

CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES ON RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT OF EFL LECTURERS AT A VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: Studies on lecturer research in English Language Teaching (ELT) are still scant and little is known about how contextual factors influence research engagement of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lecturers. This study addresses this gap by providing insights into how Vietnamese EFL lecturers at tertiary level experienced the contextual influences on their research engagement. Through a phenomenological research design, the findings from this study demonstrate that Vietnamese tertiary EFL lecturers' research engagement is driven by regulated policies in response to the national education reforms and mainly top-down, but the actual involvement is grounded in lecturers' individual responsibility and motivation. This study found that the national, institutional and individual factors had both positive and negative influences on EFL lecturers' experiences of research engagement. Drawing on the ecological systems theory, the study proposed a model of motivators and de-motivators of lecturers' research engagement.

Keywords: research engagement, contextual factors, ecological systems theory, English as a foreign language (EFL)

1. Introduction

As professional development (PD) is seen as key to educational reforms, language teachers should have continuing and sustained involvement in order to keep up with the constant change in the education system. Engaging in research activities is one of many ways that language teachers can undertake their PD. Research engagement is frequently recommended to language teachers as a potentially productive form of PD and an origin of improved professional practice (Borg, 2010). Research engagement refers to both "engagement in research (i.e. by doing it) as well as engagement with research (i.e. by reading and using it)" (Borg, 2010, p. 391). Heng et al. (2020) explained that research engagement refers to "academics involvement in various research-related activities including, among others, initiation of research ideas and projects, conduct of research, writing of research reports, and dissemination of research findings" (p. 965).

Over the past few decades, teacher research has become one of the central interests in ELT (Alhassan & Ali, 2020). However, Borg and Sanchez (2015) argued that teachers' own backgrounds and the contexts in which language teachers work are frequently not beneficial to teacher research in particular and their PD in general. Within the Vietnamese higher education setting, PD is seen as a complex, political and culturally situated aspect that plays an important part in enhancing the professional growth of lecturers. Therefore, motivators and de-motivators influencing EFL lecturers' research engagement are, arguably, originated from various complicated situations.

The topic of teacher research has drawn considerable attention from different stakeholders in the Vietnamese education system (Phuong Hoàng Yến et al., 2017; Vũ Mai Trang, 2021). Nevertheless, the number of studies, particularly those employing phenomenological research approach to investigate how EFL lecturers experience the contextual influences on their research engagement, is still under studied within the scope of higher education reforms in Vietnam. As a result, this study addresses this gap by providing insights into how Vietnamese tertiary EFL lecturers experienced research engagement in order to propose a model for research improvements.

To achieve this aim, the study seeks answer to the research question:

How do EFL lecturers perceive the influence of contextual factors on their research engagement?

2. Background of the study: Vietnam's national policies on lecturer research

In recent years, ELT in Vietnam has experienced a significant change and “The stimulus for change derives from the country's rapid economic development and, in particular, the growing demand for a skilled, efficient, and well-educated professional labor force, which provides the necessary impetus for the nation's success” (Nguyễn Văn Trào, 2018, p. 95). Because the English language education has been identified as one of the main emphases of the national education reforms, lecturers' PD plays a vital role in the enhancement of ELT quality.

Along with the teaching responsibilities, lecturers are expected by the Vietnamese government to regularly engage in several PD opportunities, particularly in research activities. According to Article 55 of the Law on Higher Education, lecturers must undertake research projects and develop applied science and technology transfer (Vietnamese National Assembly, 2012). In the amendment of the Law on Higher Education, the government has revised this Article by adding a demand for lecturers' engagement in practical activities in order to promote the qualities of training and scientific research (Vietnam National Assembly, 2018). As mentioned in Circular No.47/2014 on *The regulations on the work entitlements for university lecturers* issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), lecturers at tertiary institutions must work 40 hours per week. The total mandatory working hours per year that each lecturer must complete to meet the required teaching, research, and other PD responsibilities should be 1,760 hours (MOET, 2014). A significant point of this document is that lecturers' responsibility for research is explicitly presented. Particularly, lecturers must spend at least one-third of their total working hours per year undertaking research projects. If lecturers cannot complete their research obligation, their commendations and compensations at the end of each academic year are affected (MOET, 2014).

