

**Research Related Professional Development Needs of University Faculty Members:**

**Gender-Based Qualitative Evidence**

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**Abstract**



*The purpose of the current qualitative study was to explore the research-related professional development needs perspectives of the faculty members of the University of Education Lahore, Pakistan. It was also determined whether the perspectives of male and female teachers were the same. Thirteen regular faculty members (seven male, six female) were selected as study participants from the University of Education Lahore. The purposive sampling technique was used for this purpose. The researcher reviewed the related literature, and a semi-structured interview protocol was developed to interview the faculty members. The data from semi-structured interviews were collected till saturation. All of the interviews were translated into English and verbatim transcribed. The data were analyzed after transcription using thematic analysis. The study's six major themes emerged: article writing and publication, research projects, research tools, research-related software, plagiarism and ethical issues, and research culture. Those, as mentioned earlier, have emerged as major professional learning needs of university teachers. There was no distinct difference between the perspectives of male and female teachers on their research-related PD needs. It is recommended that the university's management should encourage and provide opportunities for its faculty members in research-related professional development. Workshops and training courses need to be organized by the university to assist teachers in improving their academic research skills. To cultivate research, university management should develop a research culture in the university.*

**Keywords:** Research Related Professional Development Needs, University Faculty Members, Gender Based, Qualitative Evidence

**Introduction**

It is becoming more widely acknowledged that for teachers to maintain their position as professionals throughout their careers, they need to engage in professional development activities. The educational system's success depends on university teachers' professional development (Smith, 2017). Teaching is commonly recognized as a challenging profession, and that to advance their professional development, they must have access to enriched learning opportunities (Kelchtermans et al., 2018). Universities in several countries continue to demonstrate an intention of helping teachers who are involved in PD research activities. UK University teachers are invited to participate in research-related activities, such as workshops on developing research projects and research articles (Roberts & Weston, 2014). Universities have received several requests to accurately identify and meet teachers' research-related professional learning needs (Berry, 2016). Interestingly, teachers from different nations identified research-related professional development activities in the field of education as one of their primary needs for professional learning (MacPhail et al., 2019). The preferred method for teachers to secure their future is research. According to Van Der Klink et al. (2017), participating in research-related professional development activities is necessary for university teachers in different countries.

Research has been an imperative commodity in a globalized world because it generates new knowledge that leads to innovations and advancement (Khan, 2015) and provides a platform for universities to develop and contribute to the education system (Naz & Malik, 2014). As a result,

higher education institutions have placed a greater emphasis on research to develop evidence-based policies and programs, find solutions to society's pressing and mounting challenges, and improve the quality of knowledge sharing and technology innovation (Bourke & Loveridge, 2017). Participation in research-related activities is beneficial for the professional progress of teachers. It would seem that the learning experience that teachers go through is improved by having research articles and projects. For one's professional development as a researcher, getting help with research methodologies from other scholars who have more expertise is extremely necessary (Meeus et al., 2018). Czerniawski et al. (2017) explored research-related PD activities to stay current on advancements in their profession and actively contribute to the growth of present bodies of knowledge. The study participants believed writing research publications was a worthwhile activity with a good chance of being educational. A study in Finland suggests that research-related activities are vital to teachers. Writing articles, chapters, or even entire books was the outcome of their research. Teachers' participation in research groups had prompted them to seek external funding. Having established themselves as capable researchers, they aspired to publish only the highest-quality work. They viewed research as a tool to improve their performance at work (MacPhail & O'Sullivan, 2019).

Universities in Pakistan are currently viewed as having primary responsibility for research. HEC is supporting research efforts at Pakistan's higher education institutions. HEC has undoubtedly taken several steps to improve its teachers' professional development programs. The government has given HEC full authority to assist universities in raising the standard of university education and creating a research environment that can fulfill the country's needs worldwide. Universities in developed nations have a strong culture of research. Academic research significantly affects the development of knowledge-based enterprises in developed nations (Subhani et al., 2017).

On the other hand, universities in developing nations have strong teaching traditions but a weak research culture. Pakistan is not an exception in this regard (Naoreen & Adeeb, 2014). So, the purpose of the current study was to explore the research-related professional development needs perspectives of the faculty members of the University of Education Lahore, Pakistan. In addition, the views of male and female teachers were compared and contrasted. Little research has been done on teachers' research-related professional development needs (MacPhail & O'Sullivan, 2019). The professional development needs of university teachers concerning research have received relatively little focus in literature. This study is important because it may contribute to the limited empirical knowledge previously available regarding the research-related professional development needs of university teachers in Pakistan. There is a potential that the findings of this study may impact the University of Education Lahore's current practices and plans for professional development. University management may be able to provide meaningful research-related professional development to their faculty members based on study findings.

