



## PROMOTION ORIENTED RESEARCH CULTURE: UNDERSTANDING SCHOLARS' DEFICIENCIES IN RESEARCH PROFICIENCY

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### ABSTRACT

Promotion-oriented research culture connects number of publications to selection in next rank. This incentive-based research environment provides less support to students in their research endeavors consequently they face a number of challenges while undertaking their research projects. This qualitative research investigated the students' problems through thematic analysis of the content of queries which they post on face book groups. Seven themes emerged from that data which represent range of students' research related problems including literature search, academic writing, topic selection, use of research software, statistics, publication and referencing. The findings of the study suggest that faculty should be evaluated equally on research and teachings if both are valuable for universities. Moreover, along with classroom teaching, students' research skills should boost through workshops, seminars, research bulletins and increased opportunities of scholarly interactions.

**Keywords:** Promotion-oriented research culture, Students deficiencies, research proficiency,

**JEL Codes:** M51, L84

### I. INTRODUCTION

The worth of academia can be determined by the quality and nature of contributions the research scholars add to shape the economic, social and scientific policies of a country for sustainable future (Hussain et al., 2019). The role of young scholars cannot be ignored in achieving these goals. The young scholars and emerging researchers are partner and future leaders in academic and research culture of universities. They are energetic, enthusiastic and have potential to contribute in their respective fields. They have the ability to learn and adapt to the changing dynamics and requirements of the changing world. Their spirit, abilities and the potential needs to be channelized to help them contribute to the development of a sustainable research culture within institutes to finally contribute to the development of nation. Development of sustainable research culture demands a continuous change across diverse research groups (Adams, Martin, & Boom, 2018) including young scholars. It is unreasonable to expect sustainable research culture without working on enhancing knowledge, skills, attitude and competence of young scholars (Brundiers & Wiek 2011). In developed countries, universities have an established research culture which contributes towards economic, social and scientific development of the country. While university culture in developing countries sticks to strong classroom teaching and too little is being carried out to conduct a fruitful research worthwhile for the country (Lodhi, 2012; SalazarClemeña & Almonte-Acosta, 2007). Present research culture in our country revolves around striving for multiplication of publications which is associated with university ranking and faculty promotion (Zardari, 2014). It neither centers on self-interest of scholars nor on contributing to the sustainable country's development. When scholars come to research, they find less support and face a number of problems which are part of our academic research culture.

Talking about this issue a faculty reflected in response to a query posted by a student on Facebook that: *"Our research has become "self-centered". Neither it is aligning with our personal interests not with country development. We have ignored young scholars which should be our primary focus"*. Research as knowledge generation tool is acknowledged as crucial for sustainable development (Waas et al., 2012; Ali and Naeem, 2017; Ali, 2011; Ali, 2015; Ali, 2018; Ali and Bibi, 2017; Ali and Ahmad, 2014; Ali and Audi, 2016; Ali and Audi, 2018; Ali and Rehman, 2015; Ali and Senturk, 2019; Ali and Zulfiqar, 2018; Ali et al., 2016; Ali et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2015; Arshad and Ali, 2016; Ashraf and Ali, 2018; Audi and Ali, 2017; Audi and Ali, 2017; Audi et al., 2021; Ali and Ali, 2016; Audi et al., 2021; Audi et al., 2021; Audi et al., 2021; Haider and Ali, 2015; Kaseem et al., 2019; Roussel et al., 2021; Senturk and Ali, 2021). Conventional and prevailing research practices seem not to address the requirements of sustainable development (Lodhi, 2016). It demands a sustainable research