In addition, the Vietnamese government has launched several significant projects such as Project 322, Project 2020 and Project 911 in order to develop lecturer research. Under the implementation of these projects, approximately 1,000 Vietnamese lecturers at tertiary institutions have been awarded scholarships to undertake doctoral studies in developed countries since 2005 (Huỳnh Thanh Tiến, 2016). These policies and initiatives demonstrate that the Vietnamese government has made considerable efforts to support lecturers' PD in order to create more favorable conditions for their research engagement. However, Huỳnh Thanh Tiến (2016) pointed out that “Vietnamese university research performance and productivity have still been limited in comparison with other neighboring countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand” (p. 7). Thus, it is very important to conduct a comprehensive study to understand Vietnamese tertiary EFL lecturers' experiences of the contextual factors influencing their research engagement. The findings from this study could assist policy makers, PD planners and academic managers in proposing relevant strategies and policies for enhancing lecturer research within the setting of Vietnamese higher educational reforms.

3. Theoretical framework

The main theoretical framework underpinning this study is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. This theory focuses on the ways in which systems can influence individuals and vice versa. Although this theory initially emphasised on child development, it also provides insights into adult learning. In Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, “the environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). At the lowest level, a microsystem focuses on “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). A mesosystem involves the interactions between microsystems or connections between contexts. Thus, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems. An exosystem refers to “one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). A macrosystem involves “the level of the subculture or the culture as

a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) model, in which different levels of ecological contexts are framed as nested, conforms well to our research purposes. Since Vietnam is a socialist republic with a one-party system led by the Communist party (Bui, 2016), the educational system is centralised and hierarchically organised. Bronfenbrenner’s nested model is appropriate as a theoretical framework for understanding how these social-political features influence the participants in this study. As a result, this model was employed to investigate how different contextual factors influenced EFL lecturers’ experiences of research engagement and how different contextual factors interact with each other in connection with lecturers’ PD.

4. Methods

4.1. Research design

Because the focus of this study was on the influence of contextual factors on EFL lecturers’ experiences of their research engagement, instead of exploring ideas and concepts about how the world really is, the researcher employed a qualitative approach involved with how people experience the world. Therefore, this research approach sits within the constructivist or interpretivist paradigm. Grbich (2013) interpreted that in constructivism or interpretivism:

The research focus is on exploration of the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences in the worlds in which they live and how the contexts of events and situations and the placement of these within wider social environments have impacted on constructed understanding. (p. 7)

The qualitative approach also fits well with the use of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to investigate EFL lecturers’ lived experiences of their research engagement. Particularly, a phenomenological approach was used in this study. As explained by Creswell (2013), “a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 75).

4.2. Participants

This research was undertaken at a large public university in Vietnam. This university offers programmes across a variety of disciplines at the undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral levels. EFL lecturers from this university are accountable for teaching English to both majored and non-majored students of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling. In order to recruit the participants for interviews, four criteria were employed. Firstly, the participants should partake in the research interviews voluntarily. Secondly, the participants should hold at least a master’s degree in the English language teaching or the English language education accredited by the Vietnamese MOET. Thirdly, the participants should be employed as a full-time EFL lecturer. Finally, the participants should have gained at least three years of teaching experience as a university lecturer. Cilesiz (2011) explained that in a phenomenology study, a relatively homogenous group of participants should be chosen to identify and describe a shared essence of experiences within a particular group.

All recruited participants had different experiences of research engagement. There were a total of 12 EFL lecturers and six academic managers who were willing to take part in this study. The involvement of the six academic managers was important in collecting different perspectives on the research engagement experiences. Together with their management responsibilities, these participating managers were also responsible for planning and facilitating research activities and teaching different courses of EFL. There were 12 participants with a master’s degree and six participants holding a doctoral degree.

As suggested in Masuda et al. (2013), there are three main stages in the teacher career including *Beginning* (1-5 years teaching), *Midcareer* (6-20 years teaching) and *Late-career* (20+ years teaching). However, this study recruited all participants from the *Midcareer* and *Late-career* groups because there were not any lecturers at the *Beginning* stage at the research site. Table 1 presents the participants' gender and years of teaching experience across two main groups: *Midcareer* lecturers (6-20 years teaching) and *Late-career* lecturers (20+ years teaching). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and their job positions are not presented in this table to ensure anonymity.

