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An Investigation of Research Culture Factors in Public Sector Universities of Punjab

1. **Muhammad Amin** (Corresponding Author)
University of Education, Lahore Email: amin@ue.edu.pk
2. **Samreen Jalal**
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Division of Education, University of Education Lahore
Email: samreen.jalal@ue.edu.pk
3. **Humera Amin**
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Division of Education, University of Education, Lahore
Email: f2016095005@umt.edu.pk

Abstract



This study tried to explore the factors that influence the development of research culture in universities. Research culture facilitates a suitable working environment for university faculty members to perform different types of research-related tasks. This study used a convenient method of sampling and 7 general public sector universities were considered as a sample. The teaching faculty of these universities were interviewed by purposive sampling. 16 interviews were recorded till saturation and a semi-structured interview protocol was employed for this purpose. Recorded interviews were analyzed by thematic data analysis technique. The themes of these interviews presented that three factors are environmental, institutional, and personal factors that were responsible for research culture. This study suggested that equal importance had to be given to these three factors and ignorance of any one factor would be responsible for creating those circumstances that were not in favor of creating positive research culture.

Keywords: Research culture, General Public Sector Universities, Environmental Factors, Institutional Factors, Personal Factors.

Introduction

The ranking of universities is mostly dependent on the quantity and quality of research output that is produced by their faculty members. Certain conducive conditions are needed in universities to conduct research activities so that research culture can be developed in the universities. Research plays an important role in decision-making and helps to solve the problems of daily life. It has become an essential part of every field of life, particularly education. Research increases and improves teaching in the field of education. We are missing a well-meaning source by ignoring research that is contributed to the development of teachers (Bengo, Herrera, San Diego, Santos, 2012).

Marchant (1999) describes four models of research: the first model is concerned with independent researchers. In this model, no research values are formulated and research is carried out by some faculty members. Financial support is provided at the minimum level but in most cases, it is not provided. The second model is about to start. Research is carried on by a very small number of experts and it is limited in scope because research is based on the interest of experts. In the third collaborative & centralized model, an expert group of faculty members carried out the research. They share their ideas to reach a conclusion and all the members' research by collective effort. The fourth model is called the independent centralized model, a group of faculty members researches in it but some of the members are actively involved in the completion of work.

Hill (1999) describes the role of individuals as researchers that research values fall at the lowest level, research objectives fall at the middle level and research ideas fall at the highest level. Research values are the goals and these are immediate planned outcomes, research objectives are the long-term goals and research ideas are ultimately achieved and these are based on research goals and objectives. So research culture includes the accepted wisdom of faculty members for conducting the research activities in universities. Faculty members perform their tasks with their research expertise and need a supportive environment for this purpose.

Stehlik (2002) describes these three components as models for building research culture in universities. At the macro level: strategies are structured and finalized by the head of the department. These are related to planned workshops and collaborative environments. At the meso level, the head of the department and faculty members have their policies. These are research projects, seminars, meeting with scholars, reading books personally & in the group. At the micro-level: university students formulate their groups for completion of research activities and demand support from the university.

Universities in developed countries have a strong tradition of research and efforts are made to improve research culture but in developing countries, the main focus is emphasized on teaching that's why these have weak research culture. The development of research culture needs proper planning and determination of resources (Salazar – Clemena & Almonte – Acosta, 1997). Higher Education Commission is formulating modules on research methodology and skills for teachers. It provides research funds based on research journals. Higher Education Commission provides teachers training courses on research and provides research incentives to those who attend these courses. These efforts are made for developing research culture in universities (Malik, 2015).

The condition of HEC support to improve research culture in Pakistani Universities has increased in terms of by providing research grants, resources, increasing the number of Ph.D. faculty members by allowing free access to instrumentation and consultation to foreign faculty (Anonymous, 2018). In the universities world ranking, research has a 30% score and business work has 2.5 to 7.5 %. It shows the importance of research activities all over the world (Times Higher Education, 2015). Anyhow, the universities of Pakistan have a research culture but do not have the research culture in that sense it possesses. Three factors are responsible for this that is environmental, institutional, and personal career factors.

In environmental factors, the department is very supportive in assigning teaching and administrative duties (Hardre, Beesley, Miller, Pace, 2011). Group environment helps in raising the research output of faculty members because each member discusses their ideas with each other (Bland & Ruffin, 1992). Heads have to establish collaborative research teams by combining faculty members of their university and other universities (Hazelkorn, 2004).

