

INCULCATING ACADEMIC INQUIRY: FOSTERING ACADEMIC RESEARCH AMONGST SCHOOL FACULTY

Bindu Saini¹
Rohit Sarkar²

Quality Education - the United Nation's SDG #4 – stresses on the need for ensuring inclusive and equitable education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. These aspects play an integral part in guaranteeing the holistic development of the entire nation's educational landscape. To bring this agenda to fruition, the personal and professional development of faculty needs to be stressed on.

Academic research is an area pursued by educators mostly from the higher education sector. The authors suggest that school faculty - both scholastic and co-scholastic – need to be empowered for research-driven initiatives. Further, there is a need to essentialise the culture of research within the school ecosystem whilst maintaining an equilibrium between research and the daily academic pursuits of school faculty. This will supplement their professional growth, amplify their skill set, open avenues for better employability, and add significantly to the knowledge repository within their field of study.

¹**Bindu Saini:** Principal, S.B. Patil Public School, Pimpri-Chinchwad.

²**Rohit Sarkar:** Media and Publishing Department Executive, S.B. Patil Public School.

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Introduction

Whether we realize it or not, most of us conduct research in our own way almost every day: when we look up a word in a dictionary; when we Google a question; browse through an encyclopedia; or even compare reviews of a restaurant we plan to dine at. Whilst this may not classify as academic research, it still falls under the purview of research because simply put, research is a systematic investigation of an issue.

When one wants to investigate an existing problem; provide solutions to question; explore and analyze general issues; construct or create a new procedure or system; explain a new phenomenon; generate new knowledge; or a combination of two or more of any of the above (Gratton and Jones, 2010), one will lean on research for the solution.

A Reliance on Research

Education extensively relies on academic research by providing a foundation for teaching practices, developing curriculum, and crafting policy decisions (Cohen et al., 2018). Research within education further helps identify approaches to effective teaching methods (Hattie, 2009), develop assessments to measure student learning with precision (Black and William, 2009), and understand how students learn and process what they are taught (Bransford et al., 2000).

Inculcating research in to what is taught and into one's teaching practice helps one not only be a better educator but contributes to the overall enhancement of the institute (Holland, 2023). With holistic and inclusive education as the need of the hour, research helps educators understand the needs of diverse learners (Gay, 2000) and thus develop culturally-responsive teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

2004; Boote and Beile, 2005). Contributing to the existing pedagogical practices evidently benefits then broader educational community (Shulman, 2004).

Furthermore, research at times requires collaboration. This collaboration with fellow colleagues helps promote a sense of **community** and leads to knowledge exchange further enhancing the **professional** development of faculty (McLaughlin, 2003).

One of the most critical factors research aids in is enhancing one's **credibility** as a faculty. It augments one's reputation, thus recognizing **them** as experts in their field (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009).

Facing Challenges

Conducting academic research at the school level can be a **challenging** task for faculty school faculty (Loughran, 2007). As noted by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), faculty members are often faced with time constraints as they have to concentrate on classroom activities, assigning homework, examination correction, etc. This aside, they also have limited resources to conduct the necessary research of interest therefore making it difficult to produce high-quality studies.

The challenge of accessing relevant literature and resources, as highlighted by Higgins and Vallejo (2005), is a major problem **especially** within the school structure. Schools, unlike universities, **often** have limited access to academic databases and resources, thus **making** it difficult for its faculty to conduct thorough literature reviews (Higgins & Vallejo, 2005).

Higher education faculty are within a formal structure that fosters the required training and support to conduct academic research. This may not be so in case of school faculty (Hargreaves, 1996). Obtaining ethical approval for research studies can be a lengthy and complex process, requiring significant time and effort (Bryman, 2008) thus

detering school faculty from investing time in much-required research.

Finally, school faculty may face the challenge of disseminating their research findings. The exposure faced by the faculty of higher education institutions is significantly greater; and as highlighted by Kotsis (2024) research findings of school faculty are often not shared widely, thus deterring to impact policy and practice.

