RE-SEARCHING THE RESEARCH CULTURE IN TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT

The universities are the research oriented institutions that promote research culture throughout the world academia. As research culture includes disciplinary and interdisciplinary ideas and values, it is not easy to flourish it in the universities overnight especially where research is relatively a new. This study is an effort to investigate research culture in universities. The main purpose of this study is to find out the existing provisions for promoting research culture and to identify the barriers to the development of research culture in higher education institutions of Punjab province. The design of study is descriptive and exploratory in nature. The interpretive approach is applied to describe phenomena. Sample of this study is derived from six public sector universities of the Punjab offering M.Phil/PhD programs in Education. The sample consists of 06 heads of departments, eighteen teachers and twenty students of M.Phil/ PhD. Data is collected through interviews and focus group discussions based on four indicators of research culture. The major findings highlight that the research resources for scholars are needed to be provided at department level. Inter university research collaboration is also required to promote the research culture and that research culture is not limited to four indicators of research. It is recommended that further researches may be conducted to investigate its other aspects.

Keywords: *Research Incentives, Environment, Support & Research Collaboration*

INTRODUCTION

The term `research' can be defined as: "*an intellectual activity and a source of creating new knowledge*" (Pratt, Margaritis & Coy, 1999).This term clarifies that the central mission and the purpose of the universities is the creation of new knowledge. In other words, culture is considered as influential framework for those who are decision makers and most importantly, administrators who need to possess a complete understanding of the customs and traditions, the structures whereof may be formal/informal. 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). Thomas (2001) comments that research funding increases individuals' performance of work. On the other hand, Berliner (2002) argues that the lack of research funding, lack of research skills, lack of interest, lack of time management skills and lack of competency work as barriers to the development of research culture in an institution. At university level, as discussed by Altbach (2003), research culture is facilitated through managing the workload of the academic staff to create

more space for research, research funding, monitoring and judging the quality of research conducted at the institution and training arrangements to develop research skills. It also includes excitement of the academics to engage themselves in research projects (Evans, 2007).

As reported by RAE, Teachers are the most significant contributors in promoting research culture and the same role is played by teacher education institutions as these institutions are responsible for producing future teachers (RAE, 2008). Majority of the universities are at their initial stage to flourish research culture. It is a right time to study perceptions of academicians about prevailing of research culture in their universities (Evans, 2011). A society in which knowledge industry plays a vital role in enhancing its power and wealth; Universities play an important role in sustaining the knowledge society through research activities (Wye, Brangan, Cameron, Gabbay, Klein, Anthwal & Pope, 2015). In Pakistan research culture in the country is still far from being inspiring. Majority of the universities in Pakistan have strong tradition of teaching and other curriculum activities, but are weak in promoting research culture (Agha, 2015). Therefore there is a dire need to understand the research environment at the universities to shift the focus of the faculty from teaching traditions to research activities.

LIETRATURE REVIEW
The research culture in the higher education institutes includes disciplinary and interdisciplinary ideas and values while creating a simultaneous environment where the researchers can flourish themselves as individuals with their own research capacities and aptitudes. The universities of developed countries have rich research culture. Academicians in these countries contribute in the development of knowledge based economy through their scholarly research outputs. On the other hand, universities in the developing countries have strong teaching traditions but weak research culture. Basic reason is the shortage of resources at the universities (Fullan, 2001). In a country like Pakistan, there is a great shortage of resources to the researchers, though Higher Education Commission (HEC) has taken many initiatives to upgrade infrastructure at universities by investing lots of money for last many years but still it will take some time to develop such an environment for promoting research culture. When a researcher enters in research field, his/her colleagues, research fellows and friends are of great value to him/her. They are very helpful for the researchers to provide productive feedback, to encourage and to provide additional support that the researcher may need. It is also important to enhance academic productivity of new researchers (Harrison & Samuel, 2001).