In institutional factors, supportive factors include the arrangement of research seminars, university funding for research activities, management of teaching workload for provision of time for research activities, and discouraging factors include the absence of time for research activities, high teaching workload, perform administrative tasks, and lack of experience for getting research grants (Geare & Edgar, 2011).

In personal factor, faculty members of universities have the necessary research skills to perform research activities and Evan (2007) considers these skills as an extended professional model. Faculty members use their basic and modern research skills, try to put efforts into enhancing research methodological concepts, adapt already established research methods, produce new concepts based on findings, and often revise their research studies.

So this study explored the factors of research culture by collecting the views from the education faculty of public sector universities and highlighted the supportive and discouraging factors of research culture.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the factors of research culture in Public Sector Universities of Punjab.
2. To analyze the factors that provide motivation and demotivation to universities teachers in conducting research activities.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors that structure research culture in Public Sector Universities of Punjab?
2. Which factors provide support and discourage university teachers from performing research activities?

Significance of the Study

Pakistani universities have a research culture but do not have a strong research culture. The reasons are that they do not have good collegial relationships, not supportive institutional policies, and lack research competencies. These are concerned with three factors that are environmental factors, institutional factors, and personal factors, and the positive aspect of these factors strengthening the research culture. Results of the study may be helpful to highlight the motivational and demotivational

aspects of these three factors of research culture and helpful for future researchers to understand these in detail and for further studies.

Research Methodology

This study was comprised of the interpretivism paradigm of research because this paradigm of research emphasizes using different ways to know about phenomena. Phenomena cannot be studied objectively but can be discussed in a subjective way (Pham, 2018). The qualitative research method was employed and it focuses on exploring the reality by being part of the situation and multiple views are collected for the understanding of phenomena by using different methods of research. A convenient method of sampling was used for the selection of 7 general public sector universities and these universities were situated in Lahore, Gujarat, Faisalabad, Bahawalpur, and Sargodha. 16 interviews were recorded by using purposive sampling till saturation and one senior and one junior faculty member interview was conducted. The tool of research was a semi-structured interview protocol and questions were related to factors responsible for research culture. The researcher conducted the interviews according to the interview schedule and recorded the interviews personally. Responses of each faculty members' interview were transcribed. Themes were drawn out from the transcribed responses of university faculty members' interviews and the results of the study were described as:

Analysis & Findings of the Study

It was summarized from faculty members' views that supportive factors for the establishment of research culture in the departments and universities were the arrangement of workshops, seminars, and conferences. A good collegial relationship existed among faculty members; they shared their research-related ideas and had time for writing research articles. Hurdles in the establishment of research culture were no motivation by higher authorities, no collaborative environment, and no arrangement of research activities.

Factors influencing Research Culture

It appeared from the university faculty interviews that some were supportive and some were discouraging aspects that influenced the research culture of Public Sector Universities of Punjab.

1. Environmental Factors

Supportive Factors

Faculty members were opinioned that a collaborative environment was prevailing in departments of universities and they could exchange their ideas with each other. Someone said:

"In my department, there is a collaborative environment, we can discuss and I discuss with junior colleagues and solve out the problems"

Discouraging Factors

Some discouraging factors influenced the university research culture. Faculty members were not committed to doing research and they were not encouraged by higher authorities. Someone said:

"There are so many factors which are affecting our research culture because when a person writes or creates any additional role, there is no encouragement".

Provision of guidance was also not provided by the department to complete the research activities. One of the faculty members told:

"No, guidance is not provided to fulfill the research activities".

It was concluded from faculty members' views that a collaborative environment was persisted in the development of research culture. Other environmental factors that were related to no guidance, no motivation, no encouragement, and no commitment by faculty members for research activities became a hurdle in research culture development in universities.

2. Institutional Factors

Supportive Factors

University provided different types of benefits and supports to those faculty members who wrote the required number of research articles and their research articles were published in recognized research journals. That's why they were motivated to research because they were awarded incentives and got promoted to a higher grade when they published the research articles. The university faculty member said about it:

"The major incentive that's on the part, your promotion as Assistant, Associate Professor then incentive and that you can title as university support. The other thing they also know is that research articles in reviewed journals we can get some thought of 10,000 or more or less

money, that's all show support. Two supports, one is to be promoted as Assistant and Associate Professor and the other is to be awarded Rs.10, 000 more or less".

Another said:

"University provides 10000 to a person who writes an article in the international journal and 5000 for the national journal".

Some of the faculty members' interviews revealed that scholarships were also provided to the faculty members both by university and HEC but these were awarded for getting higher degrees, not for research-related activities. Someone said:

"Research scholarships are not awarded to the faculty members, however, if under the rules and the criteria, if any party fits and suitable for that, definitely will be awarded scholarship".

