

Research Capacity of the Faculty Members at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ho Chi Minh City

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Abstract

This paper described the motivation and research capacity of the faculty members at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities – Viet Nam National University Ho Chi Minh City (HCMUSSH-VNU). A quantitative research technique was employed based on information provided from 169 permanent faculty members, it reflected that the factors of curiosity, personal interests, responsibility, self-assert affect their research competence, and professional development were the main research motivators of the respondents. They also assessed themselves to have the capability to do research and make their inquiry scientific. From the results, implications are drawn to promote the research productivity of the faculty members at the HCMUSSH-VNU.

Keywords: Research capacity, Research motivation, Research performance

1. Introduction

Scientific research is seen as an important tool for advancing knowledge, it is an attempt to study, to discover or to gain solutions to problems (Palispis, 1993), it is also considered as an effective way to change personal behaviors and society toward better life (Morton, 2015),

consequently, its findings will improve our well-being and increase satisfaction in multitudinous ways. The role of scientific research nowadays becomes more crucial in every country in order to facilitate knowledge production to meet the growing needs of society (Weinberg et al., 2014, Benneworth, 2019). It is considered as contributing factor to increase the competitiveness and development among individuals, organizations and countries (Bay & Clerigo, 2013; Ivanenco et al., 2015; Fawzi and Al- Hattami, 2017, Nasser-Abu and Majdob, 2017; Benneworth, 2019). Scientific research has become one of the important missions of higher education (Hanover Research, 2014; ENHANCE, 2017) in the context of technological innovation and knowledge economy.

In Vietnam the roles of science, technology and education have long been considered as "a key driving force for rapid and sustainable national development" (Decision 418/ QD-TTg dated 11/4/2012), for this reason, the Vietnamese government always spends 2% of total budget expenditure on education (Ministry of Science and Technology, 2017) in order to "... actively contribute to improve the quality of training and serving socio-economic development" (Directive 296/ CT-TTg February 27, 2010). In light of this goal, higher education is expected to be more active and productive in research as the Executive Committee Session VIII had stated: "Universities must be centers of scientific research, technology, technology transfer and application into life" (Central Committee Executive Committee Session VIII).

The University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City is one of the leading universities in the field of social sciences and humanities, and this research-oriented university aims to contribute its research outputs to the process of socio-economic development in Vietnam. However, the research outcomes are not as good as expected, according to the annual report, the quantity and quality of research are still limited. There are many reasons for this situation, and this paper aims to investigate this issue, specifically, the authors tried to answer the following questions 1) What motivates lecturers at the USSH to conduct research? 2) What is the ability of the faculty at USSH in conducting scientific research?

2. Review of Related Literature and Studies

Human resources are the main actors of any educational institution, teachers are the decisive factor in helping student's growth and success. They are essential specialists in higher education and play a central role to determine the success of research-oriented universities (Albatch, 2013). Since research requires to have certain knowledge and skills (Wester and Borders, 2014), the effectiveness in research is determined by human resources who have the motivation and ability to carry out particular scientific research.

The personal research motivation is interpreted as the act of discovering, exploring, searching for ideas to make contributions to society through innovative works or creative ideas (Bland et al., 2008), it is seen as the initial element to lead and to push someone into action. Previous studies have shown that there are different factors that motivate individuals to conduct research (Chen et al., 2010, Zhang, 2014; Ryan, 2014; Mussige & Maassen, 2015; Huynh Thanh Nha, 2016; Aydin, 2017; Naser-Abu & Majdob, 2017). These factors are considered as

motivators and were categorized into two groups: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. While extrinsic motivation consists of job promotion, reward, and payment from institution, other's recognition, respect and acceptance from others or job stability, etc; intrinsic motivation refers to researcher's interests and passion, sense of responsibility, self-esteem, the wish to develop their career/, specialization, academic qualifications, a desire to collaborate with others, giving contribution to the field, autonomy, etc.

