



## Qualitative

# An Investigation into the Sociological Factors Influencing the Formation of Scientific Stagnation among Faculty Members of Universities in Mazandaran Province

**Majedeh Gholipour**

Department of Social Sciences, Babol Branch, Islamic Azad University, Babol, Iran.

**Receive:**

28 January 2023

**Revise:**

18 March 2023

**Accept:**

06 May 2023

**Keywords:**

Sociological factors, academic stagnation, career plateauing, university faculty members, Mazandaran Province

**Abstract**

The present study aims to examine the sociological factors influencing the formation of academic stagnation among faculty members of universities in Mazandaran Province. In terms of design, this research is qualitative and based on the grounded theory approach. The study population consisted of 21 faculty members from universities in Mazandaran Province, who were selected through purposive sampling using the data saturation technique. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Data analysis was conducted using the grounded theory method.

Following data analysis and coding across three stages—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding—the findings were categorized into 100 concepts, 12 subcategories, 6 core categories, and one central category titled “The Structure–Agency Context of Occupational Plateauing.”

Based on the central category, which represents the condition of plateauing among faculty members in universities of Mazandaran Province, it can be concluded that plateauing is a condition shaped by both individual and personal characteristics of faculty members (such as personal experience, personality traits, type of self-concept, and individual habits) and organizational characteristics of their workplace (including the dominant discourse within the university and the prevalence of self-centered attitudes), as well as, to some extent, the broader external environment surrounding the academic sphere. This condition manifests and intensifies within these contexts, assuming a particular form (structural or content-related).

**Please cite this article as (APA):** Gholipour, M. (2023). An Investigation into the Sociological Factors Influencing the Formation of Scientific Stagnation among Faculty Members of Universities in Mazandaran Province. *Management and Educational Perspective*, 5(1), 187-211.

<b>Publisher:</b> Iranian Business Management Association	<a href="https://doi.org/10.22034/jmep.2026.385000.1167">https://doi.org/10.22034/jmep.2026.385000.1167</a>	
<b>Corresponding Author:</b> Majedeh Gholipour		
<b>Email:</b> majedeh.gholipour@iau.ac.ir	<b>Creative Commons:</b> CC BY 4.0	

## Extended abstract

### Introduction

The university, as a subsystem of the higher education system, is an institution with specific missions and functions defined within the broader responsibilities of higher education. Although the history of university development in Iran shows that the first model (teaching-oriented) emerged in the late nineteenth century, the second generation (research-oriented) formed in the early twentieth century with an emphasis on knowledge production, and the third generation appeared in the second half of the century after World War II, adding entrepreneurship and the application of knowledge to its missions—hence referred to as the entrepreneurial university (Hakak et al., 2018). This trajectory indicates that the university has been, and still remains, a reference institution, retaining its role as the “voice of society” (Khaniiki, 2017).

Such a transformation has resulted in the perception of the university as a mass-production factory of outputs—outputs that have acquired an identity independent of their producers, while the producers themselves have become alienated from the scientific products they create. Fazeli states: “Among faculty members, there is nearly no critical reflective perspective regarding the role of professors and the extent of their influence on the slow pace of scientific development and the fulfillment of the university’s missions. Today, numerous written discourses are published, yet authentic and innovative intellectual debate platforms are rarely observed” (Fazeli, 2014).

From a structural perspective, Bardwick (2005) distinguishes between two main types of career plateauing—structural and content plateauing—each occurring under specific conditions:

- **Structural plateauing:** refers to the cessation of opportunities for upward mobility within the organizational hierarchy. This trend intensifies when organizations adopt horizontal structuring, which increases structural plateauing.
- **Content plateauing:** occurs when individuals experience stagnation due to the nature of their job content. Low-variety, monotonous, and repetitive tasks fall into this category because employees know exactly what is expected of them each day and have nothing new to learn (Vahidi, 2014).

According to Gaines and Jermier, limited opportunities for promotion and rigid rules and regulations give individuals the impression that they are trapped in an unfair system, leading to negative perceptions about their job (Dehghani et al., 2015). Some scholars believe that personal characteristics, such as self-development, can mitigate or eliminate the harmful effects of such structural conditions. Based on the study by Rastegar et al. (2017), self-development influences cognitive and metacognitive knowledge and skills, which may dilute or neutralize the factors that create plateauing conditions. Additionally, psychological capital can reduce negative emotions among teachers.

The present study seeks to answer the following question: **What are the sociological factors influencing the formation of academic stagnation among faculty members of universities in Mazandaran Province?**

### Theoretical Framework

#### Career Plateauing

Career plateauing is defined as a point in one’s job or profession where the likelihood of further hierarchical promotion becomes very low. Due to changes in organizational environments, one of the most critical issues related to career paths in the coming decade is career plateauing (Chou et al., 2022).

Darling and Cunningham (2023) examined the perceived causes of career plateauing in public service delivery. Their findings revealed that a general picture of the factors contributing to



plateauing can be identified in ten themes, grouped into three categories: perceived favoritism and discrimination within the organization (two themes); lack of experience, education, skills, and training (four themes); and competitive skills (four themes).

Changya et al. (2022) conducted a meta-analytic study on career plateauing. Their research examined the correlation between two types of plateauing:

1. Hierarchical plateauing
2. Job content plateauing

According to their results, positive relationships were found between plateauing and several antecedent variables, including job adaptability, person–environment fit, psychological capital, and workplace support. Career plateauing was positively associated with counterproductive work behavior, job insecurity, psychological distress, rationality, and turnover intention. However, it was negatively associated with job satisfaction, extra-role performance, in-role performance, job involvement, job satisfaction, mentoring support, organizational commitment, and work commitment. Career plateauing also showed associations with various demographic and contextual variables, including age, gender, work experience, race, and role ambiguity.

### **Research Methodology**

This study was conducted qualitatively using the grounded theory method. The research population consisted of 21 faculty members from universities in Mazandaran Province, selected through purposive sampling using the data saturation technique. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews.

### **Research Findings**

Data analysis was performed using grounded theory. After analyzing and coding the data across the three stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, the findings were categorized into 100 concepts, 12 subcategories, 6 core categories, and one central category titled “The Structure–Agency Context of Occupational Plateauing.”

Based on this central category, which reflects the plateauing condition of faculty members in universities in Mazandaran Province, it can be inferred that plateauing is a condition shaped by both individual and personal characteristics of faculty members (such as personal experience, personality traits, self-concept, and individual habits) and the organizational characteristics of their workplace (including the dominant discourse within the university and the prevalence of self-centered attitudes), as well as, to some extent, the external environment surrounding the academic sphere. This condition manifests and intensifies within these contexts, taking on a specific form—either structural or content-related.

### **Research Methodology**

This study was conducted qualitatively using the grounded theory method. The research population consisted of 21 faculty members from universities in Mazandaran Province, selected through purposive sampling using the data saturation technique. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews.

### **Research Findings**

Data analysis was performed using grounded theory. After analyzing and coding the data across the three stages of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, the findings were categorized into 100 concepts, 12 subcategories, 6 core categories, and one central category titled “The Structure–Agency Context of Occupational Plateauing.”

Based on this central category, which reflects the plateauing condition of faculty members in universities in Mazandaran Province, it can be inferred that plateauing is a condition shaped by both individual and personal characteristics of faculty members (such as personal experience, personality traits, self-concept, and individual habits) and the organizational characteristics of their workplace (including the dominant discourse within the university and



the prevalence of self-centered attitudes), as well as, to some extent, the external environment surrounding the academic sphere. This condition manifests and intensifies within these contexts, taking on a specific form—either structural or content-related.