



Conducting Research in Private and Public Higher Learning Institutions: An Index for Quality of Education

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Abstract

Research is the key for innovation, progress and development. However, research is not widely regarded as a normal activity (Seyoum, 1998; Zulfa, 2000; Taddesse, 2000). It is with this issue that this paper is concerned. The study discusses an account of lecturers' involvement in conducting research, and the barriers that impede instructors from doing research. The study was made on both private and public colleges in Addis Ababa. Questionnaires were distributed to lecturers and deans of public and private colleges. The findings of the study show that, with few exceptions, lecturers have detached themselves from doing research. In conclusion it could be said that research and teaching has never remained in close touch in the Ethiopian higher education arena.

Introduction

Research is an outlet value for innovation and it is responsible for the broadening and deepening of knowledge. In the realm of education, research is the cause for the change of curriculum development, evaluation, teaching methods, learning process, strategies for assessment and the like (Neary, 2002). Testing the existing policy, theory, pedagogical practice and exploring difficulties and problematic areas, all these would be possible through research (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995).

Apart from the tightened link between research and teaching, research could give teachers the opportunity for continuous personal and professional identities. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) revealed that research is a central ingredient for teacher's status, for their personal and professional development, too. Furthermore, research enables teachers to be open to new ideas and will become more flexible in their thinking (Pine, 1981). It was also believed that such research narrows the gap between theory and practice and the expert and the teacher researcher.

The link between teaching and research in higher education is a complex one (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Higher education has a two fold mission_ teaching and conducting research. In addition to educating enlightened and well-rounded citizens, creation of knowledge is the lofty mission of higher education, too. This could only be true through research. UNESCO (1998) underscored that the linking of teaching and research is also becoming essential to ensure the effectiveness of higher education and to develop indigenous capacity for research.

If teaching and research are so inseparable in higher institutions, instructors should be engaged in conducting research. Beirut plan of action as cited by UNESCO (1998) stated that conducting research should be an obligation to all members of the teaching personnel at higher education institutions.

On top of all, there are many elements involved in research activities. To begin with, teachers' working condition is a major component among the basic essentials that are required to carryout research. It has been noted that teachers' favorable working conditions like political, social, economic and cultural security would allow them to take part in any essential professional activities like conducting research. However, the nature of teachers' working conditions is excluding of all other activities particularly as activity as demanding as research (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). To mention but few, two teachers involved in a collaborative research project stated the following, "any one who has experienced the concentrated action a teacher faces daily ask: why a teacher further complicates life by trying to collect information on a very complex area of educational theory? (Hull et. al., 1995 cited by Hancock, 2001). This indicated that research requires its own time, creative energy and commitment.

Teachers' status was assumed to be another essential component of research works. Hancock (2001) noted that teaching profession is a history of struggle for status; to a large extent classroom teachers' skills and knowledge are underestimated and disregarded by the general public. Teachers have internalized this sustained social outlook and they

have never kept their self-image on the positive line. The view that teachers/lecturers developed towards research would also affect their involvement in research. Seyoum (1998) citing Boyal (1957) explained that research is a high-hat word that scares a lot of people; rather it is nothing but a state of mind-friendly welcoming attitude towards change.

knowledge and research skill is also essentials in doing research. According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), Namuddu (1998), doubts are raised about the knowledge base from which teachers might carry out research. Nkinyangi (1983) cited by Seyoum (1998) also stressed that it would be impossible to think of carrying out research activity without the individual being equipped with basic research skill.

Experience and opportunity are also fundamental ingredients for research activities. In connection to this Namuddu (1998) asserted that experience seems to suggest that formal training is unlikely to equip adequately researchers with all the research skills needed; rather, the majority of useful and practical skills that one needs to become an excellent researcher have to be improved as one strives to do more and better research.