The motivation and its influenced level on the researcher will vary depending on the degrees, ranks or types of employment status, Lise and Hartijasti (2018) found out that master's degree holders have research productivity lower than doctoral degree holders, and doctoral degree holders have better research performance and a greater intention to do research. While Ryan (2014) stated that rewards, promotion, job stability are the main motivators and younger researchers will be influenced by external motivation, Zhang (2014) emphasized that faculty members who have higher academic qualifications are less likely to be affected by extrinsic motivation but rather than by intrinsic motivation, as a result, they are much different in research productivity (Nasser & Majdob, 2017). To be more specific, Chen et al (2010) found out that the factors of receiving tenure, promotion, staying in the current field, and getting higher pay have motivated many researchers conducting research. According to the authors, those respondents with doctoral programs place more emphasizes on teaching load, creativity/ curiosity, collaboration and finding a better job at other universities. The findings also pointed out the difference between male and female lecturers towards research motivators especially in related to tenured-untentured motivation. These studies showed the variety of research motivations, although some may be led by intrinsic, extrinsic motivation or both, scientific research is seen as a means to help individuals strive to improve their current situation and achieve their expected goals.

The transformation from research motivation to research performance is very diverse among researchers, it is affected by various factors, studies conducted by Huynh Thanh Nha (2016) and Aydin (2017) mentioned the factors of gender, age, ethnicity, academic title, academic qualifications, job position, experience, marital status, and the number of children in a family influence on individual's scientific research performance. Fukuzawa (2013) also found out that young age and experiences have a positive relationship with research performance of the researchers within life sciences and medical sciences. These findings also revealed the influenced factors of a researcher's performance, therefore, understanding the influenced factors is as important as research motivation in order to enhance research productivity at educational institutions.

Previous theories had defined that scientific research is the use of background knowledge and methodologies to find and gain scientific knowledge (Palispis, 1993; Kumar, 2005; Creswell, 2009; Bhattacharjee, 2012). This is a systematic investigation so researchers are required to have the ability to control the research process. They are expected to think and use hypothesis to explain a phenomenon or to explain the hypothetical relationships among natural phenomena (Palispis, 1993; Ragin & Amoroso, 2011; Wester & Borders, 2014). Therefore, it requires for researcher's competency in order to carry out a research successfully; motivation leads individual's behavior but it does not mean that it will lead to research outcomes, it was

emphasized by previous authors that the scientific research output is a result of personal motivations and research abilities which consists of methodologies, techniques, operational-activity and emotional-volitional components of the researcher (Bay & Clerigo, 2013; Ivanenko et al., 2015).

The research capacity allows individuals to transfer knowledge, skills, and values into conducting research and handling the research process effectively (UniWiND Guat, 2017). Adequate research capacity influences the confidence of the researcher, confidence is a predictor of research productivity (Brancolini & Kennedy, 2017; Arsyad et al., 2019) and also is a major factor in promoting (Nasser-Abu & Majdob, 2017) research performance of the individual. These abilities help researchers accomplish the complex activities at each phase of the research process scientifically (Wester & Borders, 2014) and productively.

Capacity involves research knowledge and skills which enable the researcher to recognize the existence of a problem, identify, review and define the research problems logically, in other words, it strengthens the researcher's ability to "critically examining various aspects of the subject matter; understand and establish guiding and developing principles, and put new theories into practice (Palispis, 1993; Kumar, 2005). This process consists of using various tools to search for sources of related materials, this is the way that the researcher can comprehend past theory to have clearer picture about the research problem, and initially provide general view about research goals, its scope, methods, hypothesis formulation, theoretical framework, population of the study, sampling procedure, data gathering instruments, and statistical tools.

Mastering research methods, its procedures, research instruments, data collection methods with its reliability and validity (Peri & Bellamy, 2012, Mooney-Somers & Olsen, 2016) are the indispensable requirements of any scientific research. Using the right methods and tools enables researchers to be independent, objective and judge the matter fairly in theoretical examination and argument (Bhattacharjee, 2012), this way provides reliable and valid information for the researcher to propose better adjustment or improvement of existed situation or problems. Hence, Competent in using research techniques, data gathering instruments, tests, checking the data reliability for data analysis and data interpretation (Creswell, 2009) are the parameters that reflect the ability of the researcher when conducting scientific research.

