

Bhutanese school teachers' perceptions, challenges and perceived benefits in doing research

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Many previous studies have evidenced the benefits research has on the teaching and learning process when conducted by teachers themselves. Consequently, there has been a growing number of teacher-researchers across the world, including teachers who have learned to be teacher-researchers. Understanding and knowing these teacher-researchers' thinking, beliefs, and practices is therefore critical for the success of the practice, especially in a developing country like Bhutan. With the aim of broadening and building theory concerning teachers as researchers, this study explores perceptions, challenges, and perceived benefits in doing research from 237 teachers in Bhutan. Adopting sequential explanatory mixed-method research, data were collected with a modified version of a previously used questionnaire and follow-up interviews. The findings revealed that teacher-participants held a positive perception toward research. However, they were partly demotivated as they had to deal with a range of challenges while doing research. These included lack of time due to heavy teaching loads, lack of research knowledge, lack of incentives and recognition, lack of platforms and expertise, and lack of reliable resources including books. Nevertheless, participants were duly aware of how research benefits students, teachers, institutions, and the nation at large. Therefore, this study suggests Bhutanese policymakers, and beyond, especially in southern Asian regions of similar contexts, consider the presented findings to revamp teacher-researcher policy so that they can be better agents for the education system.

Introduction

There has been much research done globally on the roles of teachers as researchers (e.g., Abelardo et al., 2019; Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Headden & McKay, 2015; Mehrani, 2015; Mills & Rinehart, 2019; Sato & Loewen, 2019; Tindowen et al., 2019; Ulla et al., 2017; Westbroek et al., 2020; Yuan et al., 2016). Most of these studies have attempted to address teachers' perceptions, motivations, benefits, and challenges in doing both action and empirical research and on how they are being supported by their organisations or institutions. The belief is that research provides insights into pedagogical practice and promotes evidence-based teaching practice (Burns & Westmacott, 2018). It has the capacity to answer all sorts of teaching questions and issues in practice (Ulla, 2018). Given this, teachers across the world have been conducting both classroom action and empirical research concerning teaching and learning (Dikilitaş & Yaylı, 2018). In fact, in the current trend of global education, research, irrespective of its type and design has somehow become a pivotal part of teachers' professional life.

Historically, educational research started gaining momentum from 1900 onwards (De Landsheere, 1985), and since then it has become one of the practices for teachers across

the world. Although the literature lacks information on the advent of a teaching and learning research culture and practice in Bhutan, establishment of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) as the centre of tertiary education in Bhutan seemingly has driven Bhutanese teachers' attention towards research practices, particularly action research, one among many emphasises given by RUB. In Bhutan's newly proposed teachers' annual performance evaluation criteria, research and publication were included as one of the assessment criteria. Since then, there has been a growing interest among Bhutanese teachers at tertiary levels in doing research (Maxwell, 2003). However, this was not the case for school teachers, who function as a separate body in Bhutan. There appears to be a lack of literature concerning policy on schools' teachers' role in doing research. Despite that, teachers, being professionals, are normally found embarked into doing classroom research to improve their work, though on a small scale. In this context, there are guidelines provided by the Royal Education Council (REC) of Bhutan about research policy, procedures and ethical process for professionals associated with the REC, teachers *per se* (REC, 2018). However, nothing was written in the REC documents about whether research is mandatory or part of job descriptions for school teachers, unlike teachers at tertiary levels.

Ever since RUB was established, research and publication have become one of the factors which determined RUB teachers' career and professional development in Bhutan (Wangchuk, 2018). However, Bhutanese school teachers are also being encouraged to conduct research, particularly classroom action research by the RUB hand-in-hand with the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Bhutan. In 2005, the Department of Research and External Relations (DRER) was established (Maxwell & Choeden, 2012), which aimed to develop research skills among Bhutanese educators (especially those working under RUB), enhance their knowledge of academic publication, and create a conducive environment to conduct research within and outside Bhutan. Further, the publication of *Zhib' tshol -RUB research policies* (RUB 2014) for faculty or teacher-researchers has somehow aided the teachers under RUB in the context of conducting research. Nonetheless, the recent and reformed agreement on annual performance evaluation criteria of university teachers in Bhutan (RUB 2018) observed a reduced workload of research to 15% from 30% in previous years (Maxwell & Chophel, 2020). Besides, Sherab and Schuelka (2019) have pointed out that research culture, especially at universities in Bhutan is in a precarious position.

