Research Culture Prevailing in Public Sector Universities of Punjab: A Qualitative Perspective

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Abstract

Research culture is comprised of behaviors and beliefs of individuals that help in conducting research activities. Present study aimed to find out the present situation of research culture in Public Sector Universities of Punjab. Qualitative research approach was employed for exploring the views of faculty members about existing condition of research culture in public sector universities of Punjab. Population of this study was comprised of all the faculty members of 18 general public sector universities of Punjab. Convenient method of sampling was used for selection of 7 general public sector universities and purposive method of sampling was applied for selecting the faculty members of these universities as a sample. Interviews were conducted from the faulty members till saturation. Tool of research was semi-structured interview protocol. Themes from interviews were drawn out and interpretation of interviews was also described. The results of the study indicated that the situation of research culture was worst and a lot of indicators responsible for creating such type of situation in public universities. At the end, certain recommendations were presented.

Keywords: Research Culture, Public, University Context.

Introduction

Research leads to development and it is useful for both faculty members and universities. When faculty members are involved in research activities then they get recognition, promotion and incentives and universities also obtain the higher status (Aniedi & Effiom, 2011). Research culture is related to particular type of environment that facilitates the university faculty members to perform different types of research activities (Salazar-Clemena & Almonte-Acosta, 2007). Archer (1988, p.1) expresses research culture (as cited in Evan, 2007); "Shared values, assumptions, beliefs, rituals and other forms of behavior whose central focus is the acceptance and recognition of research practices and output as a valued, worthwhile, and pre-eminent activity".

Hill (1999) defines research culture as "the way we do research round here" (p.1).

This definition explains the qualities of research process and research choices in the universities.

Research culture is comprised of different aspects: a) creating research culture, b) increasing research culture, c) emerging research culture, d) promoting research culture. These help to obtain the research output in an effective and efficient way. These levels can be developed through careful efforts and time (Muhajir & Abdul Rahman, 2013).

So research culture may be defined as values and ideas that researchers use to handle research related problems. It is the combination of all the activities, all the thinking, all the collaboration and cooperation carried out to promote the research in faculty members.

Jenks (2008) describes five basic elements of research culture. First element is university staff members: you are the best as your faculty; second output: results of the research process; third: University environment: that includes resources, facilities, university activities and infrastructure;

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fourth the esteem measurement: it includes public evaluation and finally, the ethos-what the ethical values and attitudes of the University regarding research.

Cheetham (2007) describes that University of Melbourne presents a triple helix model. It interweaves three aspects i.e. research, teaching and knowledge transfer. These help out in staff development through research, enhancing students' knowledge through teaching and learning and serving the community with the combination of both. First aspect is research that is related to development of new knowledge, new ideas and practices. These happenings facilitate in students' learning. Second aspect is teaching and learning that is related to body of ideas and is up-to-date by existing research and develops habits of inquiry for innovation of new ideas. Knowledge transfer is the final aspect and it combines both faculty and society people. Masses can contribute in new knowledge generation by involving in these activities that are debate and policy work. Faculty can contribute by conducting research and education facilities. Basic focus is on research culture because:

- Research is the basis of how a university education works.
- It is the intellectual life blood of our staff.
- It should be fundamental support of our teaching.
- It is a basis of our support for our community.

Aslam (2011) defines that presently information overflow is everywhere and university teachers have to update the knowledge by generating new ideas. They are engaged in research, publishing it, updating the curriculum, and utilization of new knowledge for performing of teaching activities. So their nature of job is demanding and growing because they have to perform two major roles in the university that is teaching and research.

Post-Secondary Education of Public Department has achieved attention in Pakistan since 2002. Government of Pakistan has allocated budget to education 7% before 2002 and 13.7% for 2005-06. Funds allocated for higher education will be used for the arrangement of educational activities in public-sector universities. The aims of these activities are: arrangement of professional development programs, access to higher education, excellence in learning and research and meet the socio-economic needs of the country (Akbari & Naqvi, 2008).

Safdar (2009) presents his views (as cited in Aslam, 2011) that Pakistani universities are focused more on teaching activities rather research. Teaching has first priority and research has second priority in these universities. So the development of research culture is based on the development of institutional needs. New universities are trying to develop research culture by promoting research activities and those universities that have already research culture are trying to establish strong research culture.