The process of data analysis and interpretation also requires for researcher's ability to integrate and compare different information, this comparison will help them find out the similarities and differences which is a basic to identify the new emerging problems (Wester & Borders, 2014). Data analysis also helps researchers recognizing the theoretical and practical contributions of their investigations, which is seen as one of the expected results of scientific research. The contribution of the research is derived from the systematic methods, careful interpretation, logical analysis and effective presentation of the results in proper format (Bay & Clerigo, 2013; Arsyad et al., 2019). Reporting the research findings is very crucial to all researches because the final aim of a research is to unearth hidden assumptions and declare about its reliable findings, however, not all researchers are capable and masterful in this

phase (Singh, Chana, & Singh, 2015) though they are good at identifying, defining the research problems, methodologies, and data treatment.

The process of scientific research involves various phases that require for researcher's motivation, expertise, and skills in order to pursue the research project and figure out scientific knowledge as well, research in the social sciences is viewed as complicated task that researchers are asked to examine the various angles of the research problem (Kilburn et al., 2014; Giménez Toledo, 2018), they are expected to have the ability to synthesize theories, be competent to research methodologies (Peri & Bellamy, 2012) and know how to combine expertise, experiences, and senses to interpret the observed subject. In addition, they are requested to have management skills (planning, organizing, directing and evaluating), information communication technology skills, interpersonal skills, cooperation, and persuasion skills to achieve their research objectives. These are essential skills for researchers in order to carry out their research successfully in the complex context (Ivanenko et al., 2015). While research demands knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the researcher, studying and improving the research capacity of researchers becomes the topmost concern of all educational institutions nowadays because of the faced problems related to the researcher's capacity such as research skills, and research motivations.

Previous studies concluded that many researchers and teacher educators perceived themselves as competent in doing research, especially in doing survey studies, however, they are not good at conducting mixed-method, experimental and action research, and using SPSS for quantitative analysis in particular (Iqbal, Samreen, & Khalid, 2018). Other researchers have high self-efficacy in term of choosing research design, articular clear research questions/ testable hypotheses, writing a balanced – critical – comprehensive literature, have the capacity to design and implement the sampling strategy, effectively communicate in writing the research results (Reyes-Cruz et al. (2018), and many others perceived high levels of knowledge and skills in accomplishing all the phases of the research process (Torres et al., 2016), however, their actual research efficacy with specific research outcomes differs from self-efficacy.

There are many factors affect research performance and research outcomes of an individual, several studies have pointed that research productivity is influenced by demographic profiles of the researchers and their motivations (Zhang, 2014; Ryan, 2014; Mussige & Maassen, 2015; Huynh Thanh Nha, 2016; Aydin, 2017). It is also determined by the research allocated funds in particular institutional context (Mussiige & Maassen, 2015) but the research capacity of an individual is proven as a more important factor rather than others (Nuqi and Cruz, 2012). This reality reveals the complication of research activity and research productivity that needs to be addressed to assist in increasing and enhancing the quality of research in higher education. This is one of the significant reasons why the authors were eager to conduct this study.

3. Methods

A quantitative research technique was employed in this study, by using self-administered survey questionnaires to the faculty members from 28 faculties and departments of USSH.

The questionnaire comprised of two sections, section 1 aimed to explore the motivation of the faculty member, section two investigated about their research capacity.

The contents of both sections were constructed from previous literatures and were sent to the three experts to check for its applicability in USSH context. After getting their feedback, the final questionnaire was sent to the coordinator at each faculty and department for data collection. After gathering data and encoding, Cronbach's alpha test was used to check the reliability of the instrument, all the items with obtained an alpha reliability of .60 above were accepted. The mean score is computed and explained as follow: Mean = (Max-min)/ number of respond levels = (5-1)/5 = 0.8. The mean score range from 1.00 - 1.80 means strongly disagree/ definitely not capable; 1.81-2.60: Disagree/ Probably not capable; 2.61-3.40: Undecided; 3.41-4.20: Agree/ Probably capable; 4.21-5.00: Strongly agree/ Definitely capable.

