

# Challenges Faced by Academicians in Research and Publications in Higher Learning Institutions: A Case Study of Kampala International University in Tanzania

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**Abstract:** The study was conducted at Kampala International University in Tanzania (KIUT) to establish challenges facing academic staff in doing research and publishing their outputs in scholarly journals. The study had a sample of 123 staffs that were selected through purposive sampling technique. The sample included senior and junior academic staffs. Data were collected through in-depth interview and documentary review and analysed using descriptive and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that few academic staffs were publishing despite the existing of university local Journal of Social Sciences and Business Studies. The staffs were faced with a number of challenges such as low motivation, lack of research funds, and incentives, teaching load and university various responsibilities. In addition to that, junior staffs lack mentorship, awareness of accredited journals to publish and knowledge on how to publish papers. Firstly, the study recommends the staff to apply for research funds and not to depend only to the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies and Research to seek funds for them. Secondly, the university should establish a mechanism to support its staffs rather than depending on research funds from funders that are hard to get. Thirdly, the fact that seminars and workshops are conducted at the university; academic staffs are required to attend in order to gain knowledge and skills on how to publish their research.

**Key Words:** Academic publications, research, higher learning institutions, growth and development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Scientific research productivity has been linked to the intellectual wealth and economic progress of countries (Jaffe et al, 2020). Research output can be reflected in the results of scientific studies, which are disseminated through academic publications. The most commonly used indicator to measure research productivity is the publication of articles in indexed databases, which is a proof of excellence for universities (Albers, 2015).

The study of research output started with Lotka (1926) who proposed the inverse-square law with regard to unequal distribution of research productivity. In the last decades, research productivity has been a topic of interest for several scholars, who have focused on the analysis and distribution of the number of publications, and the factors that directly or indirectly influence the productivity. However, the results

about the specific factors affecting the research output are still contradictory. Additionally, previous literature was mainly focused in developed contexts or emerging economies such as those of South Korea and China (Heng et al., 2020).

The world's research output is mainly generated by developed countries: 47% of researchers in the world come from the European Union and the United States of America, while 3.6% of them are from Latin America (UNESCO, 2015). In recent years, Latin American universities have given more importance to research output. According to the Scimago Journal database, the South American countries with the highest growth in the number of scientific article publications (2015–2016) are Ecuador (183%), Perú (103%), and Colombia (53%). In 2012, Ecuador enacted a new Higher Education Law, through which it established public policy tools focused on increasing scientific productivity, visibility, and the volume of global contribution. Likewise, the Ecuadorian government created incentives, scientific and technology transfer programs, and funding to increase research output (Castillo & Powell, 2020). In 2014, Peru approved the University Law to regulate the foundation, operation, and supervision of universities. This reform has strengthened research production in Peruvian universities. Additionally, since 2001, regulations have been promoted in Colombia to introduce a model of wage incentive based on research productivity. In fact, research output has received greater importance in the region because there have been dramatic changes in the higher education systems (Van Hoof et al., 2013)

### *Background*

In many cases universities are the main drivers of research and also spearhead the dissemination of the findings of such research (Kapp et al., 2011). Crammer (2013) for example asserts that productivity of a university can be measured by research and publication. Shumba (2010) states, similarly that the quality of a university is measured by its research output. Miller et al. (2011) equally state that journal publication is an important indicator of research productivity for academics and academic institutions. Apart from improving university ranking, research publications are also known to make

important contributions to the growth and development of industries and formulation of government policies, thus enhancing national and global development (Esau et al. 2020). For instance, Geiger (2015) established that research helps produce wealth and public support that is needed for sustainable development.

Although research and publications have been known to improve university ranking and foster development, studies have however, shown that many universities in Africa do not undertake research and often times struggle to publish in reputable high impact journals (Kumwenda, 2015). Tierney, (2012) for example argued that higher education institutions in Africa have weak research and innovation capacities due to various challenges that they encounter. He pointed out that universities in Africa do not possess adequate research capabilities, infrastructure and facilities, funding needed to make them active beneficiaries of global knowledge and/or to generate knowledge, innovation and problem solving. He adds that these institutions face critical shortage of staff to adapt and generate knowledge. Another notable and often neglected challenge to publishing scholarly articles is the English language which is mostly the second language for most if not all African countries (Esau et al. 2020).

In Tanzania, UNESCO data reports that one third of researchers have doctoral qualifications and the consultations process revealed that research training and capacity strengthening activities are limited by lack of funding. Tanzania has seen a rapid increase in the number of universities but most of them perform little research (UKaid, 2019).

