Establishing A Community of Practice for Academic Faculty in Higher Education: A Framework for Collaboration and Professional Growth

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to study the factors affecting the creation of a Community of Practice (CoP) to promote research conducting among novice lecturers. The participants consist of three novice lecturers from Faculty of Education. The research employed semistructured interviews and focus group discussion as research instruments. The findings reveal that the challenges faced by novice lecturers in research, including limited exposure to advanced methodologies, time constraints from teaching and administrative duties, and difficulties in academic writing and publishing in English. Resource limitations, such as insufficient funding and restricted access to analytical tools, further hinder progress. Despite these obstacles, lecturers remain motivated by professional growth and the desire to contribute to knowledge. The findings emphasize the need for institutional support through mentorship, training workshops, flexible workloads, and collaborative networks to enhance research capacity and productivity.

Keywords: novice lecturer, community of practice, professional growth, research ability

1. Introduction

The 21st century is marked by fast and uncertain changes in response to technological developments and economic shifts that affect all aspects of life (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Schwab, 2017). In this way, universities need to keep pace with these changes in response to a combination of technology, competition, and innovation (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The higher education system and university prepare learners to live in this changing world, and the fast and radical changes require a high level of challenges to the universities. As such, universities around the world are transforming their environment to produce graduates with the required skills and knowledge to operate in a fast-changing society. This objective forces a new perspective towards the methods of teaching and a reassessment of the contents in a new way by creating curricula that will create resilient and adaptable graduates (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). For a university professor, this new responsibility means that their function of teaching knowledge does not end with the process of teaching and learning experience. On the other hand, they are required to continue improving their knowledge, skills, and competencies, and they have to design and manage appropriate teaching methods by integrating different forms of technology (e.g. blended learning) and instilling 21st century skills such as critical thinking (Blaschke, 2012). In addition to teaching, research remains another central function of the university professor and their overall impact in terms of searching for possible solutions to current societal needs and producing new knowledge. In this regard, it is also the need for the professors to develop, grow, and maintain their high-quality professional practices. In this context, continuous professional development becomes highly essential to increase and maintain self-confidence in teachers (Bostock & Baume, 2016). New faculty members, especially those at the beginning of their academic careers, can face some development issues such as constrained resources, low financial support, and inability to manage time (Altbach & Salmi, 2011; Schön, 2017). All the above cited information leads to the conclusion that the need for Professional Growth is the most suitable for university professors. This development includes academic development in four areas including teaching, research, academic administration, and cooperation (local and international), and for the beginning and less experienced lecturer, this becomes a challenge (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). However, according to the literature review, Mentorship may play an important role in the professional growth of new teachers. A mentor is a person who is experienced and will help in the process

of development and require adaptation. The important areas that need to be developed for a new teacher include designing appropriate teaching strategies and better methods of teaching by planning and effectively managing the class (Klinge, 2015; Squires et al., 2024; Walensky et al.,2018). This may also help in the long run to develop and improve the overall practice of the new lecturer in terms of a better teaching learning environment.