The population of this study was permanent teaching staff only, they came from all ranks and have been working in their respective areas for at least one year. The expected sampling was 200 permanent lecturers out of 523, however, during the data collection process, some respondents could not respond due to their absences and unwillingness. As a result, 169 questionnaires were treated in data analysis, it means that the study's response rate was 84.5 %. The SPSS version 2.0 was used for data treatment.

4. Findings and Discussion

Fourteen motivations of the faculty members were observed, their responses were analyzed, and results are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Motivation of the Faculty at USSH

No	Content	Mean	SD
1	Personal interests	4.04	0.79
2	Additional income	3.42	1.15
3	Curiosity	4.15	0.76
4	The wish to receive rewards	2.99	1.10
5	Assert one's competence	4.10	0.74
6	Develop one's career/ specialization	4.29	0.72
7	Career promotion	2.63	1.18
8	For teaching purposes	4.21	0.62
9	To get recognition and respect from others	3.62	0.89
10	Tenure	2.69	1.13
11	Sense of responsibility to contribute knowledge into the field and for the needs of the community	4.20	0.67

12	Look for further collaborations	3.76	0.85
13	Fulfill obligation to university's research requirements	3.86	0.85
14	Look for other opportunities at other places	2.59	1.07

Table 1 reveals that faculty members are strongly motivated by intrinsic factors such as develop their career/ specialization (M = 4.29) and for teaching purposes (M = 4.21). Since research has become imperative for advancing a profession, many researchers paid efforts for this activities to develop their respective disciplines and the faculty members in this study is not exempt. They are strongly motivated by this intrinsic motivation which aligns with previous findings conducted by Zhang (2014). The factors of personal interests (M = 4.04), curiosity (M = 4.15), assert their competence (M = 4.10), sense of responsibility (M = 4.20), getting additional income (M = 3.42), recognition and respect (M = 3.62), collaborations (M = 3.76), and obligation in research (M = 3.86) moderately influence on respondents' eagerness and willingness to conduct research. Other factors such as rewards (M = 2.99), promotion (M = 2.63), job stability (M = 2.69) and look for other opportunities (M = 2.59) have less influence on faculty's choice to conduct research, this finding is inconsistent with Chen et al (2010) and Ryan (2014) which emphasized on rewards, promotion, tenure as researcher's main motivators. However, the standard deviation values are quite high in these items, it means the data points are spread out the responses and there should have a further investigation for a deeper understanding about this matter.

Table 2. Research Capacity of the Faculty Members at USSH

No	Content	Mean	SD
1	I am confident to conduct research	3.94	0.72
2	I am capable to report the research findings scientifically	4.08	0.67
3	I master of the research process and its phases	4.15	0.55
4	I can review various materials to find out research problem efficiently	4.15	0.57
5	I can define the research problem easily	3.86	0.68
6	I know how to formulate the research hypothesis	3.99	0.57
7	I use different means and tools to search for data that related to my research problem	4.16	0.58
8	I can search and select relevant information to answer for my research questions	4.10	0.58
9	I can synthesize the reviews to get a theoretical framework for my study	4.05	0.59

10	I master of research methodologies and techniques for data gathering	3.86	0.68
11	I effectively select research design and research methods that appropriate with the research problem and research objective	3.99	0.62
12	I am able to construct various tools for data gathering	3.63	0.73
13	I can treat and analyze all collected data	3.69	0.73
14	I am able to interpret, compare, analyze and find out the scientific conclusion from research results	3.93	0.59
15	I am confident to indicate the implications from research findings	3.88	0.71
16	I am fluent in writing the scientific report that follows international format (ex: APA)	3.52	0.89
17	I am confident to publish my research findings	3.80	0.73
18	I am capable to network with others for research opportunity and research grants	3.43	0.80
19	I have the ability to network, collaborate with various stakeholders to accomplish research goals	3.48	0.84
20	I can manage all emerged issues that arise during the research process to achieve research objectives	3.63	0.73
21	I can effectively use different forms of communications to reach research objectives	3.74	0.71
Overall mean		3.86	