#### *Kampala International University in Tanzania*

Kampala University in Tanzania (KIUT) is a private university established on core principles to provide high quality educational programmes that equip graduate students with universal skills to develop their potential and explore the heights nationally, regionally, and globally. KIUT serves the community through research, discovery and dissemination of knowledge, community outreach, and teaching and publication among others. The University recognizes that publications of research work and writing of books done by academic staff is a fulfillment of their official duties stipulated within their contracts but this is not done as expected.

Research and publications at KIUT are very low despite the fact that there is high number of qualified academic staff with ability to do research and publish their findings. This can be seen through the list of publication and research activities going on. Various measures to encourage research and publications at KIUT are suggested by the Council including co-authorship, to write one research proposal each year and academicians who have not published from Master or PhD dissertations/theses to write papers from their dissertations/theses. Additionally, KIUT Management meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2019 decided to make effort to change the status quo of not publishing by forming a

Committee of five members to work on possible ways of changing the research culture at KIUT. Furthermore, each academic staff is required to publish one paper annually but this has not bore fruits as stipulated in Human Resource Manual. The fact that various measures were taken to address the problem without success, and then the study investigated factors that contributed to low research and publications at KIUT. The study was guided by three questions:

1. What are the factors that contribute to low research and publication at KIUT?
2. What kind of training is needed for the academic staff?
3. What measures could be taken to increase research and publication at KIUT?

## II. RELATED LITERATURE

Research is a constructive development pedagogy in which teachers model the process of constructing knowledge in their disciplines, teach that process to students and give students opportunities to practice and become proficient at it. However, the twin principal research mandate of universities and public-funded organizations are to extend commercial or industrial application of their research outputs and advancing the frontiers of knowledge and generating quality human resources (Magolda, 2010). In addition to that, Chipeta and Nyambe (2012) noted that universities role has dramatically changed from what was in the late 19th and 20th centuries and now these institutions are portraying themselves as guardians of public knowledge, as engines of up-to-date economy and as expanders of frontiers of knowledge in the scientific and technological domains. Universities are now conveying their missions in line with these roles that faculty's involvement in research activities and publishing can be taken as index of institutional status (Magolda, 2010).

The first studies that analyzed research output (Cole & Cole, 1967; Lotka, 1926), showed differences in the intellectual production of professors. For instance, Sá et al. (2020) studied productivity among elite scientists and found that men outperform women in the number of publications, and receive substantially more citations. Several studies aim to explain the lower intellectual production of women throughout their careers caused by differences in family responsibilities, different patterns of time use, unequal resource allocation, different patterns in academic collaboration, and gender bias in peer-review (Sá et al., 2020). However, some studies contradict these results since they found that gender has no significant effect on research productivity indicators and women have production rates similar to their male peers (Khalil & Khalil, 2019).

Some studies claim that institutional status and output contribute to benchmarking of any institution's research proliferation (Masaiti and Mwale, 2017). An increase in research publication has become a guarantee for prestige and an important factor for institutional ranking (Tierney, 2012). For instance, Kumwenda (2015) conducted a qualitative

exploratory study on challenges facing young African scientists in their research careers. Results indicated that after developing interest to start a career in research, they needed a lot of support to move forward such as mentorship from senior researchers. Lecturers indicated that most potential mentors were too busy with their work and had little time for junior researchers.

The literature shows that the environment in which the researcher performs affects the levels of research output. Salinas-Ávila et al. (2020) mention the importance of institutional factors in developing a research culture aimed at promoting greater interaction and transfer of knowledge to society. Institutional factors include the size of academic departments, the faculty time dedicated to research and teaching, resource allocation, research networks, recognition, and leadership in research groups. In the same way, the skills they develop to properly administer and manage their time are essential to achieve good levels of productivity (Wills et al., 2011).

In terms of academic qualification, Kozhakhmet et al. (2020) found that research-related formation and development are positively associated with research productivity. Several studies found that the academic rank is a significant predictor of research productivity because senior faculty members have higher research productivity than their junior counterparts (Hedjazi and Behravan, 2011; Khahil & Khahil, 2019). According to Bland et al. (2005), this occurs because research output is one of the main criteria for professors to be promoted. Previous studies consider that the work habits that researchers grow from the beginning of their careers influence their future research productivity (Bland et al., 2005). In the same way, the skills they develop to properly administer and manage their time are essential to achieve good levels of productivity (Wills et al., 2011).

