



## AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN THE LIBYAN COLLEGES OF ARTS

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### **Abstract:**

The present study aimed to identify the factors that motivate the faculty members in Sabratha College of Arts at Sabratha University, and to investigate the factors that might affect their motivation. A questionnaire has been used to collect data from 51 faculty members. The findings of the study showed that lack of training, lack of support, and heavy workloads are the main obstacles that they face.

**Keywords:** promotion, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, appraisal

### **1. Introduction**

Academic research is considered the backbone of education system as it assesses the current educational process, improves the quality of education, and expands academic knowledge across the disciplines. Academics have now arrived at a conclusion that research activities within educational institutions provide quality, excellence, and world class standard in education (Meerah, Johar & Ahmad, 2001). These research activities bridge the gap that may appear within the educational processes. Academic institutions are the key to these research activities as they normally invest huge amounts of money in the development of these activities; moreover, most countries rank these institutions according to their research outcomes (Williams & Van Dyke, 2008).

Research in educational institutions needs certain skills and motivation among faculty members who can increase the standard of excellence in education. Research performance is considered the most important factor for assessing the standing of educational institutions as they compete with each other for being known as a research institution. These educational institutions have always been seen as feeder to the overall nations' development through scientific research (Uzoka, 2008). Faculty members in

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these institutions are expected to be productive in teaching as well as research (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Fairweather, 2002).

The education system in Libya has put more pressure on faculty members to be more productive in research. Although two research hours per week are allocated to all faculty members for research writing, there appears to be a low rate of research productivity. Therefore, research is a vulnerable element of faculty members' teaching schedule which places more pressure on their research output. When faculty members are trained and supported at work places, they will fundamentally change the way research is performed in terms of quantity as well as quality. A number of factors plays a crucial role in the advancement of academic research in the Arab world. Naifah (2008) revealed that weak research productivity and research funding are the problematic factors in the development of the educational system in the Arab world. Therefore, this current study aims to investigate what motivates faculty members in the college of Arts to conduct high quality research, and what factors influence their research productivity.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Researchers' Motivation

Many faculty members at the university level tend to have a number of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators towards research writing. There is a sort of argument among research scholars over which type of motivation (i.e. intrinsic and extrinsic) is more important. For instance, Worlu and Chidozie (2012) and Smerek and Peterson (2007) argue that some of the extrinsic motivators such as researcher's status and reward are the most important motivators. On the other hand, other studies emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivators as they are the nature of human; therefore, they should be understood clearly (Mehboob et al., 2009 & Smerek and Peterson, 2007). In more details, below are details of each of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

- **Intrinsic Motivation**

Many research studies in the literature agree that the following are the most common intrinsic motivators of research writing.

- **Recognition and Social Respect**

This refers to the performance of the research activity for personal satisfaction of an accomplishment in the research community. Mallaiah and Yadapadithaya (2009) argue that social compliments and public recognition are viewed as effective motivators towards research productivity. Luthans and Stajkovic (1999), moreover, argue that recognition and others' attention may have a strong impact on research performance. When faculty members do not meet the publication requirement for promotion in their institutions, they will not only be rejected for promotion, but also face other social negative consequences such as criticism from seniors and colleagues. On the contrary, those who publish and receive the promotion are given the respect and opportunities for higher academic positions. Moreover, they wish to be recognized by their high research publication record. Therefore, faculty members feel obliged to consider the surrounding community including their seniors and colleagues. Tien (2008) argues that

obtaining recognition and social respect have become an important motivator to conduct research among the higher academic ranked faculty members. Oishi and Diener (2003) argue that there is a high increase in the need for recognition among faculty members.

- **Performance Appraisal and Sense of Achievement**

Another intrinsic motivator is the appraisal that faculty members may receive within the research community, and, moreover, the sense of achievement they feel after each new publication. Blackmore and Kandiko (2011) explain that faculty members need such internal motivation and that this kind of motivation relates to the opportunity to learn and increase skills and knowledge. Those faculty members who receive such kind of appraisal are also given an extra rise in salary. This way, this extrinsic motivator plays an essential role for motivating staff to conduct research. Other researchers, however, think that academic staff publish to satisfy their internal desire to achieve something by their own efforts.

