printing, and updates on the current collection of books and sources as shown in the following transcripts:

Areas of Concern	Transcripts
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Internet Use	<i>"...Wi-Fi, sir. But it's still lacking. We can only stay for two hours here, and even then, it takes a long time for us to finish because the Wi-Fi is slow. Sometimes, even though there's Wi-Fi, it disconnects suddenly and doesn't reach certain areas." - 1:17 ¶ 426</i>
Computer	<i>"The computers there, it seems like they're no longer available, right? It looks like they've been removed. So, when we need to make quick edits or revisions, we can't encode right away because we don't have the equipment to us"- 3¶ 591</i>
Current collection of books and other sources	<i>"...unlike with books where you still have to browse through pages, and most of the books aren't even updated." - 11:43 ¶ 509</i>

Problems with the school's internet connection remains a major concern for most students undergoing research writing. Many have noted that the Wi-fi is limited only to two hours, preventing them from completing their research work. As a result, they usually go to other areas for a better connection as well as more time for browsing the internet. Most of the students are dependent on online resources and others have expressed challenges even in accessing some resources because of the need for paid subscriptions.

We found a related title, but we couldn't access it. Even though we tried using Sci-Hub and other tools, we still couldn't access it. They require payment. - 10:18 ¶ 179

Consequently, the school should consider to subscribing to paid online research databases for faster and more reliable resources for students to use in their research writing. Another issue raised by the students is the lack of available computers in the learning resource center to accommodate everyone especially when they need to make quick edits. Most of the students rely on computers of internet café's in the area. While some have laptops, the majority of the people interviewed do not have one and are dependent on other means to use a computer.

Students have also faced problems with the resources available in the library particularly the books and journals which are outdated as a resource material for research. Some even noted that their research topics are not covered by the available resources in the library.

Indeed, there is a need to strengthen the available resources in the resource center as this will help largely in the quality of research papers that can be produced by the students.

Navigating the Dynamics of Research Advisership: Challenges, Hesitations, and Strengths

The most tangible support system provided by the institution is the research adviser and the research office. They provide the guidance needed for researchers to succeed in their projects. The list below provides the most common problems faced with their advisers:

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Problem	Textual Evidence
Busyness of the advisers	<i>Sometimes, sir, we can't catch her because she's busy, and we're busy too. Our schedules don't align. But when she's available, we also try to make ourselves available. That's why it's hard to find the right time to ask for help or consult with her to have our work checked.- 9:24 ¶ 327</i> <i>Yes, sir, it's true. We can't deny the fact that our mentor is also busy with other tasks, so that's probably why there are times when they're unavailable.- 7:25 ¶ 294</i>
Too many Advisory Groups Handled	<i>"Yes, sir. In terms of guidance from our adviser, we feel that he couldn't fully focus because there were three groups under him. "- 11:18 ¶ 180</i>
Lack of expertise	<i>"That's my concern, sir, because most of our classmates' advisers are in fields that are very far from the focus of their studies. This makes it hard for advisers to relate to the topics, or sometimes they don't fully understand the study even though they've read it"- 10:29 ¶ 464</i>

In the current status quo, the lack of qualified personnel to serve as advisers in research writing significantly undermines the support system provided by the school. Most faculty members needs additional training on handling advisees and enhancing their research writing skills. Academic advising and personal tutoring is essential in students 'success in higher education. It is expected that people who will be serving as mentors should have a good standing and rich experience. In fact, higher degrees and pursuance of professional recognitions are important requirements(Lee, 2019; McGill et al., 2020). Consequently, due to the lack of qualified personnel, advisers are handling more than the usual number of advisory groups in research. The kind of attention given were not as comprehensive as expected. Students who experience problems with mentor's busyness of schedule find it hard to find guidance and finish their papers on time.

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It could also be noted that some advisers also have lacked the expertise in certain fields of interest. Some of them could not relate on certain topics proposed by students. There is a need to equip research advisers with new knowledge on their field. Thus, there is a need to expose some newer concepts related to their major or course. Others students also suggested that there is a need for other advisers to be more exposed on research process and methods as expressed in the following lines:

“... advisers should attend seminars or training on how to handle research and learn all the ins and outs of the process. They need to understand every detail of research thoroughly.” - 5:14 ¶ 237–238

Given these needs, it is imperative that the research department should provide trainings for research advising and writing among all research advisers and mentors.

Students have noted, on the other hand, that their advisers were very responsive when they are able to meet each other. They are very accommodating and approachable. Advisers were giving them comments and suggestions on how to improve their papers.

It's really about guidance, sir. When we have our work checked, our adviser carefully reads through it and provides corrections. For example, “This part shouldn't be here, it should be transferred there,” or “This author should come first, and you should have a common author to make it easier to support your study.” Things like that, sir. He really provides us with guidance. He's also quick to accommodate us; when we seek guidance, he addresses it immediately without any delays. - 2:28 ¶ 415

“... Ma'am is very accommodating. Even though she's busy, she still makes time to check our paper. She knows that we're also racing against time, so she ensures to give us the time to review our paper, check if it's accurate, and confirm if it's ready to be submitted.” - 2:29 ¶ 431

The biggest challenge now is to reduce the problems associated with a lack expertise and the unhealthy adviser-to-student group ratio. Given the circumstance, these areas must be addressed to achieve operational efficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies key challenges in research paper writing among college students at Saint Michael College of Caraga (SMCC), including gaps in foundational skills, limited access to resources, and inconsistent institutional support. Students struggle with content creation, proper citation, and complex sections like literature reviews and theoretical frameworks, exacerbated by heavy workloads and adviser constraints.

To address these issues, the study highlights the need for targeted skills training, improved access to updated resources, and enhanced mentorship grounded in expertise. By reducing extraneous cognitive load and fostering deeper engagement, these measures can enhance research productivity and academic excellence at SMCC, aligning with its mission of advancing knowledge and scholarly rigor.

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