



Research Paper

Interdisciplinary Research, a Missing Link in Faculty Members' Research: Reasons and Solutions

Mohsen Nazarzadeh Zare^{1*}, Maryam Sadat Ghoraiishi Khorasgani², Saeid Norollahee³

1. Corresponding author: Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Malayer University, Malayer, Iran. Nazarzadezare@malayeru.ac.ir
2. Department of Educational Administration and Planning, Faculty of Education and Psychology, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. m.ghoraiishi@alzahra.ac.ir
3. Ph.D. Student, Educational Management, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Bu Ali Sina University, Hamadan, Iran. saeidnorollahee@gmail.com

Received: 2021-04-18

Accepted: 2021-11-03

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the reasons for faculty members' lack of interest in conducting interdisciplinary research in the fields of humanities and social sciences and to provide solutions for that. A qualitative case study method was hence used to achieve this goal. The research sample comprised 16 academic researchers and interdisciplinary authors who were selected and interviewed using theory-based sampling. The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis method and the findings were credited using member checking and peer checking. The findings showed that the reasons for faculty members' lack of interest in conducting interdisciplinary research can be divided into three general categories of institutional, organizational, and individual. Furthermore, institutional, organizational, scientific, and individual solutions comprise the four solutions for this issue.

Keywords: *Interdisciplinary; Interdisciplinary Research; Faculty Members; Social Sciences; Humanities*

Introduction

Interdisciplinary research is currently considered the key to tackling the complex contemporary social challenges and the impetus for scientific innovation because scientific discoveries and innovations often occur at the intersection of disciplines. Academics are thus more likely to engage in research fields that surpass the traditional boundaries of their field (Sun et al., 2021). Most scholars believe that disciplinary research alone cannot cope with the complex challenges of societies, and competitive and knowledge-based economies, as well as pluralistic democracies (Bozic & Pohoryles, 2009). Thus, the issues and challenges facing contemporary society require the collaboration of several disciplines with different cultures, standards, and languages (Boix Mansilla, 2016). Addressing interdisciplinary fields and interdisciplinary research is one of the policies and strategies of the Islamic Republic of Iran to accelerate and develop science, especially in the field of humanities. The Comprehensive Scientific Map of Iran proposes “supporting the development of interdisciplinary sciences and technologies”, and “creation and expansion of interdisciplinary subfields in humanities and other sciences” as part of national strategies and measures (Comprehensive Scientific Map of Iran, 2011: 47-61). However, despite the great emphasis on the necessity and importance of interdisciplinary fields and interdisciplinary research in Iran, its development, especially in the fields of humanities and social sciences, has brought challenges to the academic community. Considering that the proper development of interdisciplinary research in universities requires a change in scientific policy, institutional strategy, and research and development in universities by higher education policymakers, analyzing the reasons for Iranian faculty members’ lack of interest in the fields of humanities and social sciences can help to achieve this goal.

Research question: What are the reasons for faculty members’ lack of interest in conducting interdisciplinary research in the fields of humanities and social sciences? What solutions can be proposed to increase their willingness to conduct interdisciplinary research?

Methodology

The present study aimed to provide a detailed explanation of the reasons for faculty members’ lack of interest in conducting interdisciplinary research in the fields of humanities and social sciences and to provide solutions for the problem. Such an explanation requires a careful study of the phenomenon from various aspects. Mertens and Wilson (2019) believe that the case study method is suitable for such explanations of the phenomenon under study because it allows the researcher to collect different types of data to better

understand the phenomenon (p. 152). A case study focuses specifically on a phenomenon, event, issue, program, group, etc. (Mertens, 2015: 305). In the present study, researchers sought an in-depth analysis of the reasons for the lack of interest in interdisciplinary research and solutions to increase willingness among faculty members in the fields of humanities and social sciences through qualitative research. Hence, a case study method was used. Since the researchers used the inclusion criteria of having at least one written book or translated book published about interdisciplinary research or having at least two articles in this field, they used the theory-based sampling method to select the participants. In theory-based sampling, the researcher selects people who theoretically represent the desired phenomenon as a sample (Mertens, 2010: 222, 233). To this end, 16 academic researchers and interdisciplinary authors were interviewed as experts (individuals who were more knowledgeable about the research subject and had at least one written or translated book or two articles about interdisciplinary research). The research data collection tool was a semi-structured interview. The thematic analysis method was used to analyze the interviews. Two methods of member checking and peer checking were used to credited the research findings.

