

LECTURERS' PERSPECTIVE OF SELF-EFFICACY TOWARDS RESEARCH: 'PUSH OR NOT TO PUSH'

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ABSTRACT

Lecturers in teacher training institute are encouraged to conduct research and are given the opportunities to present the research findings in conferences or to publish them in journals. However, the number of articles produced yearly is not promising compared to the number of lecturers in the institution. This study seeks to examine the factors which affect lecturers' self-efficacy towards research activities. A case study was conducted in a teacher training institute, involving four lecturers who have more than 20 years of teaching experience. These lecturers were interviewed using semi structured interview. Through phenomenological approach analysis, five salient factors were discovered from these interviews, namely, subject matter expertise, motivation, positive environment, interest and personal strength. This article discusses the nature of these five factors and their implications on the willingness of lecturers to be involved in research activities. This article also provides some measures that can be taken to enhance the lecturers' self-efficacy towards research.

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian National Education Plan 2001-2010 has given a lot of emphasis to research and development. All division under the Ministry of Education were instructed to continue their effort to conduct research related to policies and current educational practices and issues. Lecturers at the Teacher Education Institute (TEI) and teachers in schools were encouraged to conduct action research to address problems pertaining to teaching and learning processes. In line with that, the Teacher Education Division (TED) took positive steps to accelerate research activities in TEI nationwide, which includes activities such as organising conferences at the national and zone levels as a platform for sharing the research findings among educators and practitioners.

All the measures above are taken put with the intention to provide opportunity for the sharing of research findings and to convince educators and practitioners that the findings they obtained from research are important and that, the research that they conducted is actually worthwhile doing.

According to Bandura (as in Kauchak, 2005) self-efficacy is an individual's believe on their own capability to organize and complete a course of action required to accomplish a specific

type of task. In higher education institutions, lecturers' self-efficacy is the lecturer's belief on themselves to complete task successfully as a teacher, researcher and academician. Self-efficacy is a strong predictor for motivation and a strong determinant of an individual's performance (Heslin, 2006). Heslin (2006) also noted that if an individual has a low sense of self-efficacy, the low self-efficacy will demotivate the individual, affect their job performance and become hopeless and ineffective. Therefore, self-efficacy is a construct that determines how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. General mental ability, experience and motivation are some of the contributing factors to self-efficacy towards research (Judge, Jackson, Shaw, Scott and Rich, 2007) besides demographic factors such as age, gender and academic level efficacy (Kamarud-din and Ibrahim, 2009; Hemmings and Kay, 2008; Jingsong Zhao, McCormick & Hoekman, 2008).

In order to raise lecturers' level of self-efficacy towards research activities, TEI organises staff development courses on research methodology and conference and arrange for innovative projects competition. In addition, lecturers are also encouraged to publish their research findings in journals to promote research culture among lecturers and students.

Given the efforts taken above, the important questions that beg an immediate answer is how capable and confident are the lecturers in conducting their own research and whether they are willing to conduct the research? This issues need to be addressed because, as suggested by Mallam (1994), lecturers at TEI tend to give more emphasis to their teaching tasks compared to conducting research and publishing academic papers. Unfortunately, to the best of our knowledge, issues related to lecturers' self-efficacy towards research has not been given its due attention in Malaysia. This research is intended to gather data and findings to fill the void in this area. We believe that, to improve the research activity among lecturers, it would be strategic and appropriate to examine the lecturers' levels of self-efficacy towards research and results of this research can be used as a basis to take relevant measures to further increase the sense of self-efficacy towards research.

Aims of the study

The main aims of this research is to examine lecturers' self-efficacy towards research and to examine the underlying dimensions that contribute to lecturers' self-efficacy towards research in one of the TEI in Malaysia. The research questions for this study are:

1. To what extent is the lecturers' self-efficacy towards research and research related activities?
2. What are the underlying dimensions that contribute to lecturers' self-efficacy towards research and research related activities?

Sample

In this phenomenological study, three individuals were selected as informants based on purposive sampling. These informants are considered as senior lecturers at the local TEIs. Upon being approached, all three informants agreed to participate in this study and consented to their interview sessions being recorded. Their ages range between 44 and 57 years old with teaching experiences between 22 and 34 years. This makes them senior and experienced lecturers. All three of the informants reported that they have been involved in many research activities throughout their career. One of the informants (hereonwards referred to as Informant X) participated in the pilot study. After the pilot study, the interview questions and interview protocol were

reworded and refined based on the comments given by Informant X. The other two informants (Informant A or IA and Informant B or IB) both participated in the actual interviews.