In addition, the area of academic network and relation building in the academic fraternity and associated professional circles and sharing of knowledge on time management and task management, scheduling, and tradeoffs in teaching, research, and service (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). In general, most of the new university lecturers may have established their expertise in the area of specialization by their indepth knowledge and Ph.D. research level, therefore, they may have high levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In this regard, Mentorship in this area needs to be collegial and supportive rather than authoritative or based on an expert novice relationship and it should be built on mutual trust and respect (Hobson et al., 2009; Phuong et al., 2018; Pleschová & McAlpine, 2015; Toh et al., 2022). A more positive relationship between the mentors and mentees will lead to more effective trust and the individual's level of self-confidence. As such, the above cited features go in line with the concept of Community of Practice (CoP), where joint learning and knowledge sharing will take place through collaboration, and a higher degree of respect for one's learning among a community with the same interests (Toh et al., 2022). A Community of Practice (CoP) can be described, as defined by Wenger (1998), as a collective that is composed of individuals who are interconnected by their interest or expertise in a shared field of study or profession, and this participation takes the form of participation in knowledge sharing, joint learning, and knowledge building as a community. In this process, members of the CoP may acquire a deep learning level and engage in building their academic relationships and knowledge on the path to further developing their academic expertise (Jagasia et al.,2015; Jørgensen et al.,2019; Neufeld et al., 2013; Stein, 2005). In many instances, learners gain a large portion of the benefit from CoPs because they can utilize their time and experiences to exchange them with others in the group for the common good. On the other hand, they can develop potential solutions for new or existing problems in conjunction with members who have come across similar problems before. A CoP may be regarded as a learning platform because it serves the aspect of learning and sharing thought and tested solutions from fellow members (Neufeld et al., 2013). In this regard, a CoP may be considered a forum for group problem solving or a base for learning best practice. In addition to meeting and providing a platform for solving operational issues, a CoP is able to develop the morale of its participants and will build and develop an academic network (Allman et al., 2024; Arthur, 2016; Cojorn & Seesom, 2024; Terry et al., 2019). Academic networks are important because they build a sustainable development and will serve as a good foundation for future research activities. A CoP will give its members the privilege of ongoing knowledge transfer through day-to-day community engagement and practice. Therefore, a CoP will serve to meet the demand for sustainable professional development and will eventually result in sustainable personal and academic advancement (Cojorn & Sonsupap, 2023; Sanchez-Cardona et al., 2012; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002).

As discussed above, the Community of Practice (CoP) method is highlighted by the various features of collaborative and joint learning, knowledge sharing, and a conducive environment that supports learning. This, therefore, could be in a great deal consolidation by a collegial and supportive mentor-mentee relationship under the umbrella of the CoP. This is important since the characteristics will encourage a bidirectional relationship that will promote and support both learning and overall growth of an individual. Such a Mentorship that has an air of being collegial is therefore quite suitable for the university faculty given that it would support the university faculty to develop professional expertise. It will also support continuous growth and professional development. As a result, this research will be specific in trying to examine the features of building a Community of Practice (CoP) for new university faculty and what factors will lead to the development of a successful CoP. The results of this study will serve as a good guideline to those in the higher education bracket on how to plan and support their staff in a bid to attain and maintain career success and enjoy continuous professional growth.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Professional Growth

Professional growth is a process that involves changes for individuals in any profession in order to adjust to the dynamic world. It is about a concept of continuous development, learning, and the process of achieving and maintaining a better performance in career. It also involves having sufficient knowledge and skills for smooth performance in a given profession (Kolb, 1984; Tynjälä, 2008). Thus, Professional growth is a notion that underpins the abilities of people to continuously learn and self-develop their knowledge in their career (Dweck, 2006). The

endresult of professional development is thus, to help individuals widen their career options and develop their abilities to cope with work changes in the present 21st century. The process of professional growth also requires having a self-development initiative and growth-oriented mindset (Dweck, 2006). It allows people to have a psychological drive to keep persevering when they meet failure and look at obstacles as a platform for growth and development. Self-development activities like self-evaluation and self-reflection are key to this end result. By critically analyzing their experiences, habits, and outcomes, people can determine their strengths and points of improvement via self-reflection. Self-evaluation on the other hand, offers an organized procedure to analyze a person's abilities, competencies, and levels of development, and can be a reference point for people to set and achieve their goals at personal and professional levels (Locke & Latham, 2002; Latham, 2020). In addition to enabling people to be self-drive, these practices also help people to learn a sense of ownership and responsibility for their self-development. Regarding university professors, it is vital for the professional growth of educators. The concept of a professor in education is that which is considered very dynamic in the 21 st century. This is in the fields of quick change in modes of teaching, an increasing and more demanding need to embrace information technology in their teaching methods, and the dynamic nature of the student learning profiles. It is therefore a requirement that educators be well prepared with skills required in these areas of change so as to become better and highly competent in their career. The most important approach to these problems is an update of professors about the best practices and new methods of adapting to these factors of professional teaching. This they can achieve by using and enhancing the teaching and learning management practices, among other activities discussed in this paper, in order to enhance their career opportunities (Swennen & Bates, 2010).

