

Esoteric Ruminations: Can Emerging Researchers in Zimbabwean Teachers Colleges Genuinely Disengage the Publish or Perish Intonation?



Patrick Senderayi¹ , Sihle Patience Senderayi¹  & Bekithemba Dube² 

¹ Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Polytechnic, Gwanda, Zimbabwe.

² Centre for Diversity in Higher Education, Central University of Technology, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

The 'publish or perish' mantra has long defined university culture worldwide. This research paper thus explored research dilemmas faced by emerging researchers in teachers' colleges in publishing research. In extant literature, not much attention has been paid to dilemmas facing emerging researchers in teachers' colleges, particularly in Zimbabwe. This study was framed within the lens of the Integrated Theoretical Model of Research Productivity which argued that academic writing is a social practice encompassing power relations, identity and ideologically inscribed knowledge. The study used a qualitative research approach couched in a constructivist paradigm. Eight lecturers from a teachers college were purposefully sampled for face-to-face interviews and the data was subjected to deductive thematic analysis. The study found that emerging researchers decried lack of institutional funding support, training and mentorship, inadequate writing skills, and the absence of collaborative writing as major impediments. Writing was not yet part of the academic culture in teachers colleges which made emerging researchers lack the wherewithal to research. In light of the findings, the study recommends that to attain relevance in the Education 5.0 era, teachers colleges require a paradigm shift which will encourage the development of a writing and publishing culture to promote innovation.

Correspondence

Patrick Senderayi

Email:

senderayipatrick637@gmail.com

Publication History

Received: 29th September, 2023

Accepted: 20th March, 2024

Published online:

5th April, 2024

Keywords: *Emerging Researchers, Neoliberalism, Publish Or Perish, Research Dilemmas, Teachers Colleges.*

INTRODUCTION

In a quest to publish, some research dilemmas become evident for academics. African scholars have lately begun to illuminate the inherent shortcomings of what has been identified as a neoliberal agenda in academia. The neoliberalist agenda also termed academic capitalism, has morphed academics in Higher Education (HE) into human capital.¹ Such a prejudicious agenda is premised on the notion that knowledge is a quantifiable commercial commodity which can be sold for its monetary value for institutions to attract external income.² In this vein, academics are compelled to publish volumes of research to ensure that their institutions are visible to potential funders.

¹ K. Bone, "Dependent and Vulnerable: The Experiences of Academics on Casual and Insecure Contracts.," *The Conversation*, July 18, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/dependent-and-vulnerable-the-experiences-of-academics-on-casual-and-insecure-contracts-118608>; Michael Rustin, "The Neoliberal University and Its Alternatives," *Soundings* 63, no. 63 (July 21, 2016): 147–76, <https://doi.org/10.3898/136266216819377057>.

² Gaile S. Cannella and Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, "Neoliberalism in Higher Education: Can We Understand? Can We Resist and Survive? Can We Become Without Neoliberalism?," *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 17, no. 3 (June 27, 2017): 155–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708617706117>; Pat Mahony and Gaby Weiner, "Neo-Liberalism and the State of Higher Education in the UK," *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 43, no. 4 (April 21, 2019): 560–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1378314>.

Hlatshwayo and Ngcobo argue that the focus on the ‘publish or perish’ mantra is an age-old phenomenon, reflective of a pervasive and callous academic culture in HE which impels academics to publish or perish at the expense of their mental wellbeing and scholarly standing.³ This mantra has made HE in developing countries imitate a Western world performative culture which finds its source in Skelton’s idea that education is amenable to measurement.⁴ In the current neoliberal climate, universities are driven by notions of performativity in which academic workload and performance are inextricably linked to effectiveness. A performative university culture is therefore characterized by corporate managerial practices which use rigorous measurement to determine efficiency and productivity in teaching and research.⁵ Vurayai and Ndofirepi observe that neoliberalism has the commodification of education and research neoliberalism has commodified education and research to the extent that “novice African academics have been marginalised in the production and dissemination of knowledge on a global scale, due to weapons such as cultural imperialism, linguicide, epistemicide and poor funding.”⁶ This has resulted in African academics competing to produce and publish in high volumes. This paper focuses on a research climate driven largely by a neoliberal agenda and its impact on the growth of writing among emerging researchers in a teachers college setting. The paper continues with a literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, discussion of findings, and conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Current Status of Research in Teachers Colleges

Zimbabwean teachers colleges have hosted research conferences under the banner of the Teacher Education Research Conference (TERC) since 2016, where lecturers from different colleges present research papers. The primary agenda of the conference has been to encourage research in colleges. Of late, there has been a growing number of lecturers with masters and doctorate qualifications in teachers colleges. Despite this, there is a scarcity of documented evidence that these lecturers are engaged in active research and publishing. In terms of the Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF), most lecturers are placed on levels from Level 9 to Level 10. These levels presuppose that lecturers should demonstrate mastery of knowledge in their fields of study. Lecturers are expected to make analyses of complex issues through cutting-edge research which proposes solutions based on critical thinking, and the creation of new knowledge, on account of being autonomous researchers.⁷

In Zimbabwe, research output from teachers colleges has been rather disappointing. Table 1 illustrates the pattern of education research.