Robinson (2003) stated that teachers in general, irrespective of where they are teaching, must research their teaching practice to produce better ways to improve their students' learning achievement, and there is no certain or guaranteed way of method to improve students. This strongly indicates that research on teaching and learning is not only a requirement for university teachers but also for those who work at schools and other small educational institutions. With that being said, however, the literature revealed Bhutanese school teachers are being given less emphasis when it comes to doing research. Not only in Bhutan, but it also came to our attention that even in the Asian context, little is discussed about school teacher-researchers (e.g., Wulandari et al., 2019; Ulla et al., 2017). Although there are many studies on university teachers as researchers in the Asian context including Bhutan (e.g., Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Sato & Loewen, 2019; Sherab

& Schuelka, 2019; Xu, 2019), there is a dearth of literature concerning school teacher-researchers.

Therefore, this study investigates school teachers' perceptions, challenges, and perceived benefits in doing research. The hope is to provide additional insights and literature concerning school teachers as researchers, that could benefit teachers (irrespective of where they teach), policymakers, and heads of institutions in the context of this study, and beyond in similar contexts, especially the Asian region.

Perceptions and benefits

Teachers are often viewed as agents of positive educational development, student's learning, and beyond, to the lives of people (Bourn, 2016). Good teachers are those who are fairly inquisitive and questioning, categorically involved in researching the effectiveness and influences of their teaching practice on students, validating it with appropriate evidence, and finally reflecting and publicising their teaching practice to the world (Mills & Rinehart, 2019). Thus, globally, teachers are encouraged to conduct classroom research. In the belief that classroom research helps teachers to enrich their knowledge of teaching practice, develop professionally, enhance pedagogical content knowledge, and understand students' needs, research has become an integral part of teachers' profession (Burns & Westmacott, 2018; Dikilita & Yaylı, 2018).

Since research has become a part of many teachers' professional lives, many studies from across the world have addressed perceptions and consequent benefits that teachers receive from doing research. For instance, the study conducted by Ulla, Barrera & Acompanado (2017) looked into school teachers' perceptions of doing classroom action research. They reported that although most teacher-respondents had not conducted research per se, teacher-respondents had positive perceptions towards doing research. Some driving forces behind positive beliefs held by teacher-respondents included (1), research giving teachers a platform to investigate and explore underlying problems concerning classroom teaching practices and institutions, and, (2), helping teachers to develop and enrich their pedagogical knowledge and skills. A similar study was conducted by Wulandari et al. (2019) in an Indonesian context with 143 senior high school teacher-researchers. The way teacher-researchers perceived doing action research was not very different from the study conducted in the Philippines context (Ulla et al., 2017). The researchers concluded that most of the teachers in the Indonesian context had adopted research as it brought positive changes to classroom activities and teachers' confidence, students' critical thinking ability, motivation, and overall learning outcomes.

Rahimi and Weisi (2018) conducted a similar study with EFL teachers. They explored the perception of doing research with 150 EFL teachers from different ethnic groups including Iran, Indonesia, Japan, and Thailand. They collected the data using a mixed-methods approach (questionnaires and semi-structured interviews) from those EFL teachers who were already embarked on research in different educational contexts. The researchers found that teachers perceived doing research as beneficial as it helped them to

explore classroom issues critically and reflectively, and to find better pedagogical approaches to help students enhance their learning outcomes. They also posited that teachers who are engaged in doing research became prominent figures in the teaching and learning community. Because of this, they have strongly suggested that policymakers should support and facilitate research practice in the institutions.

Challenges

Much is written on challenges faced by teacher-researchers, even in the Bhutanese context. For instance, studies by Abelardo et al. (2019); Antonio (2020); Ellis and Loughland (2016); Gyamtso et al. (2019); Norasmah and Chia (2016); Sherab and Schuelka (2019); Tindowen et al. (2019); and Ulla (2018) looked into challenges faced by teachers (both school and university teachers) in doing research. Some very common challenges faced by teachers in doing research included lack of support from the schools or institutions; insufficient seminars and workshops in research; heavy teaching workloads; time constraints; difficulty in finding supportive academic partners to carry out the research; and an unclear role for teachers as researchers.

