Investigating Academic Research Culture in Public Sector Universities of Pakistan

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Abstract
This study aimed to investigate the existing provisions and barriers to the promotion of research culture in public sector universities in Pakistan. Based on four research questions, the researcher focused on six indicators of research culture and delimited the study to six universities. The sample of the study included six heads of departments of education, 60 teachers, and 90 students. Data were collected using questionnaire interviews, and focus group discussions. Percentage was used to analyze quantitative data and thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data. Teachers seem more satisfied about research culture as compared to students. The study recommends that basic facilities are needed for promotion of research culture. Measures should be adopted to
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Introduction
Research culture includes disciplinary and interdisciplinary ideas and values and an environment where researchers can flourish themselves as individuals with their own research capacities. It also includes the excitement of the academics to engage themselves in research projects (Evans, 2007). It can be said that research culture is the type of environment which leads academics to the research productivity in higher education institutions. Research culture may be described as the way we do research in an institution (Rao, 2003). According to Bako (2005) “Research culture' at universities or higher education institutions, is the framework in which students and their supervisors, in collaboration with stakeholders and/or funding bodies, collectively build capacity and intellectual capital for the benefit of all” (Bako, 2005, p.44). Research is now considered a core function of universities in Pakistan. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) is playing a vital role to promote research activities at higher education institutions (Higher Education Commission, 2005). No doubt many initiatives have been taken by HEC but the teachers especially in teacher education departments are stuck to the old and traditional ways of teaching and research. According The News (2010), faculty members of higher education institutions do not bother to update their knowledge and professional competencies through research activities and there is also a lack of interest and creativity in students of these institutions. The present government has empowered HEC to fully facilitate the institutions of higher education to improve quality of higher education and create a research environment to meet national and international demands. In this study, the researcher attempted to find out the existing situation regarding the provision of research resources to the research students and teachers.

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1. **Objectives of the study**

Objectives of the study were to:

1. Investigate the existing provisions for promoting research culture.
2. Identify the barriers to the development of research culture.

3. **Research questions**

The following questions were posed in this study:

a. Is there sufficient provision of research resources at the department?

b. Is the research environment motivating/encouraging?

c. Which type of research collaboration has the department established?

d. Is there provision of research support and incentives in departments?

e. What are the barriers to the development of research cultures?

4. **Delimitations and limitations**

This study was confined to public sector universities and only those students were selected in the sample who were at the stage of their research work. As this study investigated academic research culture, the six indicators of research culture studied were: research resources (human & physical), research environment, inter-institutional collaboration, research support and incentives, and research audit and publications.

5. **Procedure of the study**

The design of this study was based on descriptive and exploratory case study, and interpretive approach was applied to describe phenomena in six institutions. Multiple instruments (questionnaire, interviews, and focus group discussions) were used to collect data. Tools were discussed for validation with the faculty members and researchers in the department of education, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur and finalized according to the comments of the experts. To make the tools more reliable, a pilot study was also conducted at the department.

5.1. **Sample**

Sample of this study mainly comprised of six universities. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the desired sample. Six heads of the departments, 60 teachers and 90 M. Phil / PhD students from six teacher education departments/institutes of public sector universities of Pakistan were selected. The following universities were selected as sample (the researcher used pseudonyms to maintain anonymity of the participants):

UNI-A    UNI-B    UNI-C
UNI-D    UNI-E    UNI-F

5.2. **Instruments**

The researcher designed a questionnaire for teachers and the students based on six indicators of research culture as mentioned in delimitations. A focus group discussion and interviews were conducted on 4th research question (2nd objective) of the study. Reliability of different items of the questionnaire was tested by Cronbach’s Alpha using SPSS. The reliability of the questionnaire was .732 Cronbach's Alpha.

5.2. **Data analysis**

Data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed in terms of percentage on six indicators of academic research culture. For analysis of qualitative data regarding the barriers to promoting research culture, a thematic approach was used. All the discussions and interviews were transcribed by the researcher. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher used QSR NVIVO 9 to organize all the data into themes.

6. **Findings**

**UNI-A**

This figure shows an overall picture of research culture at UNI-A. Data indicate that there is not much difference between the views of students and teachers. Teachers seem more satisfied about flourishing research culture as compared to students. A room for improvement is apparent in areas, especially research environment, research collaboration and research publications.
Figure 1 shows that majority of teachers (34%+33%=67%) rate overall research culture at the department very well as compared to their students. The department seems providing good research opportunities to the researchers. There is a room for improvement in areas of research resources and research audit at the department and the students seem less satisfied as compared to the teachers. It can be concluded that students need to be facilitated by the department.