Professional growth of university faculty encompasses multiple dimensions, including effective teaching, research engagement, and leadership development, all of which contribute to both institutional quality and student learning outcomes. Key aspects include pedagogical skills, involving effective teaching management, evaluation, and curriculum design aligned with labor market demands (Shulman, 1987); technological competence, particularly integration of digital tools and blended learning through the TPCK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006); and research skills, encompassing innovation, publication, and grant acquisition as essential for academic advancement (Boyer, 1990). Equally important are communication and interpersonal skills, which foster collaboration with students, colleagues, and external stakeholders (Hargreaves, 2017), and mentorship and networking, which enhance career development through reciprocal learning and collaboration (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; ; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). In addition, time and project management skills enable faculty to meet professional expectations in dynamic educational contexts (Altbach & Salmi, 2011), while adaptability and lifelong learning ensure continuous growth in response to evolving academic and societal demands (Schön, 1983).

Professional growth is a very important concept for the teaching profession. It enhances the quality of their teaching, helps them adapt to the changing educational world and impacts positively on their students' academic performance. From previous studies, professional development of educators can be addressed by these methods. It is a basic yet all round strategy that centers on the promotion of meaningful professional growth for teachers. It has been seen to be key in improving the effectiveness of the educators' teaching. It also allows the university professors to better adapt to the ever-changing world, including the educational perspectives, while at the same time building the students' learning to greater levels.

2.2 Community of Practice; CoP

The primary goal of the initial communities of practice was self-empowerment, learning, and growth. The communities of practice are formed based on mutual interests, often organically. Most communities begin to organize when people find similar interests, activities, or pursuits to do (Fuller et al., 2005). Wenger et al. (2002) defined A Community of Practice (CoP) as a group of people who share similar interests, professions, or passions and learn together through a collective or repeated process of interaction. Sharing knowledge, experiences, and best practices among a group of people who work on similar domains can help enhance skills and understanding of that profession. Wenger (1998) derived the three pillars of CoP include.

1) Domain: A shared area of interest, skill, or work that provides members with a common identity and competence.

2) Community: The social relationships and interdependent interactions that build a sense of belonging, where members actively share knowledge and experiences.

3) Practice: A shared purpose, set of activities, tools, resources, and methods that allow the group to function productively toward a common goal.

Communities of Practice (CoPs) have been developed and studied extensively over the past two decades, with research highlighting several key characteristics. First, a shared domain provides identity, purpose, and focus for the community (Wenger-Trayner, 2011). Second, community emphasizes social relationships, where interaction builds trust, cooperation, and mutual learning (Vela et al., 2023). Third, practice consists of common methodologies, tools, and activities that are developed as the members work to resolve problems (Wenger-Trayner, 2011). Fourth, voluntary participation also guarantees that participation is guided by actual interest and dedication and not forced (Allman et al., 2024). Fifth, informality allows flexible interaction beyond formal structures, creating space for open dialogue and problem solving (Simon, 2024). Finally, peer-to-peer learning is based on sharing knowledge via the experiences of the members instead of top-down education (Hott &Tietjen-Smith, 2018).

Communities of Practice (CoPs) have over time been implemented in a number of different ways and studies have been conducted into the elements that lead to their success or failure. Stein (2005) has determined four major components of successful CoPs that include (1)individual, where members are willing to participate, share skills and expertise, and contribute actively; (2)content, where the contents must be relevant, helpful and of high quality to promote practices in the community; (3)meeting, where consistent, purposeful and well-organized interaction in a formal and informal environment is essential; and the (4) organizational component where institutional support is crucial through resources, recognition and alignment to organizational purpose.