Table 1. Participants' years of teaching experience

No.	Pseudonyms	Gender	Years of teaching experience
1	Diem	Female	6-20
2	Trinh	Female	6-20
3	Hue	Female	6-20
4	An	Female	6-20
5	Linh	Female	6-20
6	Huyen	Female	6-20
7	Manh	Male	6-20
8	Truong	Male	6-20
9	Chau	Female	6-20
10	Lien	Female	20+
11	Duyen	Female	20+
12	Phuong	Female	20+
13	Thuy	Female	20+
14	Hieu	Male	20+
15	Dung	Male	20+
16	Hang	Female	20+
17	Luan	Male	20+
18	Quang	Male	20+

4.3. Data collection

Prior to undertaking the interviews with the research participants, three pilot interviews were conducted with three Vietnamese EFL lecturers who were not participants in the main study. These pilot interviews provided the researchers with a chance to examine the interview protocol so that suitable adjustments or alternatives were made. Following the pilot interviews, semi-structured interviews were carried out at a Vietnamese university. All the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. Each interview was recorded and lasted from forty-five minutes to one hour. During the interviews, notes were taken and the interview files were transcribed verbatim afterwards. The researchers also read each transcript and asked the participants to review the transcripts after their interview, as a member check, to ensure that they were complete and precise.

This study included two versions of interview protocols: one for the EFL lecturers and the other for the academic managers. Both versions were divided into two main parts and differed in Part Two. Part One of the two interview protocols consisted of five items dealing with background information: workplace, job position, educational background, years of work experience, and the English courses that participants usually taught. Part Two of the interview protocol for EFL lecturers was made up of 20 open-ended questions regarding research experiences and contextual influences. The aim of this part was to encourage the participants to reconstruct the details of their research experiences within the contexts in which it happened. Part Two of the

interview protocol for academic managers included 20 open-ended questions aiming to obtain further information on the academic managers' views of their teaching staff's experiences of research engagement and contextual influences.

In order to better understand the contexts within which the participants experienced their research engagement, the analysis of national and institutional documents (e.g., laws, circulars, decisions and reports) was also employed as a second approach to gain more insights into the issue.

4.4. Data analysis

In this study, all interviews were coded by using NVivo 12 and analysed in English to determine the emerging themes or patterns upon completion. Particularly, data were analysed following the phenomenological data analysis approach suggested by Moustakas (1994) because this approach is recognised as being detailed, systematic and rigorous in analysing data about lived experiences. First, the first researcher read and reread the interview transcripts to draw out significant statements that provided in-depth information about how the participants experienced the research engagement. Second, these significant statements were grouped into themes. These themes laid the foundation for interpretation. Third, a description of the context or setting that influenced “how” the participants experienced their research engagement, called a composite structural description, was built up in this step.

4.5. Trustworthiness

In this research, four main strategies were used in order to establish validity: data triangulation by recruiting EFL lecturers and academic managers who were at different stages of their career and had diverse experiences of research engagement; member checking by sending the transcripts to the participants after the interview for clarifications; method triangulation by employing semi-structured interviews and document analysis to collect data; thematic analysis to establish the consistency of the themes that emerged from the data and direct quotes to illustrate the points made within the themes.

5. Results

This section reports findings on the key motivators and de-motivators of research engagement for EFL lecturers across the three levels (national, institutional and individual). While slightly different questions were used to interview the EFL lecturers and academic managers, findings for both groups are reported together in order to ensure confidentiality.

5.1. Motivators of EFL lecturers' research engagement

The data from this study showed that national professional policies, personal responsibility, professional expertise and occupational prestige were the positive factors influencing EFL lecturers' research engagement.

5.1.1. National professional policies

Twelve participants indicated that national professional policies, including important projects (e.g., Project 322, Project 2020 and Project 911) were key motivators for their research engagement. For instance, one participant revealed:

Following the educational reform policies, lecturers' professional qualifications have been significantly enhanced. It is mandatory for all tertiary lecturers to gain at least a master's degree. Currently, 100% of EFL lecturers in my school have hold a master's degree. In my department, nearly 80% of lecturers have received favourable opportunities to undertake higher education in English-speaking countries, so these lecturers have higher motivation to engage in research activities.
[Phuong/late-career]

Another participant reported:

After the launch of Project 2020, lecturers have been offered numerous opportunities to engage in different kinds of PD (e.g., short-term training courses, research projects and doctoral study in a foreign country). Those activities have offered lecturers many professional and research knowledge and skills. [An/midcareer]

5.1.2. Personal responsibility

As well as the national professional policies, ten participants identified personal responsibility as a significant motivator to their research engagement. For example, one participant explained that PD activities not only provided the university with many advantages but were also very beneficial to individual lecturers. She stated that “Lecturers’ enthusiastic engagement in research activities denotes their responsibility to the university and professional advancement” [Hue/midcareer]. Another lecturer commented: “Lecturers should be responsible for their professional development. Particularly, they should frequently engage with research by reading journal articles and engage in research by undertaking some action research projects concerning their teaching courses” [Luan/late-career].