A major reason of weak research culture in universities is that they have low number of research articles, and research paper of journals. But now-a-days, Pakistani universities are putting a strong effort to improve research culture in universities by developing research culture in their teachers for getting high ranking in world universities. To achieve best result, HEC has formulated the policy for public sector universities is that every promotion will be based on publication of research papers. Annual character report for performance review of teachers must be based on quality of research work. HEC grants funds to those persons who present papers in international conferences and also to universities that publish their own research journals (Akbar & Naqvi, 2008). Higher Education Commission is taking many steps to build research culture in universities. Research culture is encouraged by providing research and travel grants, development of physical infrastructure, and arrangement of faculty development programs, and access to international research journals (Naqvi, 2010).

The achievements of Higher Education Commission are: Students of Public sector universities can access to international research journals and e-books, research culture is promoting by publishing large number of research articles, video-conferencing facility has been started since September 2006 and university of Education and other universities are arranging workshops, seminars, meetings and lectures by the help of video-conferencing (Parveen, Rashid, Iqbal, & Khan, 2011).

Salazar – Clemena (2016) describes the research culture in this form:
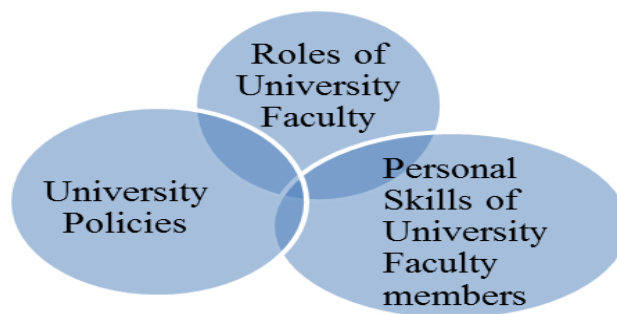
He also explains the components for improving research culture in universities: (i) time, (ii) faculty participation by collaborative environment, (iii) faculty development program, decentralized research policy & research infrastructure, (iv) strong belief about research, (v) research funds, and (vi) institutional policy for awarding of research benefits.

Time
Lack of time is a major hindrance for improving research culture of universities. Teaching time table should be allocated according to nature of research. A range of strategies must be designed for allocation of time for research purpose. These strategies should be for full time faculty member and also for part time faculty members, for the senior professors and also for the newly hired staff members so that they can improve the research by equally playing trifocal roles in universities.

Faculty Involvement by Collaborative Environment
Collaborative environment should be developed in the universities so the faculty members can discuss research experiences with each other. This type of environment will facilitate those faculty members who have less research capability and also new faculty members will complete their research work with the help of experienced faculty members. Research work should be publicized so that it can provide motivation to those who are not involved in research.

Faculty Development Programs, Decentralized Research Policy & Research Infrastructure
University should arrange research programs for the training of faculty members and training should not only the senior staff but also the newly hired faculty members. Institutes should develop decentralized policies regarding research and research infrastructure facilities in aspect of libraries and computer labs should be sufficiently provided to faculty members.

Strong Belief about Research
In universities, teachers have strong belief for teaching and considered themselves as teaching faculty. Strategies should be developed for developing strong belief about research in faculty members. They must describe the importance of research.

Research Funds
It involves that universities should provide funding to those researchers that have published their researches so that they can know the value of their work and it will develop the healthy research culture in universities.

Policies for awarding of Research Benefits & Incentives
Universities should develop clear policies for research benefits and incentives so that they can provide motivation to researchers for doing research. Especially in education field, the focus is not on teachers training in aspect of teaching but also in aspect of research.

Institutional Features
Institutional features include:
- Environment
- Decentralized policy
- Recruitment of research oriented faculty
- Clear research mission and goals
- Shared culture of research
- Positive group climate
- Mentoring & communication networks
- Allocation of resources
- Sufficient work time
- Awarding rewards

- Opportunities for professional development

    Present study aimed to highlight the present situation of research culture in public sector universities by ascertaining the views of faculty members and depicted the picture of the most effected indicators on research culture.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore university faculty members' views about research culture prevailing in Public Sector Universities of Punjab:
    a. To analyze the responsible factors of research culture prevailing in Public Sector Universities of Punjab.
    b. To investigate the opportunities facilitate in developing the research culture in Public Sector Universities of Punjab.

