

SUSTAINABLE RESEARCH CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES: CASE OF A SMALL ISLAND NATION

CULTURA DE PESQUISA SUSTENTÁVEL EM INSTITUTOS DE ENSINO SUPERIOR: O CASO DE UMA PEQUENA NAÇÃO INSULAR

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Abstract

In the case of Maldives, some of the Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) are focused solely on teaching, but recently some institutes have led new developments in research. Therefore, this paper aims to examine and identify the characteristics of the sustainable research culture through the lens of the competing values framework. The study used a qualitative approach based on a case study design. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews with 5 research heads and 10 lecturers from all 5 HEIs in the Maldives with a research department. Participants were selected purposively based on their involvement in research work. Documents available from the institutions and participants were used to triangulate the data from interviewees. The findings were generated using a thematic analysis method. It is revealed that the research culture observed in Maldivian HEIs resembles more of a hierarchical culture where formalized policies and structures are in place and implementation is in its first few stages. In

Resumo

No caso das Maldivas, algumas das instituições de ensino superior (IES) se concentram exclusivamente no ensino, mas recentemente algumas instituições têm liderado novos desenvolvimentos na pesquisa. Portanto, este artigo tem como objetivo examinar e identificar as características da cultura de pesquisa sustentável através da lente da estrutura de valores concorrentes. O estudo utilizou uma abordagem qualitativa baseada em um projeto de estudo de caso. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com 5 chefes de pesquisa e 10 professores de todas as 5 IES das Maldivas com um departamento de pesquisa. Os participantes foram selecionados propositalmente com base em seu envolvimento no trabalho de pesquisa. Documentos disponíveis nas instituições e participantes foram usados para triangular os dados dos entrevistados. As conclusões foram geradas utilizando um método de análise temática. Revela-se que a cultura de pesquisa observada



addition, some traits of market culture are envisaged as the result-oriented vision is found in the study. The study concludes that there is a long way to go for the HEIs to establish a positive research culture. The study suggests developing, sharing, and implementing research policies and procedures. The findings also highlight establishing conducive research environments and providing sufficient training, collaborative opportunities and incentives for staff to work on research. In addition, this study calls HEIs to determine a standard mechanism to monitor the institute's research output.

Keywords: Education. Research Culture. Educational Policies And Procedures. Infrastructure. Sustainability. Education Quality.

nas IES das Maldivas se assemelha mais a uma cultura hierárquica, onde existem políticas e estruturas formalizadas e a implementação está em suas primeiras fases. Além disso, algumas características da cultura de mercado são previstas, uma vez que a visão orientada para os resultados é encontrada no estudo. O estudo conclui que há um longo caminho a percorrer para que as IES estabeleçam uma cultura de pesquisa positiva. O estudo sugere o desenvolvimento, o compartilhamento e a implementação de políticas e procedimentos de pesquisa. As conclusões também destacam a criação de ambientes propícios à pesquisa e o fornecimento de treinamento suficiente, oportunidades de colaboração e incentivos para que os funcionários trabalhem em pesquisa. Além disso, este estudo convida as IES a determinar um mecanismo padrão para monitorar a produção de pesquisa da instituição.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Cultura de Pesquisa. Políticas e Procedimentos Educacionais. Infraestrutura. Sustentabilidade. Qualidade da Educação

1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education has been operating in a dynamic environment for the past few years, afflicted by numerous challenges attributed to the quick development of new technologies, an increase in demand, the spread of knowledge, increased emphasis on quality, competitiveness, changing financing mechanisms, regulations, and internationalization (Baba et al., 2021). An important obligation of faculty members at higher education institutions is to conduct research, which can provide information that will advance the institution and the development of the country (Quitoras & Abuso, 2021). While most universities in developing nations assign a greater emphasis on teaching activities and hence remain weak in terms of research, universities in developed countries have on the whole, reputable research records (Sanyal & Varghese, 2006).

According to Pratt, Margaritis and Coy (1999), research culture in higher education institutions is critical for promoting innovation, knowledge production, and economic development. He argues that a supportive research culture requires leadership that values and prioritizes research, a conducive environment for research, and adequate funding and resources. Similarly, Kivunja (2020) highlights the importance of a research

culture that promotes open and transparent research practices, encourages collaboration and interdisciplinary research, and supports early-career researchers. The authors argue that such a culture fosters creativity, increases research impact, and enhances the reputation of the institution.

