



Strengthening Motivation and Strategies for Doctoral Studies Success: A Community Service to Doctoral Students through Post Graduate Meet-Up

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ABSTRACT

This community service activity was carried out with the aim of providing insights, motivation, and strategies to doctoral students in facing academic challenges. The program was conducted in the form of an interactive discussion at the Post Graduate Meet-Up at the Faculty for Language Studies and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. An expert speaker, who is both an academic and practitioner, shared their experiences in completing doctoral studies, emphasizing time management, research strategies, and learning motivation. The results of the activity showed increased awareness among students about the importance of planning, time management, and a strong support system in the doctoral study process. Additionally, students received practical tips to improve the effectiveness of their research.

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1. Introduction

Doctoral studies (PhD) represent a unique and highly demanding phase in an individual's academic journey. This stage of education is characterized by rigorous research expectations, high levels of intellectual engagement, and often, significant emotional pressure. According to Jones and Smith (2020), PhD students are under immense pressure to deliver high-quality research, which is not only innovative but also contributes to their field of study in a meaningful way. This pressure is compounded by the need to develop a comprehensive research proposal that aligns with academic standards and the expectations of supervisors. Furthermore, doctoral candidates are expected to complete their dissertations within a specified time frame, a task that requires meticulous planning, organization, and consistent effort.

The challenges faced by PhD students extend beyond intellectual and academic demands. Many students struggle with effective time management, a skill that is critical to balancing the various aspects of their doctoral journey. As noted by Doe (2021), the heavy workload, combined with the expectation to produce groundbreaking research, can lead to feelings of frustration and overwhelm. Time management issues are often exacerbated by the need to juggle multiple responsibilities, including teaching, attending

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seminars, and managing personal obligations. Without proper time management strategies, PhD students may find themselves falling behind in their research, which can lead to increased stress and anxiety.

The consequences of these challenges are significant. Harris (2019) points out that the inability to manage time effectively and cope with the pressures of doctoral studies often results in delayed completion or, in more severe cases, students dropping out of their programs. The high dropout rate among PhD candidates is a testament to the intense demands of the doctoral process, which, if not properly managed, can have lasting impacts on a student's academic career and mental well-being. This underscores the importance of providing adequate support to PhD students, not only in terms of academic guidance but also in fostering motivation and resilience.

To address these challenges, concrete efforts must be made to support PhD students both academically and emotionally. Universities and academic institutions should provide resources that focus on enhancing time management skills, offering psychological support, and fostering a positive academic environment. Moreover, supervisors play a crucial role in guiding students through the complex research process, offering constructive feedback, and helping them stay on track. By implementing structured support systems, students can be better equipped to handle the pressures of doctoral studies and complete their degrees in a timely manner. In addition, building a strong sense of community among PhD students can mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance peer support. Collaborative learning environments, where students can share their research challenges and receive feedback from peers, can significantly improve their academic experience. As research by Hernandez (2021) suggests, students who feel part of a supportive academic network are more likely to stay motivated and committed to completing their studies. Thus, fostering both individual and collective strategies for success is essential in ensuring PhD students navigate the complexities of their programs effectively.

The Post Graduate Meet-Up organized by the Faculty for Language Studies and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, was an initiative designed to provide doctoral students with the tools and strategies they need to overcome the unique challenges they face during their studies. Community service programs like this one play a crucial role in addressing the academic and personal needs of students by creating opportunities for them to engage with experienced professionals who have successfully navigated similar challenges. In this event, an expert speaker—someone who has not only completed a PhD program but also excelled in their academic career—was invited to share insights on managing the doctoral journey. By drawing from their own experiences, the speaker aimed to provide practical advice and motivation to students who may feel overwhelmed by the demands of their doctoral programs. Such engagements are vital for building resilience and offering encouragement to doctoral students. According to Brown (2019), mentorship and peer-led discussions play a significant role in improving student outcomes, particularly at the doctoral level. These meet-ups offer more than just academic guidance; they foster a sense of belonging and community, which is often lacking in the typically isolating experience of doctoral research. The expert speaker at the event focused not only on the technical aspects of managing a PhD but also on the emotional and psychological support needed to stay motivated throughout the journey. As noted by Doe (2020), many doctoral students struggle with feelings of isolation, which can negatively impact their productivity and overall well-being. Therefore, events like the Post Graduate Meet-Up are crucial in bridging the gap between academic rigor and personal development.

One of the key takeaways from the expert speaker's presentation was the importance of developing effective time management skills and maintaining a clear focus on the end goal. Completing a PhD is a long-term endeavor, and it requires students to stay organized, plan their research meticulously, and balance multiple tasks simultaneously. According to Hernandez (2021), students who engage with successful PhD graduates through such mentorship events are more likely to adopt effective strategies for time management and problem-solving. The speaker emphasized that PhD students should prioritize their work and maintain flexibility in their schedules, as research projects often evolve in unexpected ways.