Data collection

Following the refinement of interview questions and protocol, an appointment was made with IA and IB to conduct interviews which they duly agreed. The interviews were design as semi-structured. This allows the interviewer to form new questions related to the themes explored as the interview progresses. To facilitate the interview sessions and to maintain a certain level of focus, the interview questions were arranged according to this study's research questions. Below are samples of the interview questions corresponding to the research questions:

Research Question (RQ) 1: What is the extent of lecturers' self-efficacy towards research and research related activities?

Interview questions for RQ1:

- a. Could you share your experience in research?
- b. Do you prefer to conduct research on your own or collaborate with others?
- c. Have you encountered any problem in conducting research?
- d. How confident are you in conducting research?

Research Question (RQ) 2: What are the underlying dimensions that contribute to lecturers' self-efficacy towards research and research related activities?

Interview questions for RQ2:

- a. What inspired you to conduct research? (What would motivate you to conduct research?)
- b. What are your main concerns when conducting research?
- b. Could you tell me about your published research?
- c. Could you share your experience in presenting research findings in conference?

Data analysis

The phenomenological approach was selected as the basis for analysing the data obtained from IA and IB. The verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews was prepared with the help of digital voice editor. Based on the verbatim transcription the main points or ideas from each interview were identified while the themes were drawn from the main points for every research question. In order to ensure the credibility of the main points identified, the researcher sought the help of two different lecturers with impeccable academic qualification and an extensive experience in conducting qualitative research as raters to review and analyse the verbatim transcription. These raters were asked to identify the number of points or ideas in each interview. The main points identified by the raters were matched with those identified by the researcher to check on the levels of agreement. Percentage of agreement is listed in Table1.

Table 1:
Credibility of the analysis with the researcher

	Main Points in agreement with the rater	
	Informant A	Informant B
Researcher	33	60
Rater 1	30 (90.9%)	55 (91.7%)
Rater 2	28 (84.8%)	54 (90.0%)

Findings

Several

themes emerged from the main points and these themes are elaborated with excerpts from the interviews.

Research Question 1: What is the extent of lecturers' self-efficacy towards research and research related activities?

Interview Questions:

1. Could you share your experience in research?

Environment

Informant A(IA) and Informant B (IB) were teaching in school prior to their current job as lecturer. Both informants stated that they got involve in research just after joining the teacher training institute (formerly teachers' training college).

'Aa So that is one of the thing I learn you know, when I went to the teacher training college ..and the other thing I really started to do was research.'

(I1, DU 232-242)

This is in agreement with Bandura's Social Psychology Theory which says that the environment is a contributing factor that influence once behaviour (Kauchak, 2005). In this case the informants were in an environment where research is encouraged and all concerned in the environment were given the opportunity to do research.

Evaluation

There were two types of evaluation emerged from the informants responses:

- i. Evaluations of teaching and learning (reflective practice)

IB have been practising reflective thinking as a lecturer. She had critically evaluated her teaching merely to improve her teaching as well as student learning.

'is like the 3rd time I'm teaching them and I feel it is ~ so much better'

(I2, DU 197-204)

- ii. Program evaluation

Beside evaluating teaching practices, both informants have conducted research to evaluate the academic program. The IA together with her team conducted research to evaluate the foundation program which she was teaching.

'when I look at whether this foundation , whether we have prepared them enough for the degree program. It's a kind of evaluation isn't ?'

(I1, DU 241)

'is so kind of assessing whether we have done what we are supposed to do or gone beyond to prepare them you know'

(I1, DU 243)

The informants indicated that they have conducted research to evaluate academic program and to evaluate teaching practices with the intentions of improving teaching and learning. It is also revealed that the informants were reflective practitioners.

2. Do you prefer to conduct research on your own or collaborate with others?

Collaboration

The informants revealed that they are capable of conducting research independently and as a team. Both informants had produced several research reports through collaboration with other colleagues. However they indicated that characteristic of members in the group do matters for them to work as a team in terms of expertise, experience and commitment.