### Publication

Publication is a process of placing the results of one's research into the literature. Publications make scientific information publically available, and allow the rest of the academic audience to evaluate the quality of the research and they have their own identity, place and necessity (Kaur, 2013). Publication is very important in all Higher Learning Institutions. It is one of the factors that enable academicians to move from one level to another (promotion). It is a must to all academicians to do research and publish papers that relate to their professions. Some of the universities consider publications as one criterion for promotion and renewing academicians' contracts when they expire but this has not worked as expected particularly at Kampala University. For example, Esau et al. (2020) asserts that research production is not only used as a criterion for lecturer's promotion but also lifts university's reputation and ranking. This boosted status may cause corresponding increases in student enrolment and may justify the claim for greater incentives and, in some countries, grants from government and donor agencies while the opposite may result in perishing of an institution.

### Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is the total, logical and associations of anything and everything that forms the underlying thinking structures, plans, practices and implementation of the entire research project. So, the conceptual framework comprises author's thoughts on identification of the research topic, the problem to be investigated, the questionnaires to be asked, the literature to be reviewed, the theories to be applied, the methodology, the methods, procedures and instruments, the data analysis and interpretation of the findings, recommendations and conclusions (Ravitch and Riggan, 2017).

Conceptual framework in this study adopted McGaghie et al. (2001) description that framework contributes to a research report in at least two ways because it (1) identifies research variables, and (2) clarifies relationships among the variables. Linked to the problem statement, the conceptual framework "sets the stage" for presentation of the specific research question that drives the investigation being reported.

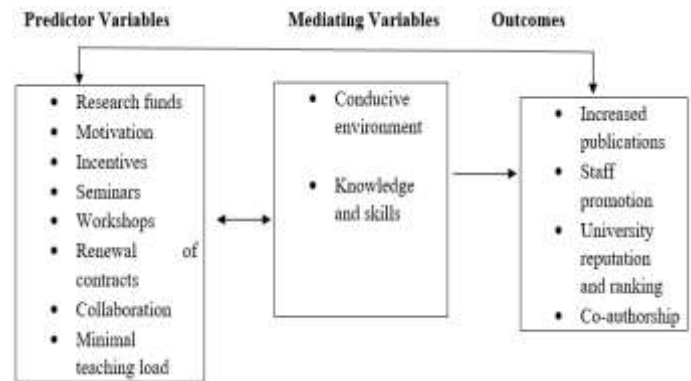


Figure 1: A Model explaining research and publications in a higher learning institution

The conceptual framework model in this study consists of three items: predictor variables, mediating variables and outcomes. In the model, predictor variables and mediating variables influence outcomes. That meant that if the predictor variables and mediating variables were available and favourable then, there would be an increase in publications, staff promotion, university reputation and ranking and co-authorship. It is anticipated that if research funds were available, staff were given incentives and had motivation to do research, seminars and workshops were conducted, contracts were renewed, collaboration with other universities exist, and staff had minimal teaching load they would contribute to outcomes. Furthermore, it was expected that if there was conducive environment and staff had knowledge and skills in research and publication they would be motivated to conduct research and publish papers. It was also anticipated that if predictor variables and mediating variables were missing then, outcomes would suffer.



### III. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at Kampala International University in Tanzania. KIUT was selected for the study because it is one of the recent established private universities that have low research and publications. This study applied qualitative approach. Qualitative approach was employed in the study because it provides a much more flexible approach and makes sense of reality. Kothari (2004) maintains that qualitative approach puts emphasis on the qualities, process, and meaning that cannot be experimentally examined. Descriptive research design was adopted because it accurately and systematically describes situation or phenomenon. The study targeted 123 senior and junior academic staff from four Faculties (Education and Legal Studies, Medicine, Allied Sciences and Computing, Management, and Social Sciences). Participants were selected through purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and documentary review and coded based on themes and presented according to the research questions. Thematic analysis was used in qualitative data. Thematic analysis is the analysis that looks across all data to identify common issues that recur, and identify the main themes that summarize all collected views from the study (Bricki and Green, 2007). This analysis allowed the researcher to put together meanings from statements of the informants within their particular perspective as presented by Joffe and Yardley (2004). One advantage of thematic analysis is that it provides more outcomes when analyzing interviews. This is because it is a flexible tool (Mohamed & Rajab, 2016).

### IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined challenges faced by academicians in research and publications at KIUT. Findings from the study are presented according to thematic areas.

