

Sharing Professional Viewpoint:

Ph.D. Students and Challenges of Learning Experience

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In this paper, the author would like to share experiential viewpoints on operations of a Ph.D. program in management for international students in four aspects: (1) students' English communication skills, (2) proposed research topic, (3) issue on literature review, and (4) students' relations with their thesis advisors.

1. Students' English Communication Skills

Ph.D. students at Rattanakosin International College of Creative Entrepreneurship (RICE) are expected to propose their planned doctoral research and pass the admission interview in English to be able to continue with the program plan to completion. They need to pay attention to further development of English communication skills. In the learning process, they have become well-aware of the significance of research abilities, communication skills and desired attributes expected of competent academics at the higher education level. The elements of knowledge, skills and attributes are for RICE to holistically develop into its doctoral graduates as the finished products of the institution.

In particular, RICE is very concerned about the English proficiency level of its Ph.D. candidates to meet with all requirements in the curriculum, as prescribed by Thailand's Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI). RICE has provided for doctoral students with an English self-practice program called *English Discovery*. It is expected that doctoral students—mainly those from China—study core courses in English to gain knowledge in international management to widen their local perspective in support of their proposed research-thesis topic at the time scheduled in the program. The author as the program director has encouraged both Thai and Chinese students to acquire their communication skills in English by maximizing the students' potential into the desired outcomes as specified in the program.

2. Proposed Research Topic

When finishing all core courses and completing the Qualifying Examination (QE), the students are to propose their research topic in the management field. They usually work under their assigned advisors on comprehensive literature review to ensure a new investigation—well-justified in rationale and expected findings. The advisors have to make sure that their students catch up with the schedule and propose their thesis statement reflecting their career-related research interest (Davis, 2001), with sufficient literature review to justify the claimed new dimension of the proposed research topic. From the author's observation, the students tend to spend their time on reviewing other theses in their selected research area, including theses by previous researchers and theses in online repositories (Vitae Website, 2021). The students are then guided to focus on new knowledge or innovations as reported in the specialized literature to help focus on the topic under study. Students from China might find

it hard to access from their home base academic websites from different parts of the world due to the country's specific policy on internet security. The case of Covid-19 has delayed a bit their progress made on their doctoral research due to distance in follow-up interactions.

3. Issue on Literature Review

The students tend to review the literature of their own country, resulting in a domestically dominant literature review. The assigned advisors need to make sure that their students keep a good balance between the domestic and international literature. The students need to distinguish their own from western countries in perception toward management/ administration and human resource approaches. Close collaboration between the assigned advisors and co-advisors can help bridge the gap in their approach and advice in guiding students toward a proposed research topic defense as scheduled. Good discipline can help both parties a great deal in attaining the mutual goal on graduation. The point on discipline is clarified by Stephen (1992) and Heberer (2020) that such a state of mind accepts without question the submission of the will and the interest of a hierarchical superior in a group, especially in order to attain the identified goal.

4. Students' Relations with Their Thesis Advisor

It is noted that students may negotiate with their advisors for flexibility in scheduling and adjustments in the course of thesis supervision. It is important that advisors establish a good rapport with students under supervision in the first place. Once a good rapport and emotion support are established, both the thesis advisors and the students can work smoothly toward the thesis proposal development and defense as required by the program. Some advisors may prefer students who are self-disciplined with functional English proficiency. From the author's experience, it might not be easy to find such ideal students, because they work and study concurrently, and work stands first for them in priority. A few may find it hard to observe the agreed schedule and the author has to follow up and encourage them to move toward the goal with adjusted time management.

As the director of the Ph.D. Program at RICE, the author has felt the urgent need to guide students to keep up with the planned schedule for research proposal submission and defense, followed by three published papers, and the final defense for graduation. As of now, there have been students who can take their proposal defense, and have published papers in international journals as required in the curriculum. To be specific, when the students have passed the proposal defense examination, they have to adjust the proposal according to the committee's suggestions within 60 days. Under such a circumstance, some students find it stressful to cope up with work pressure from the advisor and might consider requesting an extension. This could be processed for approval from the program's committee on the basis of support from the advisor concerned. To the author, it is understandable that people vary in stress resistance and management, and that students need support from the program and their advisors realistically.

5. Final Remark

Though Ph.D. students may consider the specialized knowledge and research as their focus of study, they cannot ignore the importance of English communication skills to express their ideas, discuss concepts, and present their research work. The Ph.D. students at RICE are well supported in developing their English language skills, starting from after qualifying in their admission interview, research proposal defense, required publications, to final research defense for program completion. Their English proficiency is regularly assessed and they are assigned to take a preparation English course, followed by a self-practice online program called *English Discovery* throughout the program. These are intended to enable them to express themselves well in English. The students are guided and supervised by their assigned advisors and co-advisors. The author only wishes that commitment to and responsibility for research development be proportionally shared with good will by both parties to reach the common goal on enriched learning experience and quality research for program completion. In fact, the learning path to a doctoral degree is very special in providing solid reasoning foundation, aspiration for academic excellence, self-discipline, persistence and mental stability for a person to go through and one day can look back with a fond memory of those hardly earned learning experiences.

6. The Author

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