5.1.3. Professional expertise

Nine participants told that enhancing professional expertise was another motivator of their research engagement. Particularly, one participant revealed: “After I have undertaken some research projects, my professional expertise could be greatly developed. As teaching and doing research have a close relationship, I could make appropriate adjustments in my lessons. This helps improve my teaching practice” [Linh/midcareer]. Another lecturer stated:

I feel more confident in teaching after carrying out two research projects. I am able to provide my students with updated knowledge. If I do not take part in any research activities, my academic life would be boring. I would feel ashamed of myself. [Hang/late-career]

5.1.4. Occupational prestige

Eight participants revealed that occupational prestige connected to Vietnamese cultural values was an important motivator to their research engagement. Typical comments reported by the participants were: “Although the university has not forced lecturers to participate in research activities, I am self-aware of the importance of research in my career. I do not want to receive negative judgments from my academic managers and students” [Lien/late-career], “I often undertake research projects in order to update my academic curriculum vitae. I want to be promoted to associate professor so that other people can look at me in admiration” [Diem/midcareer], and “Because I have several colleagues who are excellent at doing research, I have collaborated with them to undertake some research projects. I believe that my occupational prestige can be improved through the accomplishments of these projects” [Manh/midcareer].

5.2. De-motivators of EFL lecturers’ research engagement

The findings from this study found that time constraints, inappropriate institutional policies, lack of research knowledge and skills, lack of collegial and managerial support and lack of reference materials were the five key de-motivators to EFL lecturers’ research engagement.

5.2.1. Time constraints

All participants (18) identified time constraints due to heavy workloads as a prominent factor hindering their research engagement. For instance, one participant reflected: “I cannot engage in research activities because I have to teach more than 1,000 hours every academic year” [Truong/midcareer]. A female participant reported:

I have planned to apply for a doctoral scholarship in the next two years. However, as I am responsible for teaching, management and family duties at the same time, I could not have enough time to prepare for a research proposal. [Trinh/midcareer]

Another participant told that although she was interested in undertaking research projects, it was very hard for her to balance time for teaching and doing research:

In recent years, I have put more focus on doing some research projects and not spent much time on teaching. When judging emulation at the end of the last academic year, some colleagues commented that I did not accomplish my teaching duty. [Thuy/late-career]

5.2.2. *Inappropriate institutional policies*

Twelve participants revealed that inappropriate policies at the institutional level (e.g., lack of compulsory regulations regarding lecturer research, complicated administrative procedures, unsupportive research culture and lack of rewards and incentives) were de-motivators to EFL lecturers' research engagement. The participants commented: "Until now, the university only encourages instead of obliging lecturers' research engagement. I am not motivated to engage in research activities as I feel that they could not provide me with personal and professional advantages" [Hieu/late-career] and "Due to the complex reimbursement procedures, only lecturers with high patience incline to undertake research projects" [Huyen/midcareer]. Another lecturer explained:

Most lecturers do not engage in research enthusiastically due to the limited financial support from the university. In the near future, when the MOET empowers the university to manage its own finance, lecturers can be provided with more financial incentives and rewards to undertake research projects. [Duyen/late-career]

5.2.3. *Lack of research knowledge and skills*

Ten participants stated that they could not undertake research projects due to a lack of research knowledge and skills. For instance, one lecturer explained: "Because I do not have much knowledge on research, I am not confident to undertake research projects. I need to participate in some training sessions related to research methodology and skills" [Huyen/midcareer]. Another participant revealed:

I regularly engage with research (by reading online journal articles). However, I have never engaged in research (by doing it) because I recognize that my research knowledge and skills are not good enough to carry out any research projects. [Quang/late-career]

5.2.4. *Lack of collegial and managerial support*

Eight participants identified a lack of collegial and managerial support as another barrier influencing their research engagement. For instance, the participants indicated: "Because some senior lecturers in my department are not willing to share their research experiences with me, I have to cooperate with lecturers from other departments to undertake research projects" [Hue/midcareer] and "Three years ago, the school managing board used to form some research groups based on lecturers' interests. However, until now, those groups have not undertaken any studies due to a shortage of lecturers' engagement and collaboration" [Phuong/late-career].

