Building Educational Research Capacity: Challenges and Opportunities from the Perspectives of Faculty Staff of Selected Private Universities in Uganda

ROSEMARY NAKIJOBA,[1] AWOBAMISE AYODEJI O.[2]
[1]*Muteesa 1 Royal University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Kampala, Uganda*
[2].*Kampala International University, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kampala, Uganda*
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Abstract

This article argues that educational research in Uganda is facing severe glitches, such as low research capacity. Most private universities seem to be more focused on their day-to-day survival than identifying their research-specific needs and engaging in quality research activities. Issues of research capacity-building remain a major concern amid a lack of resources and institutional environments in which academics work. Capacity-building and research engagements would help to strengthen strategic planning and influencing policy. Hence, this study fills this gap. Specifically, it explores the perceptions and experiences of academic staff regarding research capacity-building. The study identifies the challenges that hamper educational research and capacity-building opportunities associated with the development of research capacities as perceived by a sample of staff members in the identified institutions. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research design was adopted using focus group interviews to collect data from a sample of staff. In total, 12 focus group discussions were conducted with between 8–10 persons per group. Rank ordering of responses on specific issues was done during data analysis. The findings showed that the major factors responsible for low research output include capacity-building gaps, lack of financial resources, difficulty in identifying specific calls for abstracts and manuscripts, work overload for faculty staff, limited research writing skills, and bad experiences during previous research engagements, as presented and discussed below. Based on the findings, we make the following recommendations. First, the government should earmark a significant amount in the national budget for research and innovation that institutions in Uganda can easily access, including private academic institutions. Second, institutions should continuously engage their staff regarding research and improve their research capacity through training, workshops and symposiums.

Keywords: *Educational research; Higher education; Private universities; Uganda*

Introduction

In recent years, the academic community has been debating the relevance and quality of research at higher education level and the need for tertiary institutions and researchers to develop a better knowledge base that can impact educational policies and practice significantly (Barrett et al., 2011; Cain & Allan, 2017; Gogolin, 2016). Researchers often debate what the goal of research is and whether or not it has any real-life implications. The fact of the matter is that the majority of studies carried out by researchers all over the world remain largely unseen and unread (Cain & Allan, 2017). This is even worse for researchers from Third-World countries who are competing to publish in top Western journals, but whose papers are more Afro-centric and localized, thereby making them not very sought after in the Western world. Therefore, the majority of papers, although published in these big, high-impact journals, still get very little or no readership or citation (Hallinger, 2020). Furthermore, educational research in the Global South is facing serious issues, such as limited research capacity and inconsistencies between research and educational policies, among others (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). This is particularly true in Uganda and the general East African region where the brain drain (a situation where highly qualified professionals migrate to the Global North in search of better opportunities) has all but decimated the academic sector. Also, lack of research funding from both the government and the corporate world negatively impacts research in Uganda and other East African countries. What this has translated into is that owing to a lack of proper funding and motivation for research, the quality of research output in Uganda has been questionable for a while (Atwebembeire et al. 2018).

While the issues related to research-building and -capacity have been studied in other contexts and other regions (Barrett et al., 2011; Crossley, 2001; Crossley & Holmes, 2001; Fowler et al., 2009; Harrison & Seddon, 2013; Leitch, 2009; Rees et al., 2007, Hammad & Al-Ani, 2021), very little have been done in the context of Uganda and with particular emphasis on private universities. Nanfosso (2011), in his work on capacity-building in Africa, argues that there is a need for rigorous and vigorous action aimed at improving the research capacity of quantitative and qualitative researchers on the continent and that there is a dearth of literature on the subject matter from a Sub-Saharan African perspective. A deep search on the most prominent indexing sites like the web of science, Scopus, ProQuest and so on, reveals that very little research has been done, hence the urgent need for more scientific studies that discuss how the research capacity in African higher institutions can be developed and improved. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by identifying the challenges and opportunities regarding the development of research capacities as perceived and explained by select faculty members in four of the top private universities in Uganda: Ndejje University, Muteesa I Royal University, Kampala University, and Kampala International University.

