Factors Influencing Teacher Educators’ Research Engagement in the Reform Process of Teacher Education Institutions in Myanmar

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Abstract

This study addresses how similar teacher education institutions differ in terms of teacher educators’ research engagement and what causes these differences. Underlying factors were explored by comparing teacher educators’ research engagement at two Education Colleges in Myanmar that differed in terms of the educators’ research activities. Applying the qualitative case study research design, data were drawn from a document analysis and semi-structured interviews with the college principals and teacher educators. Institutional expectation and encouragement for teacher educators’ research engagement, their views on research, ways of their research engagement, and the motives and challenges in each case were scrutinized using a summative approach to qualitative content analysis. The findings demonstrate that personal, institutional, policy-related, and system-related factors influence teacher educators’ research engagement. This suggests that, apart from the consideration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, teacher educators’ autonomy in their research engagement should be secured and their policy awareness and buy-in assured.

Keywords

teacher educator, research engagement, education college, teacher educator research, Myanmar

Introduction

Teacher training centers have been undergoing reform to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in many countries since the 1980s (Kosnik et al., 2016; Yogev & Yogev, 2006). Since research activeness is one of the criteria for the ranking and reputation of HEIs (Livingston et al., 2009), teacher educators’ research capacity has become one of the prominent priorities in teacher education institutions (Griffiths et al., 2010). Teacher educators are expected to connect scholarship with practice (Cochran-Smith, 2005) because they are positioned at the nexus of teacher training and research practice (Murray et al., 2009).

Despite the increasing expectations on teacher educators to be research active in many parts of the world, knowledge about teacher educators’ role as a researcher is still emerging across the globe (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Erbilgin, 2019). Furthermore, it is pivotal to understand the institutional- and individual-level activities of teacher educators to be active participants and leaders of the reform process, especially during the transitional period in which teacher training institutions are institutionalized as HEIs (Loughran, 2014). While considerable effort has been made to study teacher education content under reconstruction in many contexts, teacher educators’ professional learning, and development activities have not received concomitant attention from researchers (Swennen & Bates, 2010), and the conducive institutional contexts for research engagement have been questioned (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012). Research related to teacher educators has been particularly scarce in Myanmar (Borg et al., 2018), with minimal studies on their research engagement.

In Myanmar, education colleges (ECs) are the main providers of primary and middle school teachers. At the time of the study, there were 24 ECs in Myanmar (A new EC was opened in December 2019, bringing the current total to 25), and in 2016 these were institutionalized as HEIs (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2016c). ECs run throughout the year and use the same schedule directed by the Teacher Education Sector (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2016a). Teacher educators are the

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primary agents of pre-service and in-service teacher education programs at ECs and are centrally recruited by the MOE. With regard to teacher educators’ research capacity, UNESCO (2016b) remarked that research skill and information and communications technology (ICT) competency are the new skill areas that are yet to be developed for EC teacher educators in Myanmar.

The research engagement of these educators has been encouraged through Action Research Contests (ARCs) and research grants provided by the MOE. ARC was initiated in 2013. It was held once in an academic year until 2018 and requires mandatory participation by all ECs. In 2018, the frequency of ARC was increased to twice a year (MOE, 2018b). Additionally, research project grants were provided by the MOE starting from 2018. Teacher educators were invited to register their research projects and apply for research funds, regardless of their research type (MOE, 2018d).

However, although all ECs follow the centralized system (UNESCO, 2016a), there are variations among the ECs in ARC performance and registered lists of research projects by teacher educators: some ECs won frequently at the ARCs and registered research projects, while others did not appear in either record during the first 3 years of being institutionalized as HEIs (MOE, 2016a, 2016b, 2018a, 2018c, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). This apparent variation raised the question “what makes similar institutions differ and how different are they?” This question calls for an in-depth, comparative qualitative analysis of teacher educators’ research engagement. The lack of empirical in-depth findings might lead to a misunderstanding of teacher educators’ views and practices of research engagement, engendering the reverse effects of the expected outcomes or rendering the ministry’s efforts ineffective. Understanding how teacher educators engage with and in research and the factors underlying their research engagement can help us deal with similar issues concerning the promotion of teacher educators’ research activities in Myanmar and globally.

This study focuses on teacher educators’ research practices, based on Pollard’s (2006, p. 255) distinction among education research, educational research, and practitioner research, defined as follows:

Education research rests on the major contributory disciplines of education (e.g., psychology, philosophy, sociology) and on the significance of the production of new forms of knowledge for their own sake. Educational research is more applied, seeking to use disciplinary insights, theories, and tools in illuminating issues of policy and practice. Professional inquiry or practitioner research is of great value in the improvement of practice.

