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Research Article

Research Hesitancy in the Academe: A Multi-University Study in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Cultivating a culture of research in the academe is one of the goals of every institution of higher education in the Philippines. Despite of this, there exists a hesitation among faculty and non-teaching staff in engaging in research and publication. This study explored the reasons behind the decrease of research productivity in the academe in different higher education institutions in the Philippines. Sixteen faculty members from different disciplines were included in the study and were interviewed from November to December 2022. Employing a descriptive phenomenological research design, results showed that the causes of research hesitancy were summarized into four domains, namely: individual, institutional, scientific and professional domains. Under the individual domain, the themes of lack of confidence, lack of motivation, lack of time and lack of interest were identified. The institutional domain enumerated lack of research training, equipment, lack of research programs and funding deficiency. The scientific domain contained themes like lack of knowledge, skill and expertise in conduct of research and writing publishable papers. The professional domain identified themes that revolve around lack of access, lack mentors and lack of collaboration between faculty members. Based on the results of the study, all of the participants expressed the lack of funding support, which included tedious methods of acquiring such funding from the institution and other stakeholders as the primary cause of their hesitancy. Furthermore, participants expressed that individual factors that cause research hesitancy are most difficult to overcome as it pertains to past negative experiences, which led to the reluctance to be trained or to engage in research. The lack of a research culture within the institution was also linked to the absence of a clear research agenda and

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program, and capacity-building programs geared towards faculty researcher development.

Keywords: *Barriers to research, Research hesitancy, Research in the academe*

Introduction

The importance of research in the academe cannot be overly emphasized. Research is considered as the best method to enhance knowledge and provide evidence-based practice in the different academic fields. It provides an avenue for identifying gaps in knowledge and pathways to address these gaps. Also, the scholar doing the research does not just gain the answer to the research question but also is being equipped with the skills necessary in the conduct of the research like observation, analysis, and evaluation.

Despite of the paramount essentiality of research in education, it is still one of the waterloos of most universities. Many research directors find themselves with faculty members, unwilling to undertake research work, despite of the offering of funding and incentives.

Over the last decade, there has been increased research curiosity to study the factors that are acting as barriers for faculty members in carrying out research, and it was observed that the major hurdles that are lying in the path of smooth conduct of research include monetary reasons, lack of timely access to new and relevant statistics and evidence, rapidly changing administration and regulations, the lack of professional researchers, poor selection and administration, and the lack of hindering research programs that block the pathway of research.

Therefore, the goal of this study was to explore the reasons behind this epidemic of research hesitancy among professors through a guided interview that answered the grand tour question: "What are your experiences in research as a professor?".

Methods

Research Design

For the purpose of understanding the participants' lived experiences, researchers in this research study employed a qualitative research

method, particularly a transcendental phenomenological research design. Transcendental phenomenology (also termed "psychological, bracketing, empirical, or hermeneutic phenomenology" by Creswell, 2018) is a qualitative research design and a philosophical approach in which the same experienced phenomenon from a group of individuals will be explored. This phenomenon may be the subjective or objective lived experiences of the participants in this study by means of virtually interviewing the participants for the data collection procedure. The interview was derived from the two essential elements of a phenomenological study which are: (1) the "what" and (2) the "how" of the participants who experience the phenomenon (Moustakas, 2019).

Inclusion Criteria

Further, the following inclusion criteria were used in the selection of participants through purposive, non-probability sampling: teaching for at least 3 years in a higher education institution, with a rank of assistant professor to full professor, and currently residing in Luzon, Philippines. The interviews were conducted via Google meet or Zoom from November to December 2022.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done through the generation of recurring themes with the use of Atlas.ti software and constant comparative method. The researchers treated and analyzed the gathered data from interviewing the participants by using Moustaka's approach which was remodeled by Hu and Chang (2017). The first step was **bracketing** wherein the researchers set aside the participant's previous research experience prior to being part of the academe and instead focused on the barriers that arose during their faculty days. Then, the researchers proceeded to **horizontalization** wherein the transcripts from the interviews

were thoroughly examined and significant statements were highlighted. The significant statements then are formed into clusters wherein it was utilized to form and write a **textual description** and a **structural description** (how the participants have experienced the phenomenon). Next, the researchers write a composite description that presents the barriers to conducting research among members of the faculty in higher education institutions based on the constructed structural and textual descriptions.

After describing the essence of the phenomenon in this study, the researchers initiated the final step which is to obtain **verification** from the participants. The researchers reached out and communicated with the participants again via Google Meet/Zoom and provided a hard copy of the verbatim transcriptions of their responses and how they were interpreted. With that, it enabled the participants to review their answers and provide clarifications or modifications if necessary.

Findings

A total of 16 professors from different disciplines were interviewed before the point of saturation was reached. 62.5% of the participants were females, 43.75% have doctorate degrees, while 25% were currently finishing their doctoral degrees.

As shown in Figure 1, the study identified four domains that causes research hesitancy among the participants, namely: individual domain, institutional domain, scientific domain and professional domain. The individual domain contained the following themes: lack of confidence in conducting research, lack of motivation, lack of time, and lack of interest. The institutional domain consisted of the following themes: lack of research training, lack of research laboratory or equipment, lack of an established research program, and lack of research funding.