Recently, Abelardo et al. (2019) delved into challenges faced by high school teachers in Licab, Philippines. The participants were 52 teachers comprising both inexperienced and experienced teacher-researchers. The researchers used a modified questionnaire and guided interviews as instruments to collect the data concerning challenges faced by teachers in doing school or classroom-based research. The challenges, which included inadequate support from the schools, not having sufficient time to research as they have to deal with other academic work, and insufficient skills to conduct research were no different from the previous studies discussed above. Also, their finding was in accord with Norasmah and Chia (2016) who looked into the challenges faced by Malaysian teachers in doing research.

In Bhutan, although very little research has investigated school teacher's challenges in doing research, some studies have examined experiences encountered by Bhutanese tertiary (university) teacher-researchers, such as Gyamtso et al. (2019) and Sherab and Schuelka (2019). Prominent challenges included insufficient time due to heavy teaching load and other academic responsibilities, lack of funds for conducting research, lack of knowledge and confidence to publish research articles, lack of primary and secondary data sources, and lack of interest and support from organisations or institutions.

The literature discussed thus far has indicated that teacher-researchers, irrespective of their context, perceive doing research as a beneficial element of teaching and learning, and that they also need to deal with a wide range of challenges in conducting research. However, studies in Bhutan to date have not attempted to explore perceptions, challenges, and perceived benefits from doing research, amongst teachers at schools and other smaller education enterprises. Therefore policymakers, institutions, teachers, and other education firms need an updated view of how teachers perceive doing research, and the challenges and benefits they encounter in doing research. To fill the gap concerning

school teachers as researchers in Bhutan, the present research aims at answering the following questions.

1. How do school teachers perceive doing research?
2. What are the challenges faced by school teacher-researchers in doing research?
3. What are the perceived benefits of school teacher-researchers in doing research?

Research methodology

This section includes detail of research design and respondents, research instruments, data collection procedure, and process involved in data analysis.

Design and respondents

A sequential explanatory mixed-method was adopted. The data were collected both quantitatively (using questionnaires) and qualitatively (using semi-structured interviews) to unravel the deeper thoughts (Creswell et al., 2003; Riazi & Candlin, 2014) of teacher-participants from Bhutan in doing research. Convenience and snowball sampling techniques of collecting data were used to reach the teachers who were teaching in Bhutan. The snowball sampling method was used because the target participants needed for this study were not easily accessible (Ghaljaie et al., (2017). A total of 237 Bhutanese school teachers teaching in different districts of Bhutan aged from 20 to 52 years and with 1 to 30 years of teaching experience participated in the survey. There were 92 male and 145 female teacher respondents, all Bhutanese natives with different fields of study, and teaching different subjects and age groups of students at both public and private schools. Of 237 teacher-participants, the demographic data revealed that only 56 (23.6%) of them had research experience, and the remaining 181 (76.4%) did not conduct any research throughout their career besides minor projects, theses, and short articles, which were part of the assignments completed for bachelor or masters degrees. However, a few of the teacher-participants (10.5%) who had embarked themselves into research had experiences of publishing in international (5.1 %) or national (5.4%) publications.

Only 19 of the survey participants accepted invitations to participate in the follow-up semi-structured interviews. Since the emphasis of this study was to examine the general perceptions, benefits, and challenges of teachers in doing research in the Bhutanese context, we haven't delved into teacher-participants' professional profiles, qualifications, and educational background, whether they pursued their bachelor, master or PhD degrees in Bhutan or abroad.

Research instruments

This study used two research instruments to collect the data: a modified 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5) on perception and challenges in doing research, adopted from Ulla et al. (2017) and follow-up semi-structured individual interviews.

The emphasis of the modified questionnaire was upon collecting data on how teachers perceive doing research and probable challenges faced/facing while doing research along with their teaching. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items; categorised into two parts. Part one consisted of 5 demographic items and 10 items on perception towards doing research. The second part, which consisted of 15 items dealt with the challenges that the teacher-researchers faced while doing research. All the survey questionnaire data were collected electronically via *Google Forms* as the data were collected during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The semi-structured interview questions were developed by analysing the questionnaire data from the teacher-respondents. The interviews focused on the probable reasoning about challenges that the teachers faced/ are facing and perceived benefits in doing research. The semi-structured interview was used because it gives both interviewer and interviewee a sense of liberty, flexibility, and structural guidance, resulting in a greater in-depth and meaningful interaction (Xerri, 2018).

