

Factors that can affect academic staff in research and publication in Papua New Guinea universities

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Abstract

Research and publication by academic staff are significant for several reasons: advancement of knowledge, academic excellence, teaching and learning enhancements, problem-solving, collaboration and networking, career development and recognition and new knowledge contribution to society. When an academic staff member does not actively engage in research and publication, several consequences arise: stagnation of knowledge, reduced teaching effectiveness, missed opportunity for professional growth, limited contribution to new knowledge in the discipline, decreased institutional reputation, limited collaboration and networking and reduced contribution to societal impact thus, research and publication are highly valued in academia. This paper discusses some of the factors that can affect research and publication by the staff at Papua New Guinea (PNG) universities. These factors need to be addressed for staff to engage in research and publication.

Keywords: factors, research, publication, academic staff, research productive, publication output, workload, business studies department, divine word university, Papua New Guinea.

Introduction

Research and publication are integral to the mission and success of universities. They advance knowledge, contribute to academic excellence, enhance teaching and learning, drive societal impact, support career development, foster collaboration and establish an academic legacy (Blackmore & Cousin, 2003). By prioritizing and supporting research and publication activities, universities can create an environment conducive to intellectual growth, innovation and positive change. Academic staff engaged in research and publication are integral to the success and impact of a university. Their involvement drives knowledge generation, enhances teaching and learning, fosters a research culture, elevates the institution's reputation, and makes a positive societal impact. Supporting and encouraging their research endeavours is vital for the overall excellence and advancement of the institution (Marsh & Hattie, 2002).

When staff are not engaged in research and publication, there can be limited contributions to knowledge, stagnant teaching practices, reduced collaboration opportunities, diminished institutional research profile, limited professional development, weaker industry connections, the potential impact on funding opportunities, and missed opportunities for student involvement (Iqbal & Mahmood, 2011). Universities need to create a supportive environment that encourages and facilitates research engagement among staff while also valuing and supporting their teaching and other institutional contributions.

This paper will discuss some of the main factors (from literature and experiences) that can affect research and publication at PNG universities. These factors need to be addressed for successful academic engagement in research and publication. These factors will now be discussed, starting with big student numbers in class.

Big student numbers

Lower student numbers in a class can provide academics with reduced teaching workloads, enhanced interaction and personalization, increased flexibility, and the freedom to align research with teaching. It can create collaborative research opportunities, facilitate resource allocation, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and support professional development and recognition (Coleman, 1990; Heng et al., 2020). These factors collectively contribute to academics being more engaged in research and publication activities. Universities need to recognise the potential challenges associated with high student numbers and actively support academics in balancing their teaching responsibilities with research and publication. Allocating adequate resources, providing mentoring and support structures, and fostering a research-friendly environment can help mitigate the impact of high student numbers on academic research engagement (Dhillon et al., 2015).

High teaching workload

A low teaching workload provides academics with increased time availability, enhanced focus, and the opportunity to pursue complex research questions (Eam, 2015). It allows for longitudinal studies, facilitates collaboration and networking, supports professional development, enables the pursuit of external research funding, and contributes to recognition and advancement within academia. These factors collectively foster an environment conducive to engaging in research and publication activities (Iqbal et al, 2018). A high teaching workload can result in time constraints, reduced focus on research, increased administrative responsibilities, limited professional development opportunities, decreased motivation, restricted research collaboration, resource limitations and institutional emphasis on teaching evaluation (Eam, 2015). These factors collectively contribute to academics not being able to actively engage in research and publication activities. Universities need to find a balance between teaching and research expectations, provide adequate support and recognise the importance of scholarly activities in an academic's workload (Marsh & Hattie, 2002).

Writing skills

Writing skills positively contribute to staff engagement in research and publication by facilitating effective communication of ideas, producing high-quality research papers, enabling strong review and editing abilities, supporting successful grant and proposal writing, boosting confidence and motivation, facilitating effective collaboration and expanding publication opportunities (Lee & Boud, 2003). Staff members with strong writing skills are better equipped to actively contribute to research and publication activities, enhancing their impact and recognition within their academic field (Flowerdew, 1999). Poor writing skills can hinder academics' engagement in research and publication by affecting their ability to communicate effectively, write research papers, contribute to collaborative writing, review and edit work, find publication opportunities, maintain confidence and motivation, and write successful grant proposals (Flowerdew, 1999). Improving writing skills through training, practice and seeking feedback is crucial for academics to actively engage in research and publication, effectively communicate their ideas and increase their impact within the scholarly community.