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culture which is able to provide solutions to the problems of present scholars and also fulfill the requirements of future scholars to support them in generating fruitful and sustained research. Researching academic research culture has emerged as a parallel field of inquiry along with other aspects of academia such as supervision, teaching etc. A variety of scholarly literature has been produced on different aspects of academic research including research productivity, supervisor and scholar relationship, factors affecting academic research etc. Extensive efforts have been put to understand doctoral preparation and providing recommendations for novice researchers' development (Boote and Beile 2005; Golde, Walker, and Associates 2006; Kamler and Thomson 2006, 2008; Golde 2007; Levine 2007; Walker et al. 2008; Boud and Lee 2009; Olson and Clark 2009; Gardner and Mendoza 2010; Walker and Thomson 2010; League of European Research Universities 2010; McAlpine and Amundsen 2011; Lee and Danby 2012; Roulston, Preissle, & Freeman, 2013). Considerable work centers on understanding process of doctoral researchers (Lee 2008; Sambrook, Stewart, and Roberts 2008) and development of students as scholars and researchers are studied by (Colbeck 2008; Bruce, Stoodley, and Pham 2009; Johnson-Leslie 2009; Sweitzer 2009). Another body of literature dealt with how students perceive course work and its relationship to their development for dissertation research (Lovitts 2005). Students' perceptions regarding teaching and research relationship was addressed by (Llamas and Boza, 2011). Baker and Pifer (2011) examined the transition of scholars from course work to start dissertation work. However, there are few aspects including research culture which are rarely studied and still need scholarly attention Brew and Åkerlind (2009). Few scholars studied research culture in the universities of Pakistan including Sabzwari et al. (2009) and Lodhi (2016). However, they did not pay special attention towards the problems faced by young scholars during their research. The current paper is an effort to investigate individual scholars' capacity to conduct a research, what problems they face while undertaking research activities and how the present culture can be developed to foster their potential. An attempt will be made to recommend strategies for improving and refining the scholars' skills, knowledge, attitudes and competences to do a fruitful research.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study used multitasking theory which is an extension of simple principle agent model as theoretical framework. It explains possible changes in behavior of faculty in response to changing structure of incentives for multiple tasks. In simple principal agent model, principal assign the agent a single task. If the agent is self-centered (as faculty in our case) he will have incentive in perusing his own goals and will contradict principal's goals. Principal control agent's opportunistic behavior and encourage required effort by measuring its performance and attach incentives to that performance (Burgess and Ratto 2003; Heinrich and Marschke 2010; Lane 2012). Multitasking theory, on the other hand, assumes that agents execute several tasks or single task with multiple dimensions. In real life, public servants have to perform several tasks at the same time. As in the example of faculty, they have to manage between teaching, research and sometimes administrative duties simultaneously. Sometimes they have to perform many conflicting assignments (Dixit 2002; Holmstrom and Milgrom 1991; Rainey 2009). If agent is in multitask situation, the performance incentive system motivates him to reallocate his attention among various tasks and put in more effort to more incentivized task. As in our situation faculty have multiple tasks including research and teaching (Holmstrom and Milgrom 1991; Marschke 2001). However, we see they are evaluated only on research and have incentives for publications. The incentive allocation for one task inclines them to put more energy on research and less concentration on teaching. If agent is self-centered and don't put equal effort on all tasks, the performance base incentive system will not benefit organization. Performance measures and organizational values will be misaligning by moving in opposite direction (Bakers, 1992). This effort substitution can be reduced by compensating agent's effort on each task. In case of complementary performance where increase performance in one task will increase performance of other task, awarding incentive will increase output of both tasks (Marschke 2001). As in our case if teaching quality and research output are complementary and have symbiotic relationship, incentivizing one task will increase value of both.