To sum up, the close link between teaching and research is called upon to make institutions the right educational center. However, in most circumstances research is seen as peripheral aspects of teaching. For instance, the status of research activities in Addis Ababa high schools was marginal (Syoun, 1998; Zulfa, 2000; Taddesse, 2000).

To maintain a high standard of excellence, research in higher institutions is indispensable; nevertheless, the rapid expansions of both public and private colleges might not consider this crucial element into account. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore whether there are research works in public and the newly emerging private colleges in Addis Ababa or not. The present study also is an attempt to investigate factors limiting research activities.

Method

One hundred college staffs from two public and five private higher institutions were randomly selected and considered in the study. Samples were taken from the formerly established private colleges; that is, data were not taken from latter day colleges. This was intentionally done due to the assumption that the newly established colleges might not have a tertiary level established practice. The vast majority of the respondents (90.1) hold master's degree and most of the subjects (70.1) have been employed from three to ten years as permanent bases. Almost all participants (90%) were majoring in social science, education, and business and economics and taking research courses in their respective studies. From each college subjects were selected on a simple random sampling basis.

Since the key objective of the study was to reflect the status of research activities in public and private higher institutions in Addis Ababa, the major instruments employed was questionnaires for lecturers and deans. The two questionnaires used for lecturers and deans were designed by the researcher. The two questionnaires used for lecturers and deans were prepared, based on the literature consulted. Experienced researchers were asked to review the instruments and their feedbacks were incorporated to sustain content validity. Again, to ensure content validity of the instruments a pre-test was carried out on St. Mary's staffs.

In the questionnaire, the major participants (lecturers) were first asked to indicate their demographic profiles. A twenty two-item questionnaire had both open and close ended; however, most of the items of the questionnaires were close ended and few were open-ended questions.

In order to come up with reasonable explanation and to enrich the study, a questionnaire was also administered to the deans of the selected colleges. This instrument was an eleven-item questionnaire.

The SPSS programs were used for the statistical analysis of the data.

Results and Discussions

Table 1: Cross tabulation on how frequent the respondents conduct research and whether they are teacher researcher or not.

Whether the subjects are teacher-researcher or not	How frequent the subjects have conducted research				
	Sometimes	Always	Rarely	Never	Total
Yes	4	2	18	8	32
No	6	-	20	42	68
Total	10	2	38	50	100

As it can be seen from the above table, 50% of the subjects acknowledged that they have never done research in the area of teaching where as 38% of the respondents rarely did research. It is only a small minority of about 12% of the respondents who conducted research.

Although research is a valued role and is often required in higher education, lecturers might not assume research activities as part of their regular duties.

Table 2: Class tabulation on whether research is a normal practice or not by colleges

Research is not a normal practice	Names of college						
	ABCC	KCTE	St. Mary's	Admas	Unity	Total	%
Yes	10	26	10	10	6	62	79.5%

No	-	-	10	-	6	16	20.5%
Total	10	26	20	10	12	78	100%

As noted above, subjects (79.5%) responded that research was not a normal practice in the tertiary higher education. This finding was consistent with the responses that the deans of the sample colleges made. All deans (100%) responded that research was not a normal practice.

Research is a perfectly legitimate concern for higher education institutions. However, research was found to be a closed book to most of the colleges in Addis Ababa. Colleges were chiefly concerned with teaching. Under the banner of education, research and teaching were quite inseparable; research has been the badge of higher education institutions. In spite of this, most colleges (79.%) became lenient and they have never taken an interest in research works

In connection to this, Hess and Kalusopa (1998) stated that most research is not initiated from within the university but has been largely agency driven and agency serving. If this is so, the focus of research is not on the identification of problems by teachers/ lecturers themselves rather it became defined by an outside consultant or change agent.

