

# **International Masters Students' Perception of the Research Skill Development Framework**

## **1. Introduction**

Coursework Masters programs in Australia are now obliged to be compliant with the substantial research requirements of Australian Qualifications Framework Level 9 (AQF, n.d.). However, if Masters students commence with a low interest in research, or poorly developed research skills, there exists a possibility of students either failing or being overloaded with work in an attempt to understand research and attain the research practice skills required by AQF Level 9. This is of particular concern to international students, many of whom have completed undergraduate degrees in their homeland. Empowering Masters students with academic research skills is a way to motivate students to highly engage in the learning process and utilise richly the learning opportunities in their courses. One conceptual framework currently being piloted to help international Masters students and deepen their learning experience in the context of these research requirements is the Research Skill Development framework (Willison & O'Regan, 2006/2013; 2007). To this end, there is a need to ensure that the framework is effective for promoting Masters student learning in research mode, especially with international students.

## **Research Context**

This study conducted an investigation of the phenomenological issues and experiences of the RSD framework for five international students of Masters Students' experiences in the School of Education, at the University of Adelaide. This project intended to understand the research learning experience as a result of exposure to the RSD framework in an Introductory Academic Program for international students and in a School of Education Masters course called Research Based Learning and Teaching. Since the RSD framework was new to these international Masters students, a number of learning issues related to RSD framework application and understanding were relevant to be

explored, such as students' prior work and study experiences might have influenced perception of the RSD framework.

## **Method**

Masters students who satisfied the above criteria were invited to attend individual semi-structured interview and these were voice-recorded and transcribed. Regarding this study the researchers addressed the following question:

What was the international Masters students' perception of the RSD framework as experienced in the course of Research Based Learning and Teaching?

A phenomenological approach was employed to analyse the transcripts in order to address each research question.

## **Results**

All five students indicated that their first exposure to the RSD was daunting, with one student stating:

*"...at the beginning it was very confused...others were also confused too...They said that we are in the same boat...we are the same feeling..." (Participant 3).*

Nevertheless, all students also found that the RSD addressed something worth knowing more about:

*"...this framework is very good in the future with giving real specification on understanding to each facets...RSD could be much easier if I has been familiar with framework first. Therefore, it would be good for others in term of the development in approaching research" (Participant 4).*

Participants ultimately declared that the RSD was worth introducing to their colleagues back in their home countries. To make the time with the framework more international-student-friendly they

recommended more time in the introduction and use of the RSD:

*“other course lecturers need to apply the RSD in School of Education too...” (Participant 2).*

### **Implications:**

This research illustrates that the international Masters students interviewed perceived that the RSD conceptual framework is an important research based learning framework for the post graduate level. The findings indicate that the five participants interviewed describe a picture of how their learning perspectives influence working on academic tasks; the following implications for these five students may be relevant to other international post graduate students in Education and in other disciplines.

- extra support as they expose of the RSD framework for new postgraduate students, teachers, and researchers.
- the RSD framework can be a useful mechanism of communicating research based learning approach between international students and their academic research supervisor:
- repeated exposure of the RSD framework as a conceptual research framework can improve student understanding at postgraduate level, but also perceptions of usefulness for future new careers upon completion of their degree.
- the findings are not only relevant for the postgraduate Master’s program, but also may be useful for Master Graduate when they return to home countries as teachers, lecturers and other trainers to enrich curriculum content.

These findings may be relevant for any system that has substantial research requirements for students relatively new to the system, such as international students.

## References

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