In the case of Maldives, all higher education institutions focus mainly on teaching, but recently, research has been emphasized. Of the 12 higher education institutions, 5 have established a research center within the institution. The first research institute in the Maldivian higher education institutions was established in 2012 with a growth initiative to create a research-focused academic community in the Maldives. Supported by institutional policies, like academic staff workload policy, research policy, and promotion policy, faculty members in some of these higher institutions are encouraged to be involved in research and obliged to conduct research and enhance their publications in journals with high impact factor.

However, research initiation is not well established in the higher education institutions of the Maldives, nor is it prevalent in all institutions. Their implications are different in all institutions. Hence, a distinctive situation occurs if we consider the research culture of the Maldives' higher education institutions. Research culture in higher education institutions refers to the norms, values, and practices that promote and support research activities among faculty and students. This culture includes policies and procedures that encourage and reward research, the availability of resources and facilities, and research collaboration (Bryce et al., 2022).

Overall, a strong research culture in higher education institutions is essential for advancing knowledge, driving innovation, and contributing to the development of society. Despite the importance of research culture in universities, there still needs to be a gap in understanding how it is established and influences research productivity and impact (Henry et al., 2020). While some studies have focused on specific aspects of research culture, such as funding and support for early career researchers (Kent et al., 2022), the importance of leadership support for research activities (Carlsson et al., 2011), there is a need for a comprehensive and systematic examination of research culture in universities.

In the case of Maldives, there needs to be a study regarding the research initiatives of the institutions. Even though research culture in institutions has been recognized as an essential aspect of academic life, much must be understood about its nature, development,

and impact. Research is needed to explore these issues and develop strategies to promote a supportive research culture in institutions. Hence, there is a huge gap in the literature concerning the research culture at the Maldives' higher education institutions. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the characteristics of the research culture in Maldives higher education institutions through the lens of organizational culture. This focuses on how research culture is being shaped by research heads and lecturers using an analysis of their responses to the indicators of research culture by Salazar-Clemeña and Almonte-Acosta (2007).

2 RESEARCH CULTURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

Sustainable research culture is momentous to achieving the higher education institution's mission and vision. Norms, standards, regulations, and less obvious elements like conventions, beliefs, and assumptions make up the visible and less visible elements that make up the research culture of Universities (Zha & Shen, 2018). According to Huang (2018), research culture is the principles and concepts that researchers apply to solve research-related issues. It combines all actions like thinking, collaboration, and cooperation to encourage faculty members to engage in research. Promotion and recognition encourage faculty members to enhance their performance in both teaching and research; research culture is crucial for enhancing their research-related performance (Stupnisky et al., 2018). A research culture is created when academic community members consistently engage, discuss, create, and appreciate research (Iqbal et al., 2018). Teachers contribute to the research culture when certain characters and resources are present and interact with internal and external dynamics (Mirasol & Inovejas, 2017; Sherab & Schuelka, 2019; Olvido, 2020).

One of the major missions of university faculty members is research, besides their teaching obligations. Higher education institutions have become aware of the importance of research, and hence, various accrediting organizations emphasize faculty involvement in research. Research culture in universities can be enhanced by engaging in activities like serving on a panel during an oral defense, supervising and mentoring researchers, authoring research articles, and presenting them at national and international conferences (Narbarte & Balila, 2018). The growth of research culture is an investment. Hence it is evidence-based and determined by observable and quantifiable outputs in terms of

production and performance. Therefore, universities that intend to develop a strong research culture should employ appropriate techniques in tracking and evaluating research outputs as part of their investment strategy (Olvido, 2021). Hii et al. (2023) formulate an e-learning postadoption model for Malaysian universities lead to more efficient resource allocation and management of e-learning.

According to Niemczyk and Rossouw (2019), the requirements for research production impact individual scholars and institutions evaluated based on their research performance after highlighting the global demand in higher education for enhanced research productivity. The outcome of this study showed that most participants were aware of the expectations placed upon them regarding research productivity. However, many people did not recognise the rewards connected with it. There is an inconsistency between the demand for enhanced research activities and the lack of enthusiasm of many academics to satisfy such high expectations (Rossouw, 2020). Additionally, the usefulness of research goes far beyond merely expanding our body of knowledge. Georghiou (2015) notices that there are many ways that research an influence and adds value, including increasing the amount of practical knowledge, developing trained workers, developing new scientific instruments and procedures, working with users to use these facilities, and collaborating on research projects and networks with users.

