Investigating language teachers' willingness to conduct research and publish in academic journals

Leena K. Iitula

Ongwediva Teachers' Resource Centre, Ministry of Education, NAMIBIA

kaunalena@gmail.com

Hafeni P. S. Hamakali

University of Namibia, NAMIBIA

hhamakali@unam.na or hhamakali@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Research plays a significant role in shaping language instruction. Teachers, one of the stakeholders in education, are the closest to the data-rich field of information, the schools and particularly the classroom. This study investigates factors influencing the language teachers' motivation to conduct research and publish in academic journals. A questionnaire was administered to 35 language teachers from secondary schools in Oshana Region. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed using graphs and themes, respectively. The results illustrate that there are a number of factors that influence the level of teachers' motivation to conduct research and publish their scholarly works. The findings of this study could inform teacher training institutions, educational planners or advisory teachers to integrate research and publication in their teacher training programmes and in service training programmes.

KEYWORDS: research, publish, willingness, language teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

Research is about generating new understanding and solves the actual problems in given areas (Erba, 2013). Steele (2007) views research as the most appropriate method to explore ways to improve one's teaching practices and to improve quality learning outcomes for learners. Teaching without research has been reduced to yellow pages referencing because research is highly mystified and believed to be for the few in higher institutions of learning such as universities (Banda, 2016). Although conducting research and going public with it by publishing it is an important part of research process (Karter, 2016), studies show that there is still limited teachers' involvement in conducting research and publishing their research work in academic journals (Banda, 2016; Erba, 2013). The purpose of this study is to investigate factors that influence language teachers' willingness to conduct research and publish in academic journals.

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What challenges do teachers face with regards to publishing?
2. What factors motivate teachers to conduct research and publish?
3. What interventions could be put in place to improve teachers' willingness to conduct research and publishing?

In order to answer the above research questions, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire was administered to 35 language teachers from secondary schools in Oshana Region, Namibia. Data was collected and analysed using charts and themes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical framework

This study embraces the views of Paulo Freire's literary work which advocates for education for liberation. In his book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", Freire (1968) opposes education that treats students as "depositories" and teachers as "depositors" of knowledge. He used the "banking" concept to describe such pedagogy that follows a narrative view of education. Similarly, this study opposes one-way systems that inform teachers on how to teach. It promotes systems that avail opportunities for teacher to contribute to the body of knowledge of language pedagogies. In this study, the banking concept is viewed as systems that turns teachers "into containers and receptacles to be filled" (Freire, 2000, p. 72) with knowledge, and language pedagogies. In line with Freire's view, it is believed in this study that teachers can be liberated if they are provided with the necessary support and opportunities to share their teaching experiences, research works and academic views in academic platforms such as academic journals, in order to contribute the both of knowledge in their respective disciplines.

Further, this study is informed by the Teacher Knowledge theory. Teacher knowledge refers to the particular knowledge that teachers have that relates to knowing how to teach (Bresler, 1995). According to Bresler (1995), teacher knowledge theorists believe that research that draws on teachers' concerns, and incorporates their accumulated knowledge, helps reduce the theory-practice gap, allowing authentic classroom practices to guide theory. She adds that a major characteristic of teacher knowledge is that it is contextual rather than abstract. In their study "Teacher Assessment Knowledge and Practice: A Narrative Inquiry of a Chinese College EFL Teacher's Experience", Xu and Liu (2015) warn that teacher knowledge is not something objective and independent of the teacher. It is a collection of the teacher's whole

personal, social, academic and professional experience. Therefore, this study reveres the pluralistic nature of teachers' experiences. Additionally, it also presupposes that their contribution can richly inform the effective teaching and learning.

