

FACTORS AFFECTING LECTURERS FROM RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract. The capacity of lecturers to conduct research has long been considered an essential component that keeps them posted on the latest updates in their field of contribution to their individual professional development and their teaching practice. However, several factors have kept teachers from involving in as well as conducting research activities. Based on existing studies, the current paper reviews and analyzes the six common factors that prevent lecturers from research engagement. These factors include limited resources; lecturers' limitations regarding skills, beliefs, and knowledge; economic factors; non-collaborative school culture; lack of teachers' awareness, and demotivators as mentioned in the paper. The analysis of these factors made it possible to shed some light on the issue and led to the finding of some strategies to eradicate it. The recommendations of this paper include better funding for institutions and professors that conduct research and the awareness-raising and training of lecturers when engaging in research.

Keywords: research engagement, lecturers, affecting factors.

1. Introduction

There are several benefits that have been stated when lecturers conduct research or at least read and make use of others' research. Some of these benefits include facilitating lecturers' critical thoughts, boosting their self-esteem, and increasing their awareness of students' needs. Moreover, it is claimed that when lecturers engage with research (through reading research papers) and in research (by doing research themselves) as well as make pedagogical decisions based on sound research evidence, they will bring a beneficial effect on both teaching and learning (Hargreaves, 2001). More importantly, it is stated that being research-engaged provides benefits for lecturers' professional development and for their status as professionals. Therefore, in recent years it is understandable to see a drive to engage lecturers more fully both with and in educational research (Borg, 2009). Despite these benefits of research engagement, not many lecturers are willing to conduct research for several reasons. This study is aimed at providing a detailed analysis of factors affecting lecturers from engaging in research by reviewing previous studies on the topic conducted. The most typical barriers that keep lecturers from engaging in research are limited resources, lecturers' limitations, economic factors, non-collaborative school culture, lack of lecturers' awareness, and demotivators and they will be discussed in the development of the paper alongside suggested solutions to limit this issue.

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2. Content

2.1. Factors affecting lecturers from research engagement

2.1.1. Limited resources

One of the main barriers that prevent lecturers from engaging in research is the limitations of the resources which include the shortage of time, limited references, and lack of expert support (Borg, 2006). These obstacles cause the negative of learners to research although they know the potential benefits of engagement in research. Among these barriers, the lack of time is one of the main reasons that keeps learners away from research. (Borg, 2006, 2009). Crookes and Arakaki (1999) stated that the majority of lecturers do not engage in research due to the huge amount of work they have, as well as some other duties like the preparation of lesson plans.

Related to this perspective, Allison and Carey (2007) discovered that most lecturers recognized that the time-consuming demands of teaching left them with too little space or energy for conducting research or carrying a project to completion and publication. As a matter of fact, the pressure of time-consuming is usually considered the most cited reason when explaining lecturers' low engagement in research.

In consideration of the essential factors to engage in research, the limitations in accessing the previous research literature are acknowledged as another barrier to lecturers' research engagement. In reality, this barrier has exerted a direct influence on some lecturers since working with literature is an enormous challenge for any researcher. Finding appropriate literature to answer the research questions takes more time unless there are outside supporters like librarians, other researchers, and supervisors (O'Leary, 2004). Therefore, if there is no expert aid, lecturers would encounter numerous difficulties which keep them from carrying out their research (O'Leary, 2004; Borg, 2006).

This is similar to the discoveries in Allison and Carey's study (2007) in which lecturers lose their confidence in research methodology due to the lack of monitoring and supervision from an expert. That is to say, lecturers doing research require guidance to figure out the path to follow when formulating research questions, discussing relevant themes, and searching appropriate literature from previous studies. Generally, new researchers deal with a great number of barriers to engagement in research; therefore, they need a tremendous amount of expert advice when going through the whole process (O'Leary, 2004).

2.1.2. Lecturers' challenges

The barriers to lecturers' engagement with research may derive from internal factors, or lecturers themselves. In other words, these factors include the limitations in lecturers' skills and knowledge. This means that teachers are suspicious of and lack trust in their published research projects (Shkedi, 1998).

