



SELF-PERCEIVED ABILITY OF RESEARCH SKILLS AMONG UNDERGRADUATES

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Undergraduate research is an important component in the curricula of degree programmes in universities worldwide. Since the academic community considers undergraduate research as the most powerful instructional tool, there is an increased tendency to ensure that undergraduate students gain the expected outcomes from their research experience. This study was conducted to evaluate the research skills of final year undergraduates in three Health Sciences degree programmes: Nursing, Pharmacy and Medical Laboratory Sciences at The Open University of Sri Lanka. In this quantitative descriptive study, final year undergraduates in three Health Sciences degree programmes; Nursing (n=187), Pharmacy (n=31) and Medical Laboratory Sciences (n=44) at the Open University of Sri Lanka were included. The perceived ability of 14 research skills of undergraduates were assessed using a previously validated instrument following content validation. A self-administered questionnaire was completed by the participants. All the participants signed an informed consent form prior to their participation. Most of the participants were females (n= 216, 78.5%), married (n=195, 70.9%) and were between 30-39 years (n=183, 66.5%). The lowest possible score which denoted research skills was 14 and the highest possible score was 70. Accordingly, the mean scores which denoted the research skills of MLS, Pharmacy and Nursing undergraduates were 56.4, 56.26 and 51.26 respectively which indicate a satisfactory overall self-perceived ability of research skills among undergraduate students of all three degree programmes. The self-perceived ability of research skills in designing an experiment or theoretical test of a hypothesis, statistical analysis of data, interpretation of results, and writing a research paper for publication were not satisfactory compared to the rest of the research skills. According to the findings of this preliminary study, most of the self-perceived ability of research skills among undergraduate students were at a satisfactory level while some skills were not. Hence it is useful to adopt strategies to improve undergraduate research skills and take action to enhance students' learning opportunities. Further study in this area is warranted by incorporating an observational component in the study.

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