Discouraging Factors

Faculty members had to perform multiple roles at a time. They not only performed research activities but also teaching activities and administrative tasks as well. The teaching workload was very high and it was not adjusted to those faculty members who were involved in research activities. The workload was adjusted on the day when they had to present the research articles and there was an overload of administrative tasks. A faculty member told:

"One negative factor is workload and sometimes situational engagements of teachers in different types of activities. Like functions are their admissions are open and people are engaged there, sufficient time is not available for thinking of research activities and planning and carrying on these types of activities. The workload of classes is also sufficiently high and side by side other activities".

Other said:

"There is no research culture in the way that university emphasizes on the periods how much periods that a teacher has to teach in a week or semester. A lecturer has to teach 15 periods in a week and individuals don't have the time to read and write".

Financial, physical, and material support also affected the research culture because somebody expressed:

"No financial resources or physical resources are available. Sometimes the facilities are not given to the teachers, 2/3 teachers are sitting in one room; sometimes they don't have a paper to write".

One of them expressed about the material resources:

"In our library, there is no journal. But in the main library there are journals but a few".

It was summarized that university faculty members were supported by the provision of incentives in the aspect of money and promotion after publishing the research articles. They were also awarded scholarships for higher studies. But some hindrances that were high teaching workload, less focus on research activities, no provision of physical and material resources became the causes of no development of research culture in universities.

3. Personal Factors

Supportive Factors

Faculty members' interviews revealed that seminars, workshops, and conferences were arranged for the enhancement of faculty members' research skills. Faculty members personally arranged the workshops and the university provided the financial support for the arrangement of such activities. Somebody opinioned:

"We conduct the seminars and workshops in our department".

Another faculty member expressed:

"University also helps if you want to conduct a seminar or workshop and you call experts from the other universities, so it facilitates and provides all the financial aid as well".

One of the faculty members opinioned that workshops, seminars, and conferences were arranged but these were not faculty needs. She said that:

"Sometimes workshops and conferences are arranged, but not technically handled because it's not related to aspects by which it should be started because some faculty members don't know from the beginning about research concept".

Discouraging Factors

Interviews of faculty members revealed that faculty members did not only take an interest in conducting research activities and also had less research experience. Someone told:

"First one personal factor and individuals don't like to do that because they say that does not provide any financial support and other is person's inability in the field of research, specifically I cannot identify research problem that is the basic point, and how the different process is going on".

It was summarized from faculty members' views about personal factors that workshops, seminars, and conferences were arranged for their personal development but faculty members' less research experience and attitude towards conducting research activities became hurdles in the development of research culture in universities.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors that influence research culture in Public sector universities of Punjab. The major results of the study revealed that these factors were less common in practice and personal factors affected the most in the development of research culture rather than institutional and environmental factors.

Santo et al., (2009) conducted a study to identify the factors that affected faculty productivity at the University of Minnesota. The findings of this study showed that the university had strong teaching culture rather research culture. Research productivity was (40%) and teaching activities were (92%). The findings of the present study are consistent with the findings of previous research in an aspect of teaching and research activities have equal importance and the department provides fewer opportunities to become involved in the development of research culture.

The same study was conducted by Wongwichai (2010) in Ratchapat Lampang Institution that was described the causes of low-quality research due to research hindrances. It showed that institutional factors were affected most of the research culture in terms of not provision of financial support. Personal factors were ranked second in affecting the research culture due to not having the personal research knowledge and skill. But the findings of the present study showed that personal factors affect the most rather institutional factors. The reason is that faculty members are innerly motivated to do research but they have less research competency and even research-related workshops are not arranged properly.

Conclusion

It is concluded from the study findings that research culture development is not influenced by one factor but is affected by three factors i.e. environmental factors, institutional factors, and personal factors. These factors contributed a lot to the development of research culture in the departments of universities. Findings showed that environmental factors were less common in practice by not provision of research guidance. Institutional factors were also affected in the development of research culture because institutions demanded to be productive in research but the university did not provide proper financial and administrative support for conducting research activities. It was also exposed that university teachers had less research competency and personal factors also affected the research culture. So it is revealed that these factors are less focused and need to be proper attention.

Recommendations of the Study

- Universities should encourage faculty members to extend their research skills by enhancing their academic qualifications and attending research workshops and research lectures.
- Universities should create a research guidance team for the research facilitation of faculty members.
- Universities should provide a supportive environment for faculty members. Teaching workload should be reduced so that university teachers can give more time to research activities and it will not facilitate the increase of research activities but also help in developing strong research culture.

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