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Original Research Paper

TERTIARY LEVEL TEACHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH: A MIXED-METHOD STUDY IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

This paper reflects the attitudes of university teachers towards their involvement in academic research activity in an engineering institute in Bangladesh. They responded to the questionnaire to collect data, and analyzing those data recognizes teachers' views of research activity. An analysis of the teachers' views is required to understand their circumstances and promote their involvement in research activity. The study shows that most of the time, the teachers are not willing to research because they want to do something new and innovative, instead, their professional pressure made them do so. The teachers are also less involved in research because they need more time, proper guidance and financial help, so their professional concerns are the only driving force left. The study's findings refer to the administrative, professional and institutional impediments that result in the university teacher's less involvement in research.

Keywords: Academic research, CPD, professional pressure, teachers' psychology

1. Introduction

Traditionally, the role of teachers in the field of research has been limited to that of consumers. They have been viewed as passive recipients of research produced by others, rather than active participants in its creation and dissemination (Robinson, 2003). However, with time, that view changed and proved false because scholars found it necessary to connect the consumer of research work and the producer of research to get better teaching and learning experience. It was assumed that the researcher and the practitioner have two different jobs (Robinson, 2003). If the two roles are thought separate that it indeed poses a threat, but (Robinson & Robinson, 1993) believes that the "gulf between the practitioners and the researchers' activity can be bridged' as cited in (Robinson, 2003). Research activity significantly impacts a teacher's professional life as they want to ensure a specific position in their career graph, so conducting research activity directly impacts the teachers' continuous professional development (CPD).

As in Bangladesh, teachers are bound to conduct research; many public and private universities have made specific rules to confirm that teachers research to get their queries answered and their promotions secured. 'Professional development deepens and expands as seniority increases, and confidence in one's teaching abilities grow' (Shagrir, 2012). This statement confirms that seniority has an impact on teachers' professional development. Indeed, teachers have an urge to be senior in professional designation when this desired position comes with fulfilling certain conditions. However, the authority to encourage teachers to research activities added different conditions. However, there needs to be an evaluation of how these conditions are met and to what extent they

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bought success to the teachers. Sometimes conditions like withholding promotion and increment are imposed on teachers as a forceful encouragement without realizing the dilemma this condition puts the teachers through.

This study collected the experience of the teachers who are supposed to do research as part of their development and upgradation and propose modifications to draw the maximum benefit for teaching and learning. It is cited in (West, 2011), "Action research can be seen as a way for teachers to answer questions that puzzle them (Conway & Jeffers, 2004); (Robbins et al., 2007). (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) This process is described as practical inquiry, emphasizing its utility as a way to generate or enhance practical knowledge". Continuous professional development is necessary for teachers as, according to (West, 2011), action research can establish connection between theory and practice by addressing the topics that are relevant to the practicing teachers. Scholars realized long ago that the teachers should have practical knowledge. According to (Anderson, 2001), it has become necessary to help teachers update their knowledge and skills and to deal with change, on the one hand, and manage human resources better, on the other as cited in (Lessing & De Witt, 2007).

This study determined the main constraints behind the less involvement of teachers in research activity based on the survey and interview results collected from teachers. The result can surely help the teachers and administrators in taking their decisions.

2. Literature Review

The University teachers' professional development is always an important issue to emphasize on. 'Teachers in higher education are committed to professional development under their academics, and by their obligation to keep abreast of the research work' (Shagrir, 2012). This idea in 2012 proved the idea of 2003, "Researchers produce knowledge, and teachers consume it by applying it in their schools and classrooms" (Robinson, 2003).

According to (West, 2011), he once had a colleague "who kept a pen and pad by his bed for times when he awakened at night with a good idea to try in class the next day. Although not all of us wake up in the middle of the night with new teaching ideas, most continually generate thoughts about how to help our students learn. Which pedagogical techniques work best? Which sequence makes more sense? How can I create a more inviting learning environment? What motivates my students? The list goes on. Many teachers find that they can begin to answer these questions by conducting research within their classrooms". The above statements clearly show that teachers can find the answers to their professional queries by conducting research activities because scholars agree that teachers should have done research work for their continuous professional development and to get the issues they encounter sorted out while teaching.