Table 1: Submission, Presentation and Publication Rates in Zimbabwean Teachers Colleges

Sub-theme	Year	Submitted	Presented	Published	Publication Rate (%)
Education	2011	59	14	3	5.1
	2012	70	33	2	2.9
	2013 -2014	149	69	3	2
	2015 -2018	0	0	0	0
Total		278	116	8	

Source: E. Garwe, 2015, pp. 126-127.

Table 1 shows a concerning trend where there is a huge mismatch between presented papers and those that were published under the education sub-theme. Of the 116 papers that were presented at the TERC conference between 2011 and 2018, only 8 were published. Furthermore, of the 278 papers submitted only 116 were presented indicating that a staggering 182 papers were rejected. Given these concerning statistics, the researchers argue that emerging researchers in teachers’ colleges face a myriad of challenges in their attempts to publish research. They further assume that the lack of publishing productivity is due to a local environment which precludes and does not support research in teachers colleges in Zimbabwe.

³ Mlamuli Nkosingphile Hlatshwayo and Bongwi Ngcobo, “‘Doing Just Enough to Get By’: Voices of Black Women Early Career Academics on Navigating the Publish or Perish Discourse in South Africa,” *Education as Change* 27, no. 1 (2023): 1–21.

⁴ Kim Wilcox, “Interrogating the Discourses of ‘Teaching Excellence’ in Higher Education,” *European Educational Research Journal* 20, no. 1 (2021): 42–58; Alan Skelton, “International Perspectives on Teaching Excellence in Higher Education,” *Abingdon, UK: Routledge*, 2007.

⁵ John Kenny, “Re-Empowering Academics in a Corporate Culture: An Exploration of Workload and Performativity in a University,” *Higher Education* 75 (2018): 365–80.

⁶ Simon Vurayai and Amasa Philip Ndofirepi, “‘Publish or Perish’: Implications for Novice African University Scholars in the Neoliberal Era,” *African Identities* 20, no. 2 (2022): 122–35.

⁷ Science and Technology Development Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, “Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework,” 2019.

Research in a Neoliberal Academic Climate

Literature on the ‘publish or perish’ discourse and its effects on HE is quite extensive. This is because academics in HE have a responsibility to generate new knowledge through research.⁸ However, the dominance of academic capitalism in the form of neoliberalism in higher education does present some dilemmas.

Neoliberalism advances an arguably false logic that publishing in high volumes is the primary vehicle through which academics can both share knowledge and prove their worth to colleagues and broader society.⁹ Therefore, a ubiquitous and dominant belief is that by publishing large amounts of articles, scholars attain lofty statuses and visibility in the academic community. Fyfe et al. are therefore correct in arguing that present-day academia is viewed as a ‘prestige economy’, based on a symbolic capital created mainly by publications, as opposed to direct monetary returns.¹⁰ For example, Blackmore avers that excellence in research attracts prestige which excellence in teaching does not.¹¹ In a prestige economy, academics view research as a social marketplace where outputs, such as publications, grants and networks, assume purchase for money, prestige, or recognition, which elevates them to a special class of celebrities.¹² It is important to illuminate some of the challenges which are at play in an environment where the focus is on quantifying research to attain visibility by researchers

The Neoliberal Agenda and Questionable Research Practices

While there is a compelling need to encourage publishing, an important caveat is that pressurizing academics to publish may stifle innovation, and more negatively, it can precipitate the publication of research articles grounded on inaccurate results.¹³ This results in a quantitative, but not necessarily qualitative output, with much of this research prone to maleficence.¹⁴ Consequently, increased questionable research practices (QRPs) and flagrant research fraud have been noted in extant literature.¹⁵

QRPs comprise falsification, multiple reporting, and the inclusion of false authors.¹⁶ Stone aptly points out that QRPs arise from ‘careerist, self-interested motivations for publishing.’¹⁷ QRPs are mostly practiced by ‘academics’ who regard publishing as ‘a game’, and are solely motivated to create glowing curriculum vitae.¹⁸ It can be concluded that such motivations relegate publication to be of little intrinsic value beyond that instrumental goal.¹⁹ Some academics have warned that the normalization and institutionalization of research malpractice assumes purchase when it is rationalized by the perpetrator(s).²⁰ The implication is that by pressurizing staff and demanding publication targets, HE institutions and researchers therein are complicit in the promotion of academic fraud. This poses an inherent danger for emerging researchers who will (un)knowingly resort to publishing in predatory journals in the quest to meet the targets and gain visibility. Given this, Hlatshwayo and Ngcobo make a persuasive argument

⁸ William Osei Appiagyei, Daniel Arkoh Fenyi, and Rosemary Awogya, “Challenges in Conducting Academic Research and Publication: Exploring the Experiences of Language Teachers in Higher Education Institutions in Ghana,” *International Journal of Education, Technology and Science* 2, no. 3 (2022): 244–62.

⁹ Hlatshwayo and Ngcobo, “‘Doing Just Enough to Get By’: Voices of Black Women Early Career Academics on Navigating the Publish or Perish Discourse in South