- **Extrinsic Motivation**

There is a consensus among researchers that the promotion and financial rewards are the two main extrinsic motivators towards research writing.

- **Promotion**

Promotion is perceived as one of the reinforcers of the reward system to motivate faculty members to do research. Most higher education institutions are often built on the research accomplishment of their faculty members (Kaufman & Chevan, 2011). This is an incentive model that makes them compelled to produce research. (Leslie, 2002; Bland et al., 2006). Lai (1990) considers promotion as an effective motivator to conduct research in education institutions. Moreover, Yining et al. (2006) point out that promotion is an effective motivator to research productivity, and that research publication is the most important indicator in academic promotion.

However, faculty members tend to delay their research outcome until promotion time approaches. According to Tien and Blackburn's study (1996), research publication rate remains low until the time of promotion is near. In other words, faculty members publish only when promotion is due. Beck (1990) argues that the effect of promotion is dependent on faculty members' need for promotion. If they do not value promotion, they will not work hard for it. Similarly, Tien (2000) points out that it is expected that faculty members who need promotion publish more than those who do not.

- **Financial Rewards**

Another extrinsic motivator for research productivity is rewarding researchers for their publications. Financial reward is probably the most common performance practice to recognize educational accomplishment in education institutions. It is also perceived as a symbol of success and motivator. This means that researchers who are given a financial reward are productive, whereas those who are not rewarded are less productive (James, 2011). According to Brewer's research (1990), respondents in his research sample believe that the presence of reward system does increase faculty research productivity. Financial reward system in each education institution can be an efficient way to motivate academic staff to conduct research and produce high quality outcome. It is

obviously evident that education institutions need to implement a reward system for research productivity. Rewarding exceptional research work is essential to reinforce and maintain research productivity.

## **2.2 Research Productivity**

Research productivity is measured within educational institutions by the number of research studies a faculty member publishes in a refereed journal and conference proceedings (Denton et al., 1986). All faculty members are expected to be productive in scholarly research that results in journal publication. Such research productivity contributes to the scientific literature and provides credibility and acclaim both to the faculty member and the educational institutions (Plucker, 1988; Tien & Blackburn, 1996). Therefore, high research productivity is an indication of success and knowledge, and consequently a criterion for academic promotion (Brooks & German, 1983). Research productivity is an ideal way to demonstrate faculty performance.

There are always factors that may influence faculty research productivity. For instance, Buchheit et al., (2001) argued that the allocation of working time to research activities and support may influence faculty research productivity. Faculty teaching time may conflict with their research productivity. In other words, faculty members with higher teaching load tend to be less productive in research (Buchheit et al., 2001; Chow & Harrison, 1998). Teaching responsibilities consumes much of the faculty members' time and efforts; and consequently, they do not have sufficient time for conducting research. When Libyan researchers return to Libya after engaging intensively in the research environment abroad, their academic life becomes full of all sorts of teaching activities including lecturing, assessing, and invigilating which do not contribute to their research development (Asmar, 2003). However, these academic duties, if combined with academic research, may offer rich possibilities to produce research-oriented faculty members. These academic duties alone were seen as a major inhibitor of research (Bazeley et al, 1996). Another factor that may affect faculty research productivity is research support. As educational spending rise nowadays, research funding has become a challenging stage. Research funding is very limited and always provided based on its relationship to the institution and value to society (Fairweather, 2002). Lack of research funding is commonly seen as an inhibitor of research.

## **2.3 The Factors that Influence Research Productivity**

Different studies have investigated the factors that affect faculty members' motivation to conduct scientific research, (Dundar & Lewis, 1998). Creswell (2002) identified two types of factors: one focuses on faculty member's innate attributes such as gender, age, and years of work experience; another type is related to work environment factors such as teaching load and research support. Bland et al. (2002) identified insufficient time for research and lack of support from colleagues as main factors that hinder conducting research.