### **Research Question**

What are the perceptions of university male and female teachers regarding their research-related professional development needs?

### **Review of Related Literature**

There is a growing recognition that for teachers to continue to function as professionals throughout their careers, they must remain actively engaged in professional development (Van Der Klink et al., 2017). Van Der Klink et al. (2017) highlight the significance of developing one's competencies and continuing one's training throughout life. According to Gallagher et al. (2011), teacher education is a difficult and complex field involving pedagogy, the curriculum, and research. Even if this is considered, most teachers, according to them, are given very little assistance or mentoring for their professional development in most teacher education programs. In this complex and rapidly changing era of knowledge and innovation, it is indisputable that the importance of high-quality learning, research and innovation programs in universities has moved from the realm of the routine to occupying a central place on the education policy agenda (Ping et al., 2018). This has taken the top priority position in the government's policy. As a direct result of this, the functions that university teaching professionals play have become and are continuing to become increasingly complex (Ulla et al., 2018). Consequently, the teachers must be aided in developing the capabilities necessary to deal with this tendency (Van Der Klink et al., 2017). This is because most university teaching staff worldwide frequently enter university service based on experiences as students in the colleges and universities they attended, with a minimal pedagogical and andragogic background. This is the case in

countries such as China, where most university teaching staff enter university service based on their student-based knowledge and experiences (Gong et al., 2021). This raises concerns about the significant extent to which such teachers possess the expertise to deliver exceptional university services, such as teaching, research, and involvement in development initiatives. This is especially the case in sub-Saharan African countries where the universities have not yet acted as a catalyst for improving people's quality of life or for the country's overall advancement (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2014).

Changing educational policies and programs may serve as external motives for the professional development of teachers. Institutions of higher education have been encouraged to compare their research productivity to that of other institutions, which has prompted teachers to increase their skills, knowledge, and capabilities in conducting research due to these changes (Ping et al., 2018). Universities want teachers to publish frequently to gain recognition and appreciation and spread awareness about it to others. It is not uncommon for higher education strategy plans to include such practices (MacPhail & O'Sullivan, 2019). In China, the publication is a crucial evaluation criterion for academic promotion for Chinese teachers (Zhu, 2010). Many Chinese teachers have expressed a desire to earn a Ph.D. to have their names listed as "Professors" when seeking funding for research. Professional titles (such as "Professor") are also widely held in China to be associated with greater recognition from colleagues and major universities (Gong et al., 2021). A strong research profile is required for promotion and career advancement for most higher-education teachers (MacPhail & O'Sullivan, 2019), but it must also be considered important compared to other university academics (Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2014). Their universities encourage effective teachers to be critical research users (Loughran, 2014). Many universities contribute knowledge through research (Lunenborg et al., 2014). Individually or collectively, researching their practice enhances teachers' awareness of the possible incompatibilities between their purpose and beliefs, and they practice and explore new ways of teaching in connection to their students' learning (MacPhail, 2019). The need for a research-based professional development program has moved from the United States and the United Kingdom to Scandinavia countries and Europe, a significant trend in European and worldwide education (Lambirth et al., 2019). A research-based professional development program is being implemented worldwide to raise professionalism among teachers and improve student achievement.

In the context of Pakistan, it is required of universities, regardless of whether they are public or private, to define a significant drive toward the generation of knowledge through research culture. Several policies about research and innovation have been proposed, the primary purpose of which is to strengthen the involvement of university faculty members in research-related professional development activities. The HEC provides university researchers/faculty with some financial assistance through awards. In addition, it establishes the standard of performance for the faculty and the university as a whole. Therefore, research has evolved into a means by which individual faculty members, as well as institutions of higher education, can obtain financial incentives from national and international organizations (Subhani et al., 2017).