5.2.5. *Lack of reference materials*

As reference materials play a vital role in enhancing lecturers' research, more than half of the participants reported that a lack of reference materials was an inhibiting factor. For example, one *late-career* participant revealed: "Because I could not get full access to many online databases through the learning resource center's website, sometimes I had to pay much money to download articles necessary for my research" [Dung/late-career]. Another lecturer remarked:

The university learning resource center has not provided lecturers with adequate reference materials on the field of English language teaching. Furthermore, most materials currently available at the center are not up to date. Therefore, I have not got enough reference materials to undertake my research projects. [An/midcareer]

Overall, the data from this study show that EFL lecturers' experiences of research engagement were both positively and negatively influenced by the contextual factors at different levels of macro, exo, meso and micro systems. This study contributes to the research field by providing in-depth insights into Vietnamese tertiary EFL lecturers' experiences of their research engagement. The findings enabled the researcher to identify key issues to consider in order to support planning and implementing high-quality research activities for tertiary EFL lecturers in Vietnam.

6. Discussion

Grounded in the literature on lecturer research and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), this section will discuss the findings and propose a model of motivators and de-motivators of EFL lecturers' research engagement. Although not all influencing factors have been presented through Figure 1, it gives an overview of the types of contextual factors tertiary EFL lecturers in this research experienced that influenced their research engagement.

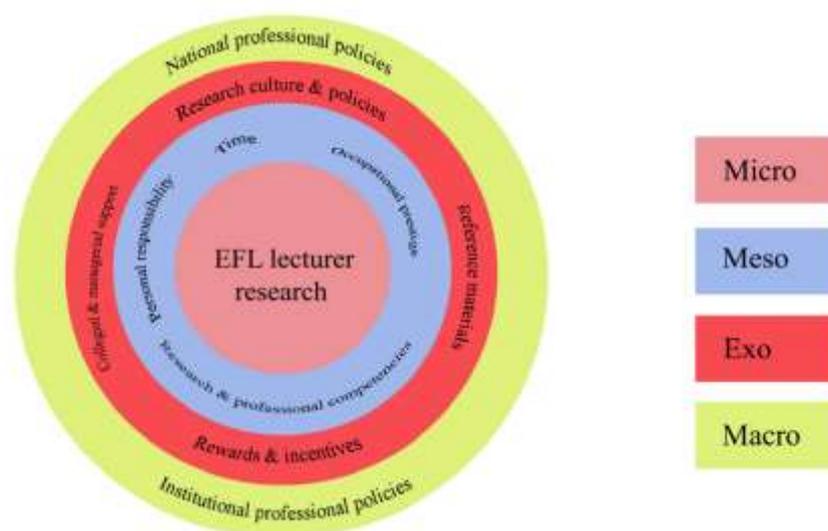


Figure 1. An ecological model of motivators and de-motivators of EFL lecturers' research engagement

At the *macrosystem* level, it is evident that, influenced by the national education reform policies and significant projects, EFL lecturers' professional qualifications and expertise had been greatly improved. However, as the national professional policies generally followed a top-down approach, they put more pressure on EFL lecturers' motivation to engage in research activities. This finding suggests that the Vietnamese government should consider integrating both top-down and bottom-up national policies. If policymakers, PD planners and academic managers are able to take into account EFL lecturers' voices when establishing and implementing high-stake policies, lecturers can be provided with relevant and timely support and be more easily able to meet the government's objectives. This finding is supported through the argument made by Wyatt and Ager (2017) that both top-down and bottom-up approaches should be integrate in order to improve the effectiveness of lecturer research.

At the *exosystem* level, the majority of participants reflected that some significant issues (e.g., lack of mandatory institutional policies regarding lecturer research, unsupportive research culture, complicated administrative procedures, lack of reference materials and lack of rewards and incentives) were de-motivators to lecturers' research engagement. These findings correspond with Phương Hoàng Yến et al.'s (2017) study, which found that Vietnamese EFL lecturers were frustrated with the institutional research culture issues such as irritating paper work for research and lack of access to online databases. The data from this study are also in line with previous international literature (Heng et al., 2020) indicating the institutional policies as one of the most prominent factors influencing teacher research. This study highlights the demand for establishing appropriate institutional policies in order to provide lecturers with more favorable conditions for their research engagement.