A study by Amatanious (2006) investigated the factors that demotivate Syrian university staff members to conduct research. The findings show that the lack of

financial support, lack of cooperation with other universities and administrative impediments were the main factors that hinder their research activities. The situation is similar in Saudi Arabian universities where Alzahrani's (2011) findings showed that lack of financial support and encouragement to conduct and publish research are among the factors that have a significant impact on faculty members' motivation. Similarly, Alghanim and Alhamali's (2011) investigated the factors that affect research productivity among academic staff at medical and health colleges in Saudi Arabia found that lack of fund, lack of research support, lack of time, and heavy workloads were the significant factors that impede scientific research in Saudi universities.

Although the content knowledge and research skills are essential for conducting research, they are not enough. Therefore, Brewer (2000) mentions that providing research support in terms of resources, allocated time for research and promotions have an impact on faculty members' motivation. Similarly, Wood's (1998) findings showed that financial support influences research performance.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

The study adopted a quantitative research approach. This involved the use of questionnaire to collect data.

#### **3.2 Context**

This study took place in the College of Arts at Sabratha University. The college was established in 2000 in the city of Sabratha. It includes the following departments: Arabic language, Islamic Studies, English language, French language, Media, psychology, sociology, History, Geography, Arts, Archology, and Tourism Studies. The college of Arts has 201 faculty members, 58 teacher assistants and 72 non-academic staff.

#### **3.3 Participants**

The findings reported below are based on data gathered from 50 faculty members. The participants represent the faculty members working in all different departments at the College of Arts. The population of the study included both females and males faculty members. Their experience ranged from about 5 to more than 16 years of teaching experience.

#### **3.4 Data Collection Tool**

A semi structured questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by piloting it to a small group of faculty members to check its reliability and clarity. Moreover, the researchers were not present when the participants of the current study completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administrated to 100 faculty members from all departments in the college of Arts. It focused on the factors that motivate/demotivate faculty members to conduct research. It consisted of 16 statements with various options. There were two main sections of the

questionnaire including biographical section which had 9 items related to the participants' demographic and academic information. The second section had 7 statements related to the factors that affect the scientific research in the college of Arts, research collaboration in the college, and suggestions to improve faculty members' research skills.

### **3.5 Data Collection Procedure and Analysis**

All questionnaire copies were handed to the head of the department who in turn distributed them to faculty members in the department. Few days later, the researchers started collecting the questionnaire copies from each of the departments. Some of the participants filled in the questionnaire in the department whereas others had to take them home and return them in another day. When most of the distributed questionnaire copies were collected, the researchers started analyzing the questionnaire items manually. That is, they counted the number of responses based on the statement categories, and consequently arrived at a certain percentage for each of the questionnaire items. These percentage numbers were used in the below discussion of the findings.

### **3.6 Research Questions**

- What motivates faculty members in the college of Arts to conduct research?
- What are the factors that impede scientific research in the college of Arts?
- What can be done to improve the situation?

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1 What motivates faculty members to conduct research?**

More than 64% of the participants say that promotion is their main motivator for research writing. Promotion is considered as an effective way of encouraging faculty members to conduct research. This is consistent with the Dennill's (2001) findings which showed that contextual factors such as recognition, pay rise and promotion motivate faculty members to conduct research. In Ruscio's (1987) interview study, one faculty respondent assured that the motivation beyond most of the research studies is normally promotion. In most educational institution across the world, promotion leads to higher salary and better academic status, more recognition from colleagues and students. Chen et al. (2006) believe that promotion positively influences research productivity as it is considered to be the most essential indicator of academic performance. Cooper and Burger (1980) believe that promotion, when it is contingent upon performance, has the greatest motivating influence on research productivity, and the removal of promotion influences the research productivity rates and curve. Tien and Blackburn (1996) found out that research, productivity rate remained low in the absence of promotion, and that the productivity rate was higher when promotion time was near. In other words, the nearer the time of promotion, the higher research

productivity rate becomes. Similarly, Beck (1990) pointed out that the motivational effect of promotion depends on faculty's need for promotion.