#### *Factors that contribute to low research and publications at KIUT*

Results from the interview showed that 71(87%) participants out of 123 had a problem of balancing time between teaching, research and family. It was found out that some of the lecturers had more than three courses to teach at different levels. For example, one staff had seven courses to teach at undergraduate and postgraduate. Firstly, to have more than three courses to teach at the university level is not an easy task and it will not lead to effective teaching. Secondly, the lecturer is required to prepare assignments, setting exams and marking scripts that also take much of his time when at the campus. Thirdly, the lecturer had to perform other responsibilities such as supervising undergraduate and postgraduate students, supervising field practical attachments and chairing Faculty meetings. He said, "Lack of enough time due to administrative responsibilities at KIUT affect my ability to do research and publish." Having busy academicians staff like this one at the university; one cannot expect them to have time to do research and publish as expected.

Furthermore, findings from assistant lecturers indicated that they lack knowledge on how to convert their dissertations into paper articles. This problem was found in the Faculty of Education and Legal Studies whereby 15(71%) of lecturers out 21 faced the problem followed by the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences whereby 8 (57%) of 14 staff experienced the same problem. It is true that writing dissertation is different from writing an academic paper. Therefore one must have knowledge and skills on how to convert dissertation into a scholarly paper article since publishers need quality researched works.

In another development, two participants from the study said that local journals were not operating and international journals were expensive and competitive. This claim gives a benefit of doubt because these two staffs are the ones who said earlier that they did not have time to do research and publish because of various reasons. Now they are adding another problem. It is of the researcher's opinion that these two staffs were just listing the problems but they did not do any research. It looks like they were defending themselves on why they were not able to publish. In reality, to have such kind of staffs who are not committed would not enable KIUT to grow in terms of research and publications.

*Research fund was another factor that hindered research and publication at KIUT. In all Faculties this was mentioned as a serious problem. Here is what one of the participants from the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences said:*

"To me I find it difficult to do research because the university does not offer any support in this area. I have been here for more than five years but never seen anyone given research funds by the university. I know that institutions are required to offer or support their staffs in doing research for the benefit of the university."

*Another participant from the Faculty of Medicine added:*

"It is difficult for me to use my own money in research because the salary I get does not even satisfy my family needs. How can I do research and publish while both of them need money which I do not have?"

*Another participant from the Faculty of Education and Legal Studies said:*

"I know research and publication are requirements used in academic staffs' promotion but I don't think I will qualify in this because I do not have any single publication since I joined KIUT. The problem is money to do research."

Research and publication need funding. Results from the participants showed that lack of research fund was a serious challenge. None of them was given research fund by the university. That meant the few staff who published used their own resources. In this way one cannot expect the university to increase productivity without research fund. The finding is almost similar to those of Tierney (2012) that Africa does not

possess adequate research fund and UKaid (2019) that Tanzania has seen a rapid increase in the number of universities but most of them perform little research because they lack funding. The conceptual framework in this study shows clearly that availability of research funds is the solution for the university to increase productivity in publication as well as university reputation and ranking.

Low motivation was among the contributing factors to low publications at KIUT. Results indicated that some of the staffs were not motivated to do research. Here is what some of the participants said:

*Participant 1:*

“I know there are some universities that motivate their staff in doing research by giving them some money after publishing papers. This does not exist here. To me this should be in place because it will encourage us to do research and publish.”

*Participant 2:*

“I wrote a paper and submitted it to the editor. The paper was sent for review but the comments given did not motivate me to continue doing publishing. It was like I wasted my time and energy doing something that was not important or has no value. I was very disappointed.”

*Participant 3:*

“I published when I was at another university before I joined KIUT because they had research funds. Here research funds are not available. What would motivate me to do research in a situation like this?”

*Participant 4:*

“No incentives here. Incentives raise motivation. If it was there, it would push me to publish. For example, I published one paper but no one recognizes me. You may struggle by using your own money to publish but no recognition.”

From the findings one can observe that low motivation contributed to low publications at the institution. Most of the academic staff expected to get support from KIUT but the support was not available. They also expected to get incentives but they were not available. For example, data from documentary review showed that the idea of incentives was debated in the management committee but while some members thought that it would add value in changing research culture of the institution others feared that cash incentives might lead to poor quality of research. The findings contradict to those of Castillo and Powell (2020) that incentives and funding increase research. For instance, Colombia introduced a model of wage of incentives based on research to increase productivity (Van Hoof et. al. 2013). The fact that incentives increase productivity, KIUT should establish a model of motivating its staff like other universities in the world. This is

in line with predictor and mediating variables in the conceptual framework.