Research Questions of the Study

1. What is the present condition of research culture in Public Sector Universities of Punjab?
    a. Which types of factors responsible for research culture in Public Sector Universities of Punjab?
    b. What are the opportunities facilitate in developing the research culture in Public Sector Universities of Punjab?

Significance of the Study

Developed countries have predefined plans and visions to achieve their goals in a better way and their universities also have a strong research culture. Now-a-days, individuals of developing countries like Pakistan also realize the importance of research and they are seemed to be involved in different types of research activities. But the research outputs are not appropriate in terms of quantity and quality. A lot of reasons are responsible for it and the findings of present study may help in this perspective.

Research Methodology

This research focused on using interpretivism paradigm of research. In interpretivism paradigm of research, multiple realities are existed because they believe that reality is not fixed and it can be changed from person to person, time to time and subjective type of knowledge is used (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Research approach was qualitative because it focuses on the role of researcher and researcher is involved in the research process for explanation of problem by using multiple methods of qualitative research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Total public sector universities of Punjab were 25 in number in which faculty members of 18 general public sector universities were considered as population of the study. Rational of selecting general public sector universities was that education department was existed in these universities. Convenient method of sampling was used for selection of general public sector universities and purposive method of sampling was applied for selecting the faculty members of these universities as a sample. 7 general public sector universities were selected and 16 interviews of faculty members were conducted till saturation. Semi-structured interview protocol was also developed by the researcher on the basis of related literature of research culture and questions were related to professional roles, research activities, benefits of thesis supervision, and research culture of department or university. Researcher conducted the interviews according to interview schedule. Researcher taken the consent from respondents telephonically for conducting of interviews and then personally visited each university according to determined schedule to record the interviews. Thematic data analysis technique was used for transcribed the responses of university faculty members' views about prevailing situation of research culture and interpretations were described on the basis of results:

Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings of the Study

1. Professional Roles in University

Majority of the interviews with faculty members revealed that they were performing three major professional roles in the University. They were engaged in different types of research activities like supervision of students' thesis, faculty research and university and different funded research projects along with usual assignments of teaching and administrative. One of the faculty members expressed that:

> "My professional roles can be divided into three categories, first one role as teacher, second is supervising students' research projects, and third role is performing the daily basis tasks that have been assigned by V.C office and Director".

> Another said about the research activities:

"I'm performing research activities at two levels, first I'm supervisor of students, second research activity doing research at my own level, and we have recently completed the research projects of university that was started by Higher Education Commission so I'm supervising the research projects of students as well as doing research projects personally".

Four of them had different opinion that they were just performing two major roles in the University that was teaching and supervision of students' research work and were not involved in writing of research articles. Someone told:

"No, I'm not doing any research at the present time. My sole responsibility is to teach the students and supervise them".

Two of the faculty members described that they were not part of any university research project and even don't had information about the research projects that were going to be started by the University. Someone said:

"No, I'm not part of university research project and even don't know about university research project".

It was concluded from faculty members' views that they were involved in performing three major professional roles in university. First role was related with teaching, second was related with administrative tasks and third professional role was linked with research activities. But only one aspect of research activities that linked to supervision of students' research work was mostly employed in universities and other aspects that were related to research projects and writing research articles rarely employed in universities.

2.   Improve and expand the research skills by supervision of Thesis

Majority of the faculty members' opinioned that supervision of students' research work improved and expanded their research skills. They obtained knowledge about different educational research problems, literature review methods, types of research deigns, tool development, validity and reliability of research tools and data analysis techniques. Someone said:

"Supervising the research projects of students is a learning activity then it expands our research competencies, for example preparing research proposal, writing review of literature, design method and procedure of study and data analysis, it's very healthy activity to improve our skills in research".

Their research skills were not only improved about different steps of research process but also their research knowledge was increased when students shared their ideas with them and they also studied the things in detail.