Consequently, the combined efforts of everyone involved have been perceived as a giant step in aligning Pakistani education with other educational systems worldwide and making it more competitive. For the advancement of higher education institutions, inadequate administration, the inability of academic staff to conduct research, and a lack of research facilities were the main causes of the public universities' declining standards of education in Pakistan (Naseem et al., 2019; Lodhi, 2012). In order to do this, HEC has initiated a set of programs to enhance academics' ability for research and new standards for hiring and promoting academic faculty. These state that academics will be evaluated based on the quantity and quality of their research papers in esteemed peer-reviewed journals. Additionally, HEC has assisted public institutions by offering a variety of resources like research grants, high-speed internet, and access to the most recent academic publications. Due to HEC's investment in public universities, several published research in impact factor journals can notice an obvious increase. In addition, public universities have been gradually producing more PhDs. These data point to adopting a research culture in Pakistan's public universities. However, there is still much work to be done to get faculty members in Pakistani universities to shift their attention from prevailing teaching traditions to vibrant research culture, striking a balance between the two main academic pursuits. Therefore, we must recognize how university teachers view their professional development needs related to research (Subhani et al., 2017).

## Methodology

The purpose of the current study was to explore the research-related professional development needs perspectives of the faculty members of the University of Education Lahore, Pakistan. It is necessary to surface the useful methods for the study. Cohen et al. (2018) stated that research with a suitable research paradigm help researchers. The interpretivism paradigm was used in this study. As a result, multiple realities exist in the interpretivism paradigm of research, which claims that reality is not permanent, can change from person to person over time, and is based on subjective forms of knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative methods were used in this study. Qualitative research is an effective tool for exploring the meanings that individuals attribute to different activities (Mason 2018; Patton, 2015). At the University of Education Lahore, thirteen regular faculty members (seven male, six female) were selected as study participants. The purposive sampling technique was used for this purpose (Campbell et al., 2020; Denieffe, 2020). The researcher reviewed the related literature, and a semi-structured interview protocol was developed to interview the faculty members. The researcher was aware of the ethical considerations in the entire research process, so the researcher has given the right to study participants of confidentiality, informed consent, volunteer participation, and can withdrawal at any phase of the study. To ensure the study's trustworthiness, the researcher has used the framework of Denzin and Lincoln (2008) in qualitative research. They proposed four criteria for qualitative researchers: credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. The data from semi-structured interviews were collected till saturation. All of the interviews were translated into English and verbatim transcribed. The data were analyzed after transcription using thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019). The six major themes emerged from the research: article writing and publication, research projects, research tools, research-related software, plagiarism and ethical issues, and research culture.

## Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings of the Study

Male	Female
<b><u>Research Related PD Needs</u></b> <b>Article Writing and Publication</b> <i>Teachers' academic progression is largely inspired by their scholarly articles; therefore, they have to provide training in research skills, such as writing excellent research articles and how to publish them. (P5)</i>  <i>Holding the title of Professor motivates faculty members to engage in research activities. So, teachers want to involve in several research-related activities, such as writing research articles and projects. (P7)</i>	<b><u>Research Related PD Needs</u></b> <b>Article Writing and Publication</b> <i>In the light of university rankings that compare institutions nationally and internationally, the academic promotion of teachers is heavily weighted toward research outputs. So, we need to know how to write and publish our research in renowned HEC-recognized national and international journals of our discipline. (P8)</i>  <i>The institution's requirements to be active in academic research are the main things that drive me to do research. Thus, I need training in research-related activities such as advanced academic writing and article writing in international journals. (P11)</i>
<b>Research Projects</b> <i>Writing for a research journal and conducting research projects can provide a forum [an opportunity] for teachers to feel a sense of accomplishment by increasing their professional expertise and confidence to meet the demands and challenges of a changing educational environment. Therefore, PD needs relating to research, such as how to explore, win, write, and present research projects, should be addressed. (P2)</i>	<b>Research Projects</b> <i>Published papers profoundly influence teachers' academic promotion, so we need professional development in research, such as writing effective research articles and research projects. (P10)</i>
<b>Research Tools</b> <i>University teachers need a wide range of research tools to do research studies. I must be provided training in this area because I need to develop effective tools and instruments for my research study. (6)</i>	<b>Research Tools</b> <i>Research heavily relies on research tools. Teachers do need to develop advanced tools for research proposals and projects. So, PD should be provided to train faculty in effective research tool development. (P9)</i>



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**Research Related Software**

*Teachers are unable to do research without the use of the software. In both education and research, technology and software play a critical role. Teachers must keep up with new technology to thrive in today's competitive marketplace. So, they need training in this aspect. (P1)*

**Plagiarism and Ethical Issues**

*Regarding the publication of articles, it is expected that teachers be aware of various ethical considerations, including plagiarism. Therefore, they needed training in this regard. (P2)*

**Research Culture**

*Universities must cultivate a research culture, but this does not appear to be the case in our institution. At the university, university management did not encourage a research culture. (P5)*