A problematic situation occurs when a task is substitute for the agent but complementary from principal's point of view. In this situation high performance in all tasks is valuable for principal but from agent's point of view, spending more time in one task mean neglecting other or giving less time to other task (Dixit 2002; MacDonald and Marx 2001; Marschke 2001). In this situation negative effect occurs for overall organizational performance. Due to increase in marginal cost of other task agent will only focus on tasks offering high incentives and neglect others with low incentives (Dixit 2002). This promotion-oriented research culture revolves around achieving a specific number of publication criteria for selection in next rank. This race in turn makes faculty self-centered and contributed to the development of research environment where students find less support in their research endeavors when they come to research and face a number of challenges in conducting a productive research as elaborated by a faculty member in respond to a Facebook post, "*Whole day we are busy in playing research on our laptops and not giving required time to students. Despite of all this neither a fruitful researcher is being carried out nor are scholars developing professionally*". This provides room for further investigation of the phenomenon to unfold some other realities to have an in-depth understanding of the problems. This qualitative research is design to understand those problems which scholars face when they come to research through thematic analysis of the

content of queries which they post on face book groups. In view of this perspective, the following research questions are designed to achieve the objective of the study.

- i. What problems students face while conducting research in incentive-based research culture?
- ii. How existing literature support relationship between research and teaching in existing research culture?
- iii. In what ways can institutes support research scholars to foster a sustainable research culture in universities?

### III. METHODOLOGY

The paper used generic qualitative approach as research methodology. This approach perceives knowledge and human experience as constructed and contextual that focuses on how people construct their worlds; how they interpret their experiences and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Like other qualitative methodologies, generic studies also based on respondents' interpretation and meaning of their experiences. It tries to understand how people interpret their world (Merriam, 2002). According to Lim (2011), aim of these studies is to have a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation. This means that generic qualitative approaches generally used "highly inductive; methods including open codes, categories, and thematic analysis. (Lim, 2011). The term generic or basic qualitative study to refer to qualitative studies that do not fit in any specific subcategory of qualitative research such as case study, narrative, grounded theory, ethnography, or phenomenology (Lim,2011); Litchman, 2010; Merriam, 1998; 2002). Even though there are ample of researches exist providing different ideas about researches development including ways and challenges, this research aimed to give voice to subjective experiences and perceptions of students to allow the emergent of some new realities from a different angle. For that purpose, the researcher collected and analyzed the content of a number of face book pages which are especially managed to provide students with the facility to post their experiences of challenges and get scholarly response on their queries. These are platforms for students' scholarly interactions. The researcher collected content of students' posts of last two years to explore descriptions of challenges faced by scholars during their research. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis using four stages of themes development "initialization", "construction", "rectification", and "finalization" as suggested by (Vaismoradi et al, 2016).

### IV. ANALYSIS

Before analyzing data, out of scope posts were discarded from the content. Only post related to research were included. Total no of post analyzed were 2720. Seven themes emerged from the analysis which represents problems faced by students in literature search, academic writing, topic selection, research software, statistics, publication and referencing.

**Table 1. Total number of posts against each theme and its percentage in given in the table.**

Sr. No.	Theme	No. of Posts	Percentage
1	literature search	1024	37.65
2	academic writing	552	20.29
3	Topic Selection	540	19.85
4	research software	380	13.97
5	Statistics	116	4.26
6	Publication	60	2.21
7	Referencing	48	1.76
Total		2720	100

### V. LITERATURE SEARCH

Literature search is identified as significant component of literature review process. If a researcher is not able to search systematically, he will not succeed in generating a transparent report on what was done to identify studies and how the findings from review are grounded in relevant literature (Cooper et al, 2018). An effective literature search is required at each level of research process from topic selection to finally presentation of findings and recommendations. From the analysis of posts, literature search relevant to their studies appears as the most problematic area of students. Out of total 1024 scholars post queries seeking help in relevant literature search. It is 37.65% of the total posts. It ranges from literature search to download. Some time students are not able to search relevant literature or data sources and some time they are not succeed in downloading. The post regarding literature involves searching and downloading books, articles, scales/inventories etc. One can find a range of interesting post such as, "need questionnaire on corporate leadership. Kindly share". Or "need questionnaire about "or" social support questionnaire needed with source". Students are not well trained in online searching of questionnaire or what are few data sources of his required field. Students do need related studies which they usually find difficult to search. A student post query, "A.O.A, my topic is "Teacher intention to teach online. I need to apply "Technology

*acceptance model" on it. plz help. How can I download related studies? How can i do? Plz help me."* It is very strange looking. Student has decided topic and theoretical support but has no literature yet. He is asking for help in downloading. Sometimes scholars ask help in downloading an article after sharing its DOI. Sometime people need to download a book online, *"Can anyone provide me with books on mysticism (English translation) by Ibne Arbi"*. Although universities have digital access to most of big sources from where students can download book, articles, and thesis etc., student still face problems in literature search.

