

THE PROFICIENT TEACHER AS A RESEARCHER: DRIVERS, BARRIERS, AND RESEARCH SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

There exists a prevailing expectation that educators should assume the predominant responsibility for spearheading research initiatives at the school level. Regrettably, the involvement of teachers in action research is notably scarce, and establishing a research-centric culture proves to be a formidable challenge. An analysis of research endeavors within the Ibaan District illuminates that a paltry percentage of elementary educators (less than ten percent) have undertaken research endeavors. This statistic underscores the exigency for refresher courses to revitalize motivation and instigate active participation in this pedagogical undertaking. Consequently, the present research endeavors to proffer a meticulously designed training framework predicated upon an exhaustive evaluation of teachers' motivational levels, encountered challenges, research proficiency, and interconnectedness with diverse teacher profile variables. This research utilized a descriptive research design with a survey questionnaire as the data-gathering instrument. One hundred thirty-six randomly selected proficient teachers were the respondents of the study. Results showed that the teachers had inadequate experience in research writing since their employment at DepEd but mostly attended research training, had full-time teaching, and attended lower-level research forums. These teachers were highly motivated in research as a career responsibility, although they were moderately motivated by their growth of knowledge and skills upon doing research. For them, time constraints are a moderate barrier to conducting research. As to research skills, they were moderately skilled in facilitating the validation and reliability testing of the research instrument and in identifying and using appropriate statistical tools. The chi-square test bared that there is a significant relationship between the teachers' level of motivation and the number of research studies they made, which suggests that more research conducted leads to higher motivation in engaging in research. The proposed training design integrates sessions on enhancing the teachers' motivation and research skills.

Keywords: action research, research motivation, and skills, descriptive survey, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

There is no denying the importance of educational research. Through research, educators can discover what works well, comprehend the various effects of educational interventions, justify, and rationalize actions and decisions, and solve unforeseen problems by identifying issues and pushing for improvement

(Basu, 2020). Thus, the research initiatives must be part of the professional practices of the teachers.

Teachers must participate in academic research and classroom-based action research projects that evaluate, investigate, and analyze issues and result in the creation of practical solutions that can also advance policy.

Therefore, building the capacity to engage in action and systematic research of teachers and other research practitioners is substantial (Tatto,

2022). Teachers who engage in action research can approach their daily work with a more inquisitive mindset and modify their behaviors following the available data and the types of solutions they choose to implement (Wang, 2022).

In different countries, decentralization and teachers' increasing operational autonomy have given teachers significant opportunities to use action research to improve teaching and learning in their classrooms and schools (Wang, 2022). Accordingly, teachers must grab this chance to contribute to the existing body of knowledge while improving their practices in the classroom.

The Department of Education in the Philippines continuously supports the culture of research in education reform, relying on it as a means of progress and a manual for evidence-based decision-making at the basic education level. The department has established a few strides in strengthening research practices through the issuance of the Research Management Guidelines (RMG) and the DepEd Research Portal. Both guidelines define the research management processes to guide practitioners to achieve quality research. The RMG guides the management research activities from the national to the school levels while the portal establishes the E-saliksik for publishing and archiving quality education research. Further, DepEd issues the Quality Control Checklist (QCC) for Completed Basic and Action Research, which evaluates completed studies (Adopting Tools to Improve Quality Management of Completed Research at the Department of Education, 2022).

The Department of Education encourages all teachers to conduct action and basic research to identify and solve pressing issues in school and the teaching-learning process. The DepEd issuances provide directions for all the teaching, teaching-related, and non-teaching personnel in conducting research towards achieving the scholarly research culture. Teachers' engagement in research has been known as one of the agents to transform changes and improvement in education and has contributed to uplifting the professional status. At the school level, the teachers are presumed to be the primary producers of research.

Unfortunately, establishing a culture of research in schools where research activity is uniformly expected, discussed, produced, and

valued is very challenging (Varma, 2016). A handful of teachers at the school participate in action research, which suggests that the school's research culture has not yet been fully accepted, even though it is being promoted and is articulated on the training needs assessment, which indicates that teachers need to consider the research foundations to apply evidence-based practice effectively (Samosa, 2021). Teachers consider research more personal than a professional job (Ulla, 2018).