Results

Based on the thematic analysis of the interview, the themes and subthemes related to each of the reasons and solutions are presented in following.

- **Reasons**

The reasons for faculty members' lack of interest in conducting interdisciplinary research include the following three main categories:

Institutional reasons include subcategories of weakness of academic disciplines, misunderstanding of interdisciplinary research, dominance of a disciplinary view in Iran's higher education system, lack of supportive policies for interdisciplinary research, and centralization of Iran's higher education system. Organizational reasons have subcategories of lack of reward and motivation systems, organizational cultural problems, disciplinary barriers, and structural problems. Individual reasons comprise subcategories of inherent barriers to interdisciplinary research, lack of interdisciplinary skills, and lack of motivation to do interdisciplinary research.

- **Solutions**

The solutions to increase faculty members' interest in conducting interdisciplinary research include the following four main categories:

Organizational solutions have subcategories of structural review, strengthening the culture of interdisciplinary research among academics, and formation of interdisciplinary interactions in the academic community. Institutional solutions have subcategories of developing incentive policies and dominance of philosophy of higher education. Scientific solutions have the subcategory of dominance of philosophy of conducting interdisciplinary research. Individual solutions have the subcategory of nurturing and empowering interdisciplinary researchers.

Discussion and conclusion

Our findings showed that institutional, organizational, and individual reasons can be considered as the most important reasons for faculty members' lack of interest in conducting interdisciplinary research. Institutional reasons refer to upstream institutions, including the Ministry of Science, and are beyond the will and authority of the university. Organizational reasons refer to the structure of universities as well as their management and culture. Finally, individual reasons refer to the personality traits and individual competencies of the faculty members. In addition to identifying the reasons for faculty members' lack of interest, four solutions, namely organizational, institutional, scientific, and individual solutions were identified to increase the interest of faculty members to conduct interdisciplinary research from university experts' point of view. Organizational solutions lead to elimination of or reduction in organizational barriers to conducting interdisciplinary research. Institutional solutions depend on changes in the policies of upstream institutions, including the Ministry of Science. The scientific solutions refer to the dominance of the interdisciplinary attitude toward academic research, which requires academics to be familiar with the nature and importance of interdisciplinary research. Finally, individual solutions seek to eliminate the weakness of faculty members in conducting interdisciplinary research and help to enhance their personal competencies in conducting interdisciplinary research. In conclusion, the increase in faculty members' interest in conducting interdisciplinary research requires applying the presented solutions. Meanwhile, the efficacy of these solutions is enhanced when administrators' attitude approves their application in universities.

References

- Bozic, S. and Pohoryles, R. J. (2009). Why bother with interdisciplinarity in the social and human sciences? Innovation. *The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 22(2): 143–145.
- Boix Mansilla, V. (2006). Quality assessment of interdisciplinary research: Toward empirically grounded validation criteria. *Research Evaluation*, 14(4): 17–29.

- Comprehensive Scientific Map of Iran*. (2011). Tehran: Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution.
- Hoidn, S. (2018). Conducting Interdisciplinary Research in Higher Education: Epistemological Styles, Evaluative Cultures and Institutional Obstacles. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research and Innovations*, 6(3): 288-297.
- Mertens, D.M. (2015). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*. 4Ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Mertens, D.M. (2010). *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods*. 3Ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Mertens, D.M. and Wilson, A.T. (2019). *Program Evaluation Theory and Practice: a Comprehensive Guide*. 4Ed. New York, London: The Guilford Press.
- Sun, Y., Livan, G., Ma, A. and Latora, V. (2021). Interdisciplinary researchers attain better performance in funding. *ArXiv, abs,2104.13091*: 1-18.



This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.