Role of supervisor is also of significant value to promote research culture at universities. When an incompetent or less interested supervisor does not keep promises and does not follow policies or there is lack of communication between researcher and the supervisor, the productivity level of the researchers is marred considerably. It also has the impact on the quality of research conducted under supervision of bad supervisor (Fetalver, 2003). Research also needs motivation, satisfaction and encouragement from the workplace environment. A good workplace environment can make

difference in the performance, motivation and the retention level of the researchers (Yuan, Jiao, Yu, Xiong & Nengfou, 2005). Every productive work if appreciated can enhance productivity. Provision of reward/incentives from higher authorities has been linked with research performance of the universities since last few decades. To strive for excellence and research capacity building is not only target of western universities but according to Billot (2010) various reward systems and incentive mechanisms have been introduced in Asian universities to upgrade the research performance and profile of the faculties, it is source of encouragement for them to conduct research activities (Brenton & Driskill, 2010).

In Pakistan, universities are focusing more on teaching this paradigm must be changed because universities cannot contribute to national development without promoting research culture (Mashhood, 2015). Universities have difficult time factually assessing their comparative research strengths and weaknesses and therefore turn to external bodies to provide sources and guidance (Patel, 2016). In Pakistan, Higher education commission has established Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) in all the universities and the higher education institutions. The purpose of QECs is to patronize research activities in universities and evaluate the quality of research conducted by the students and staff. This study is an attempt to investigate research culture at different teacher education institutions in public sector universities in Pakistan with view to suggest some practical measures to develop research environment. This study took an insight of research culture provided at teacher education institutions in public sector universities in Pakistan.

Objectives of Study
This research was conducted to:

- ➢ Investigate the existing provisions for promoting research culture.
- ➢ Identify the barriers to the development of research culture.

Research Questions
Research questions of this study are:

- ➢ Is there sufficient provision of research resources at the department?
- ➢ Is the research environment motivating/encouraging?
- ➢ Which type of research collaboration has the department established?
- ➢ Is there provision of research support and incentives in the department?
- ➢ What are the barriers to the development of research cultures?

RESEARCH DESIGN
The design of this study was based on the descriptive and exploratory case study, and interpretive approach was applied to describe phenomena in six institutions and various issues related to research culture were explored. Considering complexity of the issue, interviews, and focus group discussions were used. The researcher's personal information and diary notes also helped as

supportive material. To make the tools more reliable, a pilot study was also conducted at the department.

Sample of Study

In this study purposive sampling technique was used. Sample of this study mainly comprised of six universities, six heads of the department, three teacher from each department and five groups of M. Phil / PhD students (four-five students in each group). Universities were given pseudonyms to keep secrecy of the data. These were:

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

Instruments of Study

In this study, the researcher designed a structured interview and focus group discussion for the participants. These tools were based on four indicators of research culture, which were Indicator 1: research resources (human and physical). Indicator 2: research environment. Indicator-3: research collaboration. Indicator-4: research support and incentives.

DATA ANALYSIS

For analysis of data, a thematic approach was used. Initially, all the discussions and interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Notes were also taken by the researcher during discussion and interviews to highlight the major trends. These notes contributed to initial data reduction. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher compiled the data on templates to organize notes from the transcriptions into more compact and accessible form. Four major themes were derived after managing all sub-themes which were:

Theme.1: Research Resources
Theme.2: Research environment
Theme.3: Research collaboration
Theme.4: Research support and incentives

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section sheds light on the various issues as themes of research culture derived from the data. All the themes are based on the discussion with the students of research, teachers and the heads of the department.

Theme1: Research Resources

Research resources such as library facilities, updated materials, computers with internet access, photocopier, printing facilities, proper working place for students, research journals, supporting staff and financial support from the departments to research students can contribute to develop the research interests of the students. Research centres, faculties and schools are expected to create such a vibrant type of research culture where an individual researcher or a research team can collaborate with each other. It is beneficial for the individual as well as for the university. The

essence of research culture with regard to facilities is discussed by Barnett (2000) that researchers are entitled to have computer facilities, access to copy material, print and scan, internet, subject related software, communicative sources, productive colleagues, conversant and research-minded leader. When the researcher discussed the issue regarding resources with heads of the department of education and their M.Phil/PhD students, the majority of them complained about lack of these basic resources at department level. The head of the department of Uni-A drew a picture of his department and complained that: "We have not even room for students to sit and work, no computer lab or library, we share with other department, we have only two teachers having PhD degree (one is visiting teacher from school side), regarding research there is no facility."

