The Social Sciences 10 (3): 353-361, 2015
ISSN: 1818-5800

Polytechnic English Language Lecturers Research Competencies and Interests

[1]S. Thivviyah Sanmugam and [2]Sarimah Shamsudin
[1]Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Jb Campus, Johor Bahru, Malaysia
[2]Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kl Campus, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract: Malaysian polytechnics are being geared towards rapid transformation to develop a marketable workforce to meet the demand of a developed nation by 2020. In line with the polytechnic transformational plan, three polytechnics were upgraded to the status of premier polytechnics (university level) and several degree programmes are being offered. The transformational plan presents a great challenge to its academic staff as they are expected to enhance their quality of teaching and participate in other scholarly activities such as research and publication. These expectations can only be fulfilled if the lecturers research competencies are at a stage that would enable them to produce research outputs. Thus, this study aims to identify the level of research competencies of English language lecturers in these premier polytechnics and explore their research interests in areas that are generally, covered at international conferences and publications via questionnaire. The results of the study indicate that overall, the lecturers are at the practitioner level of research competency and show a strong interest in almost all the research topics covered in Malaysian international conferences on English language teaching and learning. Hence, these findings will provide a guide to the institutions in order to build appropriate support system to support English language lecturers research efforts.

Key words: Research competency, research interests, professional development, support system, transformation

INTRODUCTION

The Education Ministry of Malaysia is geared toward developing its polytechnic education sector as a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) hub for the nations capital building. The Polytechnic Transformation Plan (2010-2015) has been set to provide a strategic route to elevate Malaysia's polytechnic education. The plan aims to promote polytechnic education as the preferred choice for students to pursue their tertiary education in the field of TVET by offering relevant and quality programmes that will produce a productive, creative and innovative workforce.

In line with the Polytechnic Transformation Plan, three polytechnics have been upgraded to premier polytechnics status and there are plans to upgrade more polytechnics to university level in future. The three polytechnics that have been selected as premier polytechnics are Politeknik Ungku Omar (PUO) in Perak, Politeknik Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah (PSA) in Selangor and Politeknik Johor Bahru (PJB) in Johor.

The Polytechnic Transformation Plan and the advancement of the three polytechnics to premier polytechnics leave an impact to its lecturers as they are now expected to integrate teaching and innovation, conduct research as well as present and publish research papers. In fact, these scholarly activities will be evaluated for their career advancements. With effect from 1st January 2008, promotions are given based on performance and no longer according to seniority or time based.

Performance in research work has become an important criteria for the career development of academics globally. In China, Chinese Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) academics are obliged to undertake research and publish papers besides teaching (Bai *et al*., 2012) and a new reward system that emphasises research has been adopted by the Chinese education system (Lai, 2010). However, conducting research activities are easier said than done for some lecturers, especially those from institutions which have been upgraded to university status. Their research competencies and skills should be adequate enough to produce research outputs.

Most research done so far focused the academics perceptions, challenges and needs towards research (Pham, 2006; Borg, 2007; Li and Flowerdew, 2009; Tahir and Abu Bakar, 2009; Zamari *et al*., 2012; Bai and Hudson, 2011; Bai and Millwater, 2011; Bai *et al*., 2012) and teaching-research nexus (Elen *et al*., 2007; Borg, 2007; Bai *et al*., 2013) but hardly any focused on the research

Corresponding Author: Sarimah Shamsudin, Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, KL Campus, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

competencies of the academicians (Mendoza, 2008; Mallari and Santiago, 2013), specifically in the context of English language lecturers at Malaysian premier polytechnics. Thus, the aims of this study are to identify the level of research competencies of English language lecturers in premier polytechnics in terms of the research procedures and explore their research interests in terms of topics that are generally covered by international conferences.

Literature review: Research pertaining to academics research in higher education setting has been done extensively in many countries. Borg (2007) surveyed 50 teachers on a Freshman English programme at a Turkish University with regard to their conceptions of research. The results indicated moderate levels of reading and conducting research among the respondents of the study. Furthermore, the study also revealed that the relationship between the teachers reported frequencies of reading and conducting research was significant but weak and lack of time was the factor most often cited.

