Research Culture among Academics at Higher Education Institutions: A Case Study at the International Islamic University Malaysia

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Abstract

Academic research has been converted into a basic element of the mission of universities, through which they contribute to the success of regional, economic, cultural and educational development plans. Thus, the success of a university today is likely being measured through the number of research, publications and intellectual properties produced by academic staff. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate the existence of research culture at the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) and examines academic staff perceptions toward it. It employed a survey method to gather the data. A survey was administered to a sample of academic staff at all Kulliyyahs (Faculties), Institutes and Centers at IIUM. A number of 411 academic staff participated as respondents in this study. A set of questionnaire consisting of 39 items was constructed to examine the research culture at IIUM. Where as a simple descriptive statistical analysis which includes percentages, frequencies and means was used for data analysis. The outcomes of this research are that tangible practical implications have emerged from the data analysis and the discussions. It is evident that academics are prepared to practice the research culture at IIUM, as well as their dispositions to engage in intellectual discourse. The academic staff are aware of the importance of research, the procedure of conducting research and that they believe that by doing research, their teaching competencies can be further improved.

Key words

Research culture, Education, IIUM research

Introduction

One of the major responsibilities of higher educational institutions is to imbue in academic staff and students the passion to carry out research. Equally, for any institutions to be progressive, both students and academic staff must possess the zeal for continuous research practice. Meanwhile, the success of an academic staff and of a university today as a whole could likely be measured through the number of research, publications and intellectual properties produced by academic staff as well as students. Academic research has been converted into a basic element of the mission of universities, through which they contribute to the success of regional, economic,

cultural and educational development plans. In addition, conducting successful research gives rise to professional excellence, creating an academic reputation, both of which are considered essential attributes in gaining high competitive positions. Thus, the importance of practitioners undertaking research is well acknowledged in many different professions (Jarvis, 1999).

Grigoreet et. al (2009) explained the importance of conducting research to the universities. Research is vital, firstly, in accomplishing the mission of the universities. Secondly, academic research has a major role in attracting and maintaining a teaching staff of top professionalism and a category of students of special quality, related to the requirements and offer of the institutions. Thirdly, academic research is one of the conditions needed to create and sustain a stimulating environment for the transmission and rapid assimilation of knowledge and transfer of experience from one generation to another and between different socio economic levels. Fourthly, research contributes to the establishment of relations with other institutions of higher education, with professionals and specialists in various fields.

In addition, one of the major conditions for improving the corporate acceptance and integrity of any higher educational institutions as well as achieving the "Research University" status is hinged upon improving on its research profile and standing. This improvement and development could only be possible if there is a presence of "research culture" amongst academic staff and students within the environment of an academic institution.

Definition of Research Culture

Research Culture has been viewed in the same way as organizational culture (Hill, 1999). Hill (1999:2) further espouses, following Schein (1985) that research culture:

> …reflects the values, ideals and beliefs about research within the organization. They, in turn are reflected in the research behaviours, research actions and research symbols of the organization. Just as the 'teaching culture' of the institution is found in the teaching values and styles, and the 'management culture' found in the managerial values and styles then the 'research culture' would reflect the research values and styles.

Similarly, the research culture has slowly been assimilated into the scholarly Malaysian environment. Cheetam (2007) affirmed;

> Research is the first strand (note the first is research), embracing the systematic generation of new knowledge, development of new ideas and experiment with new techniques…..The second strand is Learning and Teaching. It explicates a body of ideas, is informed by available research, and instills habits of inquiry that reflect the provisional nature of knowledge. The final strand is knowledge transfer. It encompasses many dimensions of interaction between academia and the wider society….

According to Cheetham (2007), research culture needs to be put in the centre because research is the basis of how a university education works, intellectual life of the staff and university, a fundamental support of teaching and a basis of support for the community. Though some might ask how does research is being turn into a culture and the answer would be due to the expansion of knowledge worldwide. Research could help in building the gap in knowledge; it is a significant culture shift (Cheetham, 2007), i.e. from a lecture based to a research based as an awareness to the importance of conducting a research.