The overall mean (3.86) in Table 2 shows that lecturers generally have ability in doing research, specifically they perceived as capable in terms of research knowledge and skills, such as in research process ($M = 4.15$), reviewing materials to find out research problem ($M = 4.15$), hypothesis formulation ($M = 3.99$), using means and tools for data collection ($M = 4.16$), searching and selecting relevant information to answer the research questions ($M = 4.10$), and synthesizing the reviews to get theoretical framework ($M = 4.05$). In addition, the faculty members are confident about research work ($M = 3.94$) and they are also capable to write a scientific report ($M = 3.52$). This information shows that at the initial stage of undertaking research, they can recognize the existence of the problem and define research problems which are perceived difficulty to many researchers.

Formulating the research problem usually begins with the identification of a gap between theoretical domain and experiential domain (Palispis, 1993). It requires researcher's ability to visual the abstract from actual observations and mentally "connect the dots", and synthesize this information to identify the hidden patterns of phenomena (Bhattacharjee, 2012), results

indicate that the faculty members are capable to narrow down the gap from these perspectives and come up with the process of conceptualization afterward. This is an essential element for them to define the research problem, formulate a hypothesis and proceed to other phases of the research process. Data reveals that faculty members at USSH have the ability to recognize assumptions bearing on the problem and to make relevant hypotheses that are tested throughout the actual research process. Research involves knowledge acquiring in which scientific methods are applied, it refers to a standardized set of techniques (Bhattacharjee, 2012), approaches, tools for data gathering, sampling procedure, data treatment (statistical tools and formula), and data interpretation. The results show that the faculty members are knowledgeable about research methodology with its components, this information aligns with the findings of Peri and Bellamy (2012); Kilburn et al. (2014) and Giménez Toledo (2018) who indicated that research methodology is one of the most important requirements of research scholars and it is essential for undertaking a valid study (Kumar, 2005), because of its importance so research methods are usually taught in tertiary education to promote research-oriented development, this is the reason why the faculty members in this study are capable in this aspect with the average mean scores are 3.86 (item 10), 3.99 (item 11), and 3.63 (item 12).

Scientific research is a process to acquire scientific knowledge, it requires for scientific methods in which comprises various phases such as defining the problem, selecting research methodology, data analysis, and interpretation, and conclusion and recommendation. Giving a conclusion is seen a final of research which is viewed as difficult phase of many researchers because it consists of inferences and findings deductions (Palispis, 1993). However, the lecturers self-assessed themselves as being capable of drawing a research conclusion ($M = 3.93$) and its implications ($M = 3.88$). These findings reflect the faculty members' knowledge and skills in the dissemination phase, they are capable to conduct research and give a scientific contribution to their particular disciplines which is the final aim of scientific research. However, to reach this final aim, the researchers are not only required to have knowledge and skills related to topics and research competency but are also required to have managerial skills to carry out and accomplish their research projects successfully. These skills involve to communication skills, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, the result from the questionnaire reflects that the faculty members have ability to effectively communicate with others during research process ($M = 3.74$), collaborate with various stakeholders to achieve research's objectives ($M = 3.48$), and be able to deal with and manage the problem arises ($M = 3.63$).