One of the fundamentals of research is the skill of conducting a methodological investigation. It has also been noted that teacher researchers are weak in selecting the tools for data analysis and interpreting results (Oestar & Marzo, 2022). In one of the studies in the country, it was concluded that elementary teachers lack writing and research experience. The teachers are only slightly capable of conceptualizing research, formulating research problems, writing literature reviews, designing research, determining quantitative research, determining qualitative research design, and completing other parts of the research proposal (Manila et al., 2022). Additionally, they also perceived that research is something that only academics and universities can do (Chow et al., 2015). Limited research outputs reflect challenges in conducting research.

The coordinates to research writing skills are the teachers' motivation and challenges in conducting and completing their studies. The teachers believe that action research is a useful tool for enhancing the process of teaching and learning (Tindowen et al., 2019). They believed that conducting research would improve their practices as teachers and students' learning processes. Job promotion was the driving force behind teachers' participation in research; however, they also noted difficulties, including a lack of research knowledge and skills, a heavy teaching load, and a lack of financial support from the schools, which prevented them from doing so (Ulla et al., 2017).

Lack of time is also an immediate barrier (Gómez & Catan, 2021; Tindowen et al., 2019; Uy, 2019) as well as the tension brought about by the tight curriculum (Chow et al., 2015). Poor time management has resulted in a low percentage of research productivity (Almonicar, 2023). The

reality is that issues in doing research have been a part of a formal investigation.

Teachers felt the need to solve a certain problem, improve the pupils' learning, and do some interventions, leaving them undocumented. Kolk (2019) reiterated that for many classroom educators, formal experimental research, including using a control group, seems to contradict the mandate to improve learning for all students. Even quasi-experimental research with no control group seems challenging to implement, given the variety of learners and diverse learning needs present in every classroom.

Similar challenges may have been experienced among elementary proficient teachers in Ibaan District. Based on the records of the district research coordinator, only a few research had been submitted for research presentation for the past three years based on the district's record of completed research. Teachers have been involved in determining the effectiveness of their interventions or strategies, grouping students based on abilities to address their learning needs, and using factual-based decisions in providing remediations. However, they may have done these practices accidentally without formal planning and methodological application.

Teachers must be retrained on writing research coupled with enhancement of their drive to pursue a formal investigation. In a study on the research capabilities of elementary school teachers, the respondents with higher levels of education and training had better research skills (Gonzales et al., 2020). Research should be organized and methodical, involving gathering data to answer questions. More than simply becoming researchers by default is required of teachers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research aims to outline a training framework tailored to teachers' motivation, challenges, and research skills. It delves into the teacher researchers' profiles, examining factors such as the quantity of conducted research, participation in research training, current teaching workload, and the extent of involvement in research forums. Additionally, it explores the motivators driving their research efforts, their perception of barriers hindering research

engagement, and self-assessment of research skills in crafting high-quality papers. The study also investigates potential significant relationships between teachers' profile characteristics, motivation levels, and research skills.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher utilized the quantitative descriptive research design with a questionnaire as the data gathering instrument to determine the drivers, barriers, and skills of proficient teachers in conducting research. This questionnaire was framed considering the specific questions set in this study and from the readings of related literature and studies. It underwent a process of validation through checking of a Senior High School Master Teacher-Researcher, school principal, and Division SEPS for Planning and Research. Comments regarding parallelism were considered, and suggestions were incorporated to finalize the copy. Pilot testing of the instrument participated by 20 teachers who are not a study sample generates Cronbach's Alpha of .931, .844, and .963, which means the questionnaire is reliable. All the variable index dimensions exhibit respectable internal consistency, according to Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.7 and higher (Adeniran, 2019).

A total of 136 proficient teachers were selected through simple random sampling. The researcher identified the number of respondents through the online sample size calculator with a 95% confidence level.

The researcher converted the questionnaire into an online form and shared the link with selected participants. The questionnaire emphasized that participation was voluntary and confidential to uphold ethical standards. After a month, the gathered data were organized in an Excel spreadsheet, coded numerically, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). A four-point rating scale was used to assess motivation, challenges, and research skills, allowing for a straightforward interpretation of responses along a continuum.

The researcher used a weighted mean to identify the degree of the motivating factors, challenges, and skills in conducting research. The



chi-square test was used to determine the significant difference in the motivation of proficient teachers in conducting research regarding their profile characteristics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Profile of Proficient Teachers

Table 1 presents the profile of proficient teachers who are respondents to the study. As to the number of research studies conducted, most of the teachers, who comprised 86 percent of the respondents, have done 1 to 2 research. The remaining percentage of proficient teachers have done 3 or more research.