Discussion: From Users to Producers

As stated priorly, engaging in academic research has manifold benefits for school faculty, the students, the educational institute, and the advancement of education. This being said, conducting academic research at school can be a challenging task for faculty, the reason primarily being that research is not part of the bloodstream of school curriculum.

However, by creating an environment that promotes research in schools through the right support, resources and incentives - as stated in the above paper - these challenges can be overcome, faculty motivated, and quality research can be produced. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) stress that research is essential for an educator's overall professional development and should it be encouraged and supported by the school administration.

This would include providing research training and support for teachers, allocate resources specifically for research, and collaborate with external organizations and institutions (Lagemann, 2000). Additionally, schools can establish research centers or clubs, providing a platform for faculty and students to engage in research activities.

Holistic school education not only ensures that students and faculty develop and progress in all areas be it academics, co and extra-curriculars, or personally and professionally. It is imperative that schools create an environment that promotes research.

Faculty need to elevate from being mere school teachers who use **research** in their teaching to producers of research so as to broaden **their** professional horizons. In this age of misinformation, reliance on **any** available information needs to shift to credible information.

These actions that lead to a reliance on research would in turn assist **faculty** to lead professional development initiatives, be credible **sources** of instruction, be superior role models and professional **mentors** to both student and fellow faculty alike.

From Theory to Practicing What We Preach

Whilst we state the above in theory, numerous research initiatives **have** been undertaken by the S.B. Patil Public School team at Ravet, **Pune**.

1. **Research Cell:** This involves students, staff, parents and alumni to research and discourse on pressing issues and changing pedagogies.
2. **School Innovation Council:** The council works on Design Thinking and collaborate with higher education institutions (HEIs) under AICTE.
3. **KHOJ - A Faculty Convention on the UN's SDGs (SDG-4):** Standing for a Journey for Knowledge, Hypothesis and Observation, this faculty convention will be a landmark in terms of bringing innovative and inclusive pedagogies on the table for Generation Alpha.
4. **Faculty engage in academic research and action research projects** with the objective of improving the teaching-learning process in classroom settings.
5. **360-degree appraisals** are conducted annually, and with **credit points are allocated for conducting research**. The **Quality Circles** provide the platform for sharing the research findings,

analysis, and deliberate on changing paradigms in school education.

6. **Gifted Students Programme:** The programme aims at identifying, nurturing and helping gifted students grasp new skills, engage with complex activities, and set higher performance bars for themselves.
7. S. B. Patil Public School's teaching and non-teaching **faculty regularly participate in conclaves, seminars, conferences, benchmark visits, etc.** to get first-hand information and engage in experiential learning activities so as to enhance the cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills of their learners.

Conclusion

Research at the school level is essential for faculty to progress as educators at a time when education is itself in transition. Inculcating the practice of participating in academic research offers numerous benefits, including becoming more adept at teaching, having a credible knowledge base, expanding and enriching one's skill sets, and advancing one's professional development.

Challenges exist but they can be overcome through support, resources, and collaboration. By prioritizing research at the school level, we can foster a culture of academic excellence and prepare students for future success.

Future Scope

The current paper has taken into consideration the benefits, challenges and solutions of school faculty conducting research. By prioritizing research at the school level, we can foster a culture of academic excellence and prepare students for future success.

Development in children unfolds in multiple social settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Rogoff, 1990), and for most children, schools act as one of the most important setting. Children spend many hours each year in school, and their school experiences profoundly influence their development. (Alibali and Nathan, 2010). Thus, research-oriented skill sets learned by faculty can not only be passed on to fellow peers but also to students.

It is with this thought that further study can be conducted on the benefits of inculcating research in the school curriculum so that students are prepared for it when they graduate school. With the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education being at 28.4% in 2021-22 (AISHE, 2022), and with the National Education Policy 2020 aiming to increase the GER to 50% by 2035 (PIB, 2020), students need to be prepared to undertake academic research at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

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