Data collection

Before proceeding to data collection, ethical considerations were taken into account by informing the targeted participants of this study that their personal information would be kept confidential and data were being collected solely for the research purpose. More so, the respondents were also given an option not to respond (fill up the questionnaire). As for interview data, consent from the respondents who had completed the survey questionnaire was sought through *Facebook* and *Gmail*. A total of 19 teacher-respondents agreed to participate in the follow-up semi-structured interviews; however, due to some unavoidable circumstances such as technical glitches and mismatches in timing, we could not collect data from some teacher-respondents who had volunteered for interview. In the end, 14 teacher-respondents were interviewed at their convenience using the *Zoom* application. Of 14 teacher-participants (10 males and 4 females), 9 of them had research experience and published at national and international levels, and the rest of them had done their final year project or thesis only. The interviews were taken in English and lasted for 15-25 minutes.

Data analysis

The questionnaire data was imported from a spreadsheet to the *SPSS* (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25. Descriptive analyses of frequency and percentage were used and tabulated to describe the quantitative findings of the present study. The data from the interviews were recorded, transcribed, analysed, and thematically described.

Results: Quantitative findings

The questionnaire findings on respondents' perceptions of doing research (in percentage) are tabulated in three columns *strongly agree/agree*, *neutral*, *disagree/agree*, and descriptively presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Teacher-participants' perception of doing research (N=237)

Items		Strongly agree/ agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree/ disagree
1.	Doing research is valuable to the teaching and learning process for me as a teacher.	92%	5.5%	2.5%
2.	Doing research is valuable to the teaching and learning process for my students.	91.9%	6.4%	1.7%
3.	Doing research will positively impact my students' learning.	86.9%	10.1%	3%
4.	Doing a research project will positively impact my teaching.	87.7%	8.9%	3.4%
5.	I view myself as a teacher-researcher.	60.3%	33.3%	6.4%
6.	Doing research will develop and enhance my skills professionally.	94.9%	3.8%	1.3%
7.	Doing research encourages critical self-reflection.	95%	3.4%	1.6%
8.	Doing research engages teachers into a more systematic examination of instruction or teaching practice.	87.3%	11.8%	0.9%
9.	Doing research enables teachers to examine and explore classroom and school problems and their solutions.	90.3%	8.4%	1.3%
10.	Doing research helps teachers to acquire new knowledge for classroom teaching.	93.2%	5.5%	1.2%

Although the results (see Table 1) revealed a slight difference in the way teacher-participants perceived conducting research, the general pattern of the responses (in percentage) remained consistent except for item 5. The teacher-participants believed that conducting classroom-based research is beneficial for the teaching and learning process for both teachers and students (items 1 and 2). Their agreement towards classroom research helping them enhance and develop their teaching pedagogical knowledge and skills was very high (item 6). Further, they also believed that conducting research not only helps them to explore the classroom and school problems and solutions but also has a positive impact on their teaching practice and students' learning outcomes (items 3 and 4). Although most of the teacher-participants had a positive perception of doing research, only 60.3% of teacher-participants viewed themselves as researchers (item 5). This indicates that teachers were less involved in researching, even though the vast majority perceive it as valuable.

As illustrated in Table 2, it seems teacher-participants have faced challenges in doing research. Although the analysis revealed teacher-participants (74.6%) had an interest in conducting research, it seems challenges they faced such as inadequate knowledge of doing research (item 11), time constraints (item 13), insufficient reference materials (item

Table 2: Challenges that teacher-participants faced in doing research (N=237)