Table 1
Profile of Proficient Teachers

Profile Variables	Frequency	Percentage
A. Number of research conducted		
1-2 research	117	86
3 and above research	19	14
Total	136	100
B. Attendance in research training		
Attended	105	77.2
Not attended	31	22.8
Total	136	100
C. Present teaching load		
330 – 360 minutes a day	75	55.1
290 – 320 minutes a day	36	26.5
Less than 290 minutes a day	25	18.4
Total	136	100
D. Highest level of research forum participated		
District	117	86
Other Higher Levels	19	14
Total	136	100

It can be interpreted from the data that those teachers had inadequate experience in research writing since their employment at DepEd. This characteristic attests to the low volume of research made annually. It can also be inferred that a few teachers occasionally conduct research.

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research made annually. It can also be inferred that a few teachers occasionally conduct research. The profile also reflects that the proficient teachers mostly attended research training. School, district, and division-level training in the past years as part of the teachers' professional development.

Regarding the present teaching load of the teachers, most proficient teachers are teaching for 330 to 360 minutes a day. Under regular class programming in elementary school, teachers can render a full-time teaching load of 360 minutes a day; thus, they practically devote the full day to teaching. Teachers who managed less than 360 minutes devoted other time of the day to teaching-related tasks like conducting research.

As to the highest level of research forum, most of the teachers, who constitute 86 percent of the respondents, have attended the district research compendium. Only nineteen teachers, equivalent to 14 percent, have attended the higher-level forum, which can be a division, regional, national, or international levels. Since participants in the DepEd research fora are research presenters, these figures reflect the limited engagement of teachers in research presentations at the higher levels.

2. Teachers' Motivation in Conducting Research

The findings showed the extent of proficient teachers' motivation in conducting research. The data shows that teachers are moderately motivated to pursue research studies. This could mean that they are inclined to research but have not yet reached their maximum predisposition and commitment. Based on the extent of their response, the teachers were highly motivated to conduct research as a career responsibility. This means that they recognized the role of research in improving the instructional process. Strengthening the research culture has been part of the DepEd's advocacy; thus, teachers are aware of the concerns and directions of their careers as teacher-researchers. This finding contrasts with a related study's conclusion that motivations for

doing research were more personal than professional (Ulla, 2018).

The teachers were moderately motivated to conduct research due to the opportunity to share with others and collaborate with other teachers. This implies that they will present their works in a compendium or forum. This motivation also shows that teachers prefer partnerships in doing research. That is why more than 50 percent of the research submitted in the district had multiple authors.

Based also on the teachers' responses, they were moderately motivated by the complexity of the classroom situations. This motivation pertains to the problems they perceive in teaching and classroom management. The teachers' belief in action research as a useful tool to enhance the teaching and learning process, increase their knowledge and pedagogy, and instructional methods (Tindowen et al., 2019) supports their motivation in analyzing the difficulty of teaching. For the teachers, these difficulties can be a basis for pursuing a formal investigation and formulating a solution.

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Although moderately motivated by having research knowledge and skills, the teachers considered this motivation to a lesser extent compared to other motivational factors. This signifies that they have not yet reached their desired research skills and they need to improve in this aspect. Moreover, this research motivation assumes that they already had considerable fundamentals in research writing that they learned in their undergraduate and graduate courses as well in the in-service research training they attended.

Consequently, teachers also have moderate motivation for the growth of knowledge upon doing research. It means that their objective of learning something from pursuing a research study is just secondary to completing their work. Although there is the realization that they learn the technicalities of research writing and that they discover something from literature reading, teachers' growth of knowledge in research must reach its highly motivational stage.

3. Barriers to Conducting Research

Proficient teachers perceive all barriers as moderate, which denotes the less extreme challenges to research activities. Specifically, they considered time constraints as a moderate barrier to conducting research. Lack of time as one of the main barriers (Gómez & Catan, 2021; Tindowen et al., 2019; Uy, 2019) and time restrictions brought on by the tension from the tight curriculum (Chow et al., 2015) contributed to the limited research output and failure to complete research documentation. Elementary teachers commonly have a full-time teaching load with other teaching-related tasks that limit their time for research activities.