Therefore, teacher educator research in this study refers to any or all types of research conducted by teacher educators such as practitioner research aiming to inform teaching practices, education research (academic research) to update their subject knowledge, and/or educational research to study teacher education or the educational system.

**Teacher Educators’ Research Engagement and Factors Influencing It**

In the field of teachers’ and teacher educators’ research engagement, a reliable body of literature has divided research engagement into two categories: engagement with research and engagement in research (e.g., Bell et al., 2010; Borg, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010; Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012; Mehrali, 2015). The former refers to reading and using research and the latter to conducting research individually or collaboratively. This study investigates both categories.

As the engagement-with/engagement-in split entails, teacher educators are both research consumers and research producers (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012). To engage with research, teacher educators mostly read research-related materials in the pursuit of empirical knowledge. They refer to online research articles and international and local research journals as their main sources of reading; the fundamental reasons for their reading are to update their professional knowledge, gather more references for their teaching, and learn about research methods and research techniques (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012). Additionally, teacher educators report that they appreciate learning by exchanging and discussing ideas with colleagues and experts through attending conferences (Castle, 2013; Kosnik et al., 2015). Further, they continue to apply what they learn through research in their teaching practices, in the sense that research can be combined and synthesized into effective and efficient pedagogy, can be related to a particular subject knowledge aimed at students at a particular grade level (Marsh, 1987), and can be used in their own research endeavors (Mitchell, 1993).

Several research-related activities are undertaken by teacher educators in line with their diversified purposes to engage in research. In general, they engage in research to upgrade their theoretical knowledge backgrounds, pursue ongoing professional development (Livingston et al., 2009; Willems & Boei, 2017), connect with other professionals from an “intellectual perspective” (Cochran-Smith, 2005, p. 21), and simply “produce local knowledge and public knowledge on teacher education” (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014, p. 301). Moreover, Loughran (2014) observes that, for teacher educators, conducting research is a dichotomous activity meant to simultaneously fulfill their roles as “teacher of teachers” and “researcher.” He asserts further that, by doing research, teacher educators pursue learning to teach teachers, which is one of the main aspects of developing the pedagogy of teacher education.

Yogev and Yogev (2006) conducted a content analysis to identify the features of teacher educators’ and university teachers’ research and reported a significantly higher frequency of practitioner research, including action research, in the classroom by teacher educators. Livingston et al. (2009) contended that teacher educators engage in practitioner research to improve their professional practice. Through practitioner research, teacher educators engage in reflection.
and critique on their own practices, which can inform the improvement of their teaching-learning practices (Ping et al., 2018).

Previous studies have discussed the factors that influence teacher educators' research engagement from two main perspectives: personal and contextual. Concerning personal factors, Ulvik and Smith (2019) highlighted the importance and impact of teacher educators' conceptions of and attitudes toward research on their research engagement. According to these researchers, teacher educators' understanding of what research is and their capacity to define the relationship between researching and teaching can inform their attitudes toward research and a clear understanding of their roles as researchers. Not surprisingly, it has been proven that when teacher educators highly value research, they are more likely to pursue research-related activities, including reading research materials, attending various research skill-based workshops and programs, applying research knowledge in practice, and conducting their own research (Kosnik et al., 2015; Ping et al., 2018). Additionally, teacher educators' previous research experience (Griffiths et al., 2010) and self-confidence in their research ability (Alhija & Majdob, 2017) motivate them to pursue research-related activities.

Regarding contextual factors, Willemsen and Boei (2017) argued that the shift of teacher education programs into HEIs and the system's demand for research output by teacher educators could be the driving factors for their research engagement. Institutional leaders' active encouragement, organizational time allocation, financial support, and a high expectation from the organization to engage in research can also lead to a high level of research engagement (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012; Griffiths et al., 2010; Willemsen & Boei, 2017). According to Shamai and Kfir (2002), the expectations and support of institutional leaders and time allocation to teacher educators' research contribute to an institution's research culture. These scholars argue that the stronger the research culture and the more institutional support a college offers, the more the teaching staff will be involved in research activities. Meanwhile, they have also stated that there might be “organizational imponderables” alongside shared preconditions for teachers’ research engagement, such as financial support and research practitioners’ expertise in research methodology (Shamai & Kfir, 2002, p. 401).