Three of them opined that they did in depth readings about the relevant topics and study different research articles for providing proper guideline to students because thesis reflected their own research knowledge. It's a two way process in which students and teachers both discussed their ideas with each other and they got new ideas from students' discussion. One of the faculty members expressed:

"In fact it has many dimensions, first of all when you are supervising, or you have to guide somebody, you have to go into the depths of subject and sometimes I have to read of lots to tell my students something, and whenever there is some problem, in fact I try to make it mutual venture and I asked my students ok that's study, you too and me too, both will be studying for this problem. So in readings research articles and when every there are certain ideas in fact so whenever you share your ideas, and even students can review some very novel ideas and research skill that may be expands as well".

So it was concluded from faculty members' views that students' thesis supervision improves and expands their research skills in aspect of learning about different types of research and parts of research process. Their research knowledge was also enhanced by reading research articles and sharing process of research related ideas between students and them.

3.   Research Culture of Department/University

Interviews with university faculty members revealed the prevalence of research culture. Strong research culture was existent in the departments of universities. All the faculty members were enriched with research knowledge and supervised students' research work. They were highly motivated and engaged in writing of research articles. Workshops, seminars and conferences about different research topics were conducted in their departments. Both teachers and students could attend these workshops, seminars and conferences. Heads of departments not only provided support for

arranging of research workshops, seminars and conferences but also encouraged the faculty members for conducting research activities. One of the faculty members communicated that:

> "Yes in fact, almost, we have 18 regular members in our department and total 39 members are there including visitors and contract basis, so almost all of the regular members are doing one way or on the other way, they are doing some research work whether they are students of Ph.D or M.Phil, they are supervising research and seminars, workshops and conferences are being held here so it's a very healthy environment, if somebody wants to they needs a lot of guidance provided by our director as well and he is very enthusiastic and encourages us a lot, for example if I want to conduct a research, he will help me in all aspects".

Majority of the faculty members opined that no research culture was existent in the departments. They discussed many aspects that became obstruct in the development of research culture. These were: no provision of facilities for research activities and all faculty members did research on their own, no commencement of research projects in the department, no appreciation by higher authorities for research activities, no collaborative environment, less focus on research activities just focus on teaching the classes and less research competency in the staff members. Someone said:

> "Here is no such research culture. I think mainly there are no such research books, only individuals are working on their only research projects and in other departments may be, but in our department it is not. Number of the people involved in their research or you can say that the nature of the activities, being led by the department is not desirable".

It was summarized from faculty members' views that supportive factors for establishment of research culture in the departments and universities were arrangement of workshops, seminars and conferences. Good collegial relationship was existed among faculty members; they shared their research related ideas with each other and had time for writing research articles. Hurdles in establishment of research culture were no motivation by higher authorities, no collaborative environment, and no arrangement of research activities.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify the present situation of research culture in Public sector universities of Punjab. Lodhi (2011) conducted research on researching the research culture in Pakistani public sector universities of Punjab. He found that major hindrances of research culture were insufficient time, personal research knowledge, and faculty members were knew the importance of research and motivated to do research but the present culture was supportive to teaching rather research activities. The findings of this study are consistent with present research with respect to institution demands to be productive in research but teaching workload is not adjusted with research work. Faculty members do survey type research common rather other types of research. Another study by Hill & Haigh (2012) indicated that group work improves the research skills and especially when people do research under the umbrella of senior members. Finding of this study is matched with the current study in perspective of not provision of any type of collaborative environment. Study conducted by Nadeem ul Haque & David Orden (2020) reported that major problem of development of research culture is the limited amount of budget and awarding of research incentives to the famous researchers. It is similar to the present study in such a way that research oriented activities are limited in range.

Conclusion

Higher Education Commission is trying to develop research culture in public sector universities by providing financial and human resources but these universities are still lack of research culture. The findings of the study showed that department was not supportive for research activities because research related information was communicated through informal meetings. Thesis supervision was the main factor that was mostly employed in universities and it helped the faculty members to enhance their research skills by sharing of research ideas to others. Proper meetings for research activities were not commonly arranged. Major hindrance in developing research culture in universities was heavy teaching workload and assignment of administrative tasks.

Recommendations of the Study

- Collaborative environment should be created in the departments of universities because this environment facilitates the faculty members to discuss different research problems and get in depth knowledge about any type of research.
- Research workshops should be arranged for faculty members so that they can enhance their research skills.
- Universities should more focus on developing of research culture than teaching culture. It will help in shifting the theme of teaching universities to research oriented universities.

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