Additionally, universities know that faculty involvement in research is crucial for faculty development since it allows them to stay current on the most recent findings, learn new skills, and receive up-to-date information (Bhatti et al., 2022). According to Sultana (2020), faculty members are subject to significant pressure from university management to enhance their research work. Involvement in research is considered beneficial to faculty members as it enhances their job performance and work behaviors. Iqbal et al. (2018) have shown that faculty members are more actively involved in research in developed countries than in developing nations due to a lack of funding and inadequate infrastructure and research culture. In addition, Lee and Kuzhabekova (2019) stated that faculty members and University management should focus on developing a research culture in universities rather than just teaching activities.

According to Mbaleka (2015), the most challenging obstacles that discourage faculty members from having enough publications are limited time, lack of publication training, fear of rejection, lack of interest, lazy faculty members having limited funds, and insufficient institutional support. Quitoras and Abuso (2021) and Kowang et al. (2020)

suggest that universities should aid in the growth of a country by providing highly specialized educational opportunities to produce experts in a range of technical and disciplinary fields by emphasizing the creation of new knowledge and skills through research and development.

Existing research on university research cultures reveals that universities that claim to have a strong research culture have significant research practices and outputs. Universities should develop research strategies and inquiries, and the outcomes must guarantee an impact on society (Stahmer et al., 2017). Although people, resources, and activities fuel the growth of research culture, the research output determines the effectiveness of these factors in boosting research productivity.

To promote a research culture that is accessible, transparent, and reproducible, Yaqoob and Darbey (2021) suggested eight actions institutions can employ. They proposed universities could join or establish a national reproducibility network, establish an open research working group, create an action plan, publish an open research statement, develop an open research champions network, develop support for research software engineering, introduce open research criteria into recruitment, promotion, assessment and reward process. These recommended actions may not improve things overnight, but universities can progressively improve the quality and integrity of their research culture by employing strategic action plans.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) is a theoretical framework that is widely used in organizational studies to describe and understand different types of organizational cultures. Developed by Cameron and Quinn (1983), the CVF is based on the premise that four competing values underlie organizational culture: clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy.

According to the CVF, the clan culture is characterized by a strong emphasis on collaboration, teamwork, and employee development. In this type of culture, the organization is viewed as a family, and employees are encouraged to build strong relationships with one another. On the other hand, the adhocracy culture is characterized by innovation, creativity, and risk-taking. Organizations with this culture prioritize experimentation and are often willing to take on new and untested ideas.

The market culture is characterized by a strong focus on competition and achieving results. In this type of culture, the organization is often driven by external factors such as customer demand and market share. Finally, the hierarchy culture is characterized by a strong emphasis on rules, procedures, and structure. In this type of culture, employees are expected to follow established protocols and to conform to organizational norms and values.

The CVF suggests that organizations can be classified into one of these four culture types and that each type of culture has its strengths and weaknesses. For example, a clan culture may promote employee engagement and retention but may be less effective in achieving short-term performance goals. On the other hand, a market culture may be influential in achieving short-term performance goals but may be less effective in promoting employee well-being and long-term success. Hence, the CVF is utilized to understand and describe the research culture in Maldives higher education institutions.

A study was conducted by Salazar-Clemeña and Almonte-Acosta (2007) to understand the research culture in some universities in the Philippines. The indicators adopting research culture were operationalised based on the previous studies and are very relevant to the developing higher education context of the Maldives. Hence, the indicators in Table 1 were used to understand the research culture of the higher education Maldives.

Table 1

Indicators of a Research Culture (Based on Salazar-Clemeña & Almonte-Acosta, 2007, p. 4)

Indicators	Operationalized Definitions
Institutional research policies and agenda	Research agenda based on the institution's philosophy, goals, mission and vision, as well as its research emphasis and strategies for supporting and promoting research.
Departmental culture and working conditions	Departmental research programs and strategies designed to encourage and sustain research productivity among the faculty and graduate students.