In addition to individual, content, meeting, and organizational aspects, research highlights further context specific factors that influence the success of Communities of Practice (CoPs). These include: clear identification of domain, which provides focus, identity, and shared passion (Hernandes & Fresneda, 2003; Terry et al., 2019; Wenger-Trayner, 2011); strong leadership, necessary for facilitating discussions, organizing activities, and sustaining engagement (Retna & Tee Ng, 2011; Terry et al., 2019; Wenger-Trayner, 2011); and time, ensuring members can meaningfully participate without undue burden (Wenger-Trayner, 2011). Other critical elements are trust and mutual respect, which foster open knowledge exchange and relationship building (Hernandes & Fresneda, 2003; Simon, 2024; Terry et al., 2019); value and recognition, motivating members through acknowledgment of contributions and tangible outcomes (Hott & Tietjen-Smith, 2018); and support, where organizational backing provides resources and legitimacy without over control (Retna & Tee Ng, 2011; Vela et al., 2023). Finally, diversity of membership encourages varied perspectives, creativity, and innovative problem solving (PlatformOS, 2024).

Forming a Community of Practice, despite how beneficial it can be to an organization, can come with its share of challenges and issues. These problems can reduce the effectiveness of the CoPs and can negatively impact or even completely reduce the long-term prospects of the CoPs taking root in an organization. The potential problems and their solutions include resistance to the group and to change, limited resources, difficulties sustaining engagement among members, finding a healthy balance between formal and informal processes, and CoPs' inability to impact assessment (Venkatraman & Venkatraman, 2018). It is important to be aware of and actively work around these problems to enhance the success of a CoP.

Professional growth is a continuous process of self-improvement. Both upskilling and reskilling are parts of professional growth. The goal of professional growth is to stay abreast with the changes that occur but also to learn new skills and increase one’s efficiency while at work. It is important for any professional, especially university teachers, to always be in the process of professional growth. Professional growth for a teacher includes new methodologies that are more responsive to the changes taking place in the world around us and the emergence of new technologies (Hott &Tietjen,2018). The future of a professional is because of the professional growth activities that the professional is willing to engage in. The main goal of professional growth as a teacher is to help the students, they are training to be prepared to take on the world that they live in. A teacher needs to be constantly evaluating new methodologies and ideas, not just to adopt but to engage with and keep their learning up to date with the latest ideas, approaches, and resources. A good and working practice to adopt as part of professional growth is the formation of Communities of Practice. A Community of Practice is a group of people with similar contexts, interests, or challenges coming together with the main aim of exchanging knowledge and helping each other to learn and grow from their own individual knowledge and experience (Vela et al.,2023). The key ideas and reasons for why CoP are so effective at professional growth and are applicable to teachers include spaces that educators and faculty members can work in together, sharing of best practices and approaches that they have acquired, as well as reflection of on their practice through conversations. The communities of practice create a space where trust exists, mentorship is possible, and knowledge is shared to make better approaches for teaching to the benefit of both the teacher and their students. Mentorship happens in the Community of Practice. You can learn or get advice from someone with more practice or know-how in a subject. It's friendly, like hanging out with colleagues. It's a cool spot to pick up some new thoughts, methods, and tools, and the best thing is you don't need to worry about being judged. Mentoring is

common within Communities of Practice and the benefit of this is that there are members of a CoP that are newer and new members can also seek guidance and mentorship from the more experienced members of a community. As Terry et al. (2019) point out, mentorship also comes in handy when a new faculty member has to spend more time teaching as mentorship can play an important role in guiding the new faculty and helping them to plan and design their journey into their new roles and functions as a member of faculty. Mentoring also helps to share useful insights and approaches that are used in a similar context. The mentors have greater experience in the same contexts as the new faculty member, and this can give more indepth and useful insights for the new member of the faculty. Mentorship is a primary benefit of Communities of Practice. However, mentorship as a characteristic also encourages more interactions and collaborations, which leads to problem solving and better ways of teaching. This directly benefits the students through the CoP as students are then able to learn and improve in learning using the skills and knowledge and know how that their teachers have gained from the Communities of Practice. It can then be concluded that Communities of Practice play a role in professional growth in education as they provide collaborative learning spaces for educators to share, learn from one another, and in the process help to improve the learning experience of the students and make a greater impact in the learning of the students.