Very recently, Kelly et al. (2020) conducted a comparative study of research teams at an Australian university to understand the conditions constructive for research team collaboration. They suggested that measurements of social networks and research participants’ perceptions can indicate productive research collaboration. However, their study focused on collaboration and participants’ perceptions of research productivity among research groups in the same context at a university and did not include a comparative analysis at the institutional level in the context of new HEIs. As illustrated in the literature, it would be pertinent to explore the underlying reasons for the differences in teacher educators’ research engagement across similar contexts. This study highlights comparative perspectives from teacher educators at two ECs, which are new HEIs in Myanmar. This method is different from those of previous studies, which emphasized differences between different institution types, such as older and newer research-based universities in Israel and England (e.g., Griffiths et al., 2010; Yoge & Yoge, 2006), or compared different research teams at the same institution (Kelly et al., 2020).

**Research Purpose and Research Questions**

With the purpose of revealing the underlying factors influencing teacher educators’ research engagement at ECs in Myanmar, this study compared two ECs that were extreme cases in terms of teacher educators’ research activities. To achieve the aim of the study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. How are teacher educators expected and encouraged to be research engaged in each case?
2. What are the views of teacher educators on teacher educator research in each case?
3. How do teacher educators engage with and in research in each case?
4. What are the motives for and challenges to the teacher educators’ research engagement in each case?

**Methods**

**Research Design and Sampling**

This study used a qualitative case study research design. According to Creswell (2013, p. 100), this “is the best approach when the researcher has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the case or a comparison of several cases.” This study was based on an examination of two ECs in Myanmar from September 2016 (when ECs were institutionalized as HEIs) to September 2019. A combination of multiple purposive sampling methods was applied to develop an intensive understanding of the particular attributes of the subject being investigated (Farrugia, 2019). To identify research sites, extreme or deviant case sampling method was used, which helps understand a specific phenomenon by meticulously investigating information-rich cases (Palinkas et al., 2015). To reveal the underlying factors influencing teacher educators’ research engagement at ECs in Myanmar, high- and low-research engagement outlier cases were compared among the ECs, which differed in research engagement despite similar geographical locations, the number of teacher educators, and the number of students. The two ECs (EC14 and EC15) are located in two big cities in central Myanmar. In the academic year (AY) 2018 to 2019 (December–March...
semester), the numbers of teacher educators in EC14 and EC15 were 90 and 92, respectively, and the numbers of student teachers were 796 and 787, respectively. Accordingly, EC14 (with no record of winning in ARCs and no registration of research projects) and EC15 (with the highest frequency in both domains) were selected as the research sites. In line with the maximum variation sampling method, meant to unearth multifaceted perspectives from different levels of participants (Palinkas et al., 2015), the participants in this study were the principals of the two ECs \((n=2)\) and 10 teacher educators from each EC \((n=20)\). This sample size is in line with Ritchie et al. (2003), who noted that sample sizes in qualitative studies should be smaller than in quantitative research and that it is desirable to involve no more than 50 participants. Subsequently, by employing the intensity sampling method to identify information-rich participants (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), all four teacher educators from EC15 who had registered research projects in AY 2018–2019 were identified and invited to participate in this study. Additionally, 16 participants were selected by employing the snowball sampling method, which identifies appropriate locations to gain valuable information about the study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

Data Collection Tool and Data Collection

The two main data collection methods used in this study are document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis, which, according to Bowen (2009), is suitable for case study research, intends to uncover meaning and develop insights related to the phenomenon investigated. It was undertaken to gain better comprehension of institutional expectations and encouragement of teacher educators’ research engagement at each research site. The documents included records and meeting notes detailing teacher educators’ research engagement and the abstracts of research papers written by teacher educators at both research sites. Moreover, to investigate teacher educators’ research engagement in-depth through open-ended, probing interview questions (Adams, 2015), one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals and teacher educators. Two semi-structured interview guides were developed by the researcher based on the literature review and the research questions. The interview guide for the principals had four main guiding questions, regarding the principals’ views on teacher educator research, their attitude toward teacher educators’ research engagement, their expectations, and their attempts to encourage teacher educators’ research engagement. The interview guide for teacher educators consisted of questions to garner information regarding teacher educators’ understanding of teacher educator research, their attitudes toward teacher educator research, ways of their engagement with and in research, and the motives for and challenges to their research engagement. The interview schedule was set based on convenient dates and times for the participants. Before the interview, participants were informed about the research title/topic and purpose and assured that their data would remain confidential and would be used only for this research, where after they signed the consent letter, which was written clearly in Burmese. The interviews were recorded with the participants’ permission, and the researcher made notes during the interviews. The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Graduate School for International Development and Cooperation at the author’s institution (HUDEC-2020-0028).