Lack of mentorship from senior members to young academicians was another challenge. Young academicians claimed to have no support from their seniors. Results from the study concur with those of Kumwenda (2015) that most potential mentors were too busy with their own work and had little time for junior researchers. The fact that mentoring is a relationship between two people with the goal of professional and personal development it was difficult for the study to justify the mentioned challenge. However, the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) 2019 guidelines stipulate that ‘every university shall consider Associate Professors and Professors as leaders and hence they shall provide leadership in mentoring junior staff in respect teaching, research and other academic as well as leadership tasks’.

*What kind of training is needed for the academic staff?*

Results from the study showed that 52 (63.96%) of the staff out of 123 studied needed academic writing skill. This is a sign that some of the staff was not competent enough in writing. It should be known that academic writing skill is a tool for academicians to communicate their research findings as well as writing books, journal articles, reports, and chapters in edited collections. It is obvious that one cannot write quality scholarly works without mastering writing skill. The fact that this was mentioned in the study and the institution has academic staff of different levels; therefore, there is a need to include writing skills in seminars and workshops at KIUT.

Research methodology section was another area mentioned in the study. It was found out that the staff needed training on how to distinguish research design and research approaches. They also wanted to be trained in data analysis particularly on how to use software. This can be done by senior staff members through workshops and seminars. It is a matter of planning. Additionally, academicians are advised to build a habit of reading books because they have adequate information about the topics raised in the study rather than depending on seminars and workshops that they did not attend when such opportunities were organized. When this is minimized, the low culture of publishing will slowly improve at KIUT.

Furthermore, findings indicated that academic staff wanted KIUT to establish seminar presentations for staff and students. However, data from documentary review showed that the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies and Research conducted seminars and workshops to academic staff and students. Results showed that twenty six out of thirty seven staff registered attended the first seminar. The seminar was about converting dissertations into journal articles but since then none of the participants have published any papers in the KIUT Journal of Social Sciences and Business Studies. In the second seminar none of the staff or students attended despite the fact that they had registered earlier. In the third seminar

only thirty participants attended while KIUT has more than three hundred academic staff. That meant seminars and workshops are organized but most of the staff and students do not attend as expected. It was strange to learn from the participants that they wanted the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies and Research to organize seminars and workshops as if they did not exist. In addition to that, there was training for staff and students on how to use TURNITIN plagiarism checker software. Only 14 people attended. This can be interpreted as there is a culture of KIUT staff and students not to attend seminars and workshops as expected which are very important and useful to them.

#### *Measures to increase research and publications at KIUT*

One of the measures to increase publications is through co-authoring. Two or three staffs can agree and plan on what they want to research on and publish together. By so doing they will be able to share the workload and speed up the writing process. This will provide an opportunity for junior academic staff to gain knowledge and writing skill as well as publishing quality papers. In a long run, it will improve research and publication at KIUT.

On the aspect of research funds, KIUT can establish its internal source of funding for research and publication like other private universities in Tanzania. This can be done by levying certain amount from each student admitted every year. This fee shall be payable every academic year by all students, irrespective of the level and year of study. This will enable KIUT to have its own source of research fund rather than depending on funders.

There is a need for the staff to change their mind set that the Director Postgraduate Studies and Research is the only person to seek for research funds. It should be noted that publications facilitate the enhancement of individual researchers with new skills and knowledge, financial benefits and reputations as well as recognition of the university; therefore, they should also find ways to get support from various sources.

Seeking collaboration with other universities is another measure to increase research and publications. This can be done by establishing links with other universities in the selected areas such teaching, research and exchanging of staff. Additionally, TCU stipulates that postgraduate students must publish papers from their dissertations before they graduate at the universities. If this is managed accordingly theses and dissertations will increase publication at KIUT.

Staff promotion is another measure that could motivate staff members to work hard knowing that they will be promoted if they publish a certain number of papers. In other words, since each academic rank is attached to certain number of units accumulated by publications then staff member is promoted if he/she has enough units. Additionally, accelerated promotions should be introduced from those who are doing well in terms of publications by renewing their contracts.

## V. CONCLUSION

Generally, the study found that there were various factors that contributed to low research and publication at KIUT such as lack of research funds, knowledge and skills in writing papers for publication, low motivation, heavy teaching load, lack of mentorship and incentives, and other institutional responsibilities. It should be noted that research is mandatory to all universities as well as publishing. Therefore, research and publications need funding in order to support staff to do research and publish. In addition to that, most of the academic staffs at KIUT are junior and their highest qualifications are Master Degree. This implies that they will need support in order to be involved in research activities and publishing.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends KIUT to establish source of funding research and publication like other private universities in Tanzania as well as creating conducive environment for the academic staffs to do research and publish their research outcomes. Additionally, there should be a Committee that is responsible for research funds and not to be considered as a one university officer's responsibility.

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