

## EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF MBA STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT WITH A RESEARCH MODULE AND THESIS WRITING IN NEPAL

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### ABSTRACT

Incorporating research within a business degree curriculum supports cultivating hands-on and enduring abilities among students. However, completing a research module and writing their thesis are frequent challenges for students. This study investigated the experiences and challenges of MBA students' engagement with research modules and thesis writing as part of their MBA program. A survey research design was used to collect data, and questionnaires were distributed to the students and research educators from prestigious MBA colleges in the Kathmandu Valley. The study used a quantitative approach to capture the experiences and challenges of MBA students' engagement with research modules and thesis writing in Nepal. The sample consisted of 321 second-year MBA students or those students who have completed their MBA program from several colleges in Kathmandu. SPSS was used to calculate the reliability and other statistical tests to generate a valid outcome. Results indicate a significant relationship between students' engagement with relationship research module leaders, effective course content, and availability of useful literature. The study occurred in the Kathmandu Valley, and its relevance to different areas or nations might be limited. Suggestions for enhancing student involvement and potential points of reference were formulated based on the evaluations provided by the participants. The study outcome has value for educational institutions, research module leaders, and students to improve the engagement level of students.

**Keywords:** *MBA, Experiences and Challenges, Research Module, Thesis Writing*

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the Study

MBA students must study and complete an academic research assignment to graduate. However, they might face several challenges during that period. Students often need help with research modules. They tend to feel anxious and concerned about completing their research assignments rather than producing quality papers (Shahsavari & Kourepaz, 2020). To encourage and motivate students toward the research module, professors must increase the subject's engagement. The module leader supports and enhances students' practical, analytical, and creative abilities (Kurniasari et al., 2018).

In the academic year 2018–19, 43,612 students registered for master's programs in Nepal (UGC, 2019). Currently, 27 educational institutions in Nepal provide MBA courses, responding to the growing market and institutional needs (Prajapati, 2015). Furthermore, numerous colleges offer programs such as EMBA and Weekend MBA to fulfill students' requirements. Despite having a 46.37% enrollment rate, the management sector has a relatively low graduation rate (Wagle, 2022). Tribhuvan University had a pass percentage of only 26.1% in 2019-20 while having 75% domestic students (Wagle, 2022). It is found that many MBA students take longer than anticipated to finish their theses (Rahardjo, 2021).

### 1.2. Problem Statement

Graduation rates are among the most critical indicators of an organization's success (Burke, 2019). Therefore, colleges and universities prioritize retaining and increasing these rates. This trend has led to the prevailing notion that pursuing a graduate degree is accessible to all. Nevertheless, advanced studies entail extensive research and the composition of a thesis; each MBA aspirant must present a thesis as a requirement for graduation. In this phase, students opt for a research subject and obtain guidance from their module supervisors, who have a crucial role in aiding them through their research tasks (Zaheer & Munir, 2020). Nevertheless, numerous postgraduate students necessitate supplementary dedication and extended periods to finalize their

theses. Furthermore, adhering to specified timeframes, students must generate research papers of exceptional quality (Shahsavari & Kourepaz, 2020).

Both teachers and students can find it hard to conduct and write research papers. Quality research articles have the potential to form the basis of future investigations. At the graduate level, a multitude of factors influence the process of thesis work and research. Hence, this study investigated the encounters and obstacles faced by MBA students as they engage with the business research module and thesis composition within Nepal.

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

- To determine the relationship between the research module leaders and students' engagement.
- To assess whether the effective course content has a significant relationship with students' engagement.
- To assess whether the availability of useful literature has a significant relationship with students' engagement.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

- Is there any significant relationship between research module leaders and students' engagement?
- Is there any significant relationship between effective course content and students' engagement?
- Is there any significant relationship between the availability of useful literature and students' engagement?

### **1.5. Research Hypotheses**

H1: It is hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between the research module leader (independent variable) and students' engagement (dependent variable).

H2: Effective course content (independent variable) leads to student engagement (dependent variable).