	Items	Strongly agree/ agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree/ disagree
11.	I do not have enough knowledge of how to do research.	34%	21.1%	34.9%
12.	I find doing research time-consuming.	41.8%	25.7%	32.5%
13.	I am so busy with my teaching practice and personal life to do research.	49.7%	25.7%	24.6%
14.	I do not have much support from the school to do research.	23.6%	30%	46.4%
15.	I have no interest in doing research at all.	4.3%	21.1%	74.6%
16.	I am not motivated to do research.	13.5%	27.8%	58.7%
17.	I have a low proficiency in English that hinders me to do research	17.2%	24.1%	58.7%
18.	I do not see the importance of doing research in my professional life.	5.5%	9.3%	85.2%
19.	There are insufficient reference materials (journals, research books, research reports, etc.) in the library.	46.4%	20.7%	32.9%
20.	There is a shortage of training and seminars on research activities.	74.7%	12.2%	13.1%
21.	There is an insufficient budget in the school to undertake research.	61.2%	26.6%	12.2%
22.	There is a lack of recognition for conducting research activities.	40.5%	35.0%	24.5%
23.	Heavy teaching load affects the practice of research.	80.6%	12.7%	6.7%
24.	There is a lack of a clear role of teachers in the school to conduct research.	62.1%	21.1%	16.8%
25.	Teachers' involvement in research should be one criterion of promotion.	43.6%	30.4%	26%

19), lack of training and seminars on research (item 20), insufficient research budget (item 21), lack of recognition (item 22), heavy teaching loads (item 23), and lack of a clear role of teachers in the school to conduct research (item 24) are hindering teachers' conduct of research. Nevertheless, it seems schools where they are working are supportive towards doing research (item 14). Further, the findings reveal that language (item 17) and the awareness of research being important in one's professional life (item 18) are not an issue with the present teacher-participants. Altogether, the findings indicated that teacher-participants were aware of how essential research is for their professional development, and most of them were interested and fairly motivated to conduct research. This suggests that if the above-mentioned challenges faced by teachers in doing research are taken care of, this might potentially add more numbers to teacher-researchers in Bhutanese schools.

Results: Interview findings

This section includes thematic interpretation of interview data and validates and supports the quantitative findings. It consists of two main themes, challenges and perceived benefits in doing research, and a few subthemes. To interpret the interview data, excerpts and pseudonyms for each teacher-respondent are used.

Challenges

Two subthemes: time constraints and heavy teaching loads; and lack of knowledge, resources, and recognition in doing research are discussed below.

Time constraints and heavy teaching loads

When teacher-respondents were asked about the challenges they have faced (or are facing) while doing research, most of them identified time constraints as being a major challenge. In the interviews, most of the teachers stated that they are overloaded by teaching loads, co-curricular activities, and other academic work, so much so that sometimes they have to sacrifice their weekends. Family time also kept them away from doing research. Also, they were aware that a lot of effort and time needs to be put into producing proper research. Some excerpts from the interviews are given below.

I feel the time constraint is the main challenge. I am considering the situation would differ from school to school. But in most of the schools, teachers are engaged mostly in the teaching-learning process throughout the day. The little free time they get is used for notebook assessment and lesson planning for the following day. Unless research is made mandatory no one would be determined to do it (Tashi).

Schoolwork is heavily burdening us that we barely have time for ourselves. More than teaching, we have to do office jobs. Sometimes we have to sacrifice family time too. Research needs a lot of time and commitment. We cannot just take out a paper that is not well researched (Dorji).

Lack of knowledge, resources, and recognition in doing research

Other common challenges among the teacher-respondents were the lack of knowledge in doing research, lack of reliable academic sources to learn about doing research, and lack of recognition or reward. The teacher-respondents commented that teachers lack knowledge of conducting research and publication, which they suggested could be resolved by giving proper training, workshops, and seminars to the teacher-researchers.

Personally, I do not do research because although many peers join in for group researches, many do not participate actively. Many join the research group only for credits; there is a general lack of integrity and honest enthusiasm. Besides that, many teachers do not have any prior training in conducting research, thus it is a new concept/ foreign concept to many and there is a general fear for any new thing. Perhaps that's the reason (Karma).

Teachers are already overburdened with a heavy workload. Most of the teachers don't have adequate knowledge of research. Financial problems and limited time are the reasons why Bhutanese teachers are not into research. Generally speaking, teachers lack proper academic research skills (Sangay)

Need to prescribe a syllabus that is time-bound. There is less appreciation or reward in research. Basically, there is no proper platform as such for us and we don't have proper guidance to do research (Lhamo)

Now being mandatory for the teachers to carry out research, more than anything, I feel teachers struggle because of the lack of adequate knowledge, reliable sources to learn, and lack of enough books. I feel the seminars, workshops held purely dedicated to helping our teachers learn about research could be very useful (Jamyang).