Previously it was thought that there was a gulf between the role of a researcher and a practitioner. However, with time it was realized that one person could undoubtedly play these two above roles because the person who urges to acquire experience by obtaining the answers to the problems that arise in the actual life classroom situation can use it for his/her professional development by searching the answers through research experiments. (West, 2011) found teacher research as a form of professional development. According to (Guskey, 2000), 'In order to generate professional development, a work environment that values inquiry, experimentation, and renewal is required' as cited in (Shagrir, 2012), so experimenting with things to get answers was the pre-requisite for teachers' development. These experiments help teachers get better in their practice.

According to (Lessing & De Witt, 2007), "The Gauteng Department of Education has taken on responsibility for the presentation of continuous professional development (CPD) workshops to assist teachers in the General Education Band (GEB) to upgrade their skills. However, the changes have been so far-reaching that it has been impossible to train all teachers adequately through the regular support services of the education department". (Lessing & De Witt, 2007), Since 1994, South Africa saw many significant changes in education policy but people did not always accept the changes.

Teachers have, for example, been challenged to move to an outcomes-based education approach (Curriculum 2005) in a brief period and attend to learners with barriers to learning in an inclusive classroom (Department of Education, 2001). While these changes have allowed teachers some

freedom, they have also caused stress since many teachers need to be equipped to deal with such changes. (Tsui, 2003) claimed that the EFL profession is facing two problems, namely, the lack of teacher training programs and the dissatisfaction with conventional theory-into-practice training models as cited in (Meng & Tajaroensuk, 2013) and this statement fits the condition of Bangladeshi tertiary level ESL and EFL teachers.

3. Research Methodology

To survey this study, fifty teachers from National Institute of Textile Engineering and Research (NITER) from five different departments e.g., Textile engineering, Industrial and Production Engineering, Fashion Design and Apparel Engineering, Electrical and Electronics, Computer Science and Engineering departments were chosen to collect data. As a mixed method is followed in this study, two instruments will be used to collect the data: a questionnaire and a semi-structured group interview with the focused group of teachers. First, the questionnaire took fifty teacher participants as respondents who answered the questionnaire. Second, the semi-structured group interview was taken from the above teacher participants.

Questionnaire data were collected to obtain a broader perspective on the issues under study. Respondents were given the questionnaire through google form and there is no denial of certain limitations. As cited in (Borg, 2009), 'Questionnaires, also, often generate superficial answers and do not allow in-depth exploration of particular issues'. Besides, there interview reports are there to support the questionnaire.

The interviews were also conducted to collect information from the respondents. Teachers were asked to elaborate on their questionnaire responses; specifically, they were asked to share their personal experience in their professional experience. Interviewees also mentioned the frequency of their involvement in research. Though the interview questions followed the structure and the order that they appeared in the questionnaire but in the interview, there was also the additional focus on the questions regarding CPD. There was scope for more liberal interaction through which teachers were given the freedom to elaborate on any matters relevant to their attitudes and experiences of research. Occasionally they got questions from the interviewer whenever required. Combining quantitative and qualitative data, I examined the results in detail.

4. Findings

The 50 respondents were asked 20 questions about their professional needs and personal thoughts. Based on their responses, the interview questions were asked so that more clarification could be drawn towards their attitude regarding the lack of research activity and CPD.

Question	Yes	No	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Do you research?	70%	6%	10%	14%	0%
Do you do research for professional purposes?	48%	26%	14%	12%	0%
Do you do research for personal development?	50%	14%	14%	14%	8%

If the teachers were asked the question, "Do you research?" and the answer was No or often or rarely, they were asked to elaborate on the answer and provide specific reasons. The table above says that 70% of the teachers do their research, 6% agree that they do not do research, and 10% and 14% say rarely and sometimes, respectively. When the same body of respondents was asked whether they do research for professional purposes, 48% agreed, 26% opposed the idea, and 14% and 12% said rarely and sometimes, respectively. Of the teachers who do research, 50% do that for professional purposes, not personal development, and only 14%of they disagreed with this answer. 8% of the teachers said often, 14% of them rarely said, 14% of them sometimes said.