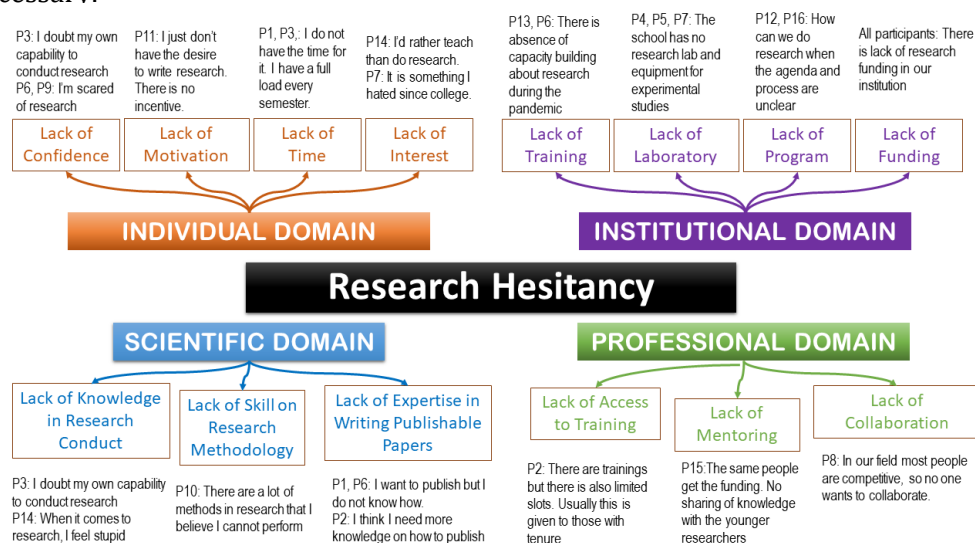


Figure 1. Four Domains and Themes on Causes of Research Hesitancy

The scientific domain contained the themes: lack of knowledge on the conduct of research, lack of skill on research methodology, and lack of expertise in writing publishable papers.

Lastly, the professional domain consisted of the following themes: lack of access to research capacity building, lack of mentoring from research experts, and lack of collaboration within the faculty.

This study has identified a lack of research training at the institution and a lack of sufficient financial budget for research activities as the largest barriers to research activity, which was supported by studies by Cocal (2017) and (2018). Furthermore, the participants stated that despite the availability of funds in their institution, the time that it takes to obtain these funds and the process they needed to undergo to liquidate or reimburse the funds were too

taxing and too tedious. Participants stated that these are deterrents for them to take on the principal investigator role in the conduct of research.

An emphasis on the scientific domain as a barrier to research was corroborated by the study by Pakdaman (2016) also showed that a lack of knowledge regarding research methods and the skills in writing publishable papers were two of the most important obstacles for the participants to carrying out research activities.

Another major concern that arose during the interview was the lack of time for research due to busyness with a full teaching load and other extra-curricular activities or committee chairmanship. This was reinforced by the studies done by Pager (2012), Ellis (2016), and Wenke (2017) where research hesitancy was caused by extrinsic factors such as a full workload that resulted to lack of time. However, this was contradicted by the study conducted by Nath (2017) which claimed that approximately 60% of faculty members in a higher education institution self-reported having enough time for conducting research but still failed to engage in research due to other factors like funding and availability of equipment.

The study further discovered that individual factors like lack of motivation and lack of interest were the hardest to overcome as they usually stem from a negative experience towards the conduct of research.

As for the professional domain, the results of the study were similar to the study by Conradie et al., which stated that lack of a dedicated research team (47.7%), reliable internet access (32.6%), and staff skilled in research (31.8%) were among the barriers to research. In the study among residents conducted by Fournier et al., it was shown that barriers to research include limited dedicated time (64%), insufficient financial resources (55%), and a lack of education in research (45%).

Discussion

This study has identified a lack of research training at the institution and a lack of sufficient financial budget for research activities as the largest barriers to research activity, which

was supported by studies by Cocal (2017) and Okoduwa (2018). Furthermore, the participants stated that despite the availability of funds in their institution, the time that it takes to obtain these funds and the process they needed to undergo to liquidate or reimburse the funds were too taxing and too tedious. Participants stated that these are deterrents for them to take on the principal investigator role in the conduct of research.

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Conclusion

This study described the different areas that cause research hesitancy in the academe. Based on the results of the study, all of the participants expressed the lack of funding support, which included tedious methods of acquiring such funding from the institution and other stakeholders as the primary cause of their hesitancy. Furthermore, participants expressed that individual factors that cause research hesitancy are most difficult to overcome as it pertains to past negative experiences, which led to the reluctance to be trained or to engage in research. The lack of a research culture within the institution was also linked to the absence of a clear research agenda and program, and capacity-building programs geared towards faculty researcher development. It is recommended that the academic leaders of universities must continue searching and thinking of strategies and programs to inspire their faculty members to conduct research and publication. One strategy is to look for best practices among higher education institutions that consistently rank high among universities in terms of research productivity.

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