Furthermore, there seems to be some kind of mystification about research; it is something conceived as an intimidating and sophisticated activity (Seyoum, 1998). The findings of the study were consistent with Research, Development, Dissemination Model that showed an implied separation of specialist researcher and teacher user (Wrigley, 1973 as cited by White, 1988). This model ignores the intermingling nature of research and development; it tried to put them in a linear sequence model. This finding showed that lecturers were segregated themselves from research activities along with research development, dissemination model.

Decline of research works in higher educations might threaten the quality of education. Owing to this, to sustain quality of educations; colleges need to get down to the research business.

Table 3: Cross tabulation on the number of papers conducted by institutions

Name of the institution	Numbers of papers lecturers produced				
	None	1-3	4-6	7-9	Total
Addis Ababa Commercial College	2	8			10
KCTE	6	16	4	-	26
St. Mary's	4	12	-	2	18
Unity	8	4	-	-	12
Royal	8	2	-	-	10
Admas	10	-	-	-	10
Queens'	12	-	-	-	12
Total	50	42	4	2	98
	51%	42.9%	4.1%	2%	100%

Irrespective of the subject institutions, research works done were insignificant. However, comparison among colleges indicted that the respondents from ABBCC, KCTE and St. Mary's were making research; on the other hand, subjects from Admas, Royal, Unity and Queens' Colleges were not engaged in conducting research at all.

Table4: Cross tabulation on research constraints and their orders from high levels of difficulty to low

Research Constraints	Ranks of Items																Total
	1		2		3		4		5		6		7		8		
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Lack of time	30	53.6	10	17.9	2	3.6	12	21.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3.6	65
Low Research competence	24	30.8	2	2.6	38	48.7	6	7.6	8	10.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	78
Lack of incentive	14	29.2	2	4.2	2	4.2	20	44.6	-	-	10	20.8	-	-	-	-	48
Poor command of Eng.	20	27.02	20	27.02	4	5.4	26	35.16	2	2.7	-	-	-	-	2	2.7	74
Absence of interest	6	8.8	6	8.8	30	44.2	-	-	26	38.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	68
Poor working condition	4	5.0	40	50	8	10	-	-	2	2.5	-	-	26	32.5	-	-	80
Lack of fund	-	-	34	56.7	10	16.7	4	6.6	12	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	60
Lack of reference	-	-	-	-	-	-	22	4.4	2	4	26	52	-	-	-	-	50

As noted in the above table, lack of time was found to be a crucial factor limiting research work. As per the data, time ranked from 1-3 accounted for 53.6%, 17.9% and 3.6%. This indicated that time constraint was a prominent factor restricting instructors from doing research. Cannon (1945:87) cited by Seyoum(1989) stated the following:

An investigator may be given a palace to live in, a perfect laboratory to work in, he may be surrounded by all the conveniences money can provide; but if his time is taken from him, he will remain sterile. On the other hand, as the history of science abundantly shows, an investigator may be poverty-stricken, he may be ill clothed, he may live in a garret and have only meager appliances for his use but given time he can be productive.

It is conceivable that time for research is necessary for lecturers: since research is a time consuming task: however, more than half of the respondents (53.6%) noted that time became one of the leading constraints impeding them in doing research.

Low research competence was also found to be the major factor limiting research activities. As it can be seen from the above table, lecturers research inability (ranked from 1-3) was 30.8%, 2.6% and 48.7%. This showed that most of the sample subjects seemed to have low research skills. This finding was in line with the responses given from the deans. All deans (100%) of the four colleges – ABCC, St. Mary's, Admass and Royal reported that low research skill of lecturers was a barrier that limits them not to involve in research activities.

On the survey study conducted by Seyoum (1998), Zulfa (2000) and Tadesse (2000), it was stipulated that Addis Ababa high school teachers, almost all, did not make research. In spite of secondary school teachers, higher institution lecturers are more likely than school teachers to possess the skills, inclination and time for research (Kember and Gow, 1992); however, this finding disclosed that even higher institution lecturers were short of research skill. In relation to this, Namuddus's (1998) finding stated that although teacher research can generate rich and important insights into the way in which we teach and learn, there is a prevailing assumptions that teachers' research

competence is low. In conformity with this, Wondwosen's (1996) findings as cited by Zulfa (2000) also showed that lack of research knowledge was the potential reason limiting research activities.