In Vietnam, Pham (2006) carried out a qualitative study to investigate the research culture of English professionals at the university level. The seven English language educators were interviewed for data collection purpose. The results signified that Vietnamese English language educators support and understand the need to conduct research. Nevertheless, there were several factors such as dissatisfaction with current evaluation regulations, lack of time, materials, trainings and opportunities to disseminate research findings which deter them to embark on research activities.

Another related study conducted by Bai and Hudson (2011) surveyed 182 Chinese TEFL academics to benchmark their research capacity and address their research productivity issues. The results indicated that the Chinese TEFL academics overall research productivity was relatively low, although, they were positive about the teaching-research nexus. In addition, it was found that they did not rate their personal outlook for research and workplace context highly.

In addition, Bai *et al.* (2012) carried out a qualitative case study to investigate how a group of Chinese TEFL academics perceived teaching-research nexus in a transitional context. Interviews were conducted with six TEFL academics from the English Department at a Chinese Higher education institution. Results from the transcribed interviews showed that Chinese TEFL academics, generally held positive perceptions about teaching-research nexus. However, the value of research to them were limited to teaching and promotion. In addition, the participants believed that reward structure for research was overrepresented rather than teaching and TEFL academics were not involved in decision making with regard to institutional research requirements. The study recommended that more emphasis to be given to teaching in assessing TEFL academics to further develop positive outlook about research.

In Malaysia, Tahir and Abu Bakar (2009) studied the perceptions of academic staffs towards research at a public university. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires which were then analysed using Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) software. The overall results indicated that the academic staffs involvement in research activities was still unsatisfactory and their main motivations to do research were to get promotions and salary increments. Besides that, it was also revealed that the main barriers of lecturers doing research are poor statistical skills, heavy teaching load and poor writing skills.

Zamari *et al.* (2012), conducted a study to investigate the challenges faced by some academicians in academic research writing. Questionnaires were distributed to 40 academicians from five major faculties at a public university. The data gathered were then analysed using SPSS version 20.0. Based on their findings, the researchers found that the challenging aspects of academic research writing were methodology, findings and literature review. The study proposed an academic writing programme to create greater awareness on the genre of academic research writing among the academicians.

In terms of academics research competencies, a review of literature shows that the area of research competency among academics is still limited compared to studies on academics perceptions towards research and research-teaching nexus. Among the first studies on research competency is conducted by Mendoza (2008).

Mendoza (2008) explored the level of research competencies and the research interests among accounting educators in the Philippines. Questionnaires were distributed to 132 respondents from three different geographical areas; National Capital region, Luzon and Visayas. The findings indicated that in general the accounting educators posses a practitioner level of competency whereby they have average knowledge and are capable of using the skills. However, they lack the speed and flexibility of a proficient researcher. In terms of research interests, the five areas reported with very high level of interests were accounting education (3.93),

assurance and attestation (3.93), ethics and corporate governance (3.89), information system and technology (3.83) and taxation and regulation (3.80).

In a recent study, Mallari and Santiago (2013) adapted the survey instrument of Mendoza (2008) and carried out a survey on the research competency and interest of accounting faculty among state universities and colleges in Region III, Philippines. The results showed that the level of research competency among accountancy faculty varied from apprentice to master level meanwhile strong were recorded for the areas of ethics and governance and international issues.

All the studies above explored the academics perceptions towards research, teaching-research nexus, and the level of research competencies and most literature reviewed earlier are concerned with universities. While, Neumann (1992) suggested further research to be conducted on academics other than research universities, there is still a lack of such efforts and even less about Malaysian polytechnic academics. This study, therefore, aims to find out the research competencies and interests of English language lecturers from premier polytechnics in Malaysia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The data for this study were collected using descriptive survey method. A total of 80 survey instruments were sent through mail to the Head of English Units and English language lecturers at the three Premier polytechnics in Malaysia. However, only 44 English language lecturers from two premier polytechnics responded to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire used for data collection was adapted from a study entitled "Research Competencies and Interests of Accounting Educators in the Philippines" conducted by Mendoza (2008). It was originally designed for accounting educators and hence was modified for the use of English language lecturers. Changes were also made to the demographic questions to suit the context of English language lecturers at Malaysian premier polytechnics. The questionnaire for this study consists of three sections which are demographic details, research competency and research interests of English language lecturers at Malaysian premier polytechnics.