Poor time management

Effective time management skills contribute to staff engagement in research and publication by prioritizing these activities, establishing clear goals and deadlines, creating a structured schedule, balancing responsibilities, minimizing distractions, efficient collaboration and networking, and regularly monitoring progress (Dundar & Lewis, 1998). By effectively managing their time, staff members can optimize their productivity, maintain momentum in their research projects, and actively contribute to the generation of new knowledge through publications (Bailey, 1999). Poor time management skills contribute to limited staff engagement in research and publication through a lack of prioritization, procrastination, over-commitment and overload, a lack of a structured schedule, difficulties in meeting deadlines, an inefficient workflow, and a lack of reflection and self-assessment (Dundar & Lewis, 1998). Addressing these time management challenges is crucial for staff members to effectively allocate time for research and publication, enhance their productivity, and increase their engagement in scholarly activities.

Plenty of work mindset

A positive mindset can significantly contribute to academics being engaged in research and publication, even in the face of heavy workloads. It enhances motivation, resilience, time management, problem-solving skills, collaboration, continuous learning, confidence, and work-life balance (Dundar & Lewis, 1998). Cultivating a positive mindset is beneficial for academics to maintain their enthusiasm, productivity, and commitment to research and publication, ultimately contributing to their professional growth and impact in their field. A 'plenty of work' mindset among academic staff can negatively affect their engagement in research and publication by limiting dedicated time, reducing motivation, contributing to burnout and stress, diverting focus and attention, neglecting professional development, limiting collaborative opportunities, and reducing visibility and impact (Brew, 2003). Recognizing the importance of balancing workloads, prioritizing research and publication, and implementing effective time management strategies can help academic staff overcome these challenges and actively engage in scholarly pursuits (Eam, 2015).

Experienced academics

Recruiting experienced academics with a higher degree can lead to increased research and publication within a department by bringing research expertise, fostering collaborative research, providing mentorship and guidance, strengthening the publication record, contributing to research funding acquisition, expanding academic networks, nurturing a research culture and enhancing the department's reputation (Altback, 2011). Their presence can create a dynamic research environment and stimulate a culture of scholarly excellence within the department. Having academics with Bachelor's degrees and limited engagement in research and publication within a department can result in challenges related to limited research skills and experience, constrained academic networks, time constraints, lack of research incentives, limited access to research funding, limited career progression opportunities and a weak research culture (Chen et al, 2006). Overcoming these challenges requires institutional support, professional development opportunities, and recognition of the

importance of research and publication for academic advancement and the overall growth of the department.

Leadership

Effect leadership in an academic department contributes to staff engagement in research and publication by setting clear expectations, providing resources and support, offering mentorship and guidance, promoting collaboration and networking, recognizing and incentivizing achievements, facilitating professional development, creating a research-friendly environment, and leading by example (Healey, 2005). By creating a supportive and conducive environment, leaders empower staff to actively participate in research and publication, leading to increased scholarly productivity and the advancement of the department's reputation in the academic community (Bailey, 1999). Poor leadership in an academic department can contribute to limited staff engagement in research and publication by failing to establish clear expectations, provide sufficient resources and support, offer mentorship and guidance, foster collaboration and networking, recognise and incentivize achievements, prioritize professional development, create a positive work environment and promote role models (Eam, 2015). Addressing these leadership shortcomings is crucial for creating an environment that encourages staff members to actively participate in research and publication activities, leading to enhanced scholarly productivity and the advancement of the department's research profile.