Problems of Doing Research in Africa

Doing research in developing nations can be problematic because of the lack of relevant information and the reliability of studies that have already been published (Kinyondo & Pelizzo, 2018; Scott, Miller, & Lloyd, 2006). Another factor that has made the problem of capacity-building more apparent is the lack of quality data (Jerven, 2013). According to Mitchell (2000), validity checks of several studies in the area of medical sciences emerging from the African continent have shown a large number of discrepancies, an indication that the validity and reliability of a lot of studies in the Global South cannot be trusted. There are a lot of reasons why carrying out surveys or ethnographic studies may generate inconsistent data, one of which is the problem of sampling in developing countries

(Zarkovich, 2000). Zarkhovich explains that in a lot of cases, surveys are not randomly distributed but are rather distributed according to the social and cultural accessibility of the population being studied. Also, owing to the very dynamic population of African countries, meanings can drastically change from one location to another, implying that a question in a questionnaire might mean one thing in a particular location and something completely different in a different location but in the same country or study population (Mitchell, 2000). Some scholars have explained that the reason why it appears that data is not consistent across different studies is that data os not coded the same way (Smith, Langlois, & Rockett, 1995).

These problems can affect the quality of data collection by scientists in all fields of endeavour (Chen & Ravallion, 2008). Given the many things that could go wrong when carrying out research, some scholars have identified different solutions that can help to reduce or eliminate the problems. For instance, Mphatswe et al. (2012) have recommended that collaboration between sectors, disciplines and regions should be encouraged to ensure that scholars from less developed and less research-inclined climes are supported, which should improve the quality of research conducted in such regions. Islam and Kiyondo (2014), in their study, noted that in Tanzania, examining the elasticity of employment over a period of time can be problematic because the "data required for estimating employment elasticity and examining its change over time are rather limited… the employment figures available from Integrated Labour Force Survey (ILFS) of different years are not comparable". Also, the two surveys used have "different age cut-offs… while the 2001 survey used ten years and over as the age for being counted in the labour force, the 2006 survey used 15 years as the lower age limits."

Apart from the issue of coding (where data coding is not consistent across studies), quantitative data can also be problematic even when coding is consistent because data in a lot of African countries is not valid and reliable. The absence of good data has been well documented by Jerven (2013, 2015). Furthermore, lack of support from the government, even for government-owned statistical offices like the Ugandan Bureau of Statistics in Uganda, makes the reliability of data collected from these sources highly questionable. However, data collected from well-funded institutions can produce very reliable and valid data.

Building Research Capacity

Huenneke et al. (2017), in their study on strategies for improving the research capacity of university lecturers, explain that tertiary institutions all over the world are under a lot of pressure to meet a standard created by global ranking demands and globalisation. To try to fit in and be considered among the 'best' institutions in the world, universities around the world are putting a lot of pressure on faculties to develop groundbreaking research and publish in only the best journals in the world. To survive in this environment of cutthroat competition, institutions around the world have come to place a lot of emphasis on developing the capacity for research (Griffioen, 2018). Institutions have adopted different approaches to developing research capacities within their institutions, but all these approaches often involve the development of the right infrastructure to foster collaboration and research, recruitment of the best brains from all over the world to help shore up their research capacity, motivating staff by proving institutional grants and also tying promotions and increased remuneration to research output (Nguyen, 2016). Huenneke et al. (2017) further explain that institutions around the world are now investing in programmes that foster collaborations, affiliations and partnerships, which invariably leads to more research output.

In the academic sector, capacity-building has often been described and promoted as a means to address the shortcomings in research in higher education and to help researchers and faculties produce high-quality, valid knowledge that addressed particular needs in society and solves real-world problems (Barrett et al., 2011; Leitch, 2009). The need for capacity-building in Africa is even more urgent, considering the growing criticism of the quality and quantity of research output on the continent. For instance, Kinyondo and Pelizzo (2018) explain that one of the major problems of conducting research in Africa is that data is very poor, does not exist or is lacking in terms of reliability and validity. They explain that there is a lack of research culture on the continent and that this has translated into very poor research outcomes on the continent. Similarly, Michell et al. (2020) argue that the research output on the continent is chronically lacking due to a lack of research capacity, but also point out that studies in Africa fail to address local needs because they all aim to be Northern-centric, implying that a lot of researchers in Africa focus on producing studies that will appeal to the Global North while ignoring the issues that they are grappling with on the continent. The reason for this is not farfetched. Since the majority of the funding for research comes from the Global North, researchers are increasingly going to focus on studies and issues that will attract the most funding. So, based on the criticisms calling out the low-quality research output and the amount of research output on the continent, there is a need for a review of the challenges being faced by academics in the continent and sub-region when it comes to developing high-quality research.

