

Chapter 25

Research Productivity, Visibility, and Impact at the University of Namibia: Building a Framework for Open Access and Research Data Management


Trywell Kalusopa

University of Namibia, Namibia


Ronald Kanguti

University of Namibia, Namibia

Patiswa Zibani

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5273-401X>
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Anna Leonard

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5237-829X>
University of Namibia, Namibia

ABSTRACT

The global competitiveness drive, pursuit for relevance, and search for true identity continues to challenge many African universities in their quest to achieve the delicate balance of preserving national indigenous reputation and worldwide visibility. For decades, universities have occupied a centre stage in this balancing act through research productivity, evaluation, and impact. The benefits of university research and innovation are varied, persuasive, well-documented, and acknowledged as benchmarks for the visibility, sustenance, and relevance of any modern university. This chapter examines the research profile of the University of Namibia (UNAM) by looking at its current research productivity, visibility, and impact in the SADC region and beyond. Using bibliometric and altimetric analysis from Web of Science, Scopus, and SciVal databases, and the institutional repository, the chapter underscores the fragility but evolving UNAM's research performance output and highlights open access and research data management as keys to enhancing institutional research productivity and visibility.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a recurring academic narrative that has foundation in the notion that the emerging global competitiveness and knowledge economy underscores a universal shift that necessitates the increased use of performance measurement metrics as basis for the appraisal of universities' research output, productivity and visibility. Clearly, there is a contemporary drive towards university research output comparisons and ranking that now appears to be a compulsion to reassert the key role that modern universities can increasingly play in a knowledge-driven global economy. Clermont, Dirksen, Scheidt and Tunger (2017, p. 250), all agree to a larger extent that "various socio-economic developments, especially in the political sphere," have actually prompted the "increasing internationalization and harmonization of university performance. The comparison of research outputs among universities has been raising an increasing amount of interest in the last few years, in that, it adds value to the decisions in the allocation of limited funds as fairly as possible (Clermont, Dirksen, Scheidt & Tunger, 2017). Increasingly therefore, there has been attention on academic research productivity for the purposes of funding and promotion in universities as well as for comparison of the personal academic, institutional, specialties, and publications standings.

In this chapter, we examine the research profile of the University of Namibia (UNAM) by looking at its current research output, productivity, visibility and impact in the SADC region and beyond. The chapter first presents the background on the quest for the reclaim of the research agenda in African Universities. The chapter then discusses bibliometric as tool for measuring research output and the rationale for the evaluation of research output and visibility at UNAM. The research infrastructural profile of UNAM is highlighted and the findings and analysis regarding UNAM's research performance and visibility are presented. The chapter underscores the slack and fragility but positively evolving UNAM's standing; underlining issues of Open Access (OA) and Research Data Management (RDM) as fundamental to enhancing institutional research productivity, competitiveness and visibility at the institution. Discussions and recommendations are then drawn in context.

BACKGROUND

Research impact "is the degree to which research findings are seen, noticed, read, used, built upon, cited and applied by other scholars" (Bashorun, 2015, p.53). Most authors of scholarly content desire their papers to be widely disseminated, read, cited and built upon to increase scientific knowledge and research impact (Chan, 2004). In that regard, research performance and output remain a key ingredient in most African universities as they strive to achieve the delicate balancing act of preserving national indigenous reputation and world-wide visibility. For decades, African universities are said not to feature well in the global university rankings due to among other reason, low research output (Andoh, 2017). In most African Universities, given the pressures of government policies of massification of higher education, research and innovation has fallen short and remained minimal, with teaching more pronounced (Andoh, 2017). Retracting the "lost mission of research" in Africa, Andoh (2017, p.20). validly observes that "the first universities in Africa were established with the mission of teaching, research and community engagement, but between the early 1970s and 2000, teaching became the only *de facto* mission of many of these African universities". He argues that most of the post-independence period witnessed a lot government and nationalistic interference in the running of universities. Andoh (2017, p.21) draws evidence to depict the low research output during that time. He says:

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