Perceived benefits of doing research

Nearly all teacher-interviewees had similar perceived benefits of doing research. Most of them stated that doing research is the utmost source of pedagogical knowledge and solution associated with teaching and learning. In addition to this, personal professional development, hands-on experience in doing research, evidence-based teaching and learning, improvement in teaching strategies, and knowing the needs of students were some other benefits of doing research that they pointed out in the interview. More importantly, the teacher-respondents highlighted that doing research be it at the institutional or national, or international level would serve as a means of information for improvement and amendments to be done for teaching and learning, and the education system as a whole.

It will help us to arrive or find out what strategies work best in teaching students, will help teachers to stay abreast with new knowledge, and help to collaborate in their teaching. Above all, if teachers themselves lack research knowledge what are they going to teach their children? (Dorji)

Obviously, doing research has benefits in one's professional development. You get to know about your student or subject better by doing research. Even as a researcher, perceiving anything would become broad. You find many alternative ways of your topics and can get to know about how to go way forward (Tashi).

If more Bhutanese can bring out authentic research papers, then it would help stakeholders to get a view of what needs to be done, or why a certain thing is happening. For teachers, we can get hands-on experience on research skills and impart the same to our students. Professionally we grow and find out ways to improve education for our children (Dema).

On the professional front, research at the institutional level gives the teacher insight into the common issues that learners are facing, thereby enabling the teacher to modify and adopt suitable teaching strategies to overcome these issues in the learners. Research practices can also highlight the loopholes in the institution and teaching system and provide opportunities for the stakeholders to overcome these loopholes (Pema).

Discussion

This study explored Bhutanese school teachers' perceptions, challenges, and perceived benefits in doing research. Several important lessons were learned from the present findings. Firstly, in line with previous studies (e.g., Hine, 2013; Herlina, Kurnia & Faridah, 2018; Rahimi & Weisi, 2018; Ulla et al., 2017; Wulandari et al., 2019), teacher-participants in this study also had positive perceptions about doing research. They agreed that doing research by teachers themselves helped develop their professional skills; improved the teaching and learning process; helped explore issues concerning teaching and learning, and enhanced teachers' pedagogical knowledge and teaching practice. Besides, surprisingly, very few Bhutanese teacher-participants were involved in doing research and nearly half of them did not view themselves as teacher-researchers. The demographic data also revealed that only 23.6% out of 237 teachers who participated in this study were embarked on doing research. This finding was also aligned with Sherab and Schuelka (2019), who found minimal involvement of Bhutanese tertiary teachers in doing research. Although findings indicated school teachers in Bhutan being less engaged in doing research, the scenario of the Bhutanese teachers teaching at tertiary levels (college and university) seems no different from school teachers when it comes to the amount of engagement in doing research. Recently, Sherab and Schuelka (2019) looked into the current status of research culture in institutions under RUB. They expressed concerns by pointing out that research culture in Bhutan, particularly in higher education institutions, is in a precarious condition. Also, the recent reformed agreement on annual performance assessment criteria for tertiary teachers in Bhutan (RUB, 2018) had observed a reduced allotted workload for research, to 15% from 30% in previous years (Maxwell & Chophel, 2020). Thus, it's not only school teachers who are less involved in research but also university teachers in Bhutan.

Secondly, the findings revealed a range of challenges that teacher-participants had faced in doing research. Interestingly, some of the challenges underscored by teacher-participants of this study, which included time constraints, being heavily overloaded by teaching and academic work, and a lack of knowledge were consistent with the challenges highlighted by some studies in different contexts, such as Abelardo et al. (2019); Antonio (2020); Norasmah and Chia (2016); and Ulla (2018). Further, in line with Gyamtso et al. (2019), who looked into the challenges faced by teachers of higher education institutions in Bhutan in doing research, in the interviews, the present teacher-participants stated the same challenges that require paying attention to, such as lack of recognition, lack of reliable sources for references, and lack of research funds. In addition to this, some added challenges included lack of incentives or rewards from the institutions or schools, lack of seminars and workshops on research, and lack of research expertise and platforms. Altogether, the findings indicated that there needs to be an immediate effort put in by institutions or schools or the Ministry of Education at large, to help teachers overcome these challenges so that teachers are encouraged to conduct research. Also, it was worth noting that these challenges were widespread for it was found very common in most of the Asian contexts discussed above. As it is believed that research not only helps teachers have new pedagogical knowledge for classroom teaching (Barjesteh & Manoocheh-zadeh,