Budget for research	Funds allotted by the institution for research, the ability of the institution and its departments to tap external sources and obtain research grants.
Infrastructure	Provision of a research unit, adequate research services, and facilities for the conduct of research.
Collaboration with and access to research professionals in other institutions	Ability to provide means for linkages with other institutions, local or international, in order to create intellectual synergy.
Policies and guidelines on research benefits and incentives	Rules and procedures on the granting of financial and non-financial rewards for research.
Research committee	Research monitoring body that screens the types of research conducted and looks into ethical dilemmas involved, especially in sensitive fields.
Publications	Quality and quantity of research produced by the faculty members.

4 METHODOLOGY

This research aims to explore the research culture in HEIS in the Maldives. The study adopted a qualitative case study design. A total of five HEIs were selected based on the existence of a research department in the institution. Data was collected by using a semi-structured interview and document analysis. The interview questions were based on the framework proposed by Salazar-Clemeña & Almonte-Acosta (2007). The participants were selected purposively based on their involvement in research work. Participants were chosen from two levels ie; the research heads and staff who are engaged in research. Five institutional research heads (four women and one man) and ten staff (eight women and two men).

The data was triangulated by using interview contents and published institutional documents. The analysis and discussion were framed by the theoretical proposals by Salazar-Clemeña & Almonte-Acosta (2007) and the Competing Values Framework (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983)

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are three parts in this section. First, data obtained from the HEIs research heads are presented and discussed. Next, the same is done with the research lecturers from the 5 HEIs. Finally, both perspectives are compared to shed light on the absurd situation of research culture in the Maldives HEIs. The discussion is based on the aforementioned research culture indicator and the theoretical perspective.

5.1 The research heads' perspective

5.1.1 *Institutional research policies and agenda*

There were discrepancies among the research heads about the existence of research policies and procedures. According to the three heads, there are research policies and different procedures and guidelines under the policies. Some of the research-related policies currently in use in the three institutes include policies related to research, research grant, ethics, and authorship policy. In two institutes, book grants and travel grants are in place. At the same time, other academic policies, like the workload policy, support the institution's research policies. On the other hand, two heads noted that there are no research policies for staff as the department is very young and is working on developing research policies. It is found that most institutions have worked on several initiatives to encourage research among staff. One of the important initiatives is the workload policy that has allowed staff to work on research. At the same time, the institutions initiate research grants and free conferences for their staff. However, heads highlighted that with much agenda to develop research, they still lacked staff who have the enthusiasm and the drive to generate new ideas and the understanding of the need for doing research.

5.1.2 *Departmental culture and working conditions*

All research heads agreed that there is a conducive research space in the institutions even though there is no specific space to work for research. One head highlighted that allocating a specific space is in their pipeline, while others mentioned that the space is not the issue in the lack of research participation from the staff. Similarly,

all research heads agreed that the staff's workload is quite considerate for staff to contribute in research work. However, all heads agreed that they do not have the genuine data analysis software, data collection tools, and equipment needed, like recording devices and transcription software. Three institutions stated that they have significant access to online databases like EBSCO, Jstor and Emerald. Some institutions have their own subscribed sources and access online resources from their partner international universities.

5.1.3 Budget for research

Three research heads highlighted that they have a specific budget for research activities like grants and annual research conferences. Other than this, there is no specific budget for some research initiatives like publications, book grants and travel grants. Three institutions shared the issue with the lack of budget allocated due to the growing demand for research grants. Three institutions highlighted the indirect budget allocated for research-focused staff under the workload load policy. In addition, two institutions noted the budget allocated for book and travel grants, allowing researchers to participate in international conferences and seminars. However, it is revealed from these two institutions that the staff cannot utilize the funds fully and have not fully exhausted the grant fund in any of the years. So, the number of applications that meet the required criteria is less than the amount they have allocated for the grant. This shows the discrepancies in the budget allocated and the utilization of the budget in the HEIs. It was also found that 3 HEIs have exerted limited or no effort to tap external sources to obtain research grants or to enhance the research budget of the institution. At the same time, two institutes have established departments to generate income for research developments. Hence, it was found that these two institutions have sufficient research budgets, which are not fully utilised due to a lack of interest from research staff or their inability to submit grant-winning proposals.