A lot has been said about improving the research capacity in universities and among researchers, but there is no agreement or consensus on exactly what is meant by research capacity-building (Hammad & Al-Ani, 2021). Different authors view it as a process that aims to develop research skills and equip researchers with sound methodologies and tools to enable them to carry out high-quality studies (Barrett et al., 2011; Rees et al., 2007; Ridley, 2011). Leaitch (2009), while attempting to understand what research capacity-building is, explains that research capacity-building is all about ensuring that there are active researchers with the right skills and knowledge to produce high-quality research. Munn (2008), on the other hand, argues that capacity-building in research goes beyond just acquiring the skills, but includes a comprehensive understanding of the entire research process and the development of applicable knowledge to apply this knowledge. Rees et al. (2007) and Ridley (2011) explain that research capacity-building primarily aims at developing the skills of researchers in the area of research methodologies and that researchers need training that addresses how to conduct empirical studies, how to use the data collected and the different analysis methods for qualitative and quantitative approaches, how to design different research instruments and, finally, how to handle large-scale datasets.

Other studies have also pointed to the fact that there are different informal as well as formal strategies that have been adopted by governments and institutions all over the world to address the issue of capacity-building in educational research. These strategies include critically reflecting on the professional experiences of other research scholars, interactions with more established scholars and engagement in research as a professional activity (Munn, 2008; Rees, et al., 2007). Barrett et al. (2011), Christie and Menter (2009) and Jacob and Meek (2013) recommend that a collaborative approach to building the research capacity of faculty members in tertiary institutions should be adopted. This collaboration should be adopted between researchers and other stakeholders during the entire research process. Asare et al. (2020) suggest collaboration between the Global North and South where European and Western-based researchers collaborate with researchers from developing

nations of Africa to carry out research that addresses the need of both societies while borrowing from the experiences of one another.

In the UK, the US and other developed Western nations, different programmes have been developed to help address the issue of educational research capacity. For instance, in the United Kingdom, three capacity-building initiatives were identified and they are: the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS), which is tasked with fostering collaborations across seven universities in Scotland; the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), whose main task is to support educational research across the entire United Kingdom; and the Welsh Education Research Network (WERN), which focuses on building a network of all universities in Wales. On the African continent, there has been an attempt to improve collaboration. For example, the East African Consortium for Clinical Research is a capacity-building network of universities from six different countries in East Africa, eight partner institutions from the Global North and five countries in the Global North and funded by the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP), also found on the African Economic Research Consortium, the Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa(CARTA), among others. However, the question remains whether or not their strategic objective of improving research in Africa is being achieved.

Based on the foregoing, the researchers, therefore, sought to answer the following research question:

What are the challenges affecting research output in educational research institutions in Uganda?

Methodology

Research approach

Considering the exploratory nature of this study, the researchers opted to make use of a qualitative research design to achieve the study objectives. Since this study focuses on exploring the perception of university lecturers in Uganda regarding the issue of educational research in the country, it was determined that a qualitative approach would be the most appropriate. According to Creswell and Poth (2017), qualitative research is appropriate when a study seeks to explore people's lived experiences since it focuses on getting the unique perspective of particular individuals that can shed light on and provide invaluable contributions to the subject being discussed. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews were used to collect pertinent data. These two approaches were combined in order to conclusively answer the "why" in this study.

Study participants

Since this study focused on the challenges faced in education research in universities in Uganda, the researchers opted to organise FGDs and interview key stakeholders in each of the schools studied. The criteria for selecting those that participated in the FGDs were as follows: first, the individual must be a lecturer with at least a doctorate working in either Kampala International University, Muteesa I Royal University, Kampala University or Ndejje University; second, the individual must have published at least three peer-reviewed articles in the previous three years. The criterion for selecting those that were interviewed was that they must be part of the top administrative staff in any of the colleges, faculties, institutes or schools in either of the universities being studied. The reason for focusing on top administrative staff (like deans, research deans or principals) is that they would be in a better position to highlight some of the challenges faced from a management and administrative perspective.

In total, 12 FGDs were organised per institution, and the breakdown is as follows:

Table 1: Breakdown of focus group discussion participants

	No. of participants	Participant characteristics	Venue	Date
Groups 1, 2 & 3	30 (10 per group)	Senior lecturers in humanities and social sciences, and administrative staff	Kampala International University	23rd August 2022
Groups 4, 5 & 6	30 (10 per group)		Kampala University	23rd August 2022
Groups 7, 8 & 9	27 (9 per group)		Ndejje University	15th August 2022
Groups 10, 11 & 12	24 (8 per group)		Muteesa 1 Royal University	15th August 2022
Total	**111**			

Furthermore, five research deans or research coordinators were interviewed at Kampala International University, three research coordinators from Kampala University, and two top administrative staff at Ndejje University and one from Muteesa I Royal University were also interviewed. It was observed that at this point, saturation had been achieved and there was no need to interview more people.