'the team comprised of various people from UK, and than our former head of department..... all very experience people'

(I1, DU 140-142)

'.....and I was very fortunate to be invited to be part of the team'

(I1, DU 138)

'I'm a person who can work alone. And I also can work... if it is a group you must see the ~~~ group'

(I2, DU 319-326)

3. Have you encountered any problem in conducting research?

Writing Skill

IA who is an English Language lecturer have had an interest in writing and many times indicated that she is into write. IA did not claim to have encountered any problem in conducting research and writing research report. However the IB stated that there were several times when she had carried out action research but found it lazy to write the report of the findings and therefore, did not complete any report at all.

'..... so people say you write book lah you write book, and my answer is I malas'

(I2, DU 240)

'...you write lah , you write lah but lazy to put it down'.

(I2, DU 244)

However, IB also noted that despite not producing any research report on her own, she did complete other research reports that were written together with her colleagues. She also claimed that she assisted her students in preparing the reports of their research projects.

'Something which to me I do it I do it but aaa just put it in..... writing is another matter'

(I2,DU 404-406)

'if they have given us the chance they would have look better'
(I2, DU 412)

It could be inferred that IB has a difficulty in writing an academic report on her own and this had contributed to the fact that she did not produce her own research report.

Motivation

Motivation and capacity are important determinants of job performance (Prawirosentono, 1999 as in Yusrizal and A. Halim, 2009). The informants indicated that lack of external motivation and internal motivation may lead to being unproductive. IA has internal motivation and receive external motivation which made her feel confident to be involved in research and related activities without any problem.

'I think it was the fact that mmm.. I was very interested in literature you know'

(I1, DU 70)

'...and I felt I could write you know I was happy I wrote even....'

(I1, DU 80)

IB indicated that she is lacking in terms of motivation and seeking for moral support and opportunity from colleagues and management (TED) to boost her confidence to conduct research. Furthermore IB continuously declaring own laziness to write and wants to be pushed to produce research and research related activities.

'at least it will push us more , give us ..a.. what you call it ... semangat a...'

(I2, DU 418)

'.. and also at the same time push us to be a more active in researchlah,'

(I2, DU 422)

Internal and external motivations are important elements to boost lecturers confidence in conducting research. The encouraging word that comes from the superior is more powerful in motivating lecturers to do research.

4. How confident are you in conducting research?

Personal Strength

IA and IB claimed that they have confidence in conducting research and both have demonstrated their confidence by conducting research individually and in collaboration with others. IA revealed that the confidence come from the expertise in the subject matter, writing skill, working with experienced people and encouragement from superiors.

'myself and de all very experience people'

(I1, DU 144)

'so I learn a great deal from that research ok'

(I1, DU 144)

IB also has the expertise in specific area and she had conducted research in that area, such as health education and pedagogy of Physical Education.

External Motivation

IB claimed to have the confidence to conduct research but did not take the initiative to conduct and to produce research report because research is not compulsory. Instead, IB had to seek for motivation and directive from the superiors to conduct her research (Heslin,2006).

'I'll do it, I'll do it, Definitely I'll do it..... .. Yes I need a push.'

(I2, DU 230)

Summary for the Research Question 1

Informants in this study displayed a high level of self-efficacy towards conducting research. Their confidence and willingness to conduct research, individually or in groups, indicated that they feel at ease with the tasks and activities that must be performed when conducting research. The only element that they do not feel comfortable about is in the report writing stage. While writing in a group seems convenient, writing a report individually seems like a daunting task to the informants.

Several themes have emerged from the first research question, namely environment, evaluation, collaboration, writing skill, motivation and personal strength. Lecturers felt encouraged and motivated to conduct research when they are in the conducive environment and if they have the skills and expertise in the area being researched. Motivated lecturers conduct research and produce report independently and collaboratively with other colleagues and also get involved in research related activities. However, there are lecturers have the knowledge of conducting research activities such as action research but find it difficult in writing the research report. They are also confident in writing research report and presenting in conference if given the opportunity to work with experienced people and encouragement.

Research Question 2: What are the underlying dimensions that contribute to lecturers' self-efficacy towards research and research related activities?

Interview questions:

1. What inspired you to conduct research? (What would motivate you to conduct research?)

Expertise

Expertise in subject matter drives the informant to do research in their own area of specialization (Judge, et. al., 2007). IA conducted research in English Language and IB did in Health and Physical Education.

'....and I'm a literature major . So I wrote about activities I conducted in one of my class'

(I1, DU 60)

'and something that I want to do to write about'

(I1, DU 160)

'I like the area of amm , something across curriculum, language across curriculum, aaa values across curriculum so I had one in.....'