2.2. Challenges faced by teachers with regards to conducting research and publishing

One of the reasons why teachers may not participate in research activities and publishing could be linked to a lack of encouragement. Research has found, for example, that some school managers or principals tend to not participate in research activities; as a result, teacher lack of encouragement and support from the school leaders may lead to poor involvements of teacher in research activities (Erba, 2013). Canagarajah (2003, cited in Carter 2013) asserts that poor interest in research activities and publishing from the side of the educational managers could result in researchers getting frustrated by certain bureaucracies that may not make the research processes run smoothly for the researchers, in this case the teachers.

Time constraints can also be some of the barriers to willingness to conduct research and publish it. A study conducted by Wakoli (2013) in a Kenyan secondary school indicated that teachers tend to be assigned different responsibilities apart from the normal classwork. These may include extracurricular activities like sports, clubs, and other administrative duties. Topping up these responsibilities with research may require that teachers have to work either during weekends or after working hours; but it should be noted that these are adults with personal lives to run, while some of them have to take care of their families.

Some teachers could also be the type of people who are perfectionists. In this case, they tend to have fear of making mistakes, and as such they find themselves hesitant to share their research work with the public. Carter (2013) cautions that:

> Negative thoughts about our writing capability can block our confidence. Our internal editors can prematurely shut down thinking, resulting in staring at a blank page, unable to begin. Perfectionism is a related factor. Perfectionists want to be seen as brilliant writers churning out solid papers without any mistakes (p. 21).

Lack of or limited resources could also be a challenge for teachers who want to conduct research and publish in academic journals. Some teachers, especially those in remote areas, may have limited or no access to journals. Even in the digital era, where resources are available online, some teachers tend to be located in areas where there is no internet coverage. In addition, they could also be computer illiterate, and it could make it difficult to find the relevant resources on their own (Singhal, 2007). This means, they may not be able to compose well informed literature reviews (Carter, 2013; Singhal, 2007).

2.3. Promoting research and publication

Different interventions are put in place by a number of institutions to assist teachers develop a culture of conducting research and publishing their academic work. The interventions documented in the available literature indicate that teachers tend to benefit well from such interventions as they are availed with resources and knowledge on how to create their own knowledge in their fields or work and studies.

The Centre for Professional Development, Teaching and Learning Improvement (CPDTLI) runs an initiative that supports Namibian educators (University of Namibia, 2016). The main beneficiaries to the centres are the school teachers, school managers, education officers, as well as higher education educators at the University of Namibia. These initiatives include the Research School that aims to empower teachers with relevant research knowledge and skills. They are trained on how to identify and examine areas of research interest in their daily operations. They are also trained on how to investigate these areas of research interest and document the finding which can be shared with fellow educators and preferably to be published in academic journals. The key goal of the centre is to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the general education sector and UNAM, in this case through empowering teacher with research skills.

In addition, the teacher training program at the University Of Namibia Faculty of Education includes an educational research module. In particular, the Bachelor of Education Honours programme is geared towards the preparation of secondary school teachers who are interested in the intellectual, social, moral and the psychological development (holistic development) of the individual learner. In the research module, student teachers are taught different research methodologies. They are also required to conduct mini theses (Project Phases 1 and 2) which are partial requirements for completion of their education degree (University of Namibia, 2016b). The main purpose of this module is to prepare future teachers to be researchers in their field of work as well as to, later, pursue further studies at masters and PhD levels.

In their article entitled "Publish or Don't Perish: Ten Tips", Carter and Aulette (2016) suggested ways to break through publishing one's research work. They maintain that although it may not be easy for teachers to get their academic work published, it is possible.

They suggest that one can start small; a starting place can be a local association newsletter. They advise that teachers can develop their ideas with their colleagues and attend workshops to gain knowledge. As they read more and become more familiar with academic journals, then they can consider submitting their piece to an academic journal. They illustrate this development with "the first author of [their] article, for example, [who] was first published in a local women's magazine in 1998. She wrote about her experience as a tourist in Nepal. Ten years later, she had published a book and journal articles" (p. 27).