Data collection instruments

Two instruments were developed to help collect data, and they are the discussion prompts and interview guides. The FGDs were organised in such a way that participants were allowed to express themselves unhindered and the researcher simply noted the key points. The discussion prompts were used to ensure that the discussions were organised and addressed the issues being discussed and provided answers to the research question. The interview guides, on the other hand, included the major questions that the researchers needed answers for.

Criteriology

There is a lot of debate about the reliability of qualitative data. However, what is clear in this debate is that researchers must ensure the validity and reliability of the conclusions arrived at irrespective of their methodological approach (Creswell, 2014). To ensure that the conclusions arrived at in this study are valid and reliable, the researchers made use of triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend the use of triangulation because it helps in removing innate bias and improves the credibility of the research findings. It is, therefore, on the basis of this premise that the researchers opted to make use of both FGDs and in-depth interviews as a way to ensure a rigorous approach to data collection. Creswell (2014) explains that to improve trustworthiness, a second opinion or corroborative evidence must be provided. By making use of both FGDs and in-depth interviews, the researchers have ensured that corroborative evidence is provided. Therefore the trustworthiness of the data and conclusions is ensured.

Furthermore, to increase dependability (also referred to as reliability in quantitative studies), the researchers provided an audit trail. This involves providing a comprehensive description of the entire process of data collection that allows other researchers to be able to replicate this study easily.

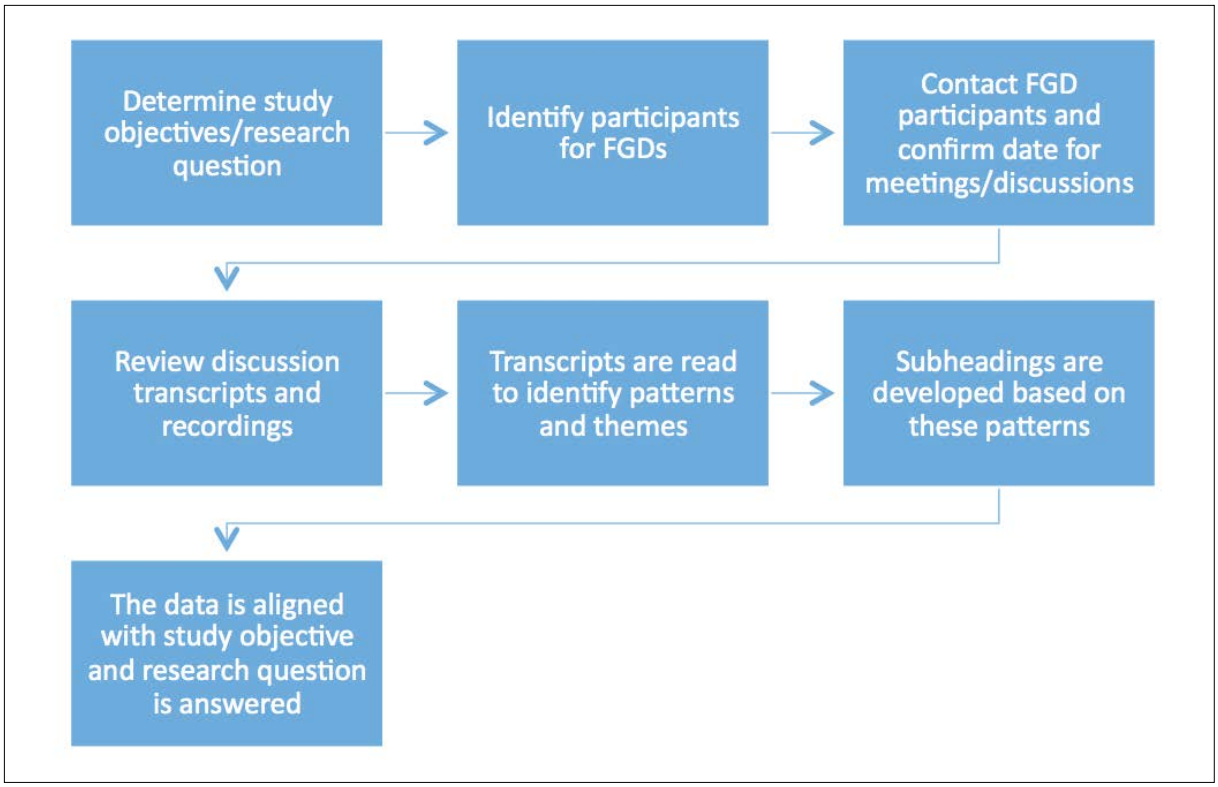
Finally, to increase conformability, which is also referred to as objectivity, the researchers removed or minimised bias by comparing the data with that from other similar studies and also consulting different extant literature on the subject matter, so various viewpoints on the subject matter are included in the current study.