Table 1 shows a description of competency level taken from Mendoza (2008) which was used by the respondents of the study to determine their research competency level for every item in the questionnaire that is related to the five research processes:

Table 1: Level, type and description of research competency (Mendoza, 2008)

Level	Types	General description
1.0-1.49	Deficient (D)	The respondent has no knowledge of the particular research process
1.50-2.49	Apprentice (A)	The respondent has read about and studied the particular research process but the knowledge is below average making him/her short of ability to use it professionally
2.50-3.49	Practitioner (P)	The respondent has an average knowledge and is capable and ready to use it but lack the speed and flexibility of the proficient researcher
3.50-4.49	Master (M)	The respondent has above averag understanding of the overall research process and can use it naturally and automatically He/she knows how to plan a research project based on a given situation
4.50-5.49	Expert (E)	The respondent has a deep understanding of the total research situation and has intuitive grasp of the particular research process. He/she is capable of proposing innovations on certain research processes

- Conceptualisation
- Research design
- Data collection
- Data processing and analysis
- Research application

Additionally, they study responded to items of the questionnaire on research interests with reference to the following scale:

- 1: no interest
- 2: little interest
- 3: moderate interest
- 4: strong interest
- 5: very strong interest

A total of fifteen areas were selected from seven international conferences on English language teaching and learning in Malaysia from 2013-2014 (Table 2) for the respondents to indicate the level of their research interests.

The data collected were then analysed using Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) software. Frequency distributions and percentage scores were used to describe demographic details meanwhile mean and grand mean scores were computed for data related to research competencies and interests.

Table 2: List of international conferences on English language teaching and learning in Malaysia from 2013-2014

Title of event	Date/Venue	Organising institution
22nd MELTA international conference	28-30th May 2013 Persada Johor Convention Centre, Johor Bahru	MELTA
International Conference on English Language Learning (ICELL 2013)	15-16th November 2013 Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	ELS language centre
International Conference on English Language Teaching (ICELT 2013)	18th-20th November 2013 Equatorial Hotel, Melaka	Universiti Putra Malaysia and ELS language centre
Taylor's Teaching and Learning Conference	23rd November 2013 Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, Subang Jaya	Taylor's University and Universiti Teknologi MARA
International Language Conference (ILC 2014)	4-6th June 2014	CELPAD, International Islamic University, Malaysia
The 12th International Asia TEFL Conference and 23rd MELTA International Conference	28-30th August 2014 Borneo Convention Centre, Kuching Sarawak	Asia TEFL and MELTA
The 5th Biennial International Conference on Teaching and Learning of English in Asia (TLEiA5)	27-29th October 2014 Langkawi, Malaysia	Universiti Utara Malaysia

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents demographic details: Table 3 presents information pertaining to lecturers demographic profiles. The survey generated a total of 44 respondents grouped into two premier polytechnics: the 59% from Polytechnic Ungku Omar (PUO) and 41% from Polytechnic Ibrahim Sultan (PIS). Majority of the respondents were female (91%) and were from the age group <40.

Besides that slightly more than half of the respondents were of grade DH41 while majority of them possessed a Bachelor's Degree (88%). In terms of teaching experience, majority of them belonged to the range of 1-10 years (64%). The demographic data reflects that majority of the respondents are probably in their thirties and has <10 years of teaching experience in the polytechnic setting.