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, the summative approach to qualitative content analysis, which goes beyond theory-informed categories and seeks to uncover the latent meaning of text data by interpreting its content, was applied (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The analysis began by identifying and counting particular types of content in the text data, namely institutional expectation and encouragement, teacher educators’ views on teacher educator research, and the way they engage in and with research, motives for and challenges to their research engagement, and then analyzing and interpreting its latent meaning. For this purpose, the emerging data from the documents and interviews were subjected to inductive content analysis by applying an open coding technique. The resulting data and patterns were filtered and refined repeatedly to develop categories. Data from relevant documents regarding institutional policy contexts for teacher educators’ research engagement, abstracts of research papers written by teacher educators, and interview data from the principals and teacher educators were triangulated to ascertain the main categories. Finally, to formulate general descriptions relevant to the research theme and to further analyze the data generated, an “abstraction” was conducted on the core categories (Creswell, 2013).

Findings

Institutional Expectations and Encouragement

The principal of EC15 had a favorable opinion of research engagement and stated that it significantly contributes to the development of the education system. With the expectation of involving every teacher educator in research engagement, the principal illustrated committed encouragement through consistent direct communication (see excerpt below). Additionally, the records of the college indicated that the institution arranged an EC-level ARC and invited research experts from universities to offer technical support three times within the three years of the study period—2016 (September), 2017 (June), and 2018 (June). The high expectation and commitment of the principal of EC15 were attested in the interview.
I believe that teacher educators’ research engagement contributes to the development of education, and it is important. . . . I want all the teacher educators in my EC to engage in research. . . . I try to talk to them and motivate them to engage in research. Although I cannot help them in the process of conducting their research, I often encourage them and ask what I can do to support them. (ECP1)

The principal of EC14 also positively perceived teacher educator research and highlighted the significance of research engagement for developing the entire education system. However, she anticipated that teacher educators’ research engagement might not be high. In EC14, there was no direct communication between the principal and teacher educators; instead, a hierarchical, administrative structure of communication existed, going via the heads of departments. Additionally, an autonomous arrangement for technical support was seen only in 2016 (September), and not in the following years. The excerpt below illustrates the principal’s low expectations and encouragement for research engagement of teacher educators.

For the improvement of education, only the information supported by research is effective and reliable. Teacher educators at ECs should engage in research to improve the quality of their teaching. . . . Honestly, I cannot set high expectations on them in terms of their research. . . . As a principal, I can generally encourage them to conduct research. I cannot ask them individually, though I connect with them through the heads of departments. (ECP2)

**Views of Teacher Educators on Teacher Educator Research**

In both cases, some respondents stated that teacher educator research is a type of practitioner research intended to improve teaching practices, whereas some other respondents believed that the nature of teacher educators’ research depends on the subject they teach, and that practitioner research, like action research, which examines the use of different teaching methods, is for those associated with educational studies and pedagogy, while academic research, which studies a particular subject deeply, is for those associated with academic disciplines. Other respondents perceived that teacher educator research could include different research types, such as action research to improve teaching practices, research about related subjects, or studies about the general education system. These varied understandings of teacher educator research are demonstrated in the interview excerpts below.

For me, research is finding ways to solve problems in teaching. (TE8)

Research is what we learn deeply about a particular subject to be a professional. For me, research is academic research, and it is different from action research—what teacher educators from the educational studies and pedagogy departments currently do. Action research focuses more on teaching methods while our research emphasizes studying deeply about a particular learning area in my subject. (TE5)

. . . . Apart from studies regarding teaching methods like in the case of action research and studies about subject knowledge, teacher educators can identify the strengths and weaknesses of teaching methods or the management system or a particular research area, which is studied in depth. (TE12)

However, the composition of conception categories differed between the two cases: in EC14, 50% (5 out of 10) of the respondents strictly believed that teacher educator research is practitioner research, in particular, action research; 40% (4 out of 10) conceived teacher educator research as academic research, that is, studying related subjects; and only 10% (1 out of 10) expressed a broader scope of conception, that is, teacher educator research as multiple types of research. However, in EC15, the percentages were 20%, 40%, and 40% for each category, respectively.

