

First Student Research Conference on Educational Sciences in Turkey

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Abstract

Student research symposiums and conferences have been organized by universities around the world in order to provide opportunities of improving skills and experiences to novice researchers. Similarly, in Erciyes University, Turkey, an annual student research conference for novice researchers had been initiated in September 2011. The conference included discussion sessions as well as oral presentations. During the conference a welcoming atmosphere were created to increase quality of the discussions and the presentations. The results showed that the participants were content about the symposium. They stated that the conference helped them improving their presentation skills in several ways.

Keywords

Student research conference, educational research, graduate students.

Introduction

Educational research is a comparatively virgin area in Turkey. The country needs more scholars and experts who study on educational sciences. Many undergraduate and graduate students are willing to become scientists and conduct research in education. However, they get few opportunities of improving their skills regarding conducting a research and presenting it.

It may come to one's mind that there are numerous symposiums or conferences on educational research arranged every year. Of course all kinds of academic meetings may provide great benefits to novice researchers. Making a presentation in front of an audience gives opportunity to participate in new discoveries, stimulates critical thinking, and gives the ability to better understand research methodologies (Truman State University Web Site). While on the other hand these professional organizations may have some disadvantages. First of all graduate students' proposals may not be accepted to the professional conferences because of lack of experience of the students on preparing a proposal. Besides, professors and experts as well as graduate students participate in these organizations that may cause a feeling of discomfort for at least some of the participating students. Also graduate students may experience difficulties in understanding experienced scholars' works and may not benefit enough from professional conferences.

That's why universities around the world have been holding student research conferences in order to create opportunities for their novice researchers to improve their research skills and presentation experiences. For example, Harvard Graduate School of Education, The University of Vermont, and Truman State University hold student research conferences. Similarly, in Erciyes University, Turkey, an annual student research conference for novice researchers had been initiated in September 2011 for the first time.

Implication

As the name implies, the student research conference on educational sciences was open to undergraduate and graduate students. 22 presentations were made by novice researchers from various universities. The conference included discussion sessions as well as oral presentations. Various topics which are assumed to be beneficial to the participants were touched in discussion sessions. Research methods, making a literature search, presenting a scientific study, and writing a manuscript were explained and discussed. Participants' opinions were listened and their questions were answered.

A longer duration (30 minutes for each paper) than usual were given for the oral presentations. The participants were not allowed to make and finish their presentations quickly without starting a debate. The last 15 minutes of the presentations were spent for questions and contributions. Because a portion of the listeners were professors, they too got involved in and sometimes directed the discussions. Full papers were demanded after the conference. The papers were gone through an intensive review process. Finally the papers were published in a special issue of a scholarly journal.

We tried to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere to increase quality of the discussions and the presentations. For example the academics made nonjudgmental recommendations about students' presentations to improve their quality. Besides, the academics started conversations with the participants during tea breaks and lunch times.

Just after the conference we collected opinions of the participants and sought the answer to the question of "how did participating in the student research symposium affect the participants' professional development". The data was collected by semi-structured interviews. In this context, 9 interviews were made with 9 graduate students (4 females and 5 males).

Results

A recent study by Potter et al. (2010) revealed that making a presentation at an undergraduate research conference was one of the most influential events which students experienced during their undergraduate years. Similarly the results of the current study revealed very positive views of the participants about the conference. They stated that they felt comfortable during the conference because all presentations were made by graduate students. All of them stated that the conference helped them improving their presentation skills in several ways. According to the students, it was a great experience for them learning to control their anxiety while making a presentation. In addition, they stated that interactions with their peers and with expert researchers during the conference helped them improve their research skills as well. The students found discussion sessions especially helpful because they had an opportunity to get feedback from experienced researchers. Some even indicated that more discussions should have been arranged. The participants recommended the organizing committee to arrange the conference annually from now on and to use social media to be able to reach more students.

As concluding remarks we were happy to see that the participants benefitted the First Student Research Conference on Educational Sciences. We are hoping to arrange this this conference annually in the future. But, availability of travel and research funding are strong motivational factors for research completion and conference participation (Kim et al., 2010). Financial support will enhance quality of the papers and reputation of the conference.

References

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