Erba (2013) conducted a study on "The Preactice and Challenges in Conducting Action Research: The Case of Sululta Secondary School" in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The study recommends some interventions to improve practices in conducting action research in particular. First, in-service training should be provided to teachers to upgrade their knowledge and skills in research activities. This is in line with the services provided by the CPDTLI at UNAM. Second, adequate budget should also be allocated to research activities since research enables teachers and other educational stakeholders to solve problems practically. Lastly, school managers should encourage and support teachers by providing incentives such as giving recognition as role model, as well as allowing opportunities to participate in academic conferences.

3. FINDINGS

The data analysis for this study was performed on the data gathered through questionnaire responses.

3.1. Bio data

The participants for this study were 31 teachers in Oshana Region. The population ranges from language teachers who teach English only (13 teachers) or a Namibian language only (Oshindonga/Oshikwanyama) (7 teachers), or both English and a Namibian language (12 teachers). The grades taught range from Grades 4 to 12. The Bio data is illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Bio data of participants

Age	20-30 years: 13	31-40 years: 9	41-50 years: 3	51-60 years: 6
Gender	Male: 5		Female: 26	
Qualification	Grade 12: 2	Diploma: 9	Degree: 17	Masters: 3

3.2. Challenges faced by teachers with regards to conducting research and publishing

From the data analysed, it is apparent that the participants were faced with a number of challenges which were hindering them from conducting research and publishing. 67% of the participants indicated that they lacked confidence and information on research and publishing because they have never attended workshops or training on conducting research and publishing. A number of participants lacked general knowledge on conducting research and publishing. Only 26% of the participants were aware of the requirements for publishing research work in an academic journal. There were 91% of the participants who were not aware whether more than one person can publish the same research work. It is therefore not surprising that 90% of the participants indicated that they have never published research work in their fields. Carter (2013) advices that negative thoughts about ones writing capability may block ones confidence. The fear of making mistakes in writing could be an aspect leading to

the lack of publishing of research work by the language teachers emanating from lack of confidence and information on publishing. Furthermore, only a mere 16% of the participants indicated that they were aware of academic journals and could list at least two titles of the journals which they were aware of.

Lack of resources also proved to be a hindrance to the participants. Only 6% of the participants indicated that they had access to resources such as computers, printing facilities and the internet. Having little access to these facilities makes it strenuous to conduct research and publish as according to Singhal (2007) it could make it difficult to find the relevant resources. This will consequently lead to a hampered ability of compiling and producing a well-informed research paper for publication.

The participants were asked to list down some of the challenges they faced when it comes to conducting research and publishing. Most of the participants (76%) listed time constraints as the reason why they do not conduct research. Time constraints may be linked to overloading of teachers with excessive responsibilities, barriers which were also identified in Wakoli's (2013) Kenyan study. In addition, three of the participants indicated that it is likely that individuals may not be willing to participate in research for example to be interviewed or to fill in questionnaires. This could be due to limited motivation to conduct research (Erba, 2013) as well as limited awareness of the role of research in teaching and learning from the side of the teachers (Carter, 2013).

However, regardless of the hindrances, it is uplifting to discern that the participants were aware of the importance of conducting research as well as publishing. The participants were requested to list possible reasons why they think conducting research is important. The

responses included gaining and broadening of their knowledge and skills in the in the researcher's subject area which will aid in being able to find solutions to these challenges through recommendations. The participants also indicated that through research, they can be in a better position to inform policy makers in various education related decisions. Furthermore, according to the participants, research may also offer useful information to the community and improve the language skills of the researcher.

The participants further listed the importance of publishing one's research work. The participants listed that through publishing, one is able share to knowledge with other teachers as well as stakeholders in education. It was also stated that publishing would expose teachers to various experts in education and create platforms to share information, which will in turn help teachers to become better in their work.

3.3. Teachers' willingness to conduct research and publish

Majority of participants displayed willingness to conduct research and publish. A remarkable 77% of the participants indicated that they are interested in conducting research in their field while 74% of the participants indicated that there are a lot of researchable problems in their field of work. There were 55% of the participants who indicated that they had confidence to conduct research and publish on their own. While 71% of the participants indicated that they would be comfortable to conduct research together with their colleagues. Almost half of the participants (48%) indicated willingness to publish their research work while 64% of the participants indicated that they were willing to join regional research clubs if any is established.