In both cases, the results indicated that most of the respondents (80% in each case) expressed a favorable attitude toward teacher educator research, highlighting its contribution to their professional lives and to the development of teacher education and the education system in Myanmar. This can be observed in the following interview quotes.

Regardless of [what] kind of teacher educator research, it is useful and beneficial for education in general. Those teacher educators who fail to engage in research shall be left behind. (TE4)

Personally, I like to be engaged in research because I believe that research makes our teaching more effective. Research is essential to identify problems in the education system, to find better ways to address teaching-learning situations, to have updated knowledge about a particular subject, and to develop the teacher education sector. (TE12)

**Teacher Educators’ Ways of Research Engagement**

Regarding teacher educators’ engagement with research, participants from EC15 appeared to be autonomous research consumers with different purposes and with independent initiatives for research engagement. This was evident in how they approached the sources of research materials, such as online research journals and research methodology books. They frequently visited the university library, borrowed research-related books from their colleagues, and sometimes bought books. They had different purposes for reading research-related materials, including to learn more about research methods, update their advanced research skills in preparation for the new curriculum and new education system, and prepare for their teaching and further studies. This is apparent in the following interview extracts.
I mostly read research books related to research methods. I borrow such books from the EC library and my colleagues. I also borrow some books from my friends and former teachers from the university. I want to learn how to conduct research systematically. Further, I want to prepare myself for our new curriculum and the new education system. (TE4)

Mostly I read research articles to prepare for scholarship applications for further study and prepare for my lessons. (TE6)

Respondents from EC14 seemed to be practitioner-research consumers. Teacher educators reported that sources of research-related materials included sample action research papers, online research-related materials, and research method books and journals, sometimes self-bought. The purposes of their engagement with research were mainly to inform their teaching and learn about research methods. For example, TE11 and TE19 gave specific accounts of their reading materials and their purposes of reading.

I usually read research, like action research papers, research journals, and research methods books. Sometimes I search online research journals, and sometimes I buy these research materials too. I read these materials mainly because I want to learn about research methods. (TE11)

Mostly, I search for further references for my teaching. Further, I want to modify my teaching in creative ways; hence, I refer to other research findings. (TE19)

Concerning teacher educators’ engagement in research, the results reported that participants from EC15 were research producers in different research fields. Their research themes included teaching methods in the classroom, particular subjects, and the new basic education curriculum. Accordingly, some of their research was done in the classrooms, such as a study by TE6 titled “How to Teach the Lesson Early Childhood Care and Development” to inform their teaching practices (Abstract, TE6). Others researched issues outside the classroom; for example, TE5 conducted a study titled “A Study on the Moat System of Yadanabon Ancient City” to analyze the urban planning of this ancient city in Myanmar (Abstract, TE5). Various research designs were applied in their studies, including the action research approach (e.g., Abstracts, TE6; TE7; TE9; TE10), literature reviews as a research method (e.g., Abstracts, TE5; TE7; TE10), survey design (e.g., Abstracts, TE1; TE2; TE4; TE6), experimental research design (e.g., Abstracts, TE2; TE3), and mixed methods (Abstracts, TE2; TE5; TE7).

Conversely, participants from EC14 were practitioner-research producers. The teaching-learning situation in their classrooms was their main research field, and action research was their main method. For example, TE12 conducted a study titled “An Analysis of Effectiveness for Think-Pair-Share Lesson by Using Different Teaching Methods” to enhance the learning outcomes of student teachers by using different teaching methodologies (Abstract, TE12).

**Motives for and Challenges to Teacher Educators’ Research Engagement**

Regarding motivation, a blend of internal and external factors motivated the participants from EC15 to engage with and in research. The results indicate a strong self-directedness to introduce innovative teaching methods and a desire to offer updated knowledge to their students. Their commitment to the profession was also linked to their internal drive. As these teacher educators were already intrinsically motivated, and the conditions became even more favorable when the MOE offered financial support. Another driver of research engagement was inspiration and encouragement from teachers they admired, who motivated them to be continuously engaged in research. Being assigned by the institution to the task of conducting research and taking part in an ARC was also described as an external motivating factor.