For the inadequate research skills lecturers have, the insufficient training in relevant research methodologies might be a barrier for teachers not developing research competence.

According to table 4, incentive accounted for 29.2%, 4.2% and 4.2% in the first three ranks respectively. This showed that incentive was also found to be one of the major constraints; that is, teacher researchers were not given incentives in any form that encourages them to be engaged in research. In order to be effectively engaged in research activity, a researcher needs to be provided with material and/or psychological incentive (Seyoum, 1998).

According to table 4 poor commands of English (from 1-3) accounted for 27.02% &, 27.02% and 5.4% respectively and it became a constraint for lecturers in making research. Command of English that becomes a tool for communication has also brought a significant impact on research works. In relation to this, Neary (2002) stated that in many countries even at the graduate level, poor command of foreign language among staffs could restrict teachers in doing research.

As it can be shown in table 4, uncondusive working environment was not a negligible factor to limit research works. This factor (concerning the 2nd the 3rd rank) accounted for 40% and 8%, which might not be marginalized. Stenhouse (1975) in Kember and Gow (1992) believed that the teachers' social climate generally offers little support to those who closely examine their own professional practice by assuming the role of research. Absence of encouragement and conducive environment remains to be the major problem.

In the same vein, most subjects (75%) responded that poor educational policy and lack of faith in the implementation of research findings were factors limiting research works.

Table 5: Cross tabulation on research constraints by colleges

Research Constraints	Names of the colleges								
	ABCC	KCTE	St. Mary's	Royal	Unity	Admas	Queens'	Total	%
The college does not fund									
Yes	8	20	-	8			12	48	65%
No	2	2	20	2			-	26	35%
Total	10	22	20	10			12	74	100%
lack of publication									
Yes	8	26	2	8	2	10	10	66	73.3%
No	2	-	18	2	-	-	2	24	26.7%
Total	10	26	20	10	2	10	12	90	100%

As per the above table, both private and public colleges, except St. Mary's, did not fund research works. Thus, it tended to be reasonable to say that research funding was an explanatory variable that could bring hindrances on research works.

Needless to mention, research requires money. The Beirut and Tokyo conferences as cited by UNESCO (1998) stated that: to guarantee high quality research, suitable systems for supporting of research has to be designed. Along with this Seyoum (1998) also disclosed that the existence of research sponsoring institution becomes indispensable. However, 65% of the subjects noted that their respective institutions did not fund for any research works. In the survey on which this paper was based, it was only St. Mary's College that offered fund for research works.

According to table 5, it was observed that lack of publication could be a factor for the decline of research activities. But this constraint, lack of publication, was found to be unimportant variable for St. Mary's college staffs.

It seems true that publication would be able to cultivate the interest of teacher researchers. The Dakar conference as cited by UNESCO (1998) stated the importance of publication as follows: to promote

research, the creation of academic journals and the implementations of a coherent publications policy at the sub-regional and regional levels is essential.

Table 6: Cross tabulation on research constraints by colleges

Research Constraints	Names of the colleges					
	ABCC	St. Mary'	Royal	Queens'	Total	%
Academic leaders are reluctant to support Research						
Yes	8	4	8	11	31	59.6%
No	2	16	2	1	21	40.4%
Total	10	20	10	12	52	100%
Promotion does not base research work	ABCC	St. Mary's	Royal	Unity	Total	%
Yes	5	12	10	10	37	71.2
No	5	-	-	-	5	28.8
Total	10	12	10	10	42	100%

As it is shown on the table, more than half (59.6%) of the sample colleges' academic leaders appeared to be reluctant to support research activities.