The participants showed eagerness to conduct research and publish. Participants selected research areas in which they are interested to conduct research. There were 29% of the participants who indicated that they were particularly interested in conducting research on learner motivation, while 38% of the participants indicated that they would like to conduct research on teaching methods. Almost half of the participants (48%) indicated that they would be interested to publish a paper on literature. Other areas of interest indicated by the participants include assessment methods, learning styles, Extra-curricular activities, language and technology as well as code switching.

Although the participants showed willingness to conduct research and publish, it transpired from the results that the participants lacked motivation to conduct research and publish. Only 12% of the participants indicated that they have conducted research and published. It is worrisome that a small population of the participants conducted research and published despite the fact that there are interventions from some institutions. A good example is the CPDTLI which runs an initiative that supports Namibian educators (University of Namibia, 2016). One of the initiatives is the Research School that aims at empowering teachers with relevant research knowledge and skills. It however transpired from the study that a high number of language teachers still lacked the knowledge and skills to conduct research.

More than half (55%) of the participants are degree holders. The teacher training program at the University Of Namibia, Faculty of Education in particular, includes an educational research module. Student teachers are taught different research methodologies in the research module. They are also required to conduct mini theses (Project Phases 1 and 2) which are partial requirements for completion of their education degree (University of Namibia, 2016b). However, although most participants are degree holders, conducting research remains very

low among the language teachers. In addition, a majority of participants (74%) have taught and have been in the education fraternity for more than 6 years, but the percentage of language teachers who have conducted research and published remains very low. This situation does not correspond to Steele (2007) view who commends research as the most appropriate method to explore ways to improve one's teaching practices and to improve quality learning outcomes for learners.

The participants were asked whether there were any rewards in conducting research and publishing. About 74% of the participants indicated that that they were not aware of the rewards in conducting research and publishing. The participants however indicated that there is a need for researchers and those who publish to be rewarded. They therefore provided suggestions on how those who conduct research and publish should be rewarded. The suggestions offered by the participants include scholarship and grants to be offered to those who aspire to further their studies and are involved in conducting research and publish. The participants also suggested that those involved in research and publishing should be promoted and be recognized with certificates at both regional and national level. Some participants suggested that the researchers should be awarded with incentives such as laptops, books, computers and printers.

4. CONCLUSION

Drawing from the responses of the participants, the results indicate that the language teachers are willing to conduct research and publish. There is however low motivation for conducting research and publishing among language teachers. The study revealed a number of contributing factors to the low level of motivation such as lack of in-service training of teachers on research and publishing which leads to the lack of knowledge and skills in

conducting research and publishing. The participants are also faced with a lot administration work and indicated that they would rarely find time to conduct research and publish. Despite interventions by institutions such as the University of Namibia, the number of language teachers involved in conducting research and publishing remains extremely low.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends the following interventions in order to motivate teachers to conduct research and publish.

- The willingness to conduct research and publish among language teachers is distinct. However, there is need to tackle the limitations which they are faced with for them to be motivated to conduct research and publish, the teachers should be acknowledged and appreciated for their research work and contribution.

- There is clearly need to enhance the motivation of teachers through various interventions beginning with impacting knowledge and skills in conducting research and publishing. This can be done through workshops and in service training.

- School principals should be made aware of the importance of publishing and conducting research so that they in turn motivate and encourage teachers to conduct research and publish.

- The Ministry of education can begin by getting experts from the academic fraternity to train Senior Education officers who in turn can train teachers on issues pertaining to conducting research and publishing and to be able to offer support in this regard.

- There must be career connected incentives in place to motivate teachers to conduct research and publish it, this may be at regional or national level. This will help in cultivating and promoting a culture of conducting research and publishing among language teachers in schools.