That is why they also regarded the teaching-related work and full-time teaching load as moderate barriers to pursuing a formal study. These barriers implied that the nature of the teachers' daily routine itself restricts them from doing research work. This moderate motivation level in conducting research is related to poor time management which has resulted in a low percentage of research productivity (Almonicar, 2023). Teachers may include research as part of the teaching-related work.

In terms of skills in research writing, proficient teachers considered the capacity to start and decide on the research topic and research gap identification moderate barriers. This means that they had relative difficulties in conceptualizing the research problem. This is related to a study finding that elementary teachers lack research writing skills although they can conceptualize research and formulate research problems (Manila et al., 2022). The teachers have yet to strengthen their

reflection skills and translate them into research writing.

Teachers perceived as moderate barriers the complexity of research work, capacity to sustain writing productivity, research materials and resources, prioritization in school, and research knowledge and skills to research engagement. They also struggled to keep their research writing pace using their resources and research skills taking into consideration the prioritization of school activities. The perception of research as something complex that only academics and universities can do (Chow et al., 2015) is related to these moderate barriers that slow down their research engagement.

Additionally, teachers considered the inclination to conduct research activities a moderate barrier. It means that they are striving with a slight interest in research engagement. Relative to this barrier is the perceived moderate barrier of minimal technical assistance from colleagues and superiors. This infers that supervisors and school heads have not yet given the maximum assistance in research writing. Teachers can be interested in research writing with technical assistance and collaboration with other teachers and school heads.

Further, the proficient teachers perceived the ability to use technology in research writing a moderate barrier. The availability of online sources, gadgets, and computer applications made technology utilization possible, and as such, teachers considered this barrier at that level.

4. Research Skills of Proficient Teachers

Proficient teachers are mostly moderately skilled in research writing. This signifies that they have average skills in carrying out research tasks. Among the research skills moderately observed, proficient teachers put a premium on conducting interviews and focus group discussions. This analysis reveals that more teachers have already been using these tools in doing research or in other school projects that require the utilization of the tools.

Also, on top of their moderately exemplified research skills was formulating conclusions and recommendations. This means that they can fairly

analyze data leading to the formulation of abstracts and offering suggestions from the conclusions drawn. For this reason, they are moderately skilled in interpreting data and information which coincides with drawing conclusions and recommendations. This analysis suggests that the teachers can be able to finish the write-up of research work to a moderate extent by having all the data that they need.

Likewise, teachers were moderately skilled in the initial stages of the research process such as writing the introduction, and rationale of the research as well as in deciding the scope and limitation of the study. However, although moderately skilled, they placed formulating logical research questions as a subordinate skill in the opening steps of research engagement. This breakdown implies that there is a need to equate their skills in defining the boundaries of their study and formulating objectives or defining the problem.

Comparatively, teachers believe they have moderate skills in facilitating the validation and reliability testing of the research instrument. Although they will be able to do testing on an average ability, teachers have reduced this skill to a considerable standard compared to other research skills. It signifies that proficient teachers need reorientation on the validation and reliability testing processes of research instruments.

Similarly, the teachers need refresher sessions on identifying and using appropriate statistical tools as they consider this skill at the bottom of their perceived moderate skills in conducting research. This corroborates with a study stating that teachers are weak in selecting the tools for data analysis and interpretation (Oestar & Marzo, 2022). This finding is consistent with a conclusion in a related study that knowledge of statistics or data analyses was one of the obstacles teachers encountered in conducting action research (Borja, 2018).

Finally, teachers can do citation of references using the APA form. However, like evaluating the instrument and utilizing statistical tools, teachers perceived this skill as the point for enhancement compared to their other perceived skills in conducting research. From this analysis, teachers have slight improbability in referencing although they have an average ability in using this skill.



5. Relationship between the Motivation in Conducting Research and the Profile of the Proficient Teachers

Table 2
Test of Relationship between the Motivation in Conducting Research and the Profile of Proficient Teachers

Variables	X ² -value	p-value*	Decision on the H ₀	Interpretation
Number of research conducted	10.59	0.014	Reject	Significant
Attendance in research training	6.20	0.102	Failed to reject	Not significant
Present teaching load	8.19	0.224	Failed to reject	Not significant
The highest level of research forum participated	0.75	0.861	Failed to reject	Not significant

*Significant at $p \leq 0.05$

Table 2 reflects that there is a significant relationship between the teachers' motivation in conducting research and the quantity of research conducted, $X^2(3, N=136) = 10.59, p < .05$. This means that the number of research conducted by proficient teachers is associated with their motivation in research. Based on the test of a relationship, it shows that teachers who completed more than two research are more motivated than those who completed one or two research only.