5.1.4 Infrastructure

The five HEIs have a Research Unit. All HEIs seem to be reasonably equipped with the required infrastructure to conduct social sciences research, as all are engaged in

research under this particular discipline. Two research heads highlighted that they do not conduct scientific research, so labs do not exist and are not required. Three of the HEIs have adequate infrastructure, both hard and soft, such as internet access, personal computers/laptops, computer labs, a library, different databases and SPSS / Nvivo software. However, all of the research heads admitted that they do not have a “designated area to do research”, instead, “many classrooms” and “library cabins” are in the HEIs. The rest of the HEIs do not have adequate resources but are optimistic to “build on” what they have and “make available” for those interested in research.

5.1.5 Collaboration with and access to research professionals in other institutions

Four HEIs agreed that collaboration with local and external Universities is increasing, which is helping to develop the research culture in their institutions. It is worth to note that three HEIs intuitions have good collaborations with international universities within the region and work on mutual benefit to develop research and publications in terms of providing funds for publications, technical support and scholar exchange programs Two research head highlighted that they “need to go beyond the Southeast Asia region” indicating the vision for research for these institutions. In terms of focusing on the level of collaboration in research across institutions, “it is very bad, very poor,” according to one research head. The head further highlighted that all HEIs should embark on “collaborative works, collaborative conferences, seminars, but unfortunately, the Maldivian cultural mindset work is all about competition”, revealing the uncertainty of working collaboratively amongst HEIs who are trying to develop the research component in each of these universities. One HEIs is in the process of collaborating with international universities.

5.1.6 Policies and guidelines on research benefits and incentives

Two HEIs heads explained policies on research benefits and incentives for staff, while two research heads were aware of the benefits; however, they do not “recall any such policy” or are “not sure whether there is a policy or guideline”. The incentives are mainly financial, including travel grants, research grants, and fewer instruction hours. In one HEI, the promotion depends on the number of publications, which gives more points

to be eligible for an increment. One research head highlighted that although the incentives are in place, “within these three years, up until today, there is no such application where we can apply for any of these things”. Two HEIs have a classification of research staff, ie; two or three categories, each one implying different requirements and productivity.

5.1.7 Publications

Two institutions do not have any publications, while the other three institutions agree that the most common type of publication in the institution is conference proceedings, as it implies less time and effort. All three institutions have research articles published in the institution's peer-reviewed research journal, even though the research heads raised the concern of the difficulty of getting articles from their own staff. One institution has been issuing one volume since 2013, while the other two have been issuing a volume since 2018. It was also found that the staff have research articles and book chapters published in other internationally indexed journals, but the institutes do not maintain these records. It was also revealed that one institution has started collecting evidence of their staff's research publications. Data on research publications revealed that the institutions have much effort to exert to enhance the publications and the status of the institutions.

5.2 The research lecturers' perspective

5.2.1 Institutional research policies and agenda

The institutional research agenda is not known among the research staff. The majority of the research staff are unaware of the university's research mission and vision about research. Some lecturers have not seen any research policies even though they believe there will be a research policy as research activities are carried out in the institution to some extent. From two institutions, lecturers believe that there is no research policy and that the institutions must draft the policies soon.

When asked about research policies, the most related policy shared by the lecturers is the workload policy. Even though the workload policy is not a research policy, since most of the lecturers are associated with the workload policy and the distribution of

their workload to teaching, research and administrative work, they wanted to highlight the policy and its impact on doing research. All lecturers raised their concern regarding the workload policy, expressing that time allocated for research is impractical due to other work. The distribution of time for research is perceived by all participants as unreal, inefficient, and unreasonable. As stated,

“Workload is so high that we can barely finish the existing workload. That is, teaching, dissertation supervision, coordination and sometimes program development. I want my research to be of very good quality. That involves much time that we don't have. Doing research is like a luxury here.”

Two institutions highlighted that they do not have a policy that gives the opportunity for them to be research-focused or research staff. This shows that the institutions are not allowing the staff to work on research during official hours.

All institutions evaluate the lecturers teaching from a form filled by the students, and in one institution, 360-degree feedback is taken for lecturer evaluation. Hence, lecturers are more dedicated to teaching workload and the administrative work of program or subject coordination. On the other hand, though time is allocated for research, a good evaluation or monitoring mechanism is not established in any institution; therefore, most of the lecturers are not on alert to dedicate their time to research. However, the fact that the three universities are talking about strengthening the research monitoring mechanism of the staff shows the new agenda of these institutions to enhance university publications and the long way to go for the other two institutions.