H3: The availability of useful literature (independent variable) to complete research increases student engagement (dependent variable).

### **1.6. Significance of the Study**

- This research paper may be used by the leader or supervisor of the research module to determine which aspect of the obstacles faced by research students has the most significant impact on their engagement and, consequently, where improvement is needed.
- The research students might become more engaged in the research methods module and thesis writing by applying the suggestions and recommendations provided in the dissertation.
- The outcomes could be valuable to individuals (students or researchers) seeking to expand their knowledge about the subject matter.

### **1.7. Scope of the Study**

The research involves conducting in-person interviews with professors and administering surveys to MBA students. These methods aim to gather insights into their encounters and challenges related to the research module and thesis composition. The survey encompassed MBA institutions such as Global College, Quest International College, and LBEF. Various factors may affect students' engagement, but this study specifically looks at the relationship between the research module leader, course content, and the availability of useful literature. The study was supported by essential theories and concepts and used quantitative statistical analysis to produce precise results.

### **1.8. Limitations of the Study**

- The study took place within the Kathmandu Valley and its applicability to different regions within Nepal or other nations might be limited.
- There may need to be more than the sample size of 321 MBA students to generalize the results.

- The challenges and experiences of MBA students in business research modules and thesis writing can be better comprehended if the research is conducted in multiple geographic regions and contextual factors are considered.
- The time limitations might have restricted the number of independent variables and other factors. There might be more to investigate and learn about the subject.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 Literature Review of Base Paper

#### 2.1.1. Base Paper One

*Table 1: A Qualitative Study on the Experiences and Challenges of MBA Students' Engagement with a Business Research Methods Module*

Author Name/Year	Chinny Nzekwe-Excel / 2021
<b>Features</b>	Key Features: -Helps students acquire knowledge and abilities they may use in their daily lives. -Learn from the personal experiences of MBAs who have just completed business research projects for their degrees.
<b>Benefits</b>	-Improves ability to think analytically and solve complex problems. -Create an advanced capability for self-directed study.
<b>Limitations</b>	-Adopts only qualitative technique -Only 11 students are included in the sample.
<b>Advantages</b>	-To help make learning enjoyable for students and make it possible for efficient application of theory to practice.
<b>Methods of Research</b>	Interview
<b>Model Used</b>	Qualitative (NVIVO Software)

#### 2.1.2. Base Paper Two

*Table 2: Postgraduate Studies: The Challenges of Research and Thesis Writing*

Author Name/Year	Uduak Imo Ekpoh / 2016
<b>Features</b>	Key Feature: -To address the difficulties graduate students, encounter when conducting research and preparing theses.

<b>Benefits</b>	-Aids in understanding the difficulties graduate students experience when conducting research and preparing theses. -Possible solutions to those problems
<b>Limitations</b>	-Reliability (subjective, as the researchers personally administered the questionnaire to evaluate its validity and reliability)
<b>Advantages</b>	-Describes the various seminars and workshops that might help teachers and students improve their abilities. -A method of tracking and providing feedback on progress reports for ongoing projects. -Makes a case for formalizing the accepted method of evaluating graduate students' thesis papers.
<b>Methods of Research</b>	-Survey
<b>Model Used</b>	-Quantitative

## 2.2. Previous Studies

Various aspects of the student experience in postgraduate research and thesis writing, including **learning, supervision, resources, progress, assessment, access to research support resources, and professional growth**, were examined in an **exploratory study** (Lau et al., 2019). The three variables determining student participation in the study were behavior, affect, and cognition. Student involvement and participation are referred to as behavior, emotional states like happiness or sadness or boredom, anxiety as impact, and linking ideas to experiences is referred to as cognition. The study used the **Self-Determination theory** first, then the **Organismic theory**, to boost the intrinsic motivation of student involvement. According to research conducted on international postgraduate students in the United Kingdom, a **sense of belonging, teaching quality, the integration of English proficiency, and employability skills** are crucial engagement factors. Similarly, students who are aware of their duties and responsibilities and have a clear vision for their academic objectives are more likely than other students to have a high level of engagement (Brown et al., 2014). It is essential to comprehend

and analyze student perceptions to improve student engagement and develop critical problem-solving skills (Schaddelee & Mc Connell, 2018). By emphasizing these areas, the MBA program can better prepare students for workplace success and equip them with the skills necessary to become influential leaders. A holistic and practical approach is required to satisfy the expectations of the students.