Studies on research culture have focused on the kind of environment that leads to research productivity among faculty members in HEIs. Bland and Ruffin (as cited in Pratt, Margaritis, & Coy, 1999) identified 12 factors present in high performing research environments: clear goals for coordination, research emphasis, distinctive culture, positive group climate, decentralized organization, participative governance, frequent communication, resources (particularly human resources), age group, size and diversity, appropriate rewards, recruitment emphasis, and leadership with both research skill and management practice.

Research culture also plays a significant role in the university goal attainment and the management of staff. Research is one the pivot on which university education stands; its culture will determine the attainment of the goals of university existence. On the part of management of staff, the relevance attached to research also influences the management of staff, where research

culture is favorable to staff, their management is likely to produce a positive result and vice versa, where the reverse is the case (Anijaobi et. al, 2012).

Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which "Research Culture" existed and practiced at the International Islamic University Malaysia.
2. To investigate the value of "Research Culture" among academic staff at the International Islamic University Malaysia.

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of "Research Culture" among staff at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM)?
2. How do IIUM academic staff value "Research Culture" in their academic pursuit?

Research Methodology

The study was exploratory and empirical in nature. It employed a survey method to gather the data. A survey was administered to a sample of academic staff at all Kulliyyahs (Faculties), Institutes and Centers at IIUM Gombak, Kuala Lumpur and Kuantan campuses.

Sample

The 411 respondents used in the survey were randomly selected from a complete and current list of academic staff in IIUM using sample random sampling technique. With a Confidence Interval (CI) (Peers, 1996; Koopsman, 1987) set at .95 and accuracy to be at ± 5% of the true proportion, the sample size needed for the study is 384. The population of the study is closer to 500, a sample size of 357 (Krejcie and Morgan, 1979) is recommended to adequately represent the population. In this study, there were 411 respondents, thus it is more than sufficient.

Research Instrument

A set of questionnaire consisting of 39 items was constructed to examine the research culture at IIUM. It was divided into two sections. Section A elicited demographic information about the respondents. The respondents were asked to state the following: Gender, Nationality, Post, Years of Service, and K/I/C. While, Section (B), consisted of 34 items in four major variables as tabulated

in Table 2 below. They are: Belief, Value, Motivation and Services. Items in this section were measured by Likert-type scale.

A pilot study was conducted at the IIUM Gombak campus involving 25 academic staff from three Kulliyyahs. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine clarity and conciseness of the items in the instrument used and to test the reliability of a set of items in the questionnaire. At the beginning, 40 items were used in the analysis, but after removing some problematic items the total was reduced to 34. Moreover, the reliability result for the entire items for "Research Culture" survey in the pilot study indicated a high internal consistency of items with Cronbach Alpha of 0.781. This shows that the entire scale was robust for the sample size and respondents. The scale has adequate reliability for exploratory research (Pett, Lackey & Sullivan, 2003).

Findings and Discussions

<u>Demographic Items</u>

Demographic items in the questionnaire were divided into four major categories namely gender and nationality 3; academic post; and year of service. The respondents who participated in the study were more males (266 (55%)), Malaysians (298 (72.5%), Assistant Professors (185 (45%), and have 0-5 year of service (141 (34.3%))

Table 1: The Existence and Practice of Research Culture at IIUM

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
rblog19	I have established research 'blogs or personal digital research archives	2.8321	1.12338
tload23	My university explicitly differentiates teaching load by research activities	3.0584	1.12250
mprog27	My university has a good mentoring program that promotes understanding of research	3.1144	1.02603
virtua34	My university embeds virtual learning environment within courses to encourage research	3.1144	1.03785
stafpr32	My university provides strategies designed to sustain research productivity among the staff (full time and part-time)	3.1946	1.00539
grdprd33	My university provides strategies designed to encourage research productivity among graduate students	3.2360	.97294
linkag26	My university provides means for linkages with other institutions (local or international) in order to create intellectual synergy	3.3212	.92077
rcenta29	My university has at least two research centers	3.3625	1.03002
rdevep28	My university provides various research developmental opportunities	3.3674	.95958
avfund31	My university ensures there is availability of research funding	3.3771	1.00553
rshgrp30	My university provides research programs and strategies, like research group designed to encourage research culture	3.4185	1.00731
xdonor25	My university taps external sources (e.g., international donor agencies, non-profit organizations, industry) and obtain research grants	3.4477	.90746
frewad21	clearly links financial reward to international publication	3.4769	.87865
sgrant22	My University provides a start-up grant for all new faculty member	3.5158	.99590
stfcob14	staff at my university are usually involved in collaborative research project with other universities	3.5255	.86459
reward17	The University offers professional rewards for research	3.6180	.90125
patent18	My university has obtained several research patent rights	3.6618	.82046
confnc24	My university makes provision for paper presentation in both local and international Conference	3.7421	.90885
xterna20	My university acknowledges and rewards staff who received awards from external body for research of exceptional quality.	3.7421	.93007
promot13	International publication is the real element in my university promotion criteria	3.8637	.95044

