

Lack of Expert Research Mentorship and Publication Culture among Undergraduate Physical Therapy Programs in Pakistan

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Dear Editor, I wish to bring attention to a glaring void in the undergraduate physical therapy education system in Pakistan; the absence of structured research mentorship and a stagnant culture of scientific publication among Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) students. While research projects or theses are formally required components of the curriculum, the actual implementation of research training is fragmented, superficial, and in many institutions, purely procedural. In an era where evidence-based practice (EBP) defines clinical excellence and professional credibility, the inability of our students to conduct meaningful research, engage in critical thinking, or contribute to scientific literature places our profession at a serious disadvantage both locally and internationally (1).

Ground-Level Observations in the Pakistani Context:

Superficial Research Guidance

Many institutions assign research supervisors without considering their research background or workload. Faculty often lack formal training in research design, statistical methods, or publication ethics. As a result, students are left with minimal mentorship, often copying past projects, selecting repetitive or irrelevant topics, and relying on non-contextual, outdated templates to complete their work (2).

“Tick-Box” Thesis Culture

The final-year research project is widely treated as an academic formality, meant to fulfill degree requirements rather than to foster scientific curiosity. Students frequently describe the process as “mechanical”, “copy-paste”, or “confusing and unsupported.” Many finish their thesis without fully understanding their own methodology or results, reflecting a systemic failure in research education. Furthermore, considering this void, from writing theses to publishing an article, the theses writing has become a wide marketplace for paid write-ups and unethical publications (3).

Lack of Institutional Support for Publication

Even when students manage to complete quality research, there is no structured process to convert their findings into publishable manuscripts. Most institutions do not offer editorial guidance, journal selection support, or training in submission processes. Consequently, the vast majority of

undergraduate research dies silently on the library shelf or institutional database, never reaching the wider scientific community (4).

Limited Access to Digital Libraries and Modern Research Tools

Students in many government institutions report no access to paid journals, citation software, plagiarism checker like Turnitin, or data analysis tools like SPSS or NVivo. Literature reviews are often limited to a few freely available articles, and referencing remains manual and error-prone. Without institutional subscriptions or modern tools, students are unable to build strong, evidence-informed projects.

Overcrowded Classrooms, Undertrained Faculty

In many private-sector colleges, one research supervisor is tasked with guiding 10–20 students simultaneously, leaving no time for detailed feedback, statistical support, or one-on-one sessions. Faculty themselves often face pressure to prioritize teaching or administrative duties, making research mentorship an afterthought (5).

Lack of Role Models and Research Visibility

In most DPT programs, students graduate without ever seeing their faculty publish in indexed journals, present at conferences, or lead funded research projects. This creates the impression that research is optional or unimportant, and that clinical work alone defines a successful physiotherapy career.

Why this Matters:

This systemic neglect has led to a generation of therapists who lack confidence in interpreting and applying new research in clinical settings, seldom consider postgraduate research or publication as part of their career, and are ill-equipped to lead evidence-based reforms in Pakistan’s healthcare system. Without fostering research at the undergraduate level, the profession cannot expect innovation, accountability, or meaningful advancement.

Recommendations for Reform:

Mandatory Research Training Across All 5 Professional Years in DPT

Introduce basic modules in years 1-3 covering research literacy, ethics, referencing (APA/Harvard), and literature

search strategies, followed by structured training in years 4-5 on proposal writing, methodology, and data analysis.

Faculty Development in Research Supervision

Conduct workshops and certifications for research mentors to build capacity in guiding students through topic selection, protocol design, and publication. Make mentorship quality part of faculty performance reviews.

Institutional Incentives for Student Publication

Universities should offer awards, publication grants, or fee waivers for students who get accepted into peer-reviewed journals or present at national conferences. Visibility drives motivation.

Establish Student Research Cells and Local Journals

Create research societies led by students and moderated by faculty to encourage collaboration, journal clubs, and inter-institutional projects. Launch institutional or regional student journals to practice writing and publishing.

Public-Private Research Collaborations

Encourage partnerships between academic institutions and clinical facilities for data collection, pilot studies, and implementation research, allowing students to work on real-world problems with societal impact.

Conclusion

In conclusion, research is not a luxury, it is the backbone of evidence-based practice, policy advocacy, and

professional credibility. We must replace the current passive, paper-bound approach with active, mentored, and meaningful research engagement. By doing so, we will not only empower students but also elevate the standing of physical therapy as a scientific and socially responsible discipline in Pakistan.

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Substantial Contributions	Conception or Design of the work Data acquisition Data analysis or interpretation	1 1 1
Drafting or Reviewing	Draft the work Review critically	1 1
Final approval	Final approval of the version to be published.	1
Accountable	Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work.	1

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