Some interviewees know that there are research policies like research grants, book grants and travel grant policies. However, they are not aware of the details of the policies. At the same time, they raised the concern that most of the lecturers do not take the opportunities as there are difficulties in applying and winning the grant or if they are awarded, to get the fund. As one participant stated,

“It's not very easy to get the money. People are not encouraged to apply for the grant because of the difficulty in financial assistance. Based on previous experience, staff are discouraged to even apply. Not many people applied in the following year. This year two or maybe one applied. They keep extending the application this year. Last year 6 researchers won the grant.”

In addition, from another institution, one participant states that most of the staff are unaware of how the grant is given and that none out of seven was given the grant due

to the high standard of the grant proposal guideline. However, it was expressed that after that, the research department held sessions to give information on preparing a grant-winning proposal.

5.2.2 Departmental culture and working conditions

All lecturers appreciate that they have a functional working conditions concerning research. However, lecturers highlighted that there is no designated area. As highlighted,

“Library is there, there are cabins, but there is no area to do collaborative work. If I want to do individual work, there are small cabins where I can go and work. I am emphasizing on collaborative working areas because most of the time, we are doing collaborating research instead of working as individuals... We need this conducive research area to discuss and generate new ideas.”

In addition, lecturers raised the concern of unavailability of resources like filing space, equipment like recording devices and the kind of storage areas needed for research. In addition, all researchers stressed the difficulty of not having genuine data analysis software, regardless of the many times they have requested to buy this software from the HEIs.

Lecturers also highlighted that even though there is a distribution of research work in their workload, the actual workload does not allow them to do research. As mentioned, “after teaching, coordination and program development, there is no time or energy to spare for research.”

The lecturers feel that the management does not recognize the research work nor motivate them to do research. There is no appreciation or incentive for the researchers as compared to the other works done by the institution. As highlighted by lecturers of the two institutions, they do have professorship policies; however, till today, they have not been given a monetary incentive for these professors. In addition, it was highlighted that the university does not make it practical for the researchers to conduct research; for instance, there is no official leave if they want to travel to the island to collect the data for their research unless it is research funded through the institution's research grant. With such daunting experiences, one lecturer highlighted that he joined the institutions and did much research. Now he does not understand the need to do research due to the institution's lack of support and recognition.

The lecturers highlighted the lack of mentorship within the university. Even though there are research departments, the lecturers believe that they do not get individual mentorship or guidance from the research centers, which obstructs the staff's reach output. Similarly, an experienced researcher highlighted the need for her to collaborate with more experienced researchers from other institutions, which is not provided or facilitated through the institution. All participants agreed that mentorship and collaboration would assist them to flourish as researchers. Meanwhile, from three institutions, they have tried research clusters as collaborative research work; however, it did not work.

5.2.3 Budget for research

Most of the participants believe that there must be a research budget but are unsure of the budget allocated. Most interviewees perceive that the grant and conference budget is the only research budget allocated as they are unaware of any other spending on research development. In one institution, the lecturers believe there is no specific budget for research. Lecturers from three institutions believe that there is a very limited budget for conferences and grants and expressed concerns about budget allocations for research publications, travel grants and other research development activities like the purchasing software and resources needed to do research.

However, most of the lecturers admitted that from the workload policy, the fact that they are allocated fewer modules shows that a budget is allocated for research staff to conduct research instead of teaching and doing other work. In contrast to this, one institution's lecturers appreciated that the institution has a very "lavish budget" for grants and other research activities. In another institution, a lecturer highlighted that through the staff development policy, each lecturer is provided with a small budget which they could use to develop their research skills.

5.2.4 Infrastructure

One lecturer reported that since no scientific research is conducted, there is no need for a lab. Although they lack some facilities, it was "sufficient", and the environment was somewhat conducive". On the other hand, some lecturers mentioned a shortage of

software, such as NVIVO, which is expensive to provide, according to the management. However, these HEIs, including the students, can access SPSS software. Most of the lecturers highlighted the working space as a hindrance to carrying out research work. While lecturers acknowledge the fact that they have a “library” and “meeting rooms”, it was opinionated that they “should have a place for research interests Staff to come together” and “not the canteen” indicating the “need of a quieter environment” where they could “sit there and talk about new ideas”.