## **VI. ACADEMIC WRITING**

Academic writing emerged as second major theme after the analysis of data. 552 posts were identified as asking solution to academic writing related problems. This constitutes 20.29% of total posts. Scholars asked questions about writing of different parts of thesis, article and proposal including introduction, abstract, problem statement, research methodology, theoretical framework, tool preparation, sampling etc. It seems a major problematic area. We came across post as, *"what are main parts of introduction; how can I write abstract of my article. What is difference between theoretical framework and conceptual framework; Hello, in literature review what need to be explained; how much part of theory should I write to support hypothesis? how can I interpret results from PLS SEM etc."*? Problems related to academic writing are about all parts of thesis or article starting from abstract to conclusion, discussion and recommendation. Sometimes scholars have to apply for some foreign scholarship. They need to write proposal and research plan for that purpose. When they find difficulty in writing so, they ask help by posting queries on Facebook.

## **VII. TOPIC SELECTION**

A research problem identification and selection are very crucial part of whole research as it organizes and guides the researcher throughout the project. It represents the crux of subject matter produced by different scholars in the subject under study. It leads the research to other conversation topics to discover new knowledge and understanding (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). Despite of all its importance students face serious difficulty when they come to selection of topic for research. Out of total 540 posts are related to finding help in topic selection. This is 19.85% of the total posts which seems very big part of overall problems. Students posts about the queries regarding topic selection range from very general to very specific posts. Sometimes students just ask, *"How can I select a best topic; what are strategies of selecting best topic; "Hey People, I am currently in my 4rd year of Civil Engineering. I just need some of your opinion of what will be the best title you find most interesting, that one I should opt in my final year project and also research related etc."*. They also ask specific question as, *"Plz help me in topic selection. My area is machine learning; or I am working on organizational environment, plz help me in finalizing topic for research etc."* Few students have decided their topic but now they are helpless how to further proceed on the topic. For instance, they tell topic and ask how they can further manage this title.

## **VIII. RESEARCH SOFTWARE**

Research software emerged as forth major theme representing students' problems when they come to research. 380 students post queries asking help about software including where to find and download software; how to install and crack it; how to use its different features etc. researchers asked questions about different software including MS Word for writing, analysis software (SPSS, NVivo, PLS, R etc), referencing software (Endnote, Mendeley, Zotero etc), grammar checking software, plagiarism checking software etc. Availability of software is very basic problem as somebody enquired, *"Hi all, I am looking for SPSS software, plz share. My email is JAZAKALLAH"*. They also have difficulty in using specific software and ask help to run analysis on data. It is also emerged that students don't have access to all features of different software. Actually, these are paid features and students don't afford them. Universities usually don't bother to provide students with such facility.

## **IX. STATISTICS**

Students' difficulties related to statistics constitute fifth major theme. If someone doing quantitative research, he must have good understanding of statistics. From the total post 116 people post queries regarding questions about statistics which comprises 4.26% of total posts. Students usually asked questions about how to choose a right state; how to decide different statistical tests for a specific type of data; how to interpret values derived from different statistical tests etc. Posts like, *"Anyone can help me about statistical analysis? Its template in writing?"* represent students' problems in every aspect of analysis. They don't have expertise in analysis as well as in making tables. Posts like, *"hi! Any one please helps me in interpretation of this stable"* represent problems in interpretation of results. Moreover, post like this, *"Can anyone help me to run my CFA via MOS; Who can help me with multilevel analyses in SPSS or HML? Please PM me"* represent challenges in some specific test or some specific software.