Table 3: Profile of respondents

Criteria	PUO n = 26	PIS n = 18	Total n = 44
Gender			
Male	2 (7.7%)	2 (11.1%)	4 (9%)
Female	24 (92.3%)	16 (88.9%)	40 (91%)
Total	26 (100%)	18 (100%)	44 (100%)
Age			
Under 30	8 (30.7%)	6 (33.3%)	14 (32%)
30-39	10 (38.5%)	7 (38.8%)	17 (38.6%)
40-49	5 (19.3%)	4 (22.2%)	9 (20.4%)
50 and over	3 (11.5%)	1 (5.7%)	4 (9%)
Total	26 (100%)	18 (100%)	44 (100%)
Rank			
DH52	1 (3.8%)	1 (5.7%)	2 (5%)
DH48	2 (7.7%)	1 (5.7%)	3 (7%)
DH44	8 (30.8%)	6 (33.3%)	14 (32%)
DH41	15 (57.7%)	10 (55.3%)	25 (56%)
Total	26 (100%)	18 (100%)	44 (100%)
Highest academic qualification			
Bachelor	23 (88.5%)	16 (88.9%)	39 (88%)
Master	2 (7.7%)	1 (5.5%)	3 (7%)
PhD	1 (3.8%)	1 (5.5%)	2 (5%)
Total	26 (100%)	18 (100%)	44 (100%)
Years of teaching experience			
<5 years	7 (27%)	6 (33.3%)	13 (30%)
6-10 years	10 (38.5%)	5 (27.7%)	15 (34%)
11-15 years	4 (15.3%)	3 (16.8%)	7 (16%)
16-20 years	2 (7.7%)	2 (11.1%)	4 (9%)
0ver 20 years	3 (11.5%)	2 (11.1%)	5 (11%)
Total	26 (100%)	18 (100%)	44 (100%)

Research competency of English language lecturers: This study identified the English language lecturers level of research competency in five research processes namely, conceptualisation, research design, data collection, data processing and analysis and research application. Conceptualisation process deals with the shaping process in a research. It involves an understanding of possible sources of research problem(s), formulating questions that will be answered by the research and review of related literature to enhance the research questions. The English language lecturers generally have practitioner level in the area of conceptualisation in both the polytechnics where the grand mean shows 2.91 (PUO) and 2.89 (PIS), respectively (Table 4). The result in a way is consistent with the study conducted by Mendoza (2008) where he reported in his study that the accounting educators possess practitioner level in the area of conceptualisation.

The strength in conceptualisation is dominant or at Master level in the aspect of identifying potential sources of a research problem(s) in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). The respondents have above the average understanding of the overall research process and can use it naturally and automatically which shows that they know how to plan a research project based on a given situation.

The ability of the English language lecturers to identify potential sources of a research problem in the field of ELT is a result of teaching in an environment where English is a second language and the speakers need constant improvement to boost the language usage. The students are found as a source of research problem as students have issues in communication which leads to external issues like anxiety, motivation, learning strategies and many more.

Table 4: Research competency on conceptualisation process

Criteria	PUO (n = 26)	PIS (n = 18)	Total (n = 44)
Identify potential sources of a research problem(s) in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT)	3.65^{M}	3.61^{M}	3.63^{M}
Develop problem statements and purpose in a focused area of inquiry	3.08^{P}	2.77^{P}	2.92^{P}
Formulate questions that can be answered by an investigation	3.08^{P}	3.33^{P}	3.20^{P}
Construct hypotheses that can be subjects of an empirical study	2.50^{P}	2.77^{P}	2.63^{P}
Assess the appropriateness of scope and boundaries of a scientific research	3.46^{P}	3.05^{P}	3.25^{P}
Employ the correct procedures in conducting a review of related literature	2.50^{P}	2.50^{P}	2.50^{P}
Use the literature review in enhancing the research question and framework	2.30^{A}	2.50^{P}	2.40^{A}
Grand mean	2.91^{P}	2.89^{P}	2.90^{P}

Table 5. Research competency on research design process

Criteria	PUO (9 = 26)	PIS (n = 18)	Total (n = 44)
Choose the appropriate unit of observation of the study	3.08^{P}	3.05^{P}	3.06^{P}
Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods of conducting research in ELT	2.69^{P}	2.77^{P}	2.79^{P}
Propose the most suitable method of conducting the research	2.69^{P}	3.05^{P}	2.87^{P}
Formulate the proper research design based on certain relevant factors	2.30^{A}	2.22^{A}	2.26^{A}
Construct an operational framework based on related research components such as the research questions, theoretical-conceptual framework and the like	2.50^{P}	2.22^{A}	2.36^{A}
Define operationally the important terms used in the study	3.26^{P}	3.33^{P}	3.29^{P}
Identify a set of variables and the corresponding indicators	2.30^{A}	2.50^{A}	2.40^{A}
Propose measurement methods for variables and the attributes	2.110^{A}	2.22^{A}	2.16^{A}
Grand mean	2.610^{P}	2.67^{P}	2.64^{P}

A = Apprentice (1.5-2.49); P = Practitioner (2.5-3.49); M = Master (3.5-4.49)

The criteria of using literature review in enhancing the research question and framework was reported as more difficult compared to all the criteria under the conceptualisation process. This finding was not similar to the study conducted by Mendoza (2008) where he reported that the accounting educators found the aspect of defining the scope of and boundaries of research as more difficult. Although, these aspects are not totally the weakness of the respondents, the particular aspects needs to be addressed in order to complete the conceptualisation phase effectively.