5.2.5 Collaboration with and access to research professionals in other institutions

The lecturers had a consensus that collaboration with international universities exists. However, little is known about “how collaborations work”. One lecturer reported on having “personal level” collaborations with “locals and international researchers”, however, remarking that “it’s very limited ” revealing the need for collaboration at both levels. Another staff highlighted their local collaborations in different disciplines and with industry. It is worth noting that one lecturer pointed out management travelling abroad and hoped to receive some incentives from such collaborations. Additionally, it was expressed as collaboration to go beyond the Asian region.

5.2.6 Policies and guidelines on research benefits and incentives

Lecturers agreed that incentives, to some extent, are in place. Such as research grants and travel grants; however, these “happen occasionally” and “it is not consistent”. Contrastingly, some admitted to not having any incentives and precisely “publication incentive” as non-existing. One lecturer highlighted that although the incentives are in place, “within these three years, up until today, there is no such application where we can apply for any of these things”. This indicates the inconsistency of research-related activities or a lack of implementation of research policies.

5.2.7 Publications

Most lecturers do not know about institutions’ publications, while few stated that there are publications in the annual conference proceedings and institutions’ research

journals. It was also found that most participants do not have any articles published in a highly indexed journals. In contrast, some of them have published an average of 2-3 articles in peer-reviewed journals. Only 2 participants have a book chapter published, while none of the others have published a book chapter or book. However, from one institution, the participants believed that other staff would have published books. Hence, it is concluded that the publications of journal articles and books in Maldivian HEIs are still at an embryonic stage. However, it is believed that the new pay structure of HEIs, executed in March 2023, which gives an incentive to publications, will drastically change the status of the publication.

5.2.8 Integrating the research heads' and staff's perspectives

As per the research indicator in Salazar-Clemeña and Almonte- Acosta's (2007) model, the research culture of Maldives HEIs seems to be in an infant stage. Factors such as the institutional and national policies, the rewards and incentive structures, and the staff's knowledge, attitudes, skills and interests shaped the current research culture. Either its role in relation to the other factors or alone, each of them seems to have critical consequences on the research productivity.

The research agenda of the institutions are not well established nor shared among the staff. Since a research agenda is not explicitly known, no one is obliged to participate or be responsible for committing to research activities. It was interesting to find out that the staff who engaged in the research were mainly driven due to their previous affiliations, mostly from the universities they have studied or from their PhD supervisors. Hence, it was found the institution's agenda had limited or no impact on the current research publications of the staff. All research heads acknowledge the increasing number of PhD holders positively yet slowly impacting the university research agenda. According to research heads, new initiates are carried out under the research agenda, and the response to the activities is progressive but not to the expected outcome.

Although the strategic development plan of the institutions highlights research as a key performance indicator, most lecturers are unaware of these activities. Although there are policies for faculties and research departments to assess the research activity of the research lecturers annually (in one institution, two publications per year and in

another one publication), it is not monitored well. Therefore, this raises the concern of enhancing the number of research publications despite work being allocated.

In addition, the rising attention to research quantity and not quality is observed from the lack of institutional support for conducive research conditions and training. Research staff are prescribed to publish, and it is taken for granted that they are acquainted with doing it. However, this study found that most of the research staff has limited knowledge on writing research articles and very limited knowledge of publishing articles or books.

Another remarkable finding is that to date there has been limited research agenda at the national level. Most national-level policies are not researched based and the Maldives Qualification Authorities framework for rating the HEIs has only 5% to research. Hence, it is believed that the institution itself is not motivated to engage in research. It is very much teaching-focused and has no vision of becoming a “research university” as opposed to the international higher education trend.

According to the institution's workload policies and research heads, all academic staff are distinguished into different categories. All academic staff are accountable for engaging in research in one institution. In contrast, in the other two institutions, staff are distinguished based on the amount of time accounted for in doing research, comprising research-focused and teaching-focused staff. Lecturers can be in any of these categories and are to fulfil an approved research proposal and show research productivity to be in the research-focused category. The teaching-focused lecturers prefer to dedicate their time to teaching and administrative work. Mostly, PhD holders and the ones pursuing a PhD are interested in being in this category. Most of the teaching-focused staff do not find the need to do research, are not interested in doing research, and are more comfortable taking the teaching load. However, the majority of the research staff recognized the need for conducive research conditions, research training and mentoring. Research heads highlighted that research pieces of training are continuously held, and the number of participants coming for these pieces of training is unsatisfactory.