More than 60% of the participants say that the self-development in the area of research is their motivator to conduct research. Due to the lack of training and opportunities of professional development, faculty members mostly depend on self-development through writing papers and participating in local conferences. Similarly, Gregorutti (2010) mentioned that the main factors that motivate faculty members are the intellectual growth and knowledge improvement.

Serving the community is considered one of the main missions for higher education institutes and universities. Therefore, 54% of the participants say that supporting the society is their motivator to conduct research. According to Fair weather & Beach (2002), faculty members assume that producing new knowledge impacts the society

#### **4.2 What impedes the faculty members' research productivity?**

More than 56% of the participants in the current study reported that they did not publish any paper, whereas 37% of participants have only 1-3 publications. This might indicate that the faculty members' research productivity is limited. The following are the common reasons in the participants' answers:

##### **4.2.1 Lack of training**

More than 52% of participants say that they have not received any training about how to write research papers; whereas, 35% of the participants have had only one or two training sessions.

Little attention is given in most educational institutions to the need for research training midst the ongoing development of research tools and technologies. Research training is essential and has a major impact on research integrity as it enables researchers to avoid many research pitfalls such as plagiarism, data manipulation, and data falsification, etc. Suwaed (2017) suggested that it is essential to improve researchers' capacity through comprehensive training programs that are fully integrated with research methods and publishing. The need for research training stems from the fact that faculty members encounter a number of difficulties in their research journey. These difficulties emerge from the fact that they have to develop their fulfilling career in their institutions (Austin, 2010). Based on most educational institutions, this feeling leads faculty members to be unsure about what to expect in their career future.

##### **4.2.2 Lack of support**

The faculty members were asked about the factors that hindering their research productivity. In this vain, 58% of the participants reported that they are overloaded with teaching and faculty duties. This is in line with Mugimu's et al (2013) findings which showed that the heavy teaching loads and lack of electronic database are the main obstacles.

In addition, 54% of the responses highlighted the lack of information sources such as books, articles, documents, etc. in the faculty library, and considered it as important factor that impede their research productivity. This is consistent with Bintareef's (2009) findings, which aimed to identify obstacles of scientific research in the Jordanian higher education institutions, indicate that lack of resources and fund are the main obstacle that impede research in Jordanian higher education. According to Ford (1992), if the institutions do not provide the needed support to encourage faculty members to conduct research, it is likely that their research productivity might be optimized.

### **4.3 What can be done to improve the situation?**

Participants' suggestions

- 92% of the participants strongly suggest that they need training in the research writing. Academic career requires knowledge related to research skills, conducting research, supervising, working with others, and mentoring. Bhakta and Boeren (2016) elaborate that in institutional research, there is a tendency of 'publish or perish' culture, which put more pressure on researchers' shoulders, specially new ones, to produce high quality research in a short time (Bazeley, 2003 & Akerlind, 2005). Therefore, training in academic research is needed to maintain career ambitions (Bhakta & Boeren, 2016). Furthermore, research training should target teachers as professionals who realize the notion of voluntary development (Clark, 1992). Teachers in general and faculty members in specific are expected to carry out research in their classrooms in which they act as a catalyst of an effective change (Pierce & Hunsaker, 1996).
- 41% of the participants suggest the need for financial support. In addition to providing allocated time for research, the participants suggested that the faculty administration should pay for research expenses such as paying the fees of publications and access to international journals.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This research has provided some light into the factors that impede college of arts faculty members to conduct research. What came out clearly was that the majority of faculty members showed dissatisfaction about their research skills and the support that the faculty administration offered in terms of inadequate fund, poor library facilities and heavy teaching loads. All these factors negatively affected the research output in the college. Based on the above-mentioned findings we recommend the following:

- In service scientific research and academic writing courses should be provided to enhance the faculty members' research skills.
- The university should provide financial and moral support for the faculty members to encourage them for publishing.
- Provide the basic environment for the scientific research, such as libraries, access to the internet, and electronic resources

- Institutions need to develop the culture of research and create research groups within the faculty as well as international research institutions.

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