Procedure

The participants were purposively selected and all ethical concerns were addressed. All the participants were given ample notice about the day of the interviews, as well as the time and venue. They also signed an agreement confirming that they understood the study and volunteered to give information. The researchers further assured all the participants of their confidentiality and that their names and positions would not be disclosed in any way or form during the writing of this paper. Finally, the participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw their consent at any time and stop participating in the study without needing to provide any justification or reason. These measures ensured that the participants were at ease and willingly participated in the study.

The diagram below describes the entire process of the FGDs and analysis.

Figure 1: Research methodology process (authors, 2022)



Findings and Discussion

The findings are presented with a focus on the fact that academics are expected to engage in research as part of their role. This section presents the challenges besetting educational research in selected academic institutions in Uganda from the perspectives of academic and administrative staff. The factors responsible include capacity-building gaps, including lack of financial resources, difficulty in identifying specific calls for abstracts and manuscripts, multiple roles played, limited research writing skills, and nasty experiences during previous research engagements. These are presented and discussed below.

Research capacity

The findings reveal that for most institutions, the best they can do, in terms of research, is to develop research policies and appoint specific research coordinators to oversee research at the departmental

and college levels. Most of the institutions under this study encourage staff to write and publish for their career growth and the good of the institution. The research offices are not well-facilitated to run research activities. In some academic institutions, there is completely no budget allocated specifically for research while those that have some little funding earmarked have not put it to use. This hinders not only the dissemination of research findings but also makes it impossible for inter-university research collaborations to happen, as explained by many of the study participants. This finding is affirmed by some scholars, who argue that financial constraints impact virtually every aspect of research, including its mission, the procedures, the integrity of participants and the publication of findings (Njuguni & Itegi, 2013).

The participants affirmed:

> Sometimes, the research department is there by name but does not fully function beyond just having an appointed research coordinator. It is just a normal department since it is a requirement by NICHE for each university but not effectively functioning due to a lack of relevant resources.[4]

Furthermore, it was found that some academic staff do not commit to research because of the lengthy process involved in the production of an article. For many of them, this requires a lot of patience. This discourages many from continuing to write for publication. This is an indicator of low research capacity among staff.

In one of the focus group interviews (FGIs), the participants attested:

> Together with two colleagues, we wrote a manuscript during the first COVID-19 lockdown. We received feedback several times and attended to the comments and resubmitted. Up to today, we are almost ending the third year and the article has not been published. Despite several times making follow-up, we have been told to be patient. However, this is too much because we do not even have the motivation to write another manuscript when we have not even seen the first one being published. For me, I think that writing and publishing are for the brave and most patient staff. Some of us are already discouraged but we are very much committed to teaching and will continue to do a good job.[5]

This finding was common in all universities. Some scholars affirm that publishing in academic journals is often a sluggish and frustrating experience (Njuguna & Itegi, 2013; United States University, 2005). One ought to understand that certain types of research get published quickly as compared to others and that research submitted to the top journals may take much longer than expected, given the stringent processes involved.

This finding also seems to suggest that some academic staff detach research from teaching and learning. It is worth noting that the two are inseparable and must be done hand in hand for one to enjoy multiple benefits both at the individual and institutional levels.

It was established that in some academic institutions when teaching research methodology, lecturers quickly introduce students to the process of identifying and stating the problem and then teach about the methodology. Critical aspects, such as how to develop research tools like interview guides, questionnaires, sampling and data analysis, seem to be given a lower priority. This sometimes results in poor quality research which is not methodically sound. Thus academic staff are not comfortable publishing with students, especially as supervisors who fail to support the students further in the process of research, given the time constraint and lack of motivation. This supports the findings by Griffioen (2018), Nguyen (2016) and Huenneke et al.(2017), who all suggest that if

4 FGI 2 participants
5 FGI 4 participants

research output and capacity are to be improved, then the way students and scholars are introduced to the world of research is important. They explain that the process of teaching research methodology is important in ensuring a high level of research output. These scholars generally blame the low level of research output in an academic institution on the lack of capacity-building and encouragement in these citadels of higher learning.