Attendance in research training has no relationship with their motivation to conduct research, $X^2(3, N=136) = 6.20, p > .05$. This result denotes whether teachers who attended research training do not correlate with their drive to pursue a research study. Their present teaching load also does not correlate with their motivation, $X^2(6, N=136) = 8.19, p > .05$, and the highest level of research forum participation has no significant relationship with the teachers' motivation in conducting research. Correspondingly, their motivation has no connection with the number of minutes devoted to daily teaching.

6. Relationship between Research Skills and the Profile of Proficient Teachers

Table 3
Test of Relationship between Research Skills and the Profile of Proficient Teachers

Variables	X ² -value	p-value*	Decision on the H ₀	Interpretation
Number of research conducted	8.52	0.36	Failed to reject	Not significant
Attendance in research training	2.75	0.43	Failed to reject	Not significant
Present teaching load	5.60	0.47	Failed to reject	Not significant
The highest level of research forum participated	0.51	0.92	Failed to reject	Not significant

*Significant at $p \leq 0.05$

Table 3 highlights that the number of research conducted has no relation with the teachers' research skills, $X^2(3, N=136) = 8.52, p > .05$. Attendance in research training is not also associated with present teaching load, $X^2(3, N=136) = 2.75, p > .05$. The highest level of research forum participation exhibits low association with their research skills, $X^2(3, N=136) = 0.51, p > .05$. These variables are low determinants for teachers being skilled in conducting research. Most teachers engage in research regardless of their skills and have already gained research writing fundamentals. This contrasts with the related study that the level of research capabilities of elementary teachers was significantly correlated with training (Gonzales et al., 2020).

7. Proposed Training Design for the Enhancement of Motivation and Research Skills of Proficient Teachers

The learning and development program is about enhancing the motivation, time management, and research skills of proficient teachers, considering the findings of the study. The proponent designs the training to reorient and train teachers on the skills they need to develop to produce scholarly work.

The first session deals with research as an interesting and meaningful educational practice. The teachers must visualize how important the conduct of research is. It can only be meaningful to



them if they know the research plan. This session shall utilize the DepEd classroom-based action research template for the reflection of teachers on their teaching practices.

The second session tackles the growth of knowledge and skills in research as drivers in conducting research. The training facilitators shall reorient the participants on the knowledge and skills they will use in writing research. At the same time, they shall rate their competencies and make a research plan based on their capacities.

The third session involves time management in doing research. Here, the participants shall learn the approaches and strategies for managing time as a teacher and researcher. The training team shall provide opportunities to solve situations involving time management. Finally, they will make a Gantt chart of their proposed study.

The fourth session concerns validation and reliability testing of research instruments like surveys and tests. The participants will discuss how to validate and compute the reliability statistics and interpret the results.

The last session relates using common statistical tools for evaluating the research hypothesis. The participants shall be able to view how to use a t-test, ANOVA, Pearson r, and chi-square tests in determining the significant difference/relationship of variables.

One hundred fifty proficient teachers from public elementary schools in the district are the target participants since they are the focus of the study. The training proponent randomly chose them regardless of their attendance in research training, present teaching load, and the highest level of research forum participation. Those profile characteristics of the teacher-researchers have no relationship to research motivation, barriers, and research skills. One selection criterion of having at least one research conducted was the basis for the selection.

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers have inadequate experience in research writing since their employment at DepEd but mostly attended research training and lower-level research forums with a full-time teaching load. They were highly motivated in conducting research as a career responsibility but had moderate motivation for the growth of knowledge upon doing research. Time constraints are a moderate barrier for them to conduct research. The teachers have moderate skills in facilitating the research instrument's validation and reliability testing and identifying and using appropriate statistical tools. A meaningful relationship exists between the teachers' motivation and the quantity of research completed. The proposed training design includes sessions on enhancing the teachers' motivation and research skills to enhance the motivation and research skills of proficient teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the conclusions drawn, this study recommends conducting district in-service training on motivating teachers' growth of knowledge and skills, time management, reliability and validity testing of research instruments, and using appropriate statistical tools. The teacher must also receive coaching and mentoring or technical assistance. This study also endorses holding district research conferences to highlight and motivate teachers further in research engagement.

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