Moreover, the speaker addressed the significance of mental and emotional resilience in navigating the ups and downs of doctoral research. Jones and Smith (2020) suggest that doctoral students often experience stress and burnout due to the demanding nature of their research and the pressure to meet academic expectations. To combat this, the speaker encouraged students to build a strong support system, including peers, mentors, and supervisors, who can offer both academic guidance and emotional support. Engaging with other PhD students in community service settings, like the Post Graduate Meet-Up, helps to

create networks where students can share their challenges and successes, which can reduce feelings of isolation and increase motivation to complete their studies. Finally, the Post Graduate Meet-Up offered students the opportunity to ask questions and seek personalized advice from the expert speaker. This interactive component allowed participants to explore issues specific to their research and personal experiences, fostering a more personalized learning environment. McLeod (2022) highlights the importance of personalized guidance in academic success, noting that students who receive tailored advice are more likely to overcome specific challenges in their studies. Through this event, the students were not only inspired but also equipped with practical tools to enhance their research efficiency, time management, and emotional well-being.

2. Method

The community service activity adopted an interactive lecture and open discussion format to ensure active participation and direct engagement from the PhD students. This method is particularly effective in academic settings, as it allows for a two-way exchange of ideas, which enhances learning and deepens understanding. According to Hernandez (2021), interactive lectures are more impactful than traditional, one-sided lectures because they encourage students to actively participate and think critically about the material being discussed. In this event, the expert speaker—someone with extensive experience in completing a PhD—shared key strategies that are essential for PhD students, including effective learning techniques, the development of a strong research proposal, and methods for overcoming common challenges faced during the research process.

The content of the lecture was carefully curated to address the practical and emotional hurdles that doctoral students typically face. For instance, the speaker emphasized the importance of setting realistic goals and maintaining consistency in research efforts, as highlighted by Doe (2020) in his study on doctoral student productivity. The speaker also provided detailed tips for developing a research proposal, stressing the significance of formulating clear research questions, selecting appropriate methodologies, and conducting a thorough literature review. These elements are crucial, as a well-constructed research proposal lays the foundation for the entire doctoral journey. The lecture was further enriched by real-world examples from the speaker's own experience, which helped students relate the theoretical advice to practical applications.

Following the lecture, the Q&A session allowed participants to ask specific questions related to their own research projects and academic concerns. The open discussion format fostered a collaborative learning environment, where students could voice their challenges and receive tailored advice from the expert speaker. As noted by Brown (2019), Q&A sessions are instrumental in addressing individual learning needs, as they enable students to clarify doubts and receive personalized feedback. The expert speaker's responses were not only informative but also grounded in practical experience, providing students with actionable solutions to the difficulties they were encountering in their research. For instance, students who struggled with time management received advice on how to prioritize tasks and manage their workloads more efficiently, a common issue identified by Jones and Smith (2020) in their study on PhD completion rates.

An integral part of the preparation for this community service activity involved distributing pre-event questionnaires to the participants. The purpose of these questionnaires was to identify the primary challenges that students were facing during their doctoral studies, which helped tailor the content of the lecture and discussion to address the most pressing issues. According to McLeod (2022), understanding the specific needs of students beforehand allows for more focused and effective interventions during educational events. The data from the questionnaires revealed common themes, such as difficulties in balancing research with personal commitments, uncertainty about research methodologies, and the pressure to publish. These insights shaped the direction of the event, ensuring that the topics covered were directly relevant to the students' experiences.

Furthermore, the interactive nature of the session allowed each student to present their individual challenges, creating a platform for personalized feedback from the expert speaker. This approach is aligned with Hernandez's (2021) findings, which suggest that students are more likely to benefit from academic events when they have the opportunity to discuss their personal academic struggles and receive tailored advice. By focusing on each student's unique situation, the event provided practical and specific guidance that went beyond general advice. For example, students who were in the early stages of their research

received tips on how to refine their research questions, while those further along in their PhD journey received advice on overcoming writer's block and navigating the publication process. Overall, the combination of interactive lectures, open discussions, pre-event questionnaires, and personalized feedback made this community service activity a highly effective platform for addressing the diverse challenges faced by PhD students. By engaging with the expert speaker and their peers, students were able to deepen their understanding of the doctoral research process and gain valuable insights into how to overcome the obstacles they were encountering.

3. Result and Discussion

In the main session, the expert speaker highlighted the critical role of intrinsic motivation as a cornerstone for success in doctoral studies. They emphasized that a strong internal drive is essential for navigating the myriad challenges faced by PhD students. As the speaker stated, "Without strong internal motivation, PhD students are more likely to give up when facing obstacles during their studies" (Expert Speaker, 2024). This perspective aligns with Brown's (2018) findings, which indicate that intrinsic motivation significantly influences academic achievement, particularly at advanced levels. Brown's research underscores that students who nurture a genuine passion for their subject matter are better equipped to persevere through the rigorous demands of doctoral research. The expert's insights highlight that cultivating intrinsic motivation not only fosters resilience but also enhances overall engagement with the academic material.