Question	Yes	No	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Do you enjoy doing research?	52%	14%	10%	14%	10%
Do research help your professional development?	54%	18%	10%	14%	4%
Do you research because it will help you get a promotion?	52%	10%	18%	14%	6%

When the question comes about enjoying research, 52% said they enjoy it. However, they still need to do it on the scale it should be because other things are drawing barriers in their ways, such as inadequate time, facilities, professional help, advice and many more. The teachers did not deny that the research activity helped their professional development. 54% agreed, 14% said sometimes, a small amount said often, 10% said rarely, and only 18% disagreed with this idea of professional development. When teachers disagree that research activity helps them develop professionally, they say that creative activity cannot grow under pressure. They meant professional pressure and less encouragement from the employer. 52% of the teachers agreed that they research to get a promotion, which depicts that doing research is more connected with professional flourishment than personal development. 18% of the teachers said rarely, 14% said sometimes, 6% said often, and only 10% disagreed with this view.

Question	Yes	No	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Do you research because your employer expects you to do so?	38%	18%	26%	16%	2%
Do you research to let others know about your achievement so they can benefit?	36%	24%	14%	24%	2%
Do your research contribute to the betterment of the institute you work in?	44%	14%	14%	24%	8%
Can research help you adopt new teaching methods?	38%	10%	24%	16%	12%

38% of the teachers agreed that they research because their employer wants them to, and only 18% disagreed. Very few said often, 26% said rarely, and 16% said sometimes. It becomes clear from the participants' answers that only 36% are willing to share their achievements for others' benefit, 14% rarely said, 24% sometimes. A few teachers said often, but 24% said no.44% of teachers think that their research contributes to the betterment of the employer institute, but 14% disagreed with this idea.14% said rarely,24% said sometimes, and a small amount said often. Teachers need many practical methods to apply according to the students' quality and capacity, and research can develop them.38% of the teachers supported this idea, 12% said often, 16% said sometimes, 24 % said rarely, and it was denied by 10%.

Question	Yes	No	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Does research allow you to solve different problems that you encounter in the classroom?	44%	16%	8%	24%	8%
Do you feel your job is to teach, not research?	30%	30%	12%	16%	12%
Do you get enough time to do research besides your academic duty?	34%	26%	14%	16%	10%
Do you get proper advice if you need it for your research activity?	30%	20%	28%	12%	10%
Do your colleagues help you to research?	42%	14%	12%	18%	14%

44% of the teachers think that research activity helps them solve many problems they encounter in the classroom, and 16% disagreed.8% of the teachers said it often does, 24% said it sometimes does, and 8% said it rarely does. 30% of the teachers agreed that their duty is teaching only, not researching. Another 30 % think the opposite, 12% said rarely, 16% said, and 12% said often.26% of teachers said that they do not get time for research activity besides their academic duty, but 34% said they do,14% said rarely,16% said sometimes,10% said often.

Here only 30% of teachers said they get proper advice while doing research, but 20% directly said no, another 28% rarely said it, 12%says sometimes, and 10% said it often. While interviewing those teachers, they also said they need more help to do research activities if needed. 14% of teachers say that they do not get help from their colleagues, 42% say they do,14% say often,18% say sometimes, and 12% say rarely.