Teachers also described same situation about the availability of the resources at the departments. They also showed their concerns about the lack of human resources at the departments. One of the participants showed serious concern over the lack of competent teachers in the department. If I demand some kind of grant for research project, I cannot find teachers to get assistance from them (Head, UNI-B). Another embarrassing comment was: Students are forced on to get their papers published for their supervisors because these papers count for their promotions. Un-consented help from the students is bad practice in the universities (Student-C). The interviewee at Uni-C also described a gap between the most senior and the most junior faculty members that hinders research activities at the department. There is a gap between most seniors and most juniors and those who can make bridge, are not available. One of respondents (UNI-F) says: No infrastructure/ facilities are necessary, why we talk about them...ok, if they are there, there is no interest of students; then what will be done? I think nothing, the interest and competency is more important to develop research culture'.

The above participants did not agree that the resources had any importance for the research; rather students' interest had significant value in research. The faculty members of this department also discussed the lack of interest on the part of researchers. However, there was another group of students and administration that showed greater level of satisfaction. Students and head of the department at Uni-E were almost satisfied because, during discussion, the researcher found that they had somehow managed research resources at department because they had more than three PhD teachers at department. So, good workplaces always encourage students to work, as Harrison and Samuel (2001) say that researchers get motivation, encouragement and satisfaction from the workplace facilities and environment. Thomas (2001) Darbyshire (2015) adds that researchers must be facilitated especially they need an access to data bases and research engines which make them aware of the researches conducted at national and international level and increase research productivity level of the university. Researchers' satisfaction with resources is as much important as the research itself.

Theme 2: **Research environment**

Research environment is concerned with active engagement of researchers in research activities, positive group climate, encouragement from faculty and fellows, permission to work in department till late in the evening, initiative and participatory approach of head of the department, research orientations, and sharing of research ideas and experiences. It is all due to cultivation of positive research culture at the universities. In this study, majority of the respondents at UNI-C, UNI-D, and UNI-F seemed satisfied and their behavior showed that they had good research environment at the department, they could work till late at the department and the head of the department always encouraged them to do more work. Satisfaction of majority of the respondents at the department indicates good research culture. The head of the department of UNI- D said that: I am fully satisfied because you can see there is majority of our own students in MPhil and PhD class, they like the environment at the department and get admission here.

Majority of the researchers and the faculty members feel satisfied in that environment and keep themselves engaged in their research or teaching activities. As the head of the department of UNI-F said, "The environment is fully supportive here, everyone has right for everything, everybody is free to do his/her work with own pace, I do nothing for my faculty except encourage them on their good tasks and help them plan their research activities, in returns they provide better environment to their students for research." The head of the department (UNI-A) seems quite dissatisfied and opines, "Well honestly speaking, I still think that we do not have reasonably good research environment, reason is the lack of resources here, lack of senior professors and will and wisdom of research students. We do not have proper guidelines and roadmap for those who are stakeholders. So things are ambiguous."

Research resources, in views of the head of the department of UNI-A, are also of significant value to shape research culture at the department. Availability of the senior faculty members and the competency of the research students are also influential to flourish research environment at the department. If institutions wish to create healthy atmosphere, they must recognize the need to design research policy and procedures with measurable targets. Most necessarily the institutions should be able to facilitate their researchers to upgrade their knowledge and enhance their research skills. It is the responsibility of the administration or employer to ensure satisfactory atmosphere to maximize the research productivity but sometimes the department or the administration of the university loses its purpose of promoting research.