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**Research Related Software**

*Using different latest software in research is compulsory currently. We cannot do research without software. Teachers need training in software used for research purposes. (P12)*

**Plagiarism and Ethical Issues**

*Regarding the publication of articles, teachers require knowledge regarding plagiarism and other ethical considerations. (P10)*

**Research Culture**

*A research culture within universities is necessary because no nation can stay competitive on the world stage without research. Therefore, academic challenges can only be overcome by promoting research culture through offering PD related to research activities at the university. (P13)*

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**Discussion**

According to the study's findings, the research publications and research projects were major research needs for faculty members. Participants considered research publications and research projects important in evaluating academic promotion for faculty members at the University of Education, Lahore. In addition, university faculty members needed professional development in research tools, research-related software, and plagiarism, ethical issues. Many teachers have voiced their need to advance their careers to the level of "Professor." Consequently, they wanted to publish a greater number of articles in a variety of national and international journals. They also desired to explore, write, win, and present research projects to advance their careers. In University, holding a professional title, such as "Professor," is common practice because it is associated with higher levels of recognition. According to MacPhail and O'Sullivan (2019), most faculty members must have a robust research profile to advance in their careers. So, the present study's findings, to some extent, were in line with MacPhail and O'Sullivan's (2019) study findings. Several educational institutions contributed significantly to the body of knowledge through research-related activities (Lunenburg et al., 2014). An important development in the educational systems of Europe and the rest of the globe is the shift of the need for professional development based on research from the United States and the United Kingdom to the countries of Scandinavia and Europe (Lambirth et al., 2021). Faculty members have a desire for a research culture at the University. However, no country can remain competitive without research. This research finding matched Naoreen & Adeeb's (2014) study results.

Professional development based on research is being implemented worldwide to boost professionalism among teachers and improve students' academic performance (MacPhail et al., 2019). But present study participants lacked the research skills and competencies and needed to be trained in research activities by professionals. Learning how to write academically helps teachers become more self-confident, autonomous, and authoritative in their work. Demand for expanded research programs is an undeniable fact that highlights the expected role that research plays in theorizing principles, re-examining methods, reconsidering things, and innovating things to improve academic performance through professional development (Jonasson, 2011). As a result, research has been a key approach for defining the most critical components of teachers' holistic development (Morales, 2016). This study finding followed Grima-Farell's (2017) and Ulla's (2018) research findings. The researcher has found that participating in research activities helps teachers improve and develop their research expertise and strengthens their professional experiences. Conducting research, presenting that research articles and research projects, and publicizing that study does more than enable teachers to think about the present state of affairs in their respective local contexts and solve the educational challenges. According to the findings, teachers strongly need research-related professional development activities.

## **Conclusion**

Male and female faculty members of the University of Education Lahore have identified that article writing and publication, research projects, research tools, research-related software, plagiarism, ethical issues, and research culture were major professional learning needs. They expressed a strong desire to join in research-related professional development activities. According to the study results, research-related PD needs were not perceived differently by male and female faculty members. Many university males and female faculty members indicated that they need massive research-related training in academic writing. So, the need to publicize research and write for publications was a major need for male and female faculty members. Most participants stated the need to start writing for publishing and a greater grasp of the publishing process. Most of the participants needed expertise in project writing. Some participants needed training on exploring, winning, and presenting research projects. University faculty members stated that teachers obtained advantages from writing and publishing research articles, enriched their professional skills, and enhanced their abilities to improve research publication skills. University faculty members also needed professional training in research tools, research-related software, plagiarism, and ethical issues. University faculty members have stressed the need for a research culture. Because no nation can remain competitive in the global arena without research, to cultivate research, faculty members voiced a need for university management to develop a research culture in the university.

Based on this study's findings, it is proposed that the professional development of university teachers may be considered an ongoing process. It is expected that the Higher Education Commission may boost the opportunities for the professional development of faculty members teaching in different disciplines. The university's management should encourage and support its faculty members in research-related PD activities. Workshops and seminars need to be scheduled and organized by the university to assist teachers in improving their academic research skills. The participation of teachers in a variety of learning professional development activities needs to be given enough weightage in the annually rating and vertical elevation of university faculty to increase the motivation that teachers feel toward their work (Naoreen & Adeeb, 2014). Based on the findings, it is suggested that the University of Education Lahore should provide faculty members with professional development opportunities that are more directly related to research for the members of the university's faculty to compete in research nationally and worldwide.

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