Research lecturers perceived workload and time as the main factor that impacted the research activity. Workload distribution seems impractical for all research staff participants, and those with a good research profile claim they work extra time as it needs a different kind of commitment than teaching and doing administrative tasks. All participants agree that the administrative tasks take the most time of the actual workload.

In contrast, all research heads believe that the workload distribution is very generous in the allocation of time for research and the lecturers are showing workload as an excuse for their lack of genuine interest in doing research and their inability to manage time in conducting research.

The research heads seem to be content with the infrastructure available in their institutions based on the types of research they conduct, which is social sciences. This is evident from the interviews of both groups. Similarly, it is evident from both research heads' and lecturers' data that there are challenges in accessing software such as SPSS and NVIVO. On the other hand, while the research heads expressed a list of space for staff to conduct research, lecturers admit having the same, yet they are not ready to acknowledge that it is adequate. Thus, lecturers expect a more conducive environment to work as researchers. One of the research heads supported this, accepting that they could not provide a designated space for their research staff. These perceptions reveal that although the HEIs are not in the ideal situation, the infrastructure so far is adequate.

As to the collaboration with and access to research professionals in other institutions, the research heads and lecturers coincide in saying that linkages with international universities are increasing. These collaborations vary across HEIs in terms of funds and collaborations in research. On the other hand, it is surprising to find out that the perceptions did not reveal any formal collaboration between the HEIs. However, few staff have local collaborations with individuals in HEIs at a personal level. This finding is supported by one research head who emphasised having various collaborations between the HEIs. The reason for the lack of collaboration among the HEIs is identified as the cultural mindset of being in a race in which everyone wants to win. The perceptions of both groups appreciate the international collaborations in the region; however, it was found that these collaborations to be taken beyond the Asian region.

Regarding the policies and guidelines on rewards, there is a consensus among the research heads that rewards are given. However, perceptions differ on the existence of policies and guidelines on benefits and incentives. Most of the rewards are financial; however, they sometimes count for staff promotion. All the lecturers coincide in acknowledging the rules and procedures in place. Although this is the case, these are not rolled out in the HEIs regularly, and some admit to not having any incentives. Additionally, applications for benefits and incentives are not open for applications where the staff could lodge for these. Thus, indicating the lack of an established

mechanism to implement and operationalize the policies on research benefits fully. These are crucial to encourage the staff to research so that the existing research culture can flourish further.

Considering the competing values framework (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983), the research culture in the HEIs can be identified as a hierarchical culture where policies and structure are available and at the very early stage of implementation. However, some traits of market culture can also be observed. The incentive structure and the benefits (for instance - less teaching hours at present and the promotions envisaged with the new pay structure, March 2023) drive for more publications in terms of research output. However, this could be achieved by creating the right conditions to conduct research and minimizing the administrative load to nurture high research productivity.

6 CONCLUSION

Following the indicators mentioned above of research culture and based on competing values framework, the research culture observed in Maldives HEIs resembles more hierarchical than any other type of culture. However, some traits of market culture are envisaged.

HEIs research departments and policymakers need to exert much effort in developing and sharing research policies and procedures. From both research heads and research lecturers, an attitude of passiveness towards research was observed. Policies and decisions seem to be made without the consensus of the different participants; hence, the decisions are rarely questioned, and the policies standalone without successful implementation. Moreover, the structure of institutional and national incentives plays a critical role in encouraging staff to involve and be accountable for doing research.

Lecturers could be divided into two categories, one with qualified and inclined to do research and one with limited or no interest in doing research. However, an individualistic approach to research culture is observed due to the restrictions of conducive research conditions, lack of training, and absence of research mentoring and coaching.

Research is perceived as just another elective function of the workload. There was inadequate evidence of a genuine interest in acquiring and creating knowledge, improving, and regarding research as something that can benefit society in general.

Hence, this study implies that there is a long way to go for the HEIs to establish a positive research culture.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Aishath Waheeda and Fathimath Muna conducted the analysis and created the tables and figures. Wong Chee Hoo provided technological expertise for the study.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest that the writers have disclosed. Nobody has anything to hide when it comes to their financial interests; all of the co-authors have read and approved the final manuscript. This work is not currently being considered for publication elsewhere, and the authors hereby attest that it is entirely original. Disclosure of all funding sources for the project is required.

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Authors' Contribution

Both authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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