Theme 3: **Research collaboration**
Collaboration in research activities provides opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise among collaborators. Research collaboration in this study is regarded as the use of library facilities and computer laboratories of other universities, easy access of research journals of other universities, combined publications, interaction with other researchers, guidance from other supervisors, department link with national/international bodies and encouragement to participate at the research forums. Studies reviewed by Fullan (2001) indicate that the progress of research

depends on collective capacity of individuals and institutions. The most practicing collaboration is fostered within or between institutions not individuals and it can range from simple advice to active participations in research activities or specific piece of research work.When asked about the nature of research collaboration, one of the interviewees says: "I am happy to say that this department has very good collaboration with Australia University, the other with UK University. It is at its final stage of signing MOU (Head UNI-E)."

On the other hand, very optimistic views came from students and teachers. One of the students (Student-D) in group discussion says: This department has capacity to flourish research activities because the head of the department and few of his colleagues are very much competent in developing research links at national and especially at international level. The above mentioned views clearly indicate that the head of the department is willing and enthusiastic to develop more links but he needs faculty support and expertise. There are also few universities where the research links are not as good as required. But the heads of the department are actively trying for research links: No national or international links are in written agreement but scholars are free to attend seminars and conferences anywhere. They also share their research with others in different seminars and they go to the conferences even international conferences many of them have attended by their own effort. I only encourage them (UNI-C).

There are also few universities where the research links are not as good as required. But the heads of the department are actively trying for links. According to the students of this group (Student-C & D, UNI-A), "We did not see any international research activity at this department. Teachers may be involved in these activities but we could not find any opportunity to participate at any research forum." This raises another issue of students' involvement in research activities. They also mention that they need an international exposure in research. Participants of focus group (Student-B & Student-C) showed their dissatisfaction towards this aspect of research culture. According to the students, there is a shortage of teachers and especially competent teachers who can make efforts to establish national or international research links. The reason may be that the university has not a long history and the department of education has been recently established. University may take some time to resource the department. The interviewee at UNI-D also showed his dissatisfaction towards this aspect of research.

Theme 4: Research Support and Incentives
A significant theme emerges from the discussion with the respondents' like research support and incentives. This aspect of research culture is linked with rewards for good research work, tapping external sources, funding for research work, department's capacity to generate its own sources, availability of research grants, supervisors' skills to guide researchers, provision of feedback by the supervisor, availability of supervisor, encouragement to participate at research forums, and timely help by the supervisors to the researchers. Literature on this aspect of research indicates that incentives and institutional support for the research is the key to successful research activity.

Numerous supported the idea that students and faculty of the institution, if encouraged, could better perform at national or international forums to share their research competencies. In this study, when asked about research support and incentives, one of the interviewees shared, "It is most important because many of the research organizations are market oriented. I mean they ask for certain fee for publication. So you know corporate sector or private sector charge fee for publication. If it is provided by the university it is much encouraging factor for researchers and faculty members (UNI-E)."

Teachers and the students of this university (student B & D) also raised the same issue of monetary incentives but they were satisfied with support provided by the department regarding supervisory practices. They emphasized that support or incentives were of greater value for the researchers especially monetary incentives for good research work could be source of motivation. They indicate an important issue of publishing research paper in any reputed journal that each internationally reputed journal demands publication fee. After the completion of their PhDs, they are offered with job in any public/private sector university but it depends on competence. In light of students' discussion it seems to be failure due to favouritism in universities. Universities are only promoting their teachers not PhD students. Fresh PhDs are not appreciated in field. Universities have biased behavior, our universities do not offer jobs to fresh PhDs that can be an incentive for fresh students but contrary to that, only the teachers ....already working are promoted in universities (Student B, UNI-D).

These views reflect favoritism as an overwhelming factor in universities that needs the attention of the higher authorities. Researchers need support or incentives either in form of supervisory support or financial support from their departments. It is also obvious that support or incentives may not only include monetary incentives but a little appreciation and encouragement from the department and supervisor can do a lot to increase research interest of the students. Competent staff contributes to tape external sources in forms of research grants and projects that lead the department to research productivity and if the researchers are also involved, it enhances their research competency. Cook, Holley and Andrew (2007) also feel and perceive support influential for research work. There may be institutional boundaries which need to be discovered or explored to get more flexible ways of supporting and rewarding research.