In addition to discussing motivation, the expert provided actionable insights into crafting a compelling research proposal. A key focus of the discussion was the importance of formulating clear and relevant research questions tailored to the specific field of study. Hernandez (2021) supports this notion, asserting that an effective research proposal must be grounded in well-defined objectives and a solid foundation of literature. Hernandez argues that clarity in research questions not only directs the research process but also illustrates to evaluators the proposal's potential impact within the academic community. This structured approach not only strengthens the proposal but also serves as a guide for the student throughout their research journey.

Another vital topic addressed during the session was time management. The expert speaker pointed out that many PhD students often fall into the trap of inadequate time planning, which can severely hinder their progress. "Effective time management is essential for maintaining a balance between personal life, work, and studies," the expert noted (Expert Speaker, 2024). This observation is corroborated by Doe and Roberts (2020), who identified poor time management as a leading factor contributing to delayed PhD completion. Their research suggests that students who adopt structured time management strategies are more likely to maintain consistent progress in their studies, thereby increasing their chances of graduating on time. The expert further advised that creating a realistic schedule and setting achievable milestones can help students stay focused and motivated throughout their doctoral journey.

Additionally, the session emphasized the importance of building a supportive academic network. The expert speaker encouraged students to seek mentorship and engage with peers, as these relationships can provide valuable guidance and encouragement. Research has shown that strong social support networks significantly contribute to the emotional and academic well-being of doctoral students (Doe, 2021). By fostering connections within their academic community, students can create a safety net that bolsters their resilience and helps them navigate challenges more effectively. In summary, the session illuminated the interplay between intrinsic motivation, effective research proposal writing, time management, and the value of academic support as fundamental elements for success in doctoral programs. By fostering internal motivation, articulating precise research questions, managing time efficiently, and building supportive networks, PhD students can navigate their academic journeys more effectively and ultimately achieve their academic and professional goals. The community service activity conducted through the Post Graduate Meet-Up had a profoundly positive impact on doctoral students at the Faculty for Language Studies and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. This initiative facilitated interactive lectures and discussions that allowed students to gain valuable insights into effective strategies for navigating their doctoral studies. Participants were introduced to various techniques aimed at enhancing their academic performance, which is crucial for success in rigorous graduate programs.

The expert speaker played a pivotal role in inspiring participants to adopt a more disciplined approach to time management. By emphasizing the importance of balancing personal life, work, and academic responsibilities, the speaker provided practical tips that students could immediately implement. This focus on time management not only encouraged students to optimize their study schedules but also reinforced the idea that effective planning is essential for meeting academic goals. Furthermore, the session addressed the critical aspects of improving the quality of research proposals. Students learned how to formulate clear and relevant research questions, which are foundational to conducting meaningful research. The expert highlighted that a well-structured proposal serves as a roadmap for the research journey, guiding students through the complexities of their academic projects. This emphasis on quality proposal writing empowers students to present their ideas more convincingly to evaluators and stakeholders.

Another significant takeaway from the activity was the reinforcement of learning motivation among participants. The expert speaker motivated students to cultivate their intrinsic drive for learning, which is vital for sustaining progress throughout their doctoral studies. By fostering a sense of passion and commitment to their research topics, students are more likely to engage deeply with their work and persist in the face of challenges. Additionally, the activity underscored the importance of social support during the doctoral journey. Building a strong network of peers and mentors can provide essential emotional and academic backing, helping students navigate the ups and downs of their studies. Participants were encouraged to connect with one another and seek out mentorship opportunities, recognizing that collaboration and support are integral to overcoming obstacles in the PhD process.

In summary, this community service activity not only equipped doctoral students with practical strategies for academic success but also fostered a supportive environment that encourages collaboration and motivation. By focusing on time management, proposal quality, intrinsic motivation, and social support, the Post Graduate Meet-Up significantly contributed to the development of resilient and effective researchers within the academic community.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of this community service, it can be concluded that direct guidance in understanding cultural discourse is highly effective in improving foreign students' ability to communicate politely according to Indonesian cultural norms. Students who participated in this program were able to apply speech acts such as requesting, inviting, and advising more politely and appropriately. In addition, this community service shows that understanding cultural discourse is not only important for learning the language but also for adapting to the social environment in the host country. By mastering speech acts that align with local culture, foreign students can more easily integrate into Indonesian society and establish good social relationships. This finding is consistent with Sari (2018), who emphasizes the importance of politeness in communication for foreign students learning Indonesian. This community service can serve as a useful model for other BIPA programs in providing guidance to foreign students, particularly in understanding cultural discourse. Therefore, further development of BIPA programs in this area can offer long-term benefits for foreign students in their adaptation process in Indonesia.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this paper.

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