Research design process aims to transform the aspects related to the research problems into evident units of measure. The process also deals with the way the researchers plan to put value to events and situations in the current research and measurement methods for variables are specified. Research design is an extension to the conceptualisation process.

As shown in Table 5, it was found that the research competency level of the respondents from both the premier polytechnics in the research design process was of the practitioner level. This is to some extent similar to the study conducted by Mallari and Santiago (2013). They found that the research competency on formulation of research design of the accounting lecturers' at State Universities and Colleges (SUC) 1 and 2 were at practitioner level while the research competency level of SUC 3 accounting lecturers' were of a Master (4.0). According to Mallari and Santiago (2013), the mean of SUC 3 is comparatively higher because the lecturers are submitting research proposals on a periodic basis. It can be deduced that constant efforts in doing research work could enhance ones competency level.

The findings of this study shows two areas where competency of respondents are relatively high, namely:

- Defining operationally the important terms used in the study (3.29)
- Choosing the appropriate unit of observation of the study (3.06)

This finding is similar to those of Mendoza (2008). His study reported that the accounting educators level of competency was comparatively higher in both the areas. The results reflect that these lecturers are able to define terms in relation to the context of the study and determine the appropriate unit of observation which can either be an individual, a group or an organisation.

In terms of the weakness of the respondents in the research design process, the results shows that the English language lecturers face difficulties in:

- Proposing measurements methods for variables and the attributes (2.16)
- Formulating proper research design based on relevant factors (2.26)
- Constructing operational framework based on related research components (2.36)
- Identifying a set of variables and the corresponding indicators (2.4)

It is apparent that research design process is challenging for the respondents and they need to master it to perform better in the process.

Data collection process is a process of gathering information on variables of interest in a systematic way that would help to answer the research questions, test hypotheses and evaluate outcomes. This process involves defining population, calculating sample size, constructing sample design and instrument, identifying appropriate method of data gathering and relevant quality data and employing data-gathering plan.

Table 6: Research competency on data collection process

Criteria	PUO (n = 26)	PIS (n = 18)	Total (n = 44)
Define the population on which research is to be conducted	3.26[P]	3.33[P]	3.29[P]
Calculate the sample size that is representative of the population	2.88[P]	2.77[P]	2.82[P]
Construct a reliable sampling design	2.88[P]	3.05[P]	2.96[P]
Differentiate the purposes/uses of the various methods of gathering data	2.69[P]	2.77[P]	2.73[P]
Propose the most appropriate method(s) of gathering data	3.26[P]	3.05[P]	3.15[P]
Construct a research instrument for data gathering	2.69[P]	2.77[A]	2.73[P]
Appraise the quality of data that are relevant in a particular study	2.50[P]	2.22[A]	2.36[A]
Employ a data gathering plan	2.30[A]	2.77[P]	2.53[P]
Grand mean	2.80[P]	2.84[P]	2.82[P]

Table 7: Research competency on data processing and analysis process

Criteria	PUO (n = 26)	PIS (n = 18)	Total (n = 44)
Demonstrate an understanding of several methods of data presentation (tables, graphs etc.)	3.84[M]	4.16[M]	4.00[M]
Recognise that different statistics are appropriate for each kind of data	3.46[P]	3.61[M]	3.53[M]
Demonstrate skills in the application of one or more statistical tools for social research	3.08[P]	3.05[P]	3.06[P]
Explain the differences between data, facts and inferences	3.26[P]	3.05[P]	3.15[P]
Recognize that data must be interpreted within a context to be of value	3.08[P]	3.33[P]	3.20[P]
Interpret data gathered in relation to the research question	3.26[P]	3.33[P]	3.29[P]
Identify relationships and differences in variables based on data gathered	2.88[P]	2.77[P]	2.82[P]
Compose research findings clearly and accurately	2.88[P]	2.77[P]	2.82[P]
Grand mean	3.21[P]	3.25[P]	3.23[P]