2019; Ulla et al., 2017), but also their professional identity (Dikilita & Yaylı, 2018) and allows teachers to be an innovative contributor to the curriculum design (Lastra et al., 2018), this study suggests that policymakers, institutions, schools, and universities, and beyond, the Ministry of Education of Bhutan, and of similar contexts in Asia where research culture is young, consider these challenges. Thus school teachers (not only university teachers) as researchers may prove to be better agents for the education system.

In the interviews, teacher-participants also asserted some other additional benefits that can be acquired in doing research. These included hands-on experience; evidence-based teaching and learning; improvement in teaching strategies; and knowing the needs of students. Therefore, this study suggests initiating frequent workshops, training, and seminars to encourage teachers; support them financially to conduct research, and give proper recognition and incentives upon completion so that teachers are motivated to conduct research. Since research is believed to be an evident indicator of better education systems (Rahimi & Weisi, 2018), it has the capacity to answer all sorts of teaching questions and issues in practice (Ulla, 2018). Taking these kinds of initiatives might probably help the institutions and nation at large have a higher quality education system and more teacher-researchers at institutional levels. Further, we must not forget that teachers are often referred to as agents of change in education development, student's development, and the lives of people (Bourn, 2016).

Finally, although the strength of the present study includes the originality of data, study design (mixed method), use of validated instruments, and comprehensive investigation of Bhutanese school teachers' perceptions, challenges, and perceived benefits in doing research, this study had some limitations. First, the sample size, particularly for the qualitative phase was relatively small. Therefore, it is advised to be cautious before generalising from it. Second, the study was conducted in one of the scholarly least explored environments where research culture is very young with only a few teachers embarked into research. Given this, we cannot guarantee that all findings included herein would be consistent with other contexts where research culture is dynamic.

Nonetheless, this study has given a new updated direction for future research on school teachers as researchers. Future research may concern what motivates and demotivates Bhutanese school teachers and their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to conduct classroom research, using in-depth interviews. Other matters to investigate include how informed are Bhutanese teachers about national and international journal databases; how supportive are heads of institutions and if there are any restrictions on access to conduct research; difference in perceptions of research among teachers based on their qualifications (i.e., teachers with PhD, masters, bachelor degrees). In-depth interviews with the heads of institutions, schools, or university and research experts may help consolidate the current findings, and potentially beyond, in the emerging research field of teachers as researchers.

Conclusion

This study looked into Bhutanese school teacher's perceptions, challenges, and perceived benefits of doing research. The study was needed since the culture of teachers as researchers is fairly new in Bhutan. To this end, although much emphasis is given by the Ministry of Education hand-in-hand with RUB on research by including it as part of teachers' academic responsibility (particularly for teachers teaching in higher education institutions), research practice in Bhutan is not as vibrant as expected. It was affirmed by the present study revealing that very few school teachers are involved in doing research and creating publications. Ulla et al. (2017) found that most teachers who participated in their study had not done research. Although this kind of study is certainly context-dependent, it is wise to consider the issues highlighted thus far as a fundamental identification of problems which need to be explored, researched, and discussed. This suggestion can be also extended beyond the Bhutanese context since the patterns of the way teachers perceive doing research, challenges and perceived benefits were more or less similar to previous studies conducted in different contexts as discussed above. As Mills and Rinehart (2019) noted, teachers should embark themselves into doing research, to help address issues, problems and solutions concerning teaching and learning. For this reason, we strongly suggest education sectors consider the findings of the present study, particularly on challenges and perceived benefits and suggestions presented, so that teachers have a sense of motivation to do research.

Ethical consideration

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walailak University (Certificate of Approval No. WUEC-21-099-01).

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