Sharing the same concern, Worrall's (2004) study claimed that although teaching staff were encouraged in cultivating educational research, some of them felt reluctant to conduct some research due to their misconception that research was conducted on lecturers rather than by teachers with a specific explanation: "research was something that's done to them by people outside" (p.145). The participants in this study also felt embarrassed to declare they have enough abilities to research because it seems very "grand" to them.

Such research unwillingness was also addressed by Hancock's (1997) study on looking for the reasons why class lecturers were so opposed to becoming researchers. Of the four listed areas of difficulty, Hancock (1997) identified a barrier as "the lack of expectation that lecturers should research and write about their professional practice" (p.93) which is closely connected to lacking teachers' beliefs as a discouraging factor to lecturers' research engagement. However, although the participants in Burn's (1999) study had positive attitudes toward doing research, they also

shared the same concern that they did not believe they have adequate skills, training, or knowledge to carry out research according to empirical requirements. Another example of this concern is shared by Borg (2009) that lecturers showed their lack of engagement with research since they thought that it has no practical value in their classes.

Furthermore, the limitations in lecturers' skills and knowledge are considered another significant discouraging factor to lecturers' research engagement (Burn, 1999; Borg, 2006, 2009; Allison and Carey, 2007). Specifically, by exploring how language-teaching colleagues in a Canadian university view the relationship between research and teaching,

Allison and Carey (2007) indicated lack of expertise is a hindering factor to lecturers striking out on doing research and then reducing their confidence to conduct research alone even master's graduates in this context. The specific limitations included deficiencies in research design, statistical analysis, and negotiating the process of publication.

Along with this concern, Borg (2006) mentioned a lack of technical knowledge of research in relation to a lack of expertise in research design or data analysis. These lecturers' challenges were considered as another reason preventing lecturers' research participation. Related to this perspective, Borg's (2009) study revealed that along with nine identified reasons for not doing research, lacking knowledge of research methods is the third most cited reason by the participants. This contributes to a comprehension of research engagement being an irrelevant and unfeasible activity among lecturers. In other words, the limitations of research knowledge lead to limited confidence in lecturers' research capacities (Henson, 1996).

2.1.3. Economic factors

Besides diverse unexpected constraints to lecturers' research engagement, school lecturers also deal with economic matters (Elliot, 1991). The fact is that most commercial schools maximize lecturers' workload to make school more lucrative. Obviously, school lecturers have no additional payment for their extra time dedicated to research; in other words, the majority of schools demand that their teachers complete a vast number of annual teaching hours, which is a strict requirement for each of the teaching staff to ensure the profit of the school. Consequently, teachers have to make great efforts to achieve their teaching hours per year unless they would be transferred to another position of an officer at school.

The high pressure of workload is seen as one of the main reasons that demotivate teachers from taking part in research since it might not bring them any financial benefits. These results are similar to the ones discovered in the survey of constraints on doing research conducted by McKernan (1993). It is clearly stated that most lecturers have faced some professional factors including union policy and contract. The fact is that some lecturers have signed part-time working contracts; as a result, they do not count on any financial support from their school for researching as it is likely part of their teaching duties. Nevertheless, funding has been almost a high obstacle that directly influences the lecturers' decision to engage in research, the barrier which results in the online investigation of lecturers' attitudes toward educational research conducted by the National Teacher Research Panel (2011).

On the other hand, school lecturers expect that they could have received advice on where and how to gain funding. Similarly, most teachers feel that they lack knowledge of funding resources. They complain that they do not have enough access to specialist support. Apart from organizational challenges, lecturers may feel that attempting to investigate changes in practice through action research is not worth the effort since it might not bring them personal financial benefits (Oberg and McCutcheon, 1987).

2.1.4. Non-collaborative school culture

A factor that affects lecturers' research engagement is their non-collaborative school culture. More exactly, the lack of support from colleagues, students, and staff, whether engaged in

research or not, has discouraged lecturers from getting involved in research activities. An example of such an issue is given by Atay (2006) when she claimed that the lecturers in her in-service training were eager to conduct their studies at first, but were not able to pursue them because their school administration did not grant them any time off for doing research. Moreover, she could not even help her trainees either because she had her workload to attend to.