I wish to innovate the way I teach and to deliver updated knowledge to my students. This is the reason I try to keep engaged with research. (TE2)

I have been interested in conducting research for a while now. When teacher educators were encouraged to conduct research projects with the research fund grant from the Ministry, I had the chance to fulfil my desire. (TE4)

I also must express an external drive. . . . I would like to make my admired former teacher [who wants her former students to be research engaged] feel satisfied with my research work. (TE6)

In my case, if I am asked to do research, I will do it. . . . (TE7)

In the case of EC14, the main reason for teacher educators’ research engagement was an assignment from their institution. Moreover, most of the research they conducted was action research (9 out of 10).

Frankly, I conducted the action research because I was asked to. (TE12)

In my case, only when I am asked to [would I] join the ARC. . . . (TE19)

Related to challenges, in both cases, time constraints and low confidence due to lack of proper skillsets (research, ICT, and English language skills) were reported as challenges that hampered teacher educators’ research engagement. The results indicated that the teacher educators had a shortage of time not because of the teaching workload but because of the overload of school activities. Further, being a part of a top-down system and lack of commitment due to a limited scope for promotion hindered teacher educators’ research engagement.

Right now, we must spend a lot of our time on school activities other than teaching or researching. (TE3)
I do not have the skills required for research. I do not have knowledge about research methods, especially how to construct research questions and instruments. (TE7)

I am not good at using computers, which is essential for research engagement. (TE9)

I can read only research-related articles written in Burmese, but few research papers are available in the language. ... Whether or not I engage in research, I will not be promoted because I only have a bachelor’s degree, and I am old. ... (TE10)

In addition to the aforementioned common hindrances, respondents from EC14 stated that they did not clearly understand the advantages of the ARC and perceived asymmetry between the fields of study they preferred and those stressed by the Ministry.

I strongly believe in the benefits of teacher educators’ research engagement. However, I think researchers should use actual data and show the results honestly. I have seen some unrealistically positive results in some action research papers in ARC; this raises doubts about the sincerity of the researcher. If the results are not sincere, the point of ARC is dilutted. (TE15)

I just wish to conduct research for academic research papers. ... I am not willing to do action research, which teacher educators at ECs have been encouraged to do. (TE14)

**Discussion**

The results showed that two institutional leaders had a consensus about the significance of teacher educator research. However, their expectations and ways of supporting teacher educators’ research engagement differed between the two cases. While both institutions provided financial support, they differed in their way of arrangement for technical support. In addition, the mode of communication between the leader and followers was different between the two cases.

With a common relatively favorable attitude toward teacher educator research, teacher educators in both cases held various understandings of teacher educator research such as practitioner research, research about related subjects, and an assorted type of research. However, it was found that the composition of the different understandings of teacher educator research was different between the two ECs. In EC14, 50% (5 out of 10) of respondents conceived teacher educator research as practitioner research; 40% (4 out of 10) conceived teacher educator research as the study about related subjects; only 10% (1 out of 10) had broader conceptions of teacher educator research as assorted type of research; they identified academic research, educational research and practitioner research as teacher educator research. However, in EC15, the percentages were 20% (2 out of 10), 40% (4 out of 10), and 40% (4 out of 10) for each category.

The finding also showed that the two cases were different in the way teacher educators engage with and in research, and the reasons for their research engagement. Teacher educators from EC15 appeared to be autonomous research consumers and research producers in various research fields by applying several research methods for different purposes of engaging with and in research. However, their counterpart from EC14 seemed to be practitioner research consumers and research producers, engaging in only one type of research, which was practitioner research. For their research engagement, whereas a blend of internal and external drives was displayed in EC15, task assignment was their only main drive to conduct research in EC14.

Teacher educators’ research engagement from both ECs were deterred by the time constraint, low confidence due to the insufficient skillset (research skills, ICT skills, English language skills) for research engagement, restricted conception of teacher educator research, dying commitment to the profession due to the dead-end for promotion, and sticking in the top-down system. In addition to these hindrances, teacher educators from EC14 spelled out the critiques of ARC and their perceived discrepancy between the type of research that they preferred to engage in and the one that they felt encouraged.

A comparison between the two cases revealed four key underlying factors that influenced teacher educators’ research engagement: (i) personal factors, (ii) institutional factors, (iii) system-related factors, and (iv) policy-related factors. Personal factors included teacher educators’ conception of teacher educator research, their commitment to the profession, inspiration, and confidence in research engagement. Institutional factors included institutional expectations, support, and communication between the institutional leader and followers. System-related factors were time allocation for teacher educators’ research engagement and autonomy. Policy-related factors concerned teacher educators’ acceptance of policy actions and measures to encourage teacher educators’ research engagement.