(I2, DU 165)

The knowledge and skill they have acquired together with their experience may have given them the confidence conduct research in the area they specialize.

Requirement

Informant A and B indicated that if research is made compulsory (Au Wai Yan, 2009) for all lecturers it would spur the informants to carry out research. IA first conducted a research as requirement when she was completing her master's degree thesis. She conducted another research because it was also a requirement for the programme for which she was working. These two instances suggest that lecturers need to be "push" to conduct research by way of top-down directive from their superiors in an organization.

'way I was very involved in twinning program ... after the 10 year program there was post-program research'

(I1, DU 112-114)

'Part of my work reflective thinking I think if I'm the type I think aaa I am forced to do it'

(I2, DU 228)

'and my thesis was in the self-Access centre'

(I1, DU 92)

'about what they felt about self-access centre'

(I1, DU 102)

IB was very clear about her stance in that she will only do research if it is compulsory or if she was forced to conduct a research.

Interest

Interest seems to be an important factor to do research. Both informants have the interest in doing the research. IA got inspired to do research because IA had interest in the subject matter.

'I think it was the fact that mmm.. I was very interested in literature you know'

(I1, DU 70)

'But somehow sometime I feel just inspired to write about something'

(I1, DU 110)

'We did like pantun , pantum across curriculum, pantum in a Phy J,...saaao that was successful. And so After that, the the friend the girls' friends they saw that she could use pantun then after that they the They tried out using mathematics , using science in PHy Ed using station method and all that , n that was interesting'

(I2, DU129-131)

However, the interest in the subject matter or the research alone is not sufficient to produce a research report. In the case of IB, although she had the interest in the subject matter and had the support of the colleagues, she still did not write a report for the research conducted. IB stated that laziness as one of the reason for not reporting the research.

'..... so people say you write book lah you write book, and my answer is I malas'

(I2, DU 240)

Opportunity

IA was encouraged and given the opportunity to participate in conference as a presenter by her superior. That first opportunity had boosted her confidence and motivated IA to continue with research and to participate in more conferences.

'she encourage me in fact she made it compulsory for me to present'

(I1, DU 180)

'I think that is one of encouragement I got' .

(I1, DU 199)

'Ya so From then I began to also present ... at various conferences ever since that I think I have like written a piece or presented something at least once in two a year'

(I1, DU 201 - 203)

In contrast, IB claimed that there were no opportunities to participate as a presenter in conference. IB frequently mentioned that the Teacher Education Division (TED) should consider giving opportunity to IB to be an advisor for students' research project as well as to be given opportunity to present research findings in conferences.

'if they have given us the chance they would have look better than some research so I have hope that BPG lah, IPG, IPG like next year our PE student will be in the final they have come up with such as their research project let say we are (ha aa) if we are invited to be there aaa what you call it a supervisors'

(DU 410)

It is not clear if IB is aware of the existing opportunity. May be it is her laziness that made her superiors not to give her the opportunity to present papers at conferences? Did she take initiative to acquire necessary the skill? Did she explore for options and opportunity to do research? This is an indication that individual's attitude is a contributing factor towards research activity.

2. Could you tell about your published research?

Publication

The IA has the interest, confidence and skills in writing to publish the research article. IB has the expertise in pedagogy, with that she has collaborated with other colleagues, to publish research article in journal. However there were several action research that IB carried out for improving teaching and learning but it was not reported.

'When I was in I wrote my 1st article ... published in the journal.'

(I1, DU 54-56)

'Aa Yes we did have something research with a among in the department...In the department, in the department one was with and de who was a..... think....., we did something on obesity, a and body image of KPLI ,

(I2, DU 162-164)

3. Could you share your experience in presenting research findings in conference?

Motivation

IA noted that the experience of presenting in conference was very encouraging. IA's first presentation was well received by the host and the audience. Such positive experience motivated her to continue with her research activities.

'Ya so From then I began to also present ... at various conferences ever since that I think I have like written a piece or presented something at least once in two a year'

(I1, DU 201 - 203)

Unfortunately, IB did not have any presentation of research experience to share.

Summary for research question 2

The data obtained from this study indicate that the underlying dimensions that contribute to lecturers' self-efficacy towards research are: interest, expertise in subject matter, writing skill, motivation, job requirement and opportunity. Lecturers' expertise in the subject matter gives them the confidence to explore further through research. The positive feelings they experience when their research works were recognised give them the positive experience, confidence and motivate them to continue with research. However, writing skill is equally important for the lecturers to report their findings.

