

Perception of Research Culture among Undergraduate Students in a Malaysian Public University

Edmund Ui-Hang Sim

Abstract

Studies on research culture often focus on how administrators and academics inculcate this culture and what impact it has on undergraduates. Evidently, literature information on undergraduates' perception of university research and publication agenda is lacking. Considering the fact that the campus community comprises largely of an undergraduate population and their activities, facts and conjectures alluding to research culture can be misleading without the views of undergraduate students. The study investigated the perception of research culture among undergraduate students in a Malaysian public university. The objectives of the study were to examine the students' awareness of the research culture of the university, ranging from the research culture of the university as per the lecturers to the research reputation of the university. A survey was carried out using questionnaires incorporated within the e-learning platform (Morpheus) of a taught course on scientific communication. The analysis of questionnaire data from 56 students showed that undergraduates are more aware of research than publication matters. They do not think that good research correlates with better teaching. Local students are also indifferent to issues of university ranking. Our findings provide the basis for rethinking and deriving more accurate explanations of research culture appreciation in local public universities.

Keywords: *Perception, research culture, undergraduates*

Introduction

The research agenda in a university is a major concern of academics, and to a certain extent, university administrators. It is deeply rooted in the "ivory tower" paradigm whereby higher learning institutions embody the tradition of intellectual pursuits at the highest level. This pursuit, many academics believe, places them as purveyors and custodians of knowledge mainly acquired from evidence-based studies. The practice of this belief is often translated as an inculcation of research culture. Intrinsic to this culture is the activity of publication in academic journals and/or books. Comprehensively, a research culture connotes the tradition of understanding natural phenomenon using published and refutable empirical findings, rather than experiential knowledge or common sense (Mnookin et al., 2011).

Research culture appreciation is commonly assumed for academics and university administrators. However, whether undergraduate students influence this culture, and how they are affected by it, is poorly studied (if at all). For instance, discussion on the creation of a research community that can foster educational scholarship via a scientific culture emphasises the participatory roles of researchers (academics), and administrators only (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002). When ethical standards and values for this culture were discussed, the relevant stakeholders targeted ranged from researchers to journal editors (Nosek et al., 2015), but not students. In a report on unhealthy elements that have permeated this culture (Shi & Rao, 2010), consideration of effectors and those affected did not include students. An investigation on elements of research culture in undergraduate programmes (Garde-Hansen & Calvert, 2007), including "deep" reading strategy versus plain information literacy (Cain, 2002), lacked a consideration of the students' viewpoint on the strategy. Studies to explain relationships between research culture and effective teaching of undergraduate courses are not unprecedented (Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Marsh & Hattie, 2002; Sim, 2010; Anderson et al., 2011). Nevertheless, these efforts had instructor-centred implications, and did not address the students' point of view. It is clear that in the context of academia, the understanding of research culture situates students as outsiders. Considering the fact that the campus community comprises largely of an undergraduate population and their activities, facts and conjectures alluding