

Individual-organizational construction of research from the opinions of faculty members

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ABSTRACT

Factors affecting the educational and research activities of university faculty members is a particularly interesting and controversial topic that has led to numerous researches. The present study was also conducted in order to analyze the opinion of faculty members about research activities in Mohaghegh Ardabili University. In order to collect the findings using interviews, the opinions of experienced and leading research faculty members were analyzed. The participants were 15 faculty members of different fields in three groups of basic sciences, humanities and technical engineering of Mohaghegh Ardabili University. Therefore, in this research, it was tried to select the studied sample from among the policy makers of the relevant fields of the scientific system, faculty members with group management experience, experts and specialists in the research subject, faculty members' research performance evaluation units, faculty members with management experience at the college and university level. , because these people, as cases rich in information and experiences, provide the best background for in-depth studies. The use of a specific method of data analysis in this approach led to the construction of a basic theme called "individual-social structure of research" based on which the proposed model is designed to describe the factors affecting the research activities of faculty members. The formation of research activities was investigated and analyzed under the influence of five general factors of personal and professional skills, academic conditions, facilitating strategies, organization-oriented structures and extra-organizational structures. Each of these factors as the main theme also included sub-themes. By reviewing the themes, among the main themes obtained, "individual-organizational construction of research" was identified as the central idea and related to other themes. Although individual factors are at the disposal of researchers and they are trying to increase their personal and professional characteristics such as learning skills, performing job duties and increasing scientific literacy in order to conduct research, but until the organizational factors that are in It is not within their scope to facilitate research, one cannot expect scientific and research growth and development.

Keywords: Faculty members, university, research activity, thematic analysis, Mohaghegh Ardabili University.

Introduction

The sustainable development of science necessitates the diligent and scientific efforts of numerous researchers. Rapid advancements in various scientific fields and the swift pace of globalization have made scientific production an essential requirement for the preservation and survival of nations (Arab Rahmatipour, Mirhosseini, and Saadi, 2021). Motivations for research can range from securing better job positions, earning money, and achieving favorable social status to addressing and solving national problems. Alipour, Rumiani, and Yarahamdi (2023) demonstrated that specialized and professional competencies, measurable through scientific outputs, are crucial criteria for recruiting academic staff at Farhangian University. Research activities are influenced by various factors, with the pursuit of truth being just one of them (Heidari, Faraj-Pahlu, and Asadnia, 2013). Therefore, it is essential to formulate policies based on scientific facts by understanding the individual and organizational factors affecting this area.

A review of the literature reveals that the factors influencing research—both micro-level factors such as skills and motivation, and macro-level factors such as budget and facilities—are consistent across different times and locations, varying only in their intensity. Given that research activities and scientific publications are key indicators for attracting and promoting faculty members, and that the quantity and quality of research outputs significantly define the identity of academic staff, it is necessary to address the challenges faculty members face in conducting research. This will help provide both material and spiritual support to this group with a clear vision. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the views of faculty members at Mohaghegh Ardabili University regarding the outsourcing of scientific activities and the factors that facilitate or hinder this process.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, following Creswell's (2012) guidelines for studying processes, explaining actions, or understanding interactions among people. Given the aim to identify individual and organizational factors affecting the research activities of academic staff, grounded theory was utilized. The study population comprises faculty members of Mohaghegh Ardabili University, recognized as superior scholars or research leaders based on Ministry of Ataf regulations. Purposeful sampling was used to identify these individuals, selecting cases rich in information relevant to the research purpose. This type of sampling aims to understand each phenomenon within its specific context rather than establishing generalizable rules (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 2011).

Data were collected through unstructured interviews. Merriam (2009) considers interviews a key method for data collection in grounded theory research (cited in Faraji Dehsorkhi et al., 2018). Each interview lasted between 35 and 90 minutes. A week before the interview, the title and purpose of the research, the reason for selecting the interviewee, data usage restrictions, and research questions were sent to the participants. Immediately after each interview, the text was transcribed and analyzed to refine research questions for subsequent interviews. Thematic analysis, as introduced by Boyatzis (1998) and further developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to analyze the data. This method helps identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data, organizing and describing it in detail (Kamali, 2017).

Findings

The interviews were analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding. Initially, open coding involved reading the interviews multiple times to identify relevant concepts, leading to a large number of open codes. These codes were then sifted, merged based on similarities and differences, and reduced to a limited number. This process resulted in the identification of 5 main themes, 23 sub-themes, and 96 codes. All themes were categorized under the general title "individual-organizational construction of research," highlighting the individual and organizational factors influencing research.

Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze the views of faculty members at Mohaghegh Ardabili University on research activities using a thematic analysis approach. The specific data analysis method led to the development of a foundational theme called

"individual-social construction of research," from which a model was proposed to describe the factors affecting faculty members' research activities. Previous studies (Armijos Valdivieso, Avolio Alecchi & Arévalo-Avecillas, 2021; Nguyen & Tuamsuk, 2021; Shams, 2015) have also focused on the growth and research performance of professors, but the present study distinguishes itself by emphasizing both individual and structural levels. In conclusion, while researchers can enhance their personal and professional attributes such as learning skills, job performance, and scientific literacy, organizational factors beyond their control must also be addressed to facilitate research. Without organizational support, scientific and research growth and development cannot be fully realized.

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