A = Apprentice (1.5-2.49); (P) = Practitioner 2.5-3.49; M = Master (3.5-4.49)

As shown in Table 6, English language lecturers from both PUO and PIS reported the research competency level for data collection at practitioner level and the grand mean recorded were 2.8 and 2.84, respectively. The three aspects of data collection that registered the highest mean dealt with defining the population on which research is to be conducted (3.29), proposing the most appropriate method(s) of gathering data (3.15) and constructing a reliable sampling design (2.96). The results also indicated that the lecturers are less adept in appraising the quality of data that are relevant in a particular study (2.36).

The lecturers rely on the data collection to provide empirical results but again they lack in the speed and flexibility of a proficient researcher. The years of experience and the qualification of the researcher is found to be crucial contributing factor as it would enhance the ability to identify the right parties, methods and also designing accurately the sampling.

Research competency level for data processing and analysis process recorded the highest mean (3.23) of the five research process (Table 7). It can be implied that English language lecturers are proficient in various methods of data presentations, statistics, interpretation and inferences. The research competency level of data processing and analysis shows that lecturers from both PUO and PIS are at the practitioner level with grand mean of 3.21 and 3.25, respectively.

The level of research competency among English language lecturers from PUO and PIS were most evident in the understanding of several methods of data presentation (tables, graphs, etc.) and recognising that different statistics are appropriate for each kind of data as the lecturers scored Master level with the score of 4.0 and 3.53, respectively. They are at the above average level of understanding of the overall research process and can use it naturally and automatically.

Results from the study conducted by Mendoza (2008) were similar as the highest level of competency for data processing and analysis among accounting educators was also for understanding several data methods of data presentation (3.21). However, it is interesting to highlight that Mendoza (2008) found that the accounting lecturers were less adept in the application of statistical tools (2.98) which dismisses the general impression that accountants are proficient to the use of statistics. In this study, the competency level of English language lecturers for application of statistical tools for social research recorded a grand mean of 3.06.

The lecturers are aware of the appropriate data presentation, especially tabulating it in graphs and charts in order to relate the evidence effectively. The other aspect that registered a high mean dealt with interpreting data gathered in relation to the research question (3.29). The respondents who are at the practitioner level attest that they have relevant exposure but yet needs boost to be able to reach the master level.

Research application process deals with the ability of the respondents to transform research outputs into significant plans of actions or interventions that brings importance to the organisations and communities. This process involves relating research findings with the needs of polytechnics or community, identifying areas for possible future research agenda, translating research findings into meaningful plans of actions and strategies and publishing research findings.

Table 8: Research competency on research application process

Criteria	PUO (n = 26)	PIS (n = 18)	Total (n = 44)
Relate research findings with the needs of polytechnics or community	3.46[P]	3.33[P]	3.39[P]
Translate research findings into meaningful plans of actions and strategies	3.08[P]	3.05[P]	3.06[P]
Design a roadmap to maximize the utilization of research findings	3.08[P]	2.77[P]	2.92[P]
Identify areas for possible future research agenda based on the findings of the study	3.26[P]	3.05[P]	3.15[P]
Discuss the contributions of research in building the knowledge in ELT or other related disciplines	2.50[P]	2.22[A]	2.36[A]
Disseminate research findings by presenting or publishing papers	3.46[P]	3.33[P]	3.39[P]
Grand mean	3.14[P]	2.95[P]	3.04[P]

A = Apprentice (1.5-2.49); P = Practitioner 2.5-3.49; M = Master (3.5-4.49)

The study shows two areas which recorded the highest level of competency in research application process were relating research findings with the needs of polytechnics or community and disseminate research findings by presenting or publishing papers with the grand mean of 3.39 (Table 8). This can be attributed to the expectations of the polytechnics on the staffs to conduct research that caters to the needs of the institution and the criteria of study presentations and publications for promotion purposes.

The study also revealed that the respondents are less capable in terms of discussing the contributions of research in building the knowledge in a discipline with the grand mean of 2.36. This finding is in contrast with the study conducted by Mendoza (2008) which recorded the particular aspect of research application process as the highest level of competency (3.13) among accounting educators.