Figure 2 Overall on six indicators of research culture

UNI-B

Figure 3 on overall research culture at department of education Uni-C indicates that both the stakeholders are satisfied and rate the research culture quite well. The department/institute of education at the respective university seems developing good research culture and providing better opportunities to its researchers. The department needs improvement in area of research collaboration. Overall, it can be said that the department has good research culture for the researchers.
In figure 4, data on overall research culture at department of education, Uni-D indicate that both the stakeholders rate research culture quite well but there is room for improvement in areas of research resources, research collaboration and research publications. The department needs to focus on improving research culture.

In figure 5, data on overall research culture at department of education, Uni-E indicate that both the stakeholders rate research culture quite well at department. There is room for improvement in areas of research resources, research collaboration and research support and incentives. Overall research culture at the department seems flourishing.
In figure 6, data on overall research culture at department of education, Uni-F shows that a significant majority of teachers rate research culture quite well but there is a room for improvement in all areas of research culture at the department for students because it seems that the teachers may have better opportunities at department as compared to their students.

However, the quantitative data could not help to find out the barriers which hinder promoting research culture. The researcher further discussed the phenomenon with students and the administration through interviews and focus group discussions and found out many issues related to research culture.

7. **Barriers to the Development of Research Culture**

Lack of physical resources was a big issue in majority of the universities. Students were not able to make themselves aware of the recent developments and global trends as they did not have computers or internet access in most of the universities. They were bound to share digital sources with other departments which created time management problem. The universities where faculty was available, the respondents discussed that there was big gap between senior and junior faculty. Senior faculty was very senior and junior was very junior that created mismatch of competencies and expertise. The research environment was appreciating and motivating for the researchers but in some departments the students raised issues like favouritism towards students. Research
collaboration seemed lacking in majority of the universities and teachers were getting more benefits from national or international collaborations as compared to the students. Majority of the universities had lots of financial resources but undue hurdles were created during sanctioning of funds for research. Funding process involved departmental and supervisory clashes and favouritism. Lack of time management and favouritism seemed to be at the top of all the issues discussed by the respondents. Lack of research skills was also another barrier in the development of research culture because students were not yet able to produce a good research work due to the lack of competency in research practices. Many good pieces of research were locked in shelves because the researchers did not have interest or ability to produce research papers from them and get them published in research journals/books.

8. Conclusion

There was a lack of physical resources (library facility, updated materials, computers with internet access, photocopier, printing, facility, proper working place for students) at most of the departments of education. Research support and incentives were found significant by the respondents of this study, especially monetary incentives, supervisory support and appreciations from the environment. Research collaboration was only found strong in a couple of universities. There were lots of opportunities for the researchers to get them involved in research activities and to develop their research skills.

Some of the departments lacked competent and experienced teachers. Teachers did not share their ideas and research work with the students. Research activities were hardly conducted, and when conducted, favouritism could be observed. A significant majority of the respondents seemed dissatisfied with their supervisors due to their biased behaviour and mismanagement. Time management was a big issue and supervisors did not manage their time and the researchers waited for hours to meet them for feedback; this behaviour of the supervisors seemed to create hatred among researchers. There was also lack of research skills in majority of the supervisors and supervisors themselves acknowledged their incompetency to supervise M.Phil/PhD students. The research students especially felt difficulty in academic writing, using information technology, reviewing and summarizing literature and data analysis. Quality research had only been locked inside shelves because they did not find a way to disseminate it.

9. Recommendations

Higher Education Commission should provide basic research facilities to the departments. On the other hand, the departments should make efforts to generate their own resources in the form of projects. Separate work stations are required for M.Phil/PhD students with internet access in each department offering these programs. The departments which share their resources with other departments should design a proper time schedule to save researchers’ time and provide them learning friendly environment. Research students should be involved in projects by their supervisors to enhance their research skills & capabilities.

A course on research skills must be compulsory at M.Phil/PhD level and there should be a training session for research students and their supervisors before starting their research work to enhance their research skills especially academic writing, using technology, reviewing the relevant literature and data analysis to avoid embarrassment during research.

The departments must not compromise on quality and rules for conducting good research. At least one ‘competent teacher in research’ should be freed from all departmental duties to guide research students and conduct research activities at national and international level.

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