Interestingly, because the lack of collegial and managerial support was identified as a significant de-motivator influencing their research engagement, the participants expressed the need for this type of support in the future. This finding is congruent with previous works from international literature which have highlighted the importance of collegial support in teacher research (Shen & Bai, 2019). Therefore, it is important to build a collaborative research culture which involves policymakers, PD planners, academic managers and lecturers in planning and implementing research activities.

At the *mesosystem* level, this study shows that time, research knowledge and skills, personal responsibility and occupational prestige were the prominent contextual factors influencing EFL lecturers' research engagement.

All participants reported time constraints as an important de-motivator hindering their research engagement. The data from both the interviews and document analysis undertaken in this research showed that the large number of mandatory teaching hours that EFL lecturers have to fulfil every academic year is a big inhibitor preventing many lecturers from engaging in research activities (School A, 2018). The evidence from this study is also consistent with those from international research. Particularly, Alhassan and Ali (2020) found that EFL teachers in Oman considered their workload due to many teaching hours as a prominent barrier to their research engagement. Within the context of Vietnamese education, Vũ Mai Trang (2021) reflected that EFL lecturers suffered from heavy teaching demands and did not have favourable conditions to engage in research activities despite their interest.

Of interest, more female participants than male ones revealed that they did not have sufficient time to engage in research activities because they had to fulfil individual and family responsibilities. It can be argued that, in an Asian country such as Vietnam, female lecturers play the crucial roles concerning motherhood and managing a household along with their professional duties. Therefore, they confront more barriers related to time constraints for their research engagement compared to male lecturers. According to Phan Thị Tuyết Nga and Locke (2016), Confucianism conceptualises that women play very different social roles compared to men, particularly, Vietnamese women are expected to have the four feminine virtues: “*Công, dung, ngôn, hạnh*” (Performing family duties, having good appearance, having proper speech and displaying proper behaviour) (pp. 111-112). This study contributes new understanding related to the influence of time constraints due to heavy teaching loads and gender roles in lecturer research engagement within the Vietnamese higher education setting.

Moreover, the participants reported that through research activities, they could gain professional advantages and in turn, they helped to enhance their professional expertise. As indicated in the amendment of the Law on Higher Education, one of the main roles of tertiary lecturers within the national language reforms is to enhance the qualities of training and scientific research (Vietnam National Assembly, 2018). International literature (Borg & Sanchez, 2015; Sato & Loewen, 2019) has also stated the prominent interconnection between teacher research and improvements on professional expertise. This study demonstrates that lecturers'

engagement in research is considered one of the important factors in professional achievement. It is important for lecturers to view research engagement as an on-going process throughout their career if they want to promote their professional expertise.

Personal responsibility was indicated as another decisive factor influencing EFL lecturers' research engagement. Together with teaching, the participants revealed that they always considered research as one of the most important duties in their career. This was the reason why they would like to play a proactive role in engaging in a variety of research activities across different stages of their career. As stipulated in national documents such as Law on Higher Education (Vietnamese National Assembly, 2012) and the amendment of Law on Higher Education (Vietnamese National Assembly, 2018), lecturers must take the responsibility to engage in research activities frequently in order to fulfil the professional demands from their government. The findings from this study are in line with earlier literature (Borg & Sanchez, 2015) indicating that teacher research should be self-initiated and self-directed. The evidence from this study highlights the importance of lecturers' personal responsibility in order to advance their career.

Occupational prestige, which is closely linked to personal responsibility, was identified as another influencing factor on EFL lecturers' research engagement. Because the participants revealed that they deeply appreciated the value of the admiration and respect that they could be held in by other people in Vietnamese society, they felt they need to develop their professional and research competencies in order to maintain their occupational prestige. It can be explained that influenced by Confucianism, teachers, as the knowledge conveyors, have always received high respect and admiration from other people as delineated through some Vietnamese famous sayings: "*Tôn sư, trọng đạo*" (Respect teachers, respect morality) and "*Muốn sang thì bắc cầu kiều. Muốn con hay chữ phải yêu kính thầy*" (If one wants to come to the other shore, he must build a bridge across the river. If one wants his children to be educated, he must first respect the teacher). These cultural values demonstrate that as lecturers are held in high status in Vietnamese society, they always pay much focus on maintaining their occupational prestige.