Barriers to Development of Research Culture

An analysis of the documents regarding research culture at universities of Pakistan and interviews & discussion with the respondents reveal that every aspect of research culture is affected by different factors which hinder promoting research culture. Primary focus of higher education in Pakistan seems teaching, not research while in advanced countries research is the priority of the higher education institutions and they are playing significant role in socio-economic development of the country. This study indicates different barriers that affect research focus in universities and there is lack of good research culture. Lack of physical resources is a big issue in majority of the

universities. They are not providing as much facilities to the students as required at M.Phil/PhD level. Students are not able to make themselves aware of the recent developments and global trends as they do not have computers or internet access in most of the universities. A lack of senior and competent faculty was also found at university level in majority of the universities. The universities where faculty is available, 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.

According to the majority of the respondents, the research environment is appreciating and motivating for the researchers but in some departments the students raise issues like favouritism towards favourite students and negative criticism towards others. These practices hinder to the development of research attitude & interest among students and create hatred towards environment. Research collaboration seems lacking in majority of the universities and teachers are getting benefits from national or international collaborations as compared to the students. Another important issue has been raised by the respondents; that is about research funding. Majority of the universities have lots of financial resources but undue hurdles are created during getting funds for research. Funding process suffers from departmental and supervisory clashes and favouritism. Teachers themselves are availing lots of opportunities of handling funded projects but only those students are involved who are in favourite list. Research students and the supervisors are part and parcel of the research work. Good piece of research can only be produced by the students if there is good relationship and coordination between the two.

During discussion, majority of the respondents discussed about supervisory practices that were not up to the level of satisfaction of the students and also of the supervisors themselves. Lack of time management and favouritism seemed at the top of all the issues discussed by the respondents. Favouritism seemed an issue that had been raised many times by the majority of the respondents during arguing research environment, research support & incentives and supervisory practices. Lack of research skills is also another barrier in the development of research culture because students are not yet able to produce a good research work due to the lack of competency in research practices and skills. Many good researches are locked in shelves because the researchers do not have interest or ability to produce research papers from them and get them published. Above all are the major barriers that hinder research practices and the smooth conduct of research. To develop good research culture at the universities, there is always need to remove barriers and provide proper workplace for research where researchers may concentrate on their research and most importantly, research, not teaching, needs to be focused and prioritized.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study can only be helpful for those institutions/ universities which are offering M.Phil/PhD in education. It was found that: There was 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. The administration of the departments managed resources with other departments and shared facilities with them. This created the problem of time management for the students of M.Phil/PhD. Research activities were hardly conducted, and when conducted favoritism could be observed. A significant majority of the respondents seemed satisfied for getting appreciation and encouragement from the environment but they still needed monetary incentives for research because, if they wanted to get a research paper published in good reputed journal; it demanded a huge fee. A significant majority of the respondents seemed dissatisfied with their supervisors due to their biased behavior and mismanagement of research. According to the majority of the teachers and the heads of the department, students do not have interest in research; they only find shortcuts to get degree.

Recommendations

The higher education commission provides the lots of funds to promote research culture at the universities. It is the responsibility of universities to provide research facilities to the departments. On the other hand, the departments may generate their own resources in the form of projects. A separate work station is required for M.Phil/PhD students with internet access in each department offering these programs. The departments which share their resources with other departments may design a proper time schedule to save the researchers' time and give them learning friendly environment. Rigorous and concentrated efforts are required to engage the researchers and the teachers in different research activities like seminars and conferences to create a healthy research environment. All the supervisors of M.Phil/PhD students might be given an orientation before supervising the students on how to manage their time and how to behave with students who are taking greater interest and those who are taking less interest. Research culture is not limited to four indicators of research; therefore its other aspects should also be investigated by the future researchers.

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