The findings also conceal that tension arises when trying to balance institutional and individual priorities as well as making decisions about research and the different work priorities that comprise the demands of research, teaching and administrative roles.[6] This is so because research is a labour-intensive and skill-oriented undertaking as it entails identifying and tracing sources of information, reading numerous documents, developing research tools, sampling study participants, collecting data, and analysing and interpreting data. Although this capacity can be gained through experience, a person with multiple roles to play in an academic institution finds it very difficult to manage.

Another finding reveals that some study participants did not have easy access to calls for abstracts or manuscripts unless friends share on the different forums. One participant attested thus:

> It is by chance that some of us are able to see calls for abstracts or articles and sometimes when we see them, you can find that the deadline is too soon. It becomes hard to concentrate to write in such a short time amid the many other responsibilities. So, at times, we have to let go yet it is a rare opportunity to see a call. Moreover for some calls, as one reads the guidelines, you find that you are required to pay, for instance USD 50. With our meagre resources where we are not even paid on time, it becomes hard to contribute that money. This discourages some of us from putting efforts in writing articles for publication yet it is also very rare to find a call for submission where there is no fee attached.

In a similar vein, some participants asserted:

> In one of our research networks, we accessed a call for abstracts which we followed and submitted before the deadline. We were happy when we received communication on acceptance of our abstract and went further to develop the manuscript and submitted it. It took two years for it to be published. Moreover we realised that it was not in an authentic journal because it was sent to us in a PDF format document with two other articles claiming that this was the publication. We tried to see if we could find it on Google Scholar and there was nothing. This was the most discouraging. Up to today, none of us has written again. We have asked the journal editor to pull down our article so we can get get published in an authentic journal but the response we have got is that they are working on processes, one day it will appear on Google Scholar. It is very painful spending time writing with no return.[7]

The above finding reveals that staff lack the knowledge and skills of identifying credible journals, which would be one of the first steps before putting one's effort into writing. Possibly, in this case, there was trust in the source of information about the journal. Academic institutions ought to empower their staff further regarding prerequisites for writing to publish to avoid loss of time and morale in connection with academic writing for publication.

Also, studies by Barrett et al. (2011), Leitch (2009) and Kinyondo and Pelizzo (2018) all point to the fact that Africa is data-poor and that there is a lack of research culture among African academics. They go on to suggest that for research to improve on the continent, there is a dire need for institutions to build up the capacity of the staff and to ensure that these individuals have access to good and reliable data and funding.

6 FGI1 participants
7 FG 10 participants

Social factors

The findings also reveal that some academic staff had suffered trauma in their days as students. They had experienced brutality from their academic supervisors. For instance, some of the study participants narrated how they took between four and five years to complete their master's degrees and between seven and 10 years to complete a PhD. Hence, by the time they completed their studies, they felt enough was enough and that all they needed now was to concentrate on teaching and enjoy what they had missed while pursuing their higher degree courses.

In one of the FGIs, a participant narrated:

> As an older student, one time I was told by my supervisor that he was not responsible for my coming to school late and I should not rush him into giving me comments on my work. On several occasions, I was accused of being disrespectful and rude. The meeting held before my defence brought up strange reasons why I should not defend successfully and that I am rushing my supervisor into defence. My supervisor nearly disowned me during the defence but had signed on to my work. He claimed that he had told me to make certain corrections and I refused, which was annoying for me. I felt it was a betrayal of the highest order. So, after my studies, I felt I needed a break before I resume the research agenda. It is now two years and I am trying to recover from this experience. I hope to engage in academic writing possibly in the next year.[8]

Although it is not clear on what grounds such cases occur, one can conclude that certain factors are responsible. Some academic supervisors engage in segregation based on the politics of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, class and even gerontocracy (age). Some male lecturers cannot stand female students, and some female lecturers cannot stand male students. Some female lecturers cannot stand female students and vice versa. These are individual complexities that seem to contribute to one's future interest in research or the lack thereof. Some lecturers may find more comfort in people who share their religion or denomination, which should not be the case. There are also cases where lecturers prefer to deal with wealthier students than those perceived to come from poor backgrounds. Some lecturers discriminate against their students on account of age. Others may discriminate against students who are too young or too old. The young are regarded as not serious while the old are avoided because it is believed it is 'hard' to get them to follow instructions or adhere to timelines owing to the other responsibilities they have to discharge as employees, fathers or wives, or brothers and sisters. Irrespective of the causal factors, we need to note that when one encounters a nasty experience in their academic career such as the above, it implants in them a culture of resentment and loss of morale to engage in similar activities, in this case academic research.