## **X. PUBLICATION**

60 scholars post queries regarding publication which is 2.21% of the total posts. Although there are few numbers of scholars who asked about publication though it doesn't mean that this is not a serious problem. Students have serious concerns regarding publication facilities and charges which open access journals receive for publication and

local journal receives through agents. Information about journal is very basic problematic area as post by students represent different aspects of problems regarding publication, "*Plz can anyone suggest few good journals for publication related to psychiatry!!! Thank you very much; Any HEC recognized journal for Computer science without publication fee????; Any popular veterinary public health journal with free article submission. Guide please*".

### **XI. REFERENCING**

Referencing emerge as a small theme as compare to others. Only 48 scholars out of total post queries asking about referencing. This comprises 1.76% of total posts. Mostly people asked about types of reference or how to make reference in a specific format or how to manage references in different software.

### **XII. DISCUSSION**

The research results unfolded the claim of faculty that they have become self-centered and consequently, students are suffering. As a faculty member during a discussion on Facebook explained the situation, "*Now they are only self-centered because they are going to evaluate only on research production. Nobody asks about teaching; the real purpose of their existence in university*". A growing body of literature also supports the claim. Bak (2015) pointed out two reasons due to which universities are pushing faculty into research. First is commercialization policy of universities in different countries where academic research is translated into intellectual property and marketable products to contribute in national progress (Etzkowitz and Webster 1998; Krimsky 2003; Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Slaughter and Rhoades 2009). Secondly, intensified global competition among universities in the pursuit of ranking which is mostly based on their scholarly contribution influences them to increase focus on research (Shin and Toutkoushian 2011; Strathern 2000; Hazelkorn 2011). Simultaneously, many experts showed their concern that faculty members don't fully concentrate on teaching when they have emphasis on research (Hacker and Dreifus, 2010; Bak, 2015; Rhode 2006). As a result, students suffer and face challenges in their research endeavors. From many empirical studies, no clear evidence is found that involvement in research enhances teaching quality. On the other side few studies reported negative correlation between the two (Astin 1993). While few studies found no correlation or weak positive correlation between research productivity and teaching effectiveness (Feldman 1987; Hattie and Marsh 1996; Marsh and Hattie 2002; Prince et al. 2007).

From theoretical perspective, a problematic situation is that research and teaching are substitute for faculty but are complementary for universities. University wants equal performance in both task including teaching and research because it is valuable for him but for faculty spending more time in research mean neglecting teaching. The situation becomes more severe when faculty become self-centered and spend more time in personal research consequently neglecting students in both teaching and research. Referring to student inability to select area and topic for research, one can have the impression that scholar is in the area which is not his interest and relevance. He might not have access to available data resources or he doesn't have ability to access those data. However, along with above mentioned there is another cause which lies in the selection system of candidates for research degrees. How a person without having clear understanding of what he is going to research centers in M.Phil or PhD degree. He should have a clear understanding of what he is going to research or what is his area of interest. However, if scholars enter without having an understanding of the subject and process of research require to selection of research topic will likely to face problem in his research endeavors. The problem associated mostly with departments offering M.Phil or PhD programs and selection procedures. They should start concentrating definition of research before starting the session despite after one year from the start of program. What happen is that departments usually select candidate according to available positions. They even bypass merit to fill all seats. Therefore, they cannot judge scholars' understanding of what they will research. They usually select candidate on the basis of an entry test and an interview which became a formality as if it is unable to judge the actual interest of scholars. Lastly referring to the inability to use different software in research process, it is obvious that we have very weak workshops culture in universities. Students can train in out of class activities like seminars and workshops. Moreover, they are not provided with registered versions of different software. There use is not encouraged because faculty is mostly not easy with their use. This is very basic reason that students faced challenges in software usage as they were not encouraged and trained to do so during course work.