Technology can be an effective instrument for increasing student engagement. (Kay & Pasarica, 2019) Medical students, for instance, use online and virtual technologies to enhance concentration and learning outcomes. **In addition**, most students attended the session from their residences, saving them time and enhancing their ability to concentrate on learning. Therefore, institutions should utilize technologies for the convenience of students to increase student engagement.

### **2.3. Research Theory**

#### **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is one of several theories about what motivates students to learn and best fits my research. **Psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan** put forth in their 1985 publication "Self-Determination and Intrinsic Motivation in Human Behavior" that an individual's motivation is influenced by three key elements: their feeling of independence, proficiency, and connection. "Autonomy" refers to the freedom to pursue one's goals and dreams. "Relatedness" describes a person's affinity for and involvement with a particular subject. Students conducting research should choose a topic that triggers their genuine curiosity. Such topics can inspire students to give their all-in class (Lau et al., 2019).

#### **Engagement Theory of Learning**

**Greg Kearsley and Ben Schneiderman's** engagement theory of learning from 1998 is still relevant. The key idea of this theory is that we may better understand how students are motivated to study when we leverage technology-based learning tools like SelfCad for their communication and other duties. The three pillars of the engagement theory are "relate," "create," and "donate" (Kearsley & Schneiderman, 1998). In "Relate," students work together to complete interactive

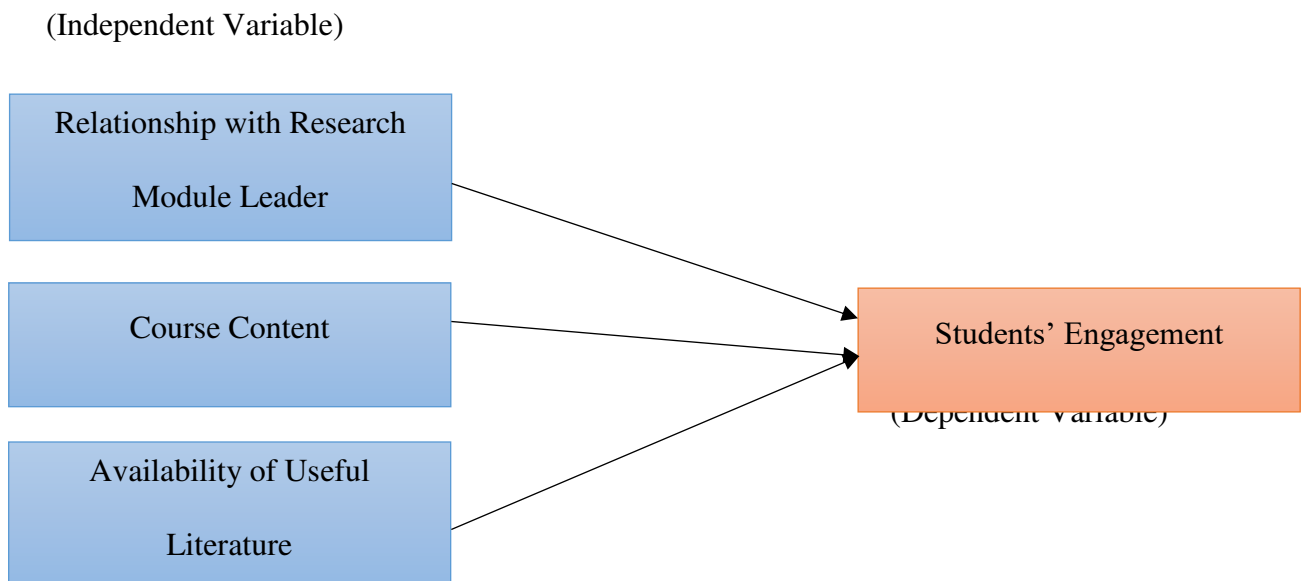


tutorials and assignments. 'Create' leverages project-based learning to foster intrinsic drive, while 'Donate' taps into the power of authentic groups like government agencies and local organizations.

### CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employed positivist philosophy, utilizing statistical tools for analyzing quantitative data to discover patterns and connections. The deductive reasoning approach was applied, testing a theory under controlled circumstances. MBA students received questionnaires to which they responded, employing the survey method. The study adopted a quantitative methodology and a cross-sectional time frame, meeting the dissertation deadline. Primary data was acquired through surveys, and secondary data was used for the literature review. MBA students completed a questionnaire with closed-ended queries using Google Docs, incorporating Likert scales. The survey was distributed among second-year MBA students, with distribution through Google Docs and physical visits to some MBA colleges. 350 second-year MBA students received the survey via purposive sampling. Data validity and reliability were scrutinized to assess the research hypothesis, evaluating precision and consistency, respectively (Patel & Patel, 2019). Ethical concerns encompassing voluntary participation, informed consent, potential risks, anonymity, and confidentiality were duly addressed, upholding the study's integrity (Tulyakul & Meepring, 2020).

#### 3.1. Research Model



*Figure 1: Research Model***CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA****4.1. Respondents Feedback***Table 3: Respondent's Feedback*

Questionnaire	Number of Questionnaires
Distributed	350
Collected Online	327
Error	6
Total Sample Size	321

The data collection process began in mid-June 2023 and lasted around three weeks. Questionnaires were distributed to 350 respondents; however, some were not submitted, and a few errors were found. A total of 321 test data generation was received.

**4.2. Reliability Test***Table 4: Reliability Results*

Variables of Study	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
All variables	25	0.934
Student Engagement (DV)	6	0.859
Relationship with Research Module Leaders (IV)	7	0.874
Effective Course Content (IV)	7	0.881
Availability of Useful Literature (IV)	5	0.794

The Cronbach's alpha of each variable is very close to 1, which means there is a strong correlation between the items in a questionnaire. Each of the three independent variables strongly

depends on the dependent variables. The dependent variable, student engagement, measured by 6 items, showed Cronbach’s alpha of 0.859, meaning the questions were relevant and dependable.

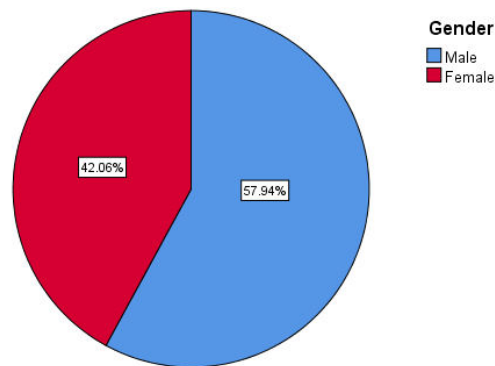
**4.3. Descriptive Analysis**

**4.3.1. Frequency Distribution**

- **Gender**

*Table 5: Gender Frequency*

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Male	186	57.94%
Female	135	42.06%
Total	321	100%



*Figure 2: Gender Frequency*

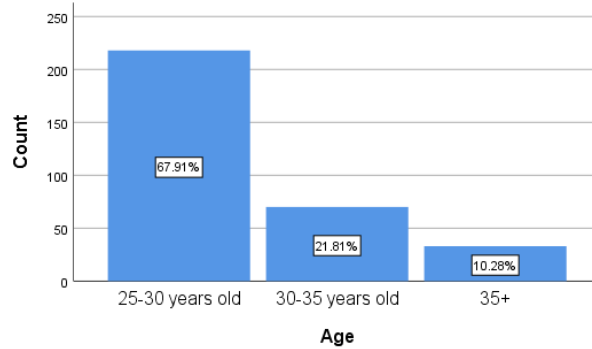
The total number of MBA (graduate) respondents was 321, out of which 186(57.94%) were male and 135(42.06%) were female. This indicates that a higher proportion of males took the survey than females. It means male respondents contributed more to the outcome of the results than females.