The contribution of the research findings cannot be applied or valued for future generation unless there is a scientific report, it is emphasized that research is a systematic investigation to contribute to the existing knowledge, therefore, it needs to be organized and reported in a scientific manner which is very important for the incremental progress of science (Bhattacharjee, 2012). For this reason, the research topic of the report should be written clearly and concisely so that people can understand it easily, for this reason, the researcher should be able to express their research works and its findings readably, reliably and scientifically (with several basic components of the report and required format). Generally,

the faculty members are able to write a final report ($M = 3.52$) and publish the results ($M = 3.80$) which is seen as the completion of the research process (Singh et al, 2015). This result provides positive information about the research competence of the faculty at USSH that need to be enhanced to optimize their research productivity at the university level.

Although the overall mean shows the confidence and adequate ability of the faculty members at USSH in conducting research, the mean scores in the early phases of the research process are higher than others, these include of conceptualization and dissemination phase. This result is consistent with the previous findings of Torres et al. (2016) in which the analytic phase was perceived with the lower levels of knowledge and skills of the researchers. This result boosts future concern regarding research professional development among faculty members, especially in the phase of research methods, research planning, and empirical testing, so that the research capacity will be aligned with their actual research outcomes.

Iqbal, Samreen and Khalid (2018) explained that the lack of research skills has limited faculty's research outputs, the results in this study reveal the adequate knowledge and skills of the lecturers in conducting the research, however, the findings from the study reject this idea because the lecturers in USSH are knowledgeable and skillful at research but their research outputs are limited. According to the USSH annual report, the lecturer's research publications in 2018 had achieved only one and a half of desired outcomes. It means there are other hidden factors interfere in lecturer's research performance rather than individual research skills, some of these factors were identified as follow: teaching assignments, university's research fund, and incentives, and research services (Torres et al., 2016).

The overall mean reflects the lecturer's relevant ability to complete different research tasks, they are knowledgeable and skillful in conducting research. However, the lowest mean score in some items needs to be continually investigated such as the ability to look for research opportunities and research grants ($M = 3.43$) and the ability to collaborate with stakeholders ($M = 3.48$). This data not only shows the lecturer's ability in networking and searching for research resources but it also informs about the factor that properly affects their research outputs. The lecturers are confident about their research skills and self-assess their ability in doing research, they have interests and diverse research motivations but it does not parallel with their research productivity, this reality properly comes from different reasons that need to be verified in order to enhance research performance at the university level.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The main goal of this paper is to explore the research motivation of the faculty members at USSH and the level of their research capacity. Findings indicate that lecturers' motivations mainly derive from teaching purposes and career/ specialized development. On other hand, the factors of personal interests, curiosity, responsibility, and obligation in research, assert lecturers' research competency, additional income moderately influences respondents' eagerness and willingness to conduct research. The motivations of rewards, promotion, job stability, and look for further opportunity to have less influence on the respondents.

Regarding lecturers' research capacity, generally, the respondents are confident about their

research work, they have the ability to identify and define the research problem, use various materials and resources to come up with a conceptual framework. Moreover, they are able to effectively use research methodologies, techniques, and tools for data gathering and analysis. They know about research procedures, be able to draw conclusions, report and publish the research findings. In addition, they also have the ability to network, communicate with other stakeholders, and manage the raised issues during the research process to achieve research objectives

The motivational aspect of the lecturers has explored and data showed that lecturers are mainly motivated by intrinsic motivation, therefore, other supports from the university management need to be paid attention in order to accommodate the intrinsic motivational needs of the faculty members in research such as facilities or research materials.

Motivation, individual confidence, and capability is a predictor of research success, although the data indicates that lecturers of USS self-assess themselves as capable in doing research, the actual research outputs vary from their actual capacity and have not yet tested. Therefore, investigations related to research productivity of the lecturers at USSH need to be conducted to deeper understanding about the hindrance to research endeavors, so that it will improve the research productivity of the USSH.

Research capacity of academic researchers is one of the factors that determine the research performance of educational institutions, this study examined the motivation and the level of research capacity of the faculty members which based on their perception only, the findings may applicable to 169 faculty members, and may not relevant to all 523 faculty members at the USSH. Therefore, it may not reflect the actual research capacity of the whole faculty members. This is also one of another significant limitation of this study that needs to be addressed by future researches.

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