- The language teachers with the assistance of their Senior Education Officers may consider establishing regional subject committees, in which they may share ideas pertaining to research as well as publishing. This will create a platform for them to meet and share common research interests offering a number of teachers an opportunity to work on a paper together.

- The University of Namibia should intensify its research initiative under the CPDTLI and consider rolling it out to the education regional offices particularly the Senior Education Officers who are directly involved in the in-service training of the teachers.

- Given the teaching and administration work load of the teachers, those who may be willing and are interested to publish may use some days during the school holiday, to work on their papers to work on this extra professional responsibility.

- The Ministry of Education Arts and Culture may consider establishing a journal where language teachers will be able to publish their research papers. This will provide a platform for language teachers to share knowledge as well as policy makers to be informed by the findings and recommendations of the teachers' publications.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Leena K. Iitula, a holder of a Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) degree (English and Biology) from the University of Namibia, serves as a Senior Education Officer, responsible for English as Second Language in Oshana Region, Namibia. She is currently enrolled for a Master of Arts in English Studies at the University of Namibia. She is passionate about Literature as well as English as a Second Language teaching and learning pedagogy. E-mail: kaunalena@gmail.com

Hafeni P. S. Hamakali, a Fulbright alumnus, is a lecturer of English for Academic Purposes at the University of Namibia. He holds a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree (English and Geography) and a Master of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (MA TESOL) from the University of Namibia and the California State University Los Angeles, respectively. He is currently a PhD in Language and Literacy student at the University of the Western Cape, in South Africa. His academic interests include language assessment and material development; e-learning; and EAP teaching methods. E-mail: hhamakali@unam.na or hhamakali@yahoo.com

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APPENDIX 1: TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear participant,

Kindly, we are hereby requesting you to complete this questionnaire for our research project. We are conducting research on factors influencing the language teachers' motivation to conduct research and publish in academic journals. The data you will provide in this questionnaire will be treated with high confidentiality and anonymity.

1. **What is your age and gender?**

_____

2. **What is your highest qualification?**

_____

3. **How many years have your been teaching?**

_____

4. **Which language(s) and grade(s) do you teach?**

_____

_____

5. **Which research areas interest you in your field of work? Please tick (√)**

Research areas	Please tick (√)
Learners' motivation	
Teaching methods	
Assessment methods	
Learning styles	
Extracurricular activities	
Language	
Literature	
First language vs Second language influences	
Language and technology	
Other (Please specify) _____ _____ _____	

6. **Please indicate whether you agree, disagree, or are natural towards the statements in the table below. Please tick (√).**

	agree	neutral	disagree
1. I have enough confidence to conduct my own			

research.			
2. I have access to research materials in my field of study.			
3. I am comfortable with conducting research together with my colleagues.			
4. I am interested in carrying out research in my field of work.			
5. There are a lot of researchable problems in my field of work.			
6. I am encouraged to publishing my research work in academic journals.			
7. I am willing to join a research club in my region.			

7. **Have you ever attended a research course/research training/research workshop. Please tick (√).**

Yes		No	

8. **Are you aware of the number of people that can work on one research paper? Please tick (√).**

Yes		No	

If yes, how many?

_____

9. **Are there any requirements for one to publish their research work in a journal? Please tick (√).**

Yes		No	

If yes, please mention them.

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. **Have you ever published research work in your field of work/study?**

Yes		No	

If yes, please list the titles of your publications?

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. **Name some of the academic journals that you know.**

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. **What are the possible challenges that may prevent you from conducting research in your field of work?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. Is there any reward for conducting research and publishing your research

work in academic journals? Please tick (√).

Yes		No	

If yes, please mention them.

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. In your view, what form of rewards for conducting research and publishing

your research work do you suggest?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

15. In your view, do you think it is important to conduct research in your field of

work? Please explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

16. In your view, do you think it is important to publish your research work?

    Please explain your answer.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your time and participation!