The findings of this study support those by Barrett et al. (2011), Christie and Menter (2009) and Jacob and Meek (2013), who recommend that a collaborative approach to building the research capacity of faculty members in tertiary institutions should be adopted. They emphasise the need for academics to come together and collaborate on research activities irrespective of race, gender or background. They explain that it is the only way to build a cohesive and highly productive research environment and culture in academic research institutions.

In addition, it can be argued that the impact of research depends highly on the attitude with which the exercise is approached. Academic institutions that have handled their clients well have been able to have good products that continue to shine wherever they are and build a better research agenda. For the more laid-back institutions, students find it very easy to manoeuvre the system even

8 FG 9 participants

when research is part of their agenda but not given high priority. So, one's choice of a university to study at matters a lot.

> We know universities here where those who have money to pay to study have got there for the sake of attaining a given title but they come out when they do not have what it takes to get the title. Others hire people to do research for them because they have money. Luckily, they defend their research work and are awarded a degree and this has become a fashion. Anyone can pass research because money matters![9]

This finding portrays the lack of seriousness about academic research supervision. Some supervisors are not motivated by their institutions to supervise research. After allocating the names of students to lecturers for research supervision, no one seems to take the trouble to supervise the process. This compromises the quality of research and the output does not aid in solving community development challenges.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that mental laziness and fatigue are evident among some academic staff. Such academic staff do not like to work. They do not concentrate on writing nor do they want to be assigned students to supervise. They try to avoid being assigned students to supervise, and when they still get such students, they treat them badly. The students do not receive feedback on time and when they do, the comments are not insightful and useful in improving the quality of their work. They do not pick up students' calls and do not respond to email messages and notes left in their offices, leaving students very frustrated. If the students drop them, they become vengeful so that if the students complete their research work and the lecturers are appointed as internal examiners, they fail such students. It is thus evident that some academic staff do not take research and publication seriously. Otherwise, they would actively engage in supervising students with the hope of producing good quality work and having it published in authentic and credible academic journals. This finding partly explains why most of the research work done by students in academic institutions has ended up being shelved instead of being put to good use. One can also conclude that such academic staff are not aware of the value that research and publication add not only to their academic progress but also to the academic institution where they teach. Furthermore, research and publishing depend on good planning and effective academic supervision, which seem to be lacking in many of our universities.

In another FGI, the participants asserted:

> Some of our fellow lecturers fear competition and will not share with anyone the relevant academic calls. Evidence of this is seen in the manner in which they delay feedback if one happens to consult them for guidance. A manuscript that would take one month to complete takes three months and if one is not careful, the deadline passes because of delayed feedback. Thus some of our fellow lecturers have almost begun to manage the speed with which one should progress in terms of academic research and publishing. This can rile. Sometimes one can misplace the hard copy of the draft work you shared for them to read yet they insist on hard copies instead of soft or digital or electronic copies, thereby wasting valuable time and delaying progress. They will shamelessly ask for another copy. Thus teamwork is not exhibited in promoting research and publication. This needs to end and we work as teams.[10]

The findings also reveal that some of the staff just do not know how to start engaging in writing to publish. The process involved is not clear at all yet they also lack role models in institutions of higher learning. Those who would be role models do not publish, even after completing their PhD. Even 15

9 FG1 8 participants
10 FG 2 Participants

years after having completed their graduate studies, some of them have just one or two publications to their name. When one Googles their name, it does not shows up. This neither encourages others to write nor motivates them to inject their meagre resources into further studies because there is not much to motivate them. Some of the staff do not have time to supervise students.

In addition, a look at the take-home salary of graduates who have struggled to publish is quite demotivating. Some such graduates do not even secure reasonable jobs. Some PhD graduates end up teaching in public secondary schools where publishing is not a requirement, while their work in private universities is simply aimed at obtaining additional income. Lack of proper remuneration also came up in a lot of extant literature. For instance, Asare et al. (2020) suggest that there is a need for the Global South to collaborate with the Global North if research is to be improved. They premised their conclusion on the fact that researchers from the Global South are poorly renumerated and have very limited access to much-needed resources. They, therefore, suggested that for researchers to remain competitive, there is a need for them to collaborate with researchers from Europe and America who have significant access to funding and are increasingly more interested in carrying out research on the African continent.