In general, English language lecturers are grouped under practitioner level of competency (grand mean of 2.93) in all the research processes (Table 9). This signifies that English language lecturers in general have an average knowledge and are capable and ready to use their competency but lack the speed and flexibility of the proficient researcher.

The respondents gained the practitioner level of competency probably because of their involvement in research activities to fulfill their promotion criteria and their annual performance appraisal report. In other words, the experience and knowledge gained in the conduct of a research is a contributing factor in gaining research competency. Thus by providing further trainings these lecturers can be fostered as experts in research.

Research interests of English language lecturers: Table 10 shows the level of research interest of the respondents from PUO and PIS. The 15 areas listed were found widely covered in the international conferences in Malaysia. Out of the 15 areas, 86.7% respondents showed Strong Interest (SI) in 13 items listed in Table 10.

Language teaching methodology and teaching the language skills are the two highest ranked areas of interests which recorded a grand mean of 4.43 (Strong Interest (SI). The ever evolving teaching and learning methodology provides opportunities for the respondents to embark on researches on the particular area.

Table 9: Level of research competencies of English language lecturers

Criteria	PUO (n = 26)	PIS (n = 18)	Total (n = 44)
Conceptualization	2.91[P]	2.89[P]	2.90[P]
Research design	2.61[P]	2.67[P]	2.64[P]
Data collection	2.80[P]	2.84[P]	2.82[P]
Data processing and analysis	3.21[P]	3.25[P]	3.23[P]
Research application	3.14[P]	2.95[P]	3.04[P]
Total	2.93[P]	2.92[P]	2.93[P]

A = Apprentice (1.5-2.49); P = Practitioner 2.5-3.49; M = Master (3.5-4.49)

Table 10: Research Interests of English language lecturers

Criteria	PUO (n = 26)	PIS (n = 18)	Total (n = 44)
Language teaching methodology	4.42[SI]	4.44[SI]	4.43[SI]
Innovations/technology in ELT	4.03[SI]	4.44[SI]	4.23[SI]
Teaching the language skills	4.42[SI]	4.44[SI]	4.43[SI]
Material selection, adaptation and production	3.46[MI]	3.33[MI]	3.39[MI]
Testing and evaluation	3.84[SI]	3.88[SI]	3.86[SI]
Language curriculum and design	3.65[SI]	4.16[SI]	3.90[SI]
ESP/EOP/Workplace literacy	4.03[SI]	3.88[SI]	3.95[SI]
Collaborative projects with industries/private sectors	4.03[SI]	4.16[SI]	4.09[SI]
Learning and teaching strategies	4.03[SI]	4.44[SI]	4.23[SI]
OBE and Language teaching and learning	3.65[SI]	4.16[SI]	3.90[SI]
Literature and language teaching and learning	3.26[MI]	2.77[MI]	3.01[MI]
Teacher education and professional development	4.03[SI]	4.44[SI]	4.23[SI]
New literacies/multiple literacies and ELT	4.23[SI]	3.88[SI]	4.05[SI]
ELT and intercultural communication	3.84[SI]	3.33[MI]	3.58[SI]
Linguistics and language awareness	4.23[SI]	3.88[SI]	4.05[SI]
Grand mean	3.94[SI]	3.97[SI]	3.95[SI]

MI = Moderate Interest (2.5-3.49); SI = Strong Interest (3.5-4.49)

Areas such as innovations/technology in ELT (4.23), Collaborative projects with industries/private sectors (4.09), ESP/EOP/Workplace literacy (3.95) and Outcome Based Learning (OBE) and language teaching and learning (3.9) were recorded under strong interest level; probably because these are some of the areas that are being emphasised by the polytechnic education system towards transforming polytechnics to become a preferred choice among potential students.

Additionally, innovations, collaborative projects with industries, classroom observations based on OBE and research activities are listed as the criteria evaluated for

promotion purposes. It is important to highlight here that many lecturers have churned research studies from their innovation and collaborative projects with the industry to fulfill the criteria for their promotions. Thus, these are the reasons why many lecturers tend to show more interests in these areas for their research activities.