- **Age**

*Table 6: Age Frequency*

Item	Frequency	Percentage
25-30 years old	218	67.91%
30-35 years old	70	21.81%

35 and above	33	10.28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>100%</b>



*Figure 3: Age Frequency*

The age group of respondents was categorized into three groups, i.e., 25-30 years old, 30-35 years old, and 35 and above. The age group of 25-30 years old contributed more to the survey outcome. 218 respondents (67.91%) were from this age group. The second largest age group of respondents was from 30-35 years old, i.e., 70 respondents (21.81%) and 33 respondents (10.28%) were from the age group of 35 and above. This age group contributed little to the outcome of the survey.

- **Educational Attainment**

*Table 7: Educational Attainment Frequency*

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Master’s	318	99.07%
Doctorate	3	0.93%
<b>Total</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>100%</b>

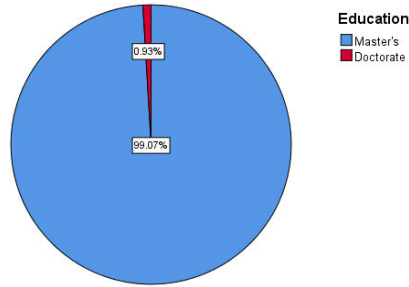


Figure 4: Educational Attainment Frequency

From the survey responses collected, 318 respondents (99.07%) participated did their master’s level, and 3 respondents (0.93%) did their doctorate. Most of the outcome was contributed by the master’s level student.

- **Name of Institution**

Table 8: Institution Frequency

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Quest College	33	10%
Excel College	14	4%
Orchid International College	24	8%
Phoenix International College	13	4%
Texas International College	24	8%
SAIM College	23	7%
Himalayan College of Management	21	7%
LBEF	14	4%
Others	155	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>100%</b>

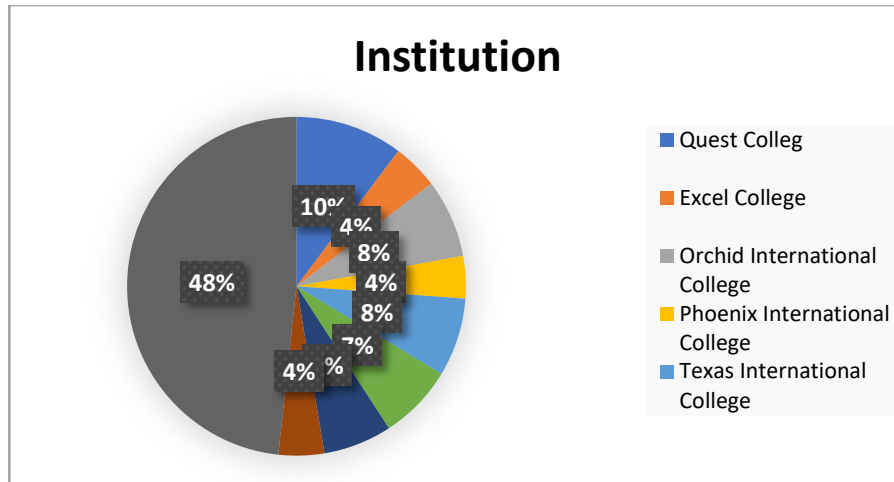


Figure 5: Institution Frequency

The respondents from different MBA colleges from Pokhara University, Purwanchal University, Tribhuvan University, and other foreign Universities participated in the survey.