Question	Yes	No	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Do you feel imposition from the employer force you research?	46%	10%	14%	12%	18%
Do you have any professional pressure from your employer to do research?	48%	18%	10%	16%	8%
Professional pressure can force you constructively to do research.	46%	22%	12%	12%	8%
Do you feel increased workload and professional pressure psychologically affect the teachers?	74%	14%	8%	3%	1%
Do you know anything about CPD?	20%	70%	7%	2%	1%

This table shows that 10% of teachers think the imposition cannot affect research activity and the growth of the researcher, but 46% agree that it does, 14% say rarely, 12%says sometimes, 18%says often. While asking about the same view in interviews, the teachers agreed more in referring to imposition as a barrier. They feel imposition can never be a solution; instead, it makes the environment intimidating, but constructive encouragement can be a solution.48% of the teachers say that they have pressure from their employers' end, but 18% say they do not. 10% of the teachers say rarely, 16% say sometimes, and 8% say often. During the interviews, most teachers even mentioned the pressure, which is not giving promotions, increments held up and so on. Here the response says 46% of teachers agreed that professional pressure could have a constructive force on them to do research, but 22% disagreed,12% rarely said,12% sometimes said,8%says often. Here 74% of teachers agreed that workload with other professional pressure could harm the teachers' psychology. Only 14% disagreed, and a small amount rarely said, sometimes and often. Among these teachers, only 20% know about continuous professional development, and 70% still need to learn about continuous professional development. 7% of the teachers rarely said, 2%said sometimes, and only 1% said often.

5. Reasons Identified

The reasons identified from the respondents' answers regarding their less involvement in the research activity mostly referred to the professional aspects responsible for the teachers' less involvement. Though it is their duty and they have professional pressure, they still do not feel the urge to research because this is not an activity that can be done under pressure; almost all of them agreed that a relaxed environment with acknowledgement and encouragement could draw the best out of them. The reasons the teachers identified during the interview are:

a) Heavy workload
b) Psychological pressure (there will be no promotion, respect and seniority issues)
c) Financial pressure (no or less increment)
d) Not enough time
e) Lack of financial help from the institute
f) No available advice and expert opinion
g) Less rewarding facilities
h) Limitation of the teachers'; knowledge, skill and exposure

6. Discussion

The results portrayed by the questionnaire and interview reflect that the teachers have a moderate engagement in research activity. The above figures can be interpreted in various ways in which the reply of the teachers was 'often' and 'sometimes'. The teachers who answered that they do research and feel that pressure from the employer can positively impact the teachers' psychology are those who have already done their PhD and have many publications, they have no requirements to meet, and they are in a relaxed position. They have already become senior and have less workload than the junior-positioned teachers. For them, the pressure is less, and the working environment is comfortable compared to the new teachers. Instead of enjoying the achievement of discovering something new, the teachers feel the pressure that they may not be able to get a promotion or have a salary rise. They feel that research can only give them an extra mark in their career graph, and the

idea of improving as a teacher is ignored. The research activity is personal for them because it relates to their professional growth rather than pedagogical development. It is an appealing idea that teachers design, conduct and share research projects with others, but the lack of support and external and internal pressure from the employer pose a threat to the preparation of good quality research.

7. Conclusion

There are much literature and many more favorable arguments that provide the benefits of being research–engaged teacher. However, in reality, the teachers systematic, structured and rigorous enquiry in their own professional arena is a rarely found activity. This is undoubtedly not a criticism of the teachers because other influential facts are working in the current situation of the above institute. The factors are drawn from the current working conditions of the teachers. The lack of a favorable research-friendly environment supported the teachers' limitations in skills, knowledge and proper attitude. Because of that, the teachers perceive the research activity as non-desirable. A beneficial and productive teacher research involvement is unlikely to occur without organizational, financial, intellectual and practical support. Therefore, the structure is needed to initiate and keep it sustainable to enhance the quality and quantity. Many issues are presented here which need s further enquiry. It needs to examine how often the teachers research and the impact of research in practice. The views provided here can have an awareness-raising function among institutions and individuals involved in promoting teacher research involvement. According to (Borg, 2009), 'Such initiatives are more likely to succeed when they are based on—and take as their starting point—an understanding of the conceptions of research teachers hold and of the contextual influences which shape the extent to which teacher research engagement is feasible'.

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