### **XIII. POLICY IMPLICATION**

This research is pretty much practical in nature and would contribute in policy formulation in many ways both at institutional and government level. Firstly, this study would address an implementation gap. We see at institutional level many things are not implemented at the level suggested by HEC. Publication policy may be one of them. In many aspects it is obvious that HEC has good intentions but it is unable to implement its strategies successfully through the universities. The nature of this phenomenon is very broad but I am trying to summing it up by providing an example. Look at the scenario where a student posts a query on face book: *Hello everybody. Anyone please downloads this article for me (doi)*. This seems very strange because almost every institute have digital access to many renowned journals through HEC Digital Library. Now it is very obvious that if HEC is providing access, why institute is prohibiting. Either university is not facilitating or students don't have knowledge about it.

Both problems are related to university. We observe it in daily routine that there is very weak trend of using digital library. Moreover, we never heard any training program for students on using digital library by any faculty. By this study we shall have a clear picture about the types of implementation gaps and how these gaps can be filled to facilitate a sustainable research culture. Secondly, post Higher Education Commission (HEC) era with unprecedented reforms at national level has changed the landscape of university culture significantly. HEC reforms were centered at promoting and supporting research activities in the universities backed by sufficient financial resources. Many research projects were also given to universities which had to involve young scholars in the projects. It means that one objective of these programs is to allow young scholars training also. But practically we see very less involvement. This study will provide an insight that how spending resources are fruitful in term of changing a research culture in a productive way. Additionally, it will provide a cost benefit analysis of HEC financing in term of young scholars' capacity building. Thirdly, CPEC has offered potential to accelerate knowledge generation through shaping a researcher culture on both sides (Masood 2019). Every year, China offers Pakistani students around 7,000 fully funded scholarships to master's and PhD courses. In February, its ambassador to Islamabad, Yao Jing, pledged to nearly treble these, up to 20,000 annually. Some 28,000 Pakistani students are already studying in China, and around 6,000 are doing PhDs (Masood, 2019). Despite of all this we cannot fully utilize this opportunity until working on capacity building of young scholars. I personally know many scholars studying there who went without acquiring basic skills to excel in a research culture. They are not performing at required level hence wasting the time and resources of both countries. Moreover, there is another concern about those scholars is that how we can channelize their potential after coming back to Pakistan. Do we have a research supporting environment for young scholars? This study will provide a fruit of thought and direction for policy makers to work on the development of young scholars both going to China and coming back from China. Fourthly, this research is an eye opening for policy makers about existing research culture in universities. This culture needs to be transformed to meet the challenges of modern world by responding challenges faced by young scholars. An academic research culture is a combination of many disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge, ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge production, sharing and transmission modes. It also includes practices include in research or how peer review is exercised, socialization in department and other networks involve intellectuals and learned societies. These all aspects need to rethink and boosts through workshops, seminars, research bulletins and increased opportunities of scholarly interactions. Last but not the least, HEC have to rethink its incentive system for research and promotion criteria. That is based on publication and neglect teaching quality. They should think whether this system is source of motivation or greed as a faculty member expressed during a discussion on Facebook, "HEC has made faculty greedy". They should include quality of teaching while evaluating overall performance of university faculty.

#### **XIV. RECOMMENDATION**

This small research tries to understand our research culture through a qualitative investigation of students' views and existing literature and draw a static relationship between students' research related problems and incentive-oriented research culture. This need to further investigate the phenomenon by measuring how faculty response changes over time in adopting new policies and incentives and how their actions effect students' performance. Secondly, this research was small scale and extended on a single theme of my PhD dissertation. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized over a large population and should be used carefully. Future researcher may generalize these results through a quantitative research on the basis of emergent themes. Thirdly, along with scholars' development there is need to investigate supervisor's professional development. It might be an implementation gap on behalf of supervisors. They may not well train in modern trend in academic research and unable to deliver. A research is needed to investigate the existing research potential of university faculty and how their research skills can further be flourished.

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