Research and higher degree office

The Research and Higher Degree Office (RHDO) contributes to staff members' effective engagement in research and publication by providing research support services, facilitating access to funding opportunities, offering training and professional development, fostering collaboration and networking, ensuring research ethics and compliance, assisting with research communication and dissemination, supporting research impact evaluation, and establishing research policies and guidelines (Boud & Brew, 2012; Iqbal et al, 2018). By providing these essential services and resources, the RHDO creates an enabling environment that empowers staff members to actively participate in research and publication activities, leading to increased scholarly productivity and the advancement of the institution's research profile (Dundah & Lewis, 1998). An ineffective RHDO can contribute to limited staff engagement in research and publication through a lack of support and guidance, limited funding opportunities, inadequate training and professional development, limited collaboration and networking support, inefficient research ethics and compliance processes, a lack of research impact evaluation, and unclear research policies and guidelines (Dhillon et al, 2015). Addressing these shortcomings and improving the effectiveness of the RHDO is crucial for creating an environment that promotes staff engagement in research and publication, ultimately enhancing the scholarly productivity and reputation of the institution (Bailey, 1999).

Discussion

Factors that affect academics' engagement in research and publication within a department can have significant implications for the overall scholarly productivity and success of the

institution. Some of these factors include high student numbers, high teaching workload, poor writing skills, poor time management, a "plenty of work" mindset, lack of experienced academics, ineffective leadership, and ineffective research and higher degree offices. To address these factors, universities need to implement several strategies.

When it comes to student numbers, the university should consider implementing strategies to manage large class sizes, such as providing adequate resources, ensuring appropriate staff-student ratios, and offering support for innovative teaching methods that balance teaching and research demands. Similarly, teaching workload, institutions can establish workload allocation models that recognise the importance of research and publication, provide mentoring and support structures, and encourage a healthy work-life balance for academics. Writing skills, offering writing workshops, providing writing resources and support, and encouraging collaboration and feedback can help improve academics' writing skills and enhance their ability to contribute to research and publication. Moreover, with time management, universities can provide time management training, establish clear expectations and priorities, and support academics in managing their workload effectively. This includes promoting a culture of work-life balance and recognizing the value of dedicated time for research and publication.

On mindset, universities should foster a positive and supportive work environment that values research and publication, encourages innovation, and recognizes the importance of scholarly activities. This can be achieved through leadership support, professional development opportunities, and recognition of research achievements. Additionally, with experienced academics, attracting and retaining experienced academics with higher degrees can be facilitated through competitive recruitment processes, offering attractive research support packages, providing mentorship opportunities, and creating a collaborative and stimulating research culture. When it comes to leadership, effective leadership plays a crucial role in creating a research-supportive environment. Leaders should set clear expectations, provide resources and support, promote collaboration, recognise achievements, and create opportunities for professional development and advancement.

Finally, universities should ensure that the Research and Higher Degree office is equipped to provide comprehensive support, including research funding opportunities, training, ethical considerations, dissemination support, and policies and guidelines that facilitate research and publication. By addressing these factors and implementing supportive strategies, the university can create an environment that encourages and facilitates academics' engagement in research and publication. This, in turn, can enhance the scholarly productivity and reputation of the departments and contribute to the overall success and impact of the institution.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted several factors that affect academic staff's engagement in research and publication within a university department. These factors include big student numbers, high teaching workload, poor writing skills, poor time management, a "plenty of work" mindset,

lack of experienced academics, ineffective leadership, and ineffective research and higher degree office. To address these factors and promote research and publication activities among academic staff, universities should consider implementing various strategies.

These strategies include managing large class sizes through adequate resources and appropriate staff-student ratios, establishing workload allocation models that recognise the importance of research, providing support and mentorship structures, offering writing workshops and resources to improve writing skills, providing time management training and support, fostering a positive work environment that values research, promoting work-life balance, attracting and retaining experienced academics through competitive recruitment processes and research support packages, developing effective leadership that sets clear expectations and provides resources and recognition, and ensuring that the research and higher degree office offers comprehensive support services.

By implementing these strategies, universities can create a supportive environment that encourages and facilitates academic staff's engagement in research and publication. This, in turn, enhances scholarly productivity, elevates departments' reputation and contributes to the overall success and impact of the institution.

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Future Paper

This paper can be extended by including other factors and areas, which are not discussed here.

Author

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