**Personal Factors**

This study found a link between the respondents’ conceptions of what teacher educator research is and their attitudes toward research. The perceptions of those who conceived of teacher educator research as strictly concerned with the study of teaching methods in the classroom with practical utility were likely to be negative, and they raised more concerns even if they demonstrated favorable attitudes toward teacher educator research. This reflects what Ulvik and Smith (2019) asserted that teacher educators’ perceptions of research are likely to be informed by how they define and understand research.

Tack and Vanderlinde (2014) reported that teacher educators’ commitment or moral belief that they should engage in research promotes their research-related activity. This study...
reinforces the same proposition, particularly for those who have indicated active, continuous research engagement based on their commitment to the profession; conversely, those who were less committed to their profession were not actively engaged in research. During the transition period of ECs into HEIs, some reform policies indicated that teacher educators would not be promoted, which led to dwindling commitment to research engagement.

Some teacher educators in this study stated that they were inspired to engage in research by former teachers; however, others complained about the lack of inspiration within their institution. This reflects Griffiths et al.’s (2010) finding that teacher educators’ experiences along their career path contribute to their eagerness for research engagement. They discussed that those who were inspired by research experts while conducting collaborative research projects had a stronger tendency to be research active.

The present finding that lack of confidence hampered teacher educators’ research engagement is consistent with Alhija and Majdob’s (2017) finding that teacher educators’ self-confidence regarding their research ability was a predictor of their research productivity. However, it is imperative to note that the causes of low confidence in this study are multiple, including inadequate research, ICT, and language skills; little research experience; and poor educational qualifications.

**Institutional Factors**

This study identified the roles of institutional leaders’ expectations and support in encouraging teacher educators’ research engagement. This is consistent with the role of administrators, as highlighted by Willemse and Boei (2017). The mode of communication between the institutional leader and followers was also found to be critical in the present study. Direct communication between the institutional leaders and teacher educators helped the former identify the latter’s specific needs and provide guidance accordingly.

While the challenges of research skills and financial support available for research engagement were similar in the two cases, teacher educators from EC15 received technical support arranged by the institution. This is consistent with Griffiths et al.’s (2010) finding on the importance of receiving supervisory or technical input for research knowledge from experienced researchers. The institution’s consistent arrangement for technical support and the direct communication between the leader and fellow teacher educators could contribute to explaining the “organizational imponderables” proposed by Shamai and Kfir (2002, p. 401).

**System-Related Factors**

Organizational time allocation has always been recognized as an institutional factor that affects teacher educators’ research engagement and has been discussed from two main perspectives: time constraints due to teaching workload and commitment to students’ social needs (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2012; Griffiths et al., 2010; Tanner & Davies, 2009). However, time constraints in this study seem to be more related to the system under which all the ECs’ schedule in Myanmar is centrally allocated by the MOE. Time constraints can be associated with teacher educators’ conception of teacher educator research and the high workload stemming from formally unrecognized duties. Although it has not been considered in previous studies, the current study found that when teacher educators restrictively conceived teacher educator research as practitioner research, it created an obstacle to their research engagement. Considering that EC students’ daily schedule was already full because of overcrowded curricula, teacher educators perceived that they could rarely find enough time to conduct research in their classrooms.

This study found that teacher educators’ research activities are hindered not from heavy teaching workloads but from unbalanced workloads, which Davey (2013) has referred to as “hidden time” that can sometimes take up more time than formal working hours. All participants complained about this “hidden time” and how their responsibility to attend to school activities was much heavier than teaching or other EC duties. This prevented them from indulging in research-related activities.

Moreover, the study also found that teacher educators who conducted research only because they were assigned to conduct it were unlikely to maintain their research engagement in the long run. Similarly, Davey (2013) demonstrated that some teacher educators conducted research only to please the system. He criticized that, in the long run, it is likely to dilute the essence of research with the “freedom of inquiry” (p. 139) as they positioned research in the culture of top-down systems, or they were conducting research for the wrong reason.