Similarly, some people graduate with a or bachelor's degree or master's degree after doing research in teams/groups. This does not necessarily imply that an individual concentrated on research since a similar mark was awarded to each of the group members. In some institutions, students pursuing particular courses engage in school practice or internships and this is viewed as sufficient. The students are not requred to undertake research. When the need arises to pursue a graduate-level programme, such individuals are forced to give an inducement to complete their studies and graduate.

Some participants stated:

> When you want such a person to guide you to write your concept paper or PhD, they can't help much and cannot support you enough because they are not sure of what exactly is required.[11]

Furthermore, the findings reveal that some academic institutions normally experience poor internet connectivity even if computers are available. The bandwidth is sometimes too low to sustain any internet activity. This is so because the institutions may not have enough resources to cater for the required bandwidth. It thus becomes hard to download the latest books to aid the literature review process. There is also sometimes not enough money for institutions to subscribe to online resources/e-libraries. This was found to be a demotivating factor for some academic staff who would otherwise actively engage in academic writing.

Conclusion

The study participants pointed out the challenges and threats that make it difficult for them to engage in academic research and publishing as expected by their academic institutions. The challenges facing academic researchers in Uganda are not only academic but also involve the limited financial resources committed to capacity-building, and include social and individual factors. Furthermore, there are not enough motivational and pull factors for the staff. Not all academic staff seem to be interested in research and publishing, as reflected in the findings. However, it is the role of an academic institution to not only interest their staff in writing for publication but also to motivate those that successfully engage in this activity. This might turn out to be an inspiration for the majority to participate in academic writing, research and publishing. A research-based environment will be

11 FGI 10 participants

more highly valued by academic stakeholders. Moreover, learning, teaching and research are all interlinked.

Recommendations

- Specific reasonable budget allocations should be earmarked for academic research in all institutions or else the persistent poor remuneration of staff will continue to negatively impact the quality of research in our academic institutions in terms of skills, facilities and the general research environment. Implementation of the budgets must be strictly followed to make the research process easier and ensure the dissemination of research findings. The budget line should also cater for activities related to partnerships between private institutions, and private and public academic institutions, as well as collaboration, which needs to be strongly encouraged to meet the needs of a larger proportion of teaching staff. In this way, our academic institutions will be able to advance and create new knowledge that will be vital in supporting communities in terms of social and economic development.
- Institutions should ensure that all members of the academic community constantly engage in research and are provided with appropriate training, besides being encouraged to work in teams, so that they can achieve their research agenda. Training should be made available in the art of writing and getting published even if it means repeating the training two or more times before the beneficiaries feel confident enough to write manuscripts. In doing so, academic institutions will be on the right path to making academic writing and publishing an enjoyable learning experience in our universities.
- Heads of departments and research coordinators need to create an inventory where a student who drops a supervisor in favour of another should never be allowed to get his or her work back in the hands of the lazy supervisor. This is because the latter will tend to engage in fault-finding and to be grumpy and uncooperative, which will have future implications for the career goals of the victim yet the victim's effort would make a meaningful contribution to research.

Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies

This study sought to find out the challenges faced by educational research institutions in Uganda in providing cutting-edge research. Owing to time and other constraints, the researchers could not explore some areas that would have further enriched this study.

First, the current study primarily focused on private institutions in Uganda while excluding comments from public institutions, which have substantially more research funding but are not necessarily publishing optimally or innovating, as would have been expected. Given this situation, the researchers recommend that other stakeholders in the education sector, including public institutions, research institutes and the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), should be included, so that a more holistic view of the subject matter can be achieved.

Second, owing to a dearth of documentary evidence and time constraints, which made it difficult for the researchers to access all available records on research output, patent submissions and approvals, as well as grant proposal submissions and approvals, the current study has not exhaustively looked into which institutions are doing well and which are not doing well in terms of research. Because of this, a comparative study looking into the differing research output of different institutions in Uganda should be considered. As it is, the current study has simply focused on finding out the challenges being faced by various educational research institutes and did not attempt to compare them.

Finally, the current study made use of a qualitative research design which, in itself, is fine and capable of providing great results. The researchers, however, recommend that future studies consider using a mixed methods approach that makes use of a survey, so a larger sample size can be considered. This will help lend further credence to the results and conclusions of the current study.

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