**4.4. Descriptive Statistics of Variables**

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Student Engagement (DV)	3.9133	.75105	321
Relationship with Research Module Leaders (IV)	3.8896	.70378	321
Effective Course Content (IV)	3.8625	.69673	321
Availability Of Useful Literature (IV)	3.8579	.79719	321

The mean score of a dependent variable, student engagement, is 3.9133 means that, on average, the overall participants in the study leaned moderately towards agreement or positive perception of their engagement level. Likewise, the mean score of other independent variables, the relationship with the research module leader, effective course content, and availability of useful literature was 3.8896, 3.8625, and 3.8579, respectively, indicating that, on average, participants reported a moderately positive perception of their relationship with research module leaders. Among all the variables, the lowest mean score was reported for the availability of useful literature, i.e., 3.8579. The standard deviation of a dependent variable, student engagement, is .75105, indicating that the responses for student engagement tend to be relatively close to the

mean value of 3.9133, indicating a moderate level of variability. It means that some participants reported a higher level of engagement while others reported a lower level. Likewise, the standard deviation of other independent variables, the relationship with the research module leader, effective course content, and availability of useful literature were .70378, .69673, and .79719, respectively, indicating moderate variability around their mean.

#### 4.5. Correlation Analysis

Table 10: Pearson Correlation Analysis

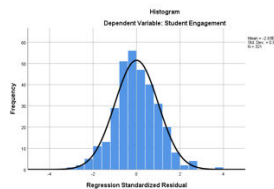
		Student Engagement(DV)	Relationship with Research Module Leaders(IV)	Effective Course Content(IV)	Availability Of Useful Literature(IV)
Pearson Correlation	Student Engagement(DV)	1.000	.807	.755	.306
	Relationship with Research Module Leaders(IV)	.807	1.000	.822	.294
	Effective Course Content(IV)	.755	.822	1.000	.278
	Availability Of Useful Literature(IV)	.306	.294	.278	1.000

The Pearson Correlation between the dependent variable, student engagement, and the independent variable, the relationship with research module leaders, is .807, indicating a strong positive correlation between these two variables. It means a significant and positive linear relationship exists between student engagement and the relationship quality with research module leaders. Student engagement also increases as the relationship quality with research module leaders increases. The Pearson Correlation value between the dependent variable, student



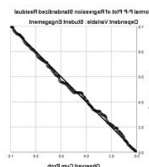
engagement, and the independent variable, availability of useful literature, is .306, indicating a weak positive correlation between these variables meaning that as the availability of useful literature increases, the level of student engagement tends to increase slightly. However, we can see a positive correlation between all the variables mentioned in the study. A one-tailed test was more meaningful for this study because the research employed a specific directional hypothesis.

#### 4.6. Normality Test



*Figure 6: Regression Standardized Residual*

From the above figure, the researcher concluded that the data tend to be symmetrically distributed around the mean. It means the histogram's left and right halves roughly mirrored each other. The linear line residual plot also explained the same concept.



*Figure 7: Linear Line Residual Plot*

From the above Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual, it can be observed that the points on the PP plot approximately fall on a straight line.

#### 4.7. Multiple Regression Analysis

##### 4.7.1. Model Summary Table

*Table 11: Model Summary Table*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of estimate
1	.826	.682	.679	.42582

a. Predictors: (Constant), Availability of Useful Literature, Effective Course Content, Relationship with Research Module Leaders

b. Dependent Variable: Student Engagement

The R-value of .826 (82.6%) indicates a better fit and a strong positive correlation between the variables employed in the study. However, adjusted R square provides a more reliable measure of the model’s goodness of fit. The adjusted R-value for the study was .679, meaning that 67.9% of the variability in the dependent variable (student engagement) is explained by the independent variables (relationship with research module leaders, effective course content, and availability of useful literature) in the regression model after adjusting for the number of predictors and the sample size.

**4.7.2. ANOVA**

*Table 12: ANOVA Table*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	123.024	3	41.008	226.159	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	57.480	317	.181		
	Total	180.503	320			
a. Dependent Variable: Student Engagement						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Availability Of Useful Literature, Effective Course Content, Relationship with Research Module Leaders						

The above table shows the F value as 226.159 and the significance level(p-value) as .000<sup>b</sup>. The higher value of F, i.e.,226.159, indicates that the variation between the group means is more significant than within the groups. The P value of .000<sup>b</sup>, less than .05, indicated that the dependent and independent variables used in the study had significant interaction. The independent variable (relationship with research module leaders, effective course content, and

availability of useful literature) is the significant predictor of a dependent variable (student engagement).