**Policy-Related Factors**

Some teacher educators pointed out the shortcomings of ARCs, such as doubts about researchers’ sincerity and the validity of their outputs when asked to complete action research in a limited time, and demonstrated their disagreement with related policy measures. Although some teacher educators had research experience and skills, they were demotivated by what they perceived as the discrepancy between the research they preferred to conduct and the research that was encouraged. This reflects what Turley (2005) underlined as the crucial importance of practitioners’ buy-in to successfully implement a particular policy. Teacher educators’ policy awareness and buy-in for certain policy measures, such as the Ministry’s arrangement of ARCs, is necessary to gain practitioners’ active participation.
Conclusion

This study offers insights into understanding teacher educators’ professional learning and development activities in the context of restructuring teacher education programs. The study revealed four main underlying factors affecting teacher educators’ research engagement: personal, institutional, system-related, and policy-related factors. To conclude, teacher educators’ development of their research identity is a long-term journey, and it is impossible to jump into it directly either only by instilling research skills in the teacher educators or via a policy mandate for them to engage with and in research. The journey demands continuous commitment, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and autonomy in their research engagement. More importantly, teacher educators’ awareness and buy-in of policy actions and measures are also crucial for promoting their research engagement.

Implications of the Study

This study contributes to the existing literature, particularly with regard to the work of professional teacher educators, and offers practical implications to foster teacher educators’ research engagement. The findings show that teacher educators’ research engagement does not depend solely on the education system, ministry-level policy, and institutional-level policy or the individual level of teacher educators. Instead, it is a complex conglomeration of ministry policy, the institutional policy context, and teacher educators as individuals. Further, the mode of communication between institutional leaders and followers and the rich experiences of teacher educators also contribute to research engagement.

Some practical implications are also highlighted based on the underlying factors affecting teacher educators’ research engagement. Research engagement of teacher educators at ECs requires sustained efforts at the ministry, institutional, and individual levels of teacher education practitioners. More importantly, teacher educators’ research engagement is not a short-term activity, and, therefore, the related policy supports ought to be sustainable. It should be continuously encouraged by a combination of extrinsic motivation, such as research funding or promotion, as well as intrinsic motivation such as raising teacher educators’ self-directedness and autonomy in their research engagement and commitment to their profession. The revealed constraints due to the limited skillset suggest the need for professional standards, induction programs, and in-service capacity development programs for teacher educators. Through such induction programs, teacher educators’ commitment to the profession can also be enhanced.

In addition to the induction and in-service capacity development programs, research skill-intensive courses for the professional development of teacher educators should be provided. Through these courses, their awareness of what teacher educator research is and how and why it is important in the arena of teacher education could be increased, encouraging their “researcherly dispositions” (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014).

Moreover, in the long run, there is a need for a rich environment that contains not only the material supports and resources to accelerate the pursuit of teacher educators’ research engagement, but also the human resources from whom they can learn and get inspired for research engagement. In providing such an environment, stakeholders and agencies should pay attention to developing research-related materials prescribed in Burmese that are currently in short supply. Such efforts would improve teacher educators’ access to the resources for consuming research knowledge or engaging with research. Further, teacher educators should have more opportunities to attend research conferences to broaden their intellectual horizons. Organizing research conferences and creating opportunities for them to attend international research conferences are recommended as appropriate strategies for broadening teacher educators’ intellectual horizons. Additionally, partnerships or cooperative relationships with universities would promote teacher educators’ research experience and confidence. Research networks and a professional learning community should flourish for the exchange of ideas, research skills, and scholarship among professionals to establish a strong research culture.

At the institutional level, the hierarchical administrative structure and assignment of research tasks in a “top-down” system should be critically analyzed, as this study found that, in the long run, such arrangements might hamper teacher educators’ research engagement. It is also crucial to ensure the autonomy of teacher educators in their professional learning. Among other things, teacher educators should have greater control of their schedule to reduce the burden of “hidden time.” Teacher educators’ research engagement to prosper at EC requires considerable attention and priority by institutional leaders, coupled with provision of and arrangements for sufficient time.

Among multiple changes in their roles and responsibilities at this juncture of institutionalization as HEI and in the long term, individual teacher educators must maintain their professionalism by pursuing scholarship, research engagement, and professional learning. Additionally, they should be aware of the importance of multi-tasking in teacher education, as they are required to constantly update their skills and professionalism to survive as educators and academia in HEI teacher education.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions to the existing body of knowledge and its practical implications, this study has certain limitations. First, as a qualitative study, its results might not be generalizable. Second, in the analysis of the underlying factors affecting teacher educators’ research engagement, a control group with the same conditions in terms of teacher
educators’ research skills, working experience in EC, educational background, teaching hours, and research experience could not be included. The results indicate a complex web of underlying factors that impact teacher educators’ research engagement; subsequently, future research should be conducted to analyze the interrelationships among these factors.

Author Note

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Ethics Statement

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