In the same vein, Borg (2009) discovered from his study with 505 lecturers in 13 countries three reasons that keep lecturers from engaging in research due to the lack of support from colleagues and students. These reasons may include the denial of lecturers to cooperate when asked for help; the lack of cooperation from learners; and the absence of an expert that can offer advice to lecturers when they conduct their research.

In addition to the lack of support from colleagues and students, there is also the case of the staff that conducts research and those lecturers who do not find “a keener sense of isolation and lack of connection with the work and ideas of others” (Allison and Carey, 2007, p.63). On the same hand, Worrall (2004) discovered in his investigation that lecturers felt that research was “something that’s done to them by people outside.

Similarly, Borg’s (2009) study noticed that a good amount of lecturers believed their work is “to teach not to do research” and this was their answer to justify their lack of research. In the specific case of language teaching research, when it comes to the relationship between linguists and teachers, most published commentary accept that teacher educators and academic applied linguists hold a different role from that of second language lecturers and that some imbalance in the profession or between the related professions distinguishes an organized institutional life (Allison and Carey, 2007). This is proved by the fact that there are two types of staff: research-engaged and non-research-engaged lecturers; even though it is harmful for both teaching and researching. Allison and Carey (2007) asserted that there should be an association between language teaching practices and research since that is “the only way to answer some of the key questions about classroom language-learning and teaching” (p. 63).

2.1.5. Lack of lecturers’ awareness

One of the factors that pushes lecturers away from research is the lack of lecturers’ awareness about the importance of doing research. As Allison and Carey (2007) stated the limitations of lecturers’ awareness of the importance of research in their professional development are considered as challenges to teachers’ efforts to conduct research. To back this idea, the study by Borg (2009) revealed lecturer participants’ less positive attitudes toward research, or “having a low level of interest in reading about research” (p. 370) which is emphasized as another reason hindering lecturers’ research engagement. The study results further clarified one reason related to the limitations of lecturers’ awareness of research as lecturers realize there are no connections between their teaching practice and engaging in research.

This view is also similar to what Macaron (2003) revealed when working with the heads of modern foreign language departments in the UK. Macaro’s study deduced the participants’ negative attitudes toward research is one of the reasons for not doing research. Thus, a negative attitude toward research is another important limitation of lecturers’ research engagement.

2.1.6. Demotivators

From several studies about the engagement of language lecturers in research (Borg, 2006, 2009; National Teacher Research Panel, 2011; Kutlay, 2013; Mehrani, 2015), it is clear that the majority of lecturers surveyed never did research or rarely engaged in research. Many factors demotivate lecturers from research engagement.

A number of language lecturers do not find reasons to engage in research. In many cases, they see themselves as teachers rather than researchers, not realizing that both things are intertwined and cannot really be separated from one another. Therefore, they believe their job is

not carrying out research (Borg, 2009). For that reason, although many teachers can recognize the importance of doing research, they are not eager to conduct their studies as 'it is not part of their job' (Borg, 2009; Kutlay, 2013). What they may not realize on occasion is that their job is to teach students to follow the latest trends in knowledge development and without constant research and learning from the professors it cannot occur.

The reason why many lecturers do not have an interest in doing research also comes from the support and encouragement of school leaders and colleagues. As mentioned in the survey of the National Teacher Research Panel in 2011, the lack of support from school leadership is one of the barriers to lecturers' engagement in research. Obviously, when they do not have the support from their leaders, particularly their rectors or school principals, doing research is not a choice for them, especially for those who even do not recognize the significance of doing research in their professional development (Halim and Meerah, 2002) as they have to handle with many obstacles in doing research.