Literature and language teaching and learning recorded medium interest (3.01) among the respondents probably because literature is not being offered or taught at polytechnics. Some of these lecturers might have studied literature during their undergraduate or masters study, however, they would have lost touch with literature teaching at polytechnics.

Hence, English language lecturers generally showed strong interest (grand mean; 3.95) in the areas mostly covered at Malaysian international conferences related to English language teaching. The result implies that the respondents show positive interests towards research areas and shows strong potential to produce research outputs in the future.

CONCLUSION

The Polytechnic Transformation Plan and the upgrading of conventional polytechnics to premier polytechnics pose great challenges to academics whose role has been teaching-oriented initially. Producing research outputs is one of the many criteria that have to be achieved by the lecturers annually. This study identified the level of research competencies of English language lecturers in two premier polytechnics and explored their research interests in areas that are generally, covered at international conferences and publications in a transitional context.

There are several limitations which hindered the results of this research. The first limitation of the study is that a thorough study could not be executed as only two premier polytechnics; Polytechnic Ibrahim Sultan (PIS) and Polytechnic Ungku Omar (PUO) participated in the study while the other premier polytechnic returned incomplete questionnaires which hindered a comprehensive study. Subsequently as the questionnaires were mailed to the premier polytechnics, the opportunity to do an interview session never materialised. The data obtained could not be triangulated, as to get better results.

Further studies using a larger sample of English language lecturers from more diversified context such as the conventional polytechnics and community colleges can be carried out to investigate the research competency level for capacity building measures. Alternatively, the research competency level of English language lecturers from private higher learning institutions can be conducted to make comparisons. Besides that studies focusing on strategies on research capacity building can be focused to enhance academics research competency level to master and eventually to expert level. Determining the lecturers research competency level can assist higher learning institutions to take effective measures that can help to enhance academics research capacity.

REFERENCES

Bai, L. and J. Millwater, 2011. Chinese TEFL academics' perceptions about research: An institutional case study. Higher Educ. Res. Dev., 30: 233-246.

Bai, L. and P. Hudson, 2011. Understanding Chinese TEFL academics' capacity for research. J. Further Higher Educ., 35: 391-407.

Bai, L., J. Millwater and P. Hudson, 2012. Chinese Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) academics perceptions about research in a transitional culture. J. Higher Educ. Policy Manage., 34: 91-102.

Bai, L., P. Hudson, J. Millwater and M. Tones, 2013. Development of a survey instrument to measure TEFL academics' perceptions about, individual and workplace characteristics for conducting research. Int. J. Res. Method Educ., 36: 52-66.

Borg, S., 2007. Research engagement in English language teaching. Teach. Teacher Educ., 23: 731-747.

Elen, J., S. Lindblom-Ylanne and M. Clement, 2007. Faculty development in research-intensive universities: The role of academics conceptions on the relationship between research and teaching. Int. J. Acad. Dev., 12: 123-139.

Lai, M., 2010. Challenges faced by Chinese academics in the academic heartland. J. Further Higher Educ., 34: 271-290.

Li, Y. and J. Flowerdew, 2009. International engagement versus local commitment: Hong Kong academics in the humanities and social sciences writing for publication. J. English Acad. Purposes, 8: 279-293.

Mallari, M.Q. and M.M. Santiago, 2013. The research competency and interest of accountancy faculty among state colleges and universities in Region III. Rev. Integrat. Bus. Econ. Res., 2: 51-66.

Mendoza, R.R., 2008. Research competencies and interests of accounting educators in the philippines. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1831240.

Neumann, R., 1992. Perceptions of the teaching-research nexus: A framework for analysis. Higher Educ., 23: 159-171.

Pham, H.H., 2006. Researching the research culture in english language education in vietnam. TESL-EJ, 10: 1-20.

Tahir, I.M. and N.M. Abu Bakar, 2009. An evaluation of lecturers perceptions towards research. Social Sci., 4: 416-423.

Zamari, Z.M., J. Yusof, R.A. Junid and A.H.M. Adnan, 2012. Publish or perish: Challenges in scholarly writing and publishing in local and international english medium journals among UiTM perak academicians. Proceedings of the 7th Malaysia International Conference on Languages, Literatures and Cultures, July 10-11, 2012, Pullman Putrajaya Lakeside, Putrajaya.