At the *microsystem* level, the participants revealed that all EFL lecturers at their university had hold a master's degree and others were undertaking doctoral study at the time of this research. Furthermore, lecturers had been provided with numerous opportunities to engage in different PD and research activities and, that helped them to improve their professional and research competencies. The findings from the document analysis reaffirm the participants' views that, in the previous years, the Vietnamese government had paid greater focus on enhancing lecturer research through the launch of a number national initiatives. This finding supports the argument made by Nguyễn Thị Mai Hoa et al. (2019) that Project 2020 has created positive influences on teachers' motivation to engage in PD activities.

In brief, the data from this study show that Vietnamese tertiary EFL lecturers' research engagement is a dynamic and multifaceted process that plays an important role in enhancing the quality of ELT in the context of the national education reforms. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, it can be explained that, at the macro system level, the national professional policies show a dynamic intercourse with the institutional professional policies and individual lecturers. This study highlights the importance of contextualising the national and institutional policies to the individual context so that these policies can fulfil both the national reform objectives and meet the research needs of EFL lecturers.

7. Conclusion

The findings from this study demonstrate that EFL lecturers' experiences of their research engagement have been affected by the concurrent confluence of national, institutional and individual contexts. Therefore, in order to understand the complexity of Vietnamese tertiary EFL lecturers' research engagement, it is important to take into consideration how different contextual factors interact with the individual lecturers and with each other. The Vietnamese cultural standards such as "*Tôn sư, trọng đạo*" (Respect teachers, respect morality) and "*Muốn sang thì bắc cầu kiều. Muốn con hay chữ phải yêu kính thầy*" (If one wants to come to the other shore, he must build a bridge across the river. If one wants his children to be educated, he must first

respect the teacher) are a significant influence on lecturers' individual motivation for their research engagement.

The evidence from this study suggests that Vietnamese tertiary EFL lecturers' research engagement should be more effective if both components of top-down and bottom-up approaches are combined and these activities are grounded in lecturers' individual motivation rather than an imposed and over-demanding duty. The ecological model of motivators and de-motivators presented in this study offers an explanation of the key influencing factors of national, institutional and individual contexts and their interaction for policy makers, PD planners, academic managers and lecturers to consider when planning and implementing future research activities. This study contributes to the current literature related to tertiary EFL lecturers' experiences of research engagement within the Vietnamese higher education context and may be applied to other international contexts.

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ẢNH HƯỞNG CỦA CÁC YẾU TỐ BỐI CẢNH ĐẾN VIỆC THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU KHOA HỌC CỦA GIÁNG VIÊN DẠY TIẾNG ANH TẠI MỘT TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC Ở VIỆT NAM

Tóm tắt: Các công trình nghiên cứu liên quan đến chủ đề nghiên cứu khoa học (NCKH) của giảng viên trong lĩnh vực giảng dạy tiếng Anh vẫn còn hạn chế và có rất ít đề tài tập trung vào nghiên cứu ảnh hưởng của các yếu tố bối cảnh đến việc tham gia vào NCKH của giảng viên. Đề tài này được thực hiện nhằm điều tra kinh nghiệm của giảng viên dạy tiếng Anh đối với sự ảnh hưởng của các yếu tố bối cảnh đến việc tham gia vào hoạt động NCKH của họ. Thông qua phương pháp nghiên cứu hiện tượng (phenomenological research design), kết quả của đề tài này cho thấy rằng mặc dù việc tham gia vào NCKH của giảng viên dạy tiếng Anh chịu tác động bởi các chính sách của nhà nước và nhà trường để đáp ứng nhu cầu cải cách giáo dục, nhưng việc tham gia thật sự phụ thuộc vào trách nhiệm và động lực cá nhân của giảng viên. Nghiên cứu này cho thấy rằng các yếu tố từ cấp độ nhà nước, nhà trường và cá nhân có cả ảnh hưởng tích cực và tiêu cực đến kinh nghiệm tham gia NCKH của giảng viên dạy tiếng Anh. Dựa trên cơ sở lý thuyết sinh thái học (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), nghiên cứu này đề xuất mô hình liên quan đến các yếu tố thúc đẩy và cản trở sự tham gia NCKH của giảng viên dạy tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: tham gia nghiên cứu khoa học, các yếu tố bối cảnh, lý thuyết sinh thái học, giảng dạy ngoại ngữ tiếng Anh