A significant number of responses from previous studies about reasons for doing or not doing research also show that lecturers are not motivated to do research when their studies are not acknowledged by their leaders and their colleagues (Allison and Carey, 2007; Borg, 2010; Mehrani, 2013). In his study, Borg (2006) also found similar responses from the respondents of his study about the conditions for lecturer research. Many lecturer researchers require their effort to be recognized when they conduct studies. The recognition for their engagement in research can be expressed by giving benefits for lecturer - researchers such as rewards and promotion. Without rewards, they are reluctant in carrying out studies as they believe there is no reason to research if it will not be recognized and rewarded. Along with that, lecturers are also impacted by their colleagues. They feel it is not necessary to research while their colleagues and people around them do not do it, not realizing that the knowledge they obtain from it can be really helpful for their teaching practice as well as for their professional prestige. Furthermore, they also cannot overcome their fear of researching unless they receive support and guidance from senior colleagues or experts with the knowledge of research (Hancock, 1997; Borg, 2006; National Teacher Research Panel, 2011), what constitutes a mental barrier that needs to be overcome by boosting lecturers' confidence and praising the work they do without help.

It is clear that a variety of obstacles demotivate lecturers in doing research. They can derive from external reasons such as no time for doing research, no support and acknowledgment from school and colleagues, but they can also come from the awareness of each lecturer about the research engagement in their professional development, and their interest in carrying out those studies.

2.2. Suggestions

The analysis of the different factors that affect lecturers from research engagement has shed some light on the issue and has led to the finding of some strategies to eradicate it. First, lecturers need to be made aware of the importance of research for their pedagogical practices and general professional development. Awareness-raising and training could be conducted by seniors and research-active peers with a clear focus on the nexus between research and pedagogy. Institutions should also encourage research by creating and promoting the culture for that. One way to do it is by establishing some research groups and forums where teachers can meet regularly to discuss research and share experiences and explore possibilities of collaborative research projects. These forums should be formalized and endorsed by the institutions to maintain their status and continuity. The role of these institutions should not be ignored as it can be highly significant in providing systematic and sustainable support to help lecturers engage in research.

Secondly, the issue of lecturer research training in research methods and methodologies is relevant to research culture. Lecturers need to be provided with rigorous research training,

particularly novice teachers. Training should be more hands-on and continual, covering both the research process (conduct) and product (writing up) and it should be provided by expert individuals and/or highly recognized and accredited institutions. Research methods and methodologies training should cover both quantitative and qualitative paradigms as well as the potential of mixing both paradigms in a mixed-method format.

Thirdly, funding is another important issue. Institutions should provide research funding to encourage lecturers' engagement in research. Incentives and rewards should also be given to research-active lecturers as a gesture of recognition for their efforts. The research component should also be highly valued and rated in lecturer appraisals. Lecturers should be encouraged to connect their research to their practices by incorporating their research findings into their classrooms. Relevant to this is research resources, and that is why the institutions should endeavor to provide lecturers with access to as wide and reliable external research resources and databases as possible. This could be done through active subscriptions and also by improving and enhancing the local libraries' acquisitions.

Finally, the institutions also need to take research seriously and they should strike a good balance between teaching and research. Institutional policies should be revised and more policies should be oriented towards research development and promotion. The balance between research and teaching duties and responsibilities could be achieved by a clear statement of policies and contractual conditions. For example, some lecturers might be recruited as teaching fellows only without any research responsibilities, while others can be recruited as either research fellows only without teaching responsibilities or fully teaching and research staff assuming both responsibilities. Time is also essential in this regard, and institutions should allocate adequate time for research. Teaching and administrative load reduction should be offered to lecturers who are research-active and load reduction, in general, should be given to lecturers who wish to engage in research activities.

3. Conclusion

During the development of this study, various factors that affect lecturers' research engagement have been reviewed. These factors can derive both from the lecturers themselves such as their awareness, beliefs, skill, and knowledge, and external factors such as their non-collaborative school culture, limited resources, economic matters and other demotivators. Therefore, in order to enhance lecturers' research engagement, these limiting factors should be addressed properly. The solutions, however, are not in the hands of the lecturers only. On the contrary, actions should be taken from many other stakeholders including education institutions, school leaders, and the government. The current paper can be used to build the theoretical framework for an in-depth study on what has prevented lecturers from research engagement in different countries and taking action to eradicate this issue.

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