**4.7.3. Coefficient Table**

The basic structure of a simple linear regression equation featuring three independent variables is represented as  $Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3$

*Table 13: Coefficients Table*

Coefficients						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.199	.160		1.241	.216
	Relationship with Research Module Leaders	.601	.060	.563	10.056	.000
	Effective Course Content	.296	.060	.274	4.926	.000
	Availability Of Useful Literature	.061	.031	.065	1.946	.046
a. Dependent Variable: Student Engagement						

*Student engagement = 0.199 + 0.601(relationship with research module leaders) + 0.296(effective course content) + 0.061(availability of useful literature)*

Based on the above equation, the researcher concluded that,

- Student engagement is projected to increase by 0.601 units when the relationship with research module leaders increases by one unit when all other independent variables remain constant, and vice versa (positive impact).
- Student engagement is projected to increase by 0.296 units when the effective course content increases by one unit when all other independent variables remain constant, and vice versa (positive impact).

- Student engagement is projected to increase by 0.061 units when the availability of useful literature increases by one unit when all other independent variables remain constant, and vice versa (positive impact).

#### 4.7.4. Results of Hypothesis

While testing the hypothesis, the acceptance or rejection of the alternative hypothesis depends upon the significance (p-value) level as calculated above in the coefficient table. The value of the pre-determined significance level is 0.05(5%). When the p-value falls below 0.05, we can reject the null hypothesis. It means that we have significant evidence to support the alternative hypothesis statistically. The result of our hypothesis is explained in the table given below:

*Table 14: Results of Hypothesis*

Developed Hypothesis	P-Value	Impact	Status of Developed Hypothesis
H1: It is hypothesized that there is a relationship between the research module leader (independent variable) and students' engagement (dependent variable).	0.000	Positive	Supported
H2: Effective course content (independent variable) leads to student engagement (dependent variable).	0.000	Positive	Supported
H3: The availability of useful literature (independent variable) to complete research increases student engagement (dependent variable).	0.046	Positive	Supported

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

### 5.1. Conclusion

From the critical findings, discussions, and literature review, there are specific challenges that MBA students face and do not complete their master's degree on time due to thesis writing. Students often struggle to cope with the challenges during the topic selection process to complete their research. Educational institutions and research module leaders or supervisors need to understand the challenges of students and address them. The study considers three independent variables, i.e., Relationship with research module leaders, course content, and availability of useful literature, to see whether it impacts student engagement. Research objectives, inquiries, and hypotheses were formulated to conduct the statistical tests. It was found that all three factors are essential to student engagement. Therefore, the educational institution and research module leaders/supervisors must consider these issues seriously and find solutions to improve student engagement. The study also includes implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### 5.2. Recommendations

- **Maintain healthy and cordial relationships:** A positive rapport between students and mentors facilitates seamless communication, idea sharing, and support for achieving successful research results.
- **Proper Guidance:** The supervisor must guide the students properly from the initial phase of selecting the thesis topic to the final stage of its submission.
- **Continuous Feedback:** The supervisors must provide their students with periodic progress reports, discussions, and suggestions on related topics.
- **Updated Course Content:** Educational institutions must provide updated course content with theoretical and practical approaches to enhance student engagement.
- **E-Learning Resources:** Universities and institutions must provide free e-learning resources to access helpful scholarly and journal articles.
- **Effort from Students:** Students should put in their best effort and follow the guidance provided by their respective supervisors.

#### 5.2.1. Recommendation for Future References

- The study outside the valley could provide different outputs.

- The sample size must be increased in future research to provide accurate results.
- The better approach for the research could be using both qualitative and quantitative approaches.
- More variables could be considered for future research.

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