Discussion

Lecturers get encouraged and motivated to conduct research when they are in the positive environment and when they have the skills and expertise from their training to conduct research. Generally, their main reason for conducting research is to improve their practises as well as students learning. They also conduct research to address current issues in education. Furthermore lecturers are involved in research for program evaluation as an effort to do systematic improvement to the program.

The underlying dimensions that contribute to lecturers' self-efficacy towards research are the lecturers' interest in conducting research, expertise in subject matter, writing skill, motivation, job requirement and opportunity. Lecturers' expertise in the subject matter gives them the confidence to explore further through research. The positive feelings they experienced when conducting their research increases their confidence in doing research and motivate them to continue with research and research related activities. At the same time, it must be noted that the lecturers' mastery of writing skill is also important for the lecturers to report their research findings.

With reference to the theme emerged in this interview we wish to propose the following model (Figure 1) to represent lecturers' self-efficacy towards research.

There are few dimensions that contribute to lecturers' self-efficacy towards research. While the interest in doing research can motivate the lecturers to participate in a research activity, their expertise in an area that is being researched on can give them the confidence and provide them with a certain amount of authority to speak about the research.

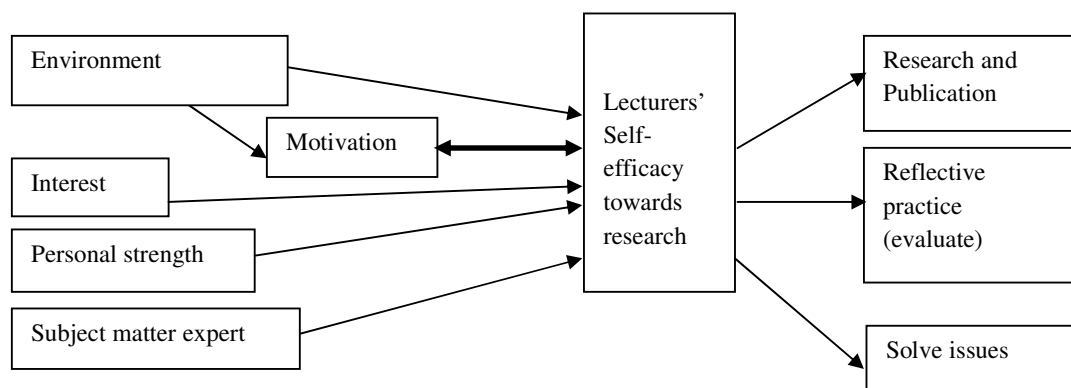


Figure 1: Lecturers' Self-efficacy Model

The environments where we work sometimes become very encouraging especially when people around you always speak about research and conduct research. In the environment where research culture exist, besides encouraging you verbally, the superiors in an organization should also become exemplars by conducting their own research. This will send a message to the subordinates in the organization that they too could become researchers (Kauchak, 2005). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can boost an individual's confidence to perform and in this study we found that this was true for Informant A and Informant B. Informant A had a very strong intrinsic motivation and at the same time had extrinsic motivation from the superiors as well as her own experience she had, gave her the confidence to conduct research.

Personal strengths in terms of the ability to work independently and in a team, to work collaboratively and of being proactive are good personal qualities which can contribute to self-efficacy in conducting a research. In addition, the Informants in this study were found to be very interested in their subject matter and in exploring the subjects matter further through research activities.

All the five factors above would increase the lecturers' self-efficacy towards research. This enables them to conduct research for evaluating their practices and academic programs, and to resolve relevant educational issues. Such activities which include improving teaching and learning may lead to creativity and innovation.

Conclusion

In this study we found that the factors which can predict lecturers' self-efficacy towards research are the lecturers' expertise in subject matter, interest in subject matter and research, motivation, positive environment and personal strength. The stronger the lecturers' self efficacy towards research the more the possibility for them to be engaged in research activities, be it in conducting the research or in reporting the research findings.

Implication

The findings of this study have three major implications to the lecturers and to the organizations. First, lecturers must be aware of their ability in writing academic and report writing. If their ability is low, remedial measures ought to be taken such as attending report writing workshops. Second, organizations should consider encouraging their lecturers to conduct research by way of giving them incentives through research grants or by making research activities as one of the compulsory

tasks in lecturers' job scope. Third, organizations should create a culture of sharing research findings among their lecturers by providing ample chances for them to present academic papers in conferences, locally and abroad.

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