restatu7	My university emphasizes research activities in pursuing research university status	4.3309	.82786
reshkpi3	Doing research is a requirement for my KPI	4.3528	.73226
reshpro2	Observing research procedures is necessary in conducting research	4.3990	.63737

In answering the RQ1, Table 1 illustrates the extent of the existence and practice of Research Culture amongst the respondents. The highest mean of 4.3990 reflects that observing research procedures is deemed important in conducting research at the university; hence it shows that the respondents are aware of the correct process of conducting research. In addition, the data reveals that the second highest mean (4.3528) is "Doing research is a requirement for my KPI". Since research is a part of the KPI that the respondents have to fulfill, so it becomes compulsory for them to conduct research. However, they do not see the importance of establishing "research blogs or personal digital research archives" as part of the Research Culture, as can be seen in the finding (mean score: 2.8321).

Table 2: Research Culture Values among Academic Staff at IIUM

senior16	Senior faculty members in my university regularly publish in highly reputable journals	3.4282	.90343
stfcob14	staff at my university are usually involved in collaborative research project with other universities	3.5255	.86459
career15	Research is useful for my career	4.3358	.74844
reshkpi3	Doing research is a requirement for my KPI	4.3528	.73226
societ12	Research outcomes should contribute back to the society	4.4039	.71389
reoutcs8	Outcomes of research will be more meaningful when shared with others	4.5085	.63384

As for answering RQ2, i.e. how do IUM academic staff value the "research culture" in their academic pursuit, finding shows that the respondents view the sharing of research outcomes with others is more meaningful. It scores the highest mean of 4.5085 followed by 4.4039 that reflects the research outcomes should be contributed back to the society. On the other hand, lowest mean score of 3.4282 is "the senior faculty members in my university regularly publish in highly reputable journals". These findings show that the values of RC are significant as the outcomes of the research need to be shared with the community.

On the other hand, the findings in regards to the research culture reveal some weaknesses. These weaknesses include only a small number of academic staff (mean score of 2.8321) has established research blogs or personal digital research archives to share and discuss matters pertaining to their research with others. At the same time, the findings show that the university does not explicitly differentiate between teaching loads and research activities (mean score of 3.0584); thus, this may hinder the academic from carrying out more research activities as they have to concentrate in their teaching. However, data reveals that the academics believe by doing research, their teaching competency is improved (mean score of 4.1411). Another weakness that can be gleaned in the data is that only a small number of senior faculty members (mean score of 3.4282) regularly published in highly reputable journals. As such, the possibility of having a "Mentor-Mentee" system is slim whereas having a "Mentor-Mentee" system, the university's research culture can be enhanced and encouraged.

Conclusion

The outcomes of this research are that tangible practical implications have emerged from the data analysis and the discussions. It is evident that academics are prepared to practice the research culture at IIUM, as well as their dispositions to engage in intellectual discourse. The academic staff are aware of the importance of research, the procedure of conducting research and that they believe that by doing research, their teaching competencies can be further improved. In order to enhance the research culture at the university, there is a need to have a "Mentor-Mentee" system in which the more senior academic staff will guide and mentor the new and inactive academics. The Kulliyyahs should recognize the existence of research activities conducted by their staffs and take into consideration the activities be part of their teaching loads.

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