As it can also be seen from the table above, all the sample subjects (71.2%) except few subjects from ABCC claimed that the promotion system did not base research works. The findings showed that prospects for promotion were not associated with research works in which lecturers were engaged in. In the light of the above data, lecturers in public institutions had the opportunities of getting promotion in the research works they made; however, this has never been true in private colleges.

The promotion system and/or staff perceptions of the reward structure in higher education tend to favor research rather than teaching (Bound and de Rome, 1983; Genn, 1982; Soliman et. al.1983 as cited by Kember and Gow, 1992). In spite of this fact promotion criteria in the sample colleges, particularly in private colleges did not consider research works at all; they did not even seem to know that research exceeds teaching.

Name of the institution	Conferences on research finding		
	Sometimes	Never	Total
ABCC	2	8	10
KCTE	26	-	26
St. Mary's	20	-	20
Unity	12	-	12
Royal	-	10	10
Queens	-	12	12
Total	60	40	100

Table7:
Cross
tabulatio
n on the
names
of
instituti

ons and conference on research findings

According to table 7, on the whole, a clear picture seemed to emerge that Kotebe College of Teacher Education, St. Mary's College and Unity University College sometimes prepared conferences. Noticeable in the above data was that some colleges did not prepare conference at all. As academic institutions, colleges are supposed to prepare workshop and/or conferences at sometime intervals otherwise; this might lead service receivers to consider them as profit making corporations rather than center for academic excellence.

Furthermore, Kember and Gow (1992) stated that workshop or/and conference could advertise the concepts of research with the expectation that participants start research project following the workshop or conference. Although the aspiration to create a dynamic, modern and competitive economy required a combination of research and teaching (Fagerlind and Kanaercy, 1998), but the sample higher institutions, with few exceptions, marginalized the central ingredient i.e. research works.

According to the above data KCTE, St.Mary's and Unity Colleges have built up a substantial lead in research works. The colleges have been gaining the lead over their competitors and they showed a good trend for other colleges to follow.

Conclusion

To ensure quality of education in higher institutions, lecturers in view of the above points, have to be involved in the tasks of producing research. Regardless of this fact, lecturers in both private and higher institutions did shy away from doing research and higher institutions in Addis Ababa seemed to be like high schools.

There was no research culture at all in higher institutions. The sample higher institutions subjects of both private and public, with few exceptions, detached research from their teaching. Comparisons among college showed that KCTE, St. Mary's and ABCC, Unity staffs looked to be sometimes engaged in research works. Others college segregated themselves from meeting this basic mission, conducting research.

According to the findings, lectures in high institutions were generally tied down with teaching activities and to countless personal and social details. This restricted them in doing research.

The insufficient ability of our lecturers in research methodology was also coming to light as a major barrier for lecturers' research involvement. Poor command of English, absence of research fund, lack

of publication, absence of incentive seemed to appear contributors limiting lecturers in doing research. Lack of promotion was also found to appear an obstacle for only private higher institution lecturers.

Within the context of rapid growth of public and private institutions, there should have been various conferences, workshops and seminars that disclose research outputs. However, comparison among colleges still indicated that KCTE, St. Mary's and Unity University colleges have sometimes prepared conferences but the remaining colleges have never prepared conferences at all.

Research which is a powerful vehicle for advancement appeared not to be understood by higher education community; less emphasis was likely to be given to research works and academic leaders were not committed to research.

Education would be revolutionalized through research and the role of research is building up quality of education is unarguable. In the light of the expansions of both private and public institutions, research works should be increased in quality and quantity. However, research is not a key concern for both private and public higher institutions in Addis Ababa. This situation might plague tertiary level education into severe crisis. This would be a landmark for the downfall of the education system; and the unhappy lot of quality of education would also deteriorate from time to time.

Accommodating the ever-increasing students number by diluting quality has worsened the crisis in education. This, in turn, leads to producing inadequate marketable services.

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