3. Method

This study adopted a qualitative research design, which is particularly well suited for exploring complex and dynamic phenomena such as the formation of a community of practice among early career university lecturers. A qualitative approach allows researchers to gain indepth insights into the experiences, perspectives, and interactions of lecturers with diverse disciplinary backgrounds and expertise. As Wenger (1998) conceptualized, a community of practice is not merely a mechanism for knowledge exchange, but also a space for constructing professional identity and fostering confidence in academic practice. Thus, qualitative research provides a valuable lens to capture the social, cultural, and professional dimensions that shape collaborative learning and development among novice university faculty.

3.1 Participants

The participants consisted of three novice lecturers purposively selected based on their teaching experience of no more than 5 years and their voluntary interest in participating in the research. The participants were drawn from 2 different departments: Educational Research and Development and Curriculum and Instruction—faculty of Education.

3.2 Data Collection

The research adopts a qualitative approach utilizing semistructured interviews and focus group discussion. A purposive sampling technique will be employed to select lecturers who fall under the criteria for a novice lecturer. The data collected will be analyzed thematically to identify emerging patterns and themes related to their research experience, challenges and their need for support.

3.3 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were obtained from semistructured interviews and focus group discussions. In order to enhance the validity and reliability of findings. The transcribed audio recordings and field notes were analyzed using content analysis and interpretation of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All authors collaboratively transcribed the focus group discussion and thoroughly read the entire dataset to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives. A table was then created in Microsoft Word, and responses from the focus group were analyzed and assigned initial codes within the table. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into categories or themes—both main themes and subthemes—that reflected the core conceptual patterns explaining key issues in the data. After that, techniques such as triangulation among the three researchers were used to reach a consensus. The researchers then interpreted how these themes reflected the educational context, the development of the community of practice, and the professional growth of the participants.

4. Results

Novice lecturers experienced different difficulties during their research journey. These lecturers had basic knowledge in mathematics, folklore, qualitative studies, or education research but moderate confidence in educational research. As new researchers, they have little to no prior exposure to interdisciplinary studies and advanced research methodologies (including statistical and qualitative analysis methods) unfamiliar to them. The low number of publications in English adds to the low confidence, and the lengthy learning curve associated with research outside

their area of specialization, for some participants, was intimidating. Most participants found it hard to work on a research study where they do not know much about the research area.

A major difficulty reported by most participants is the ability to set research goals and ensure output remains within these goals. Writing in general and especially writing the introduction and research gap sections have also been identified as some of the most difficult parts of the research process. The time pressure is a general difficulty for most participants. As novice lecturers, juggling teaching, administrative tasks, and private life often present a major concern when meeting research goals. “It’s hard to find enough time for research when teaching and administrative duties take up most of my day” is a common quote from participants on the difficulty in time management. Grant criteria, which for some is not inclusive of early career researchers, lack of funding, and low institutional support in terms of research tools like access to AI tools, plagiarism checkers, or statistical software were other key concerns for most participants. There are also unique challenges across various disciplines like bridging the gap between mathematical theory and real-world applications or statistical challenges in mathematics or qualitative studies such as working with large volumes of unstructured data.

Novice lecturers need support to address the above challenges; all participants expressed the need for such support and many identified training workshops as the most critical aspect of support. Key examples include research gap identification and writing for research publication in English. “Writing in English is a significant barrier because it takes twice the effort to ensure clarity and accuracy” is a typical quote from a participant describing their struggle with publication requirements. This is one of the numerous ways in which language may influence the productivity of early career researchers. As anticipated, most of the respondents are not acquainted with the application of sophisticated statistical or qualitative analysis software; neither are they confident with the application of such software. This fear of undertaking any research study that involves using advanced statistical tools, complicated data analysis, and any subject they are not familiar with is enormous. Still, the majority of these participants appreciate mentorship programs that allow them to receive some assistance in their workplace; a weekly or monthly face-to-face or online visit with a more experienced peer at their department.Institutions could extend this support to include research networks with other senior lecturers or interdisciplinary research teams as well as more institutionalized resource sharing in terms of tools (statistical packages and AI driven programs) and services (statisticians and other specialized research support staff).

Despite the challenges, all these novice lecturers expressed interest and motivation to continue with their research work. Personal interests as well as extrinsic factors like professional growth which also comes with financial and social rewards drive these lecturers to engage with research activities. Passion to impact educational problems, contribute to society’s knowledge pool and improve their pedagogical practices has also been cited by many participants as some of their motivations for staying in the research field. Achieving recognition in the form of publications in renowned research journals and becoming an expert in their area of specialization are some of the long-term professional goals stated by most participants in the study.

Collaboration as another important concept for these novice lecturers has also been revealed by the responses as a variable, both in how much participants collaborate and in how they benefit from this process. For example, most participants reported an active collaboration with other lecturers in their field. Participants stated that this collaboration allows the exchange of ideas as well as splitting the responsibility associated with research. This, however, was not the case for all participants as some reported no current opportunities for collaboration, especially within their departments. Although most participants reported that collaboration as a research activity is very important and the major value is in innovation and efficiency; some did report challenges in some collaboration networks. These include issues with aligning team members’ schedules and ensuring equal contribution from all participants which, when not appropriately addressed, have the potential to cause stagnation and general conflict in research teams. Extended networks and more elaborate role clarification could work towards fixing these issues.

In conclusion, the results of the current study present numerous practical implications concerning the ways in which we might assist novice lecturers in their research process and involve more individuals in the knowledge-seeking process. Streamlined grant applications and sponsorship, particularly to early career researchers, will matter a lot in this regard. The novice lecturer will really need time management and flexibility in completing teaching and administrative duties through workload reductions or workload forgiveness when carrying out the necessary research. To add to this, they will have more opportunities to enhance their research by having access to superior tools and skills on how to utilize these advanced instruments such as the AI platforms. The top of the novice lecturer agenda is also mentoring and collaborative research environments, a sustainable approach to supporting this group will be to establish Communities of Practice with active and long-term support.

The data from the study reveals different kinds of challenges that the novice lecturers experience during their research journey. A common theme that emerged is the lack of a foundation in conducting a research study. Many of the participants have gone through different kinds of research training either in their undergraduate or graduate studies and later as lecturers. The content, however, has mostly been focused on theory and discipline specific knowledge with little to no exposure to empirical research, especially those involving human subjects or participants. This lack of foundation in empirical methods was especially common for the participants who were trying to transition to a new line of research or research interest like education research. "It was a new field to me; I did not even know where to start, from reading materials to data analysis. I had a hard time" is a typical summary from such participants.

"Time management" was also a barrier that was reported as one of the major challenges that participants faced in their research journey. Participants said they have a hard time juggling between their different professional activities like teaching and administrative duties to research. This challenge was amplified for participants who were also working in collaboration with other members in the same or in different research teams. Many of the participants reported their frustrations at the lack of time to get research work done and the extra pressure of having to synchronize their work schedules with other members in their research groups.

Collaboration was also among the most frequently mentioned issues by the participants. Collaboration, in this case, has a positive impact on the research process as participants mentioned in many instances of the benefits of teamwork. However, the participants complained about team dynamics issues. These were varying work demands, varying ideas, conflicting goals, and in extreme situations communication problems. This makes teamwork extremely difficult among the inexperienced researchers who have been cited instances of tension and unproductivity due to such issues.

Another challenge was a lack of access to relevant tools and resources that are necessary for research. This problem regarding the absence of institutional backing of tools required by beginner lecturers such as statistical packages (such as SPSS) and AI-based instruments to examine data and write research papers and plagiarism detection. The unavailability and even overall ignorance of the new trends and tools of research by the participants was another issue that might hamper the research process of newcomers and even further complicate the process of complying with the necessary criterion of publishing academic work.

The participants also mentioned the importance of mentorship and guidance in their research journey. In many of the accounts, senior researchers and experienced peers were highlighted as critical for providing advice on how to best conduct a research study and how to avoid typical pitfalls. Mentorship, in this regard, is also an opportunity for learning faster and building confidence in one's ability to successfully complete a research project.

Another valuable theme in the data of this study was training with regards to various components of research. The participants especially noted this training is important in how to design a research study, critically finding research gaps and finally application of statistical means and theoretical knowledge on practice or real problems that afflict real people. It was also important that the participants be trained in how to use more advanced tools. These entail technical training in statistical packages and various software in analyzing qualitative data and writing research papers to be published in the English language.

Access to resources is another consistent request made by the participants. Specifically, access to research databases, licensed software and AI-driven statistical analysis tools, not to mention plagiarism checking, would be a welcome feature among research participants and senior researchers. Free or subsidized access to these resources is essential as discussed by the participants in various quotes to the feeling of decreasing expenses and enjoying elevated productivity and greater efficiency.

Another important outcome from this study, from the perspective of designing a Community of Practice (CoP) for novice lecturers is the importance of the collaborators or community. Participants were unanimous about the fact that they would much rather work as part of a community. Collaboration among research groups where members could share their work, provide feedback, as well as jointly work on developing different projects was the best kind of community for the participants. The mode of communication and interaction between members of a CoP is also another major theme among the participants. Most participants would prefer hybrid collaboration models that combine both onsite and online meetings and seminars. Face-to-face meetings will provide room for indepth research engagement and critical interactions.

A few important themes were identified from the data that will be critical for ensuring that the kind of CoP developed will address most of the challenges outlined by the participants. These include mentorship, balanced workload, or

time management, and integrated platforms. Institutionally driven mentorship programs that would pair a less experienced early career researcher with a senior academic with significant experience in research activities. Mentorship as mentioned from the data would be a great way to support novices through the different aspects of research from design to data analysis. Balanced workload or better time management for research is also critical from the feedback as it would ensure that enough time is given for research as well as reduce the pressure that comes with trying to meet different research deliverables. Integrating resources, tools, and even software into more central and seamless platforms like institutional libraries would also be essential for enabling easier and more efficient engagement with research activities.

5. Discussion

It is critical to understand the challenges and the perspective of novice lecturers to develop a Community of Practice (CoP) for them. A CoP for the purpose of professional development and training will provide a community of peers who can work towards providing more advanced tools to the members, sharing important resources, and to work together as a way of building new skills and learning from one another (Wenger, 1998). From the data, there are some important factors as well as challenges that must be considered in ensuring that a sustainable and responsive CoP can be developed to work towards addressing some of the key difficulties novice lecturers face.

Mentorship is a crucial factor in the support of novice lecturers. Working with other more experienced research colleagues and also by extension senior in their field can provide novice lecturers with guidance and best practices on how to go about doing a research study, as well as on some of the areas they need to be cautious with or avoid in the process (Banja, 2017; Ramhurry & Luneta, n.d.). Therefore, young or early career researchers do not have to learn everything on their own from the basic concepts or go through what is best described as a sink or swim learning process before they become experienced researchers (Burchill & Anderson, 2019). In a CoP, therefore, mentorship can also be designed to include different formats. These include a structured one-on-one mentorship model to more group-based models of learning and mentorship where participants can learn from each other in groups. De Fazio (2015) stated that a program can be designed by implementing a mentoring framework, like the Learning through Teaching Program, which facilitates discourse on teaching and research, explicitly unpacks academic literacies, and fosters engagement among novice lecturers and experienced mentors to enhance skills and productivity. The general benefit of the above support is to ensure that novice lecturers become more confident about research activities and also better at the process.

Novice lecturers all have different kinds of training and previous experience in research. This means each lecturer will have a different set of needs or requirements on how to be a better researcher. Tailored training to equip novice lecturers with the necessary tools, as well as skills, will be important in developing a more responsive CoP. Training programs can focus on some of the essentials of research that are most important for the novice lecturer; research design, determining research gaps, and applying theoretical knowledge to more practical or real-world problems are some of the most important supports that can be offered through these workshops. Technical training in the use of more advanced tools and software for statistical analysis as well as using qualitative analysis software for research data is important. Training on how to do research writing, especially how to write in English can also be useful to novice lecturers to overcome some of their challenges in meeting the minimum requirements for publication (Jorgensen et al., 2015; Sarungu et al., 2024).

Novice lecturers are from different areas of education and research, a CoP model for these lecturers needs to make provisions for cross departmental research groups that can provide a more diverse range of knowledge and experience among members (Chinamasa & Manyike, 2017; Ocampo et al., 2022; Popova et al.,2022). The mode of interaction between the members of a CoP and the hybrid meeting model will also be important and this will also be important as a mechanism to reduce scheduling conflicts among members, especially members from different departments. A hybrid model of onsite and online interactions should ensure that the members of a CoP are more flexible in their level of participation and also that the meetings and interactions are more inclusive of as many members as possible.

The CoP model also should include provisions for access to resources that can also help novice lecturers to meet their research goals and enable them to complete different research-related tasks. Universities will therefore need to provide easy access to research tools and resources. Free or free and paid access to different statistical tools such as SPSS, NVivo as well as to AI based platforms to support different tasks such as data analysis for research and plagiarism detection as well as tools to support the writing of a research manuscript. Easy access to research grants, as well as the availability of grants that are easy to apply for and that are considered novice lecturers, will also be an

important way of reducing the barriers to research productivity among novice lecturers. This data from participants also suggests that a well integrated platform where all the information, support, tools, and resources are easily accessible will also be critical in ensuring that novice lecturers have an easier time engaging with the important support functions.

Time management is also a major factor in ensuring that one can complete tasks, and this is especially the case for novice lecturers who must juggle other professional responsibilities like teaching, administrative tasks, as well as personal commitments. Flexible teaching schedules or reduced workload and workload waivers or suspension of certain duties when key research work is to be conducted can all be ways that an institution can support the novice lecturer to have a more balanced and easier schedule and therefore have more time to work towards meeting their research objectives and goals.

A CoP also has some challenges from the feedback that must be considered when working to develop a more sustainable model for professional development among novice lecturers. As these novice lecturers come from different backgrounds, some are likely to have little to no previous research experience in interdisciplinary fields of research. This can be a big challenge as they work towards collaborating with more experienced researchers from different fields of research. Institutional support through the provision of onboarding programs and training in the basics of interdisciplinary research will be essential. Sustaining participation in CoP-related activities and engagements among members can also be a big challenge. For instance, the participants might not be as motivated to participate in some CoP activities if it does not contribute to their individual benefit. Fostering a stronger sense of community and more common purpose and goal can be an important way of countering this. Institutionalizing a system of rewards that will appreciate and acknowledge participation and contribution as well as opportunities for members to publicize their achievements and research engagement can also be a way of motivating participation in CoP engagements. Participation in CoP engagements as well as the benefits of participation must also be aligned with the individual career development and progression goals.

6. Conclusions

The factors and challenges identified in this analysis can be addressed through the framework of a Community of Practice (CoP) designed to support novice lecturers in their research activities. With appropriate institutional support and strategic interventions, universities can foster sustainable models of professional development and capacity building. Such initiatives not only enhance the individual growth of novice lecturers within a supportive CoP but also contribute more broadly to strengthening the academic and research community as a whole.

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Authors contributions

Assoc. Prof. Kanyarat Cojorn and Assist. Prof. Kanyarat Sonsupap were responsible for study design and writing the manuscript Assist. Prof. Kanyarat Sonsupap was responsible for data collection. Assoc. Prof. Kanyarat Cojorn was responsible for data analysis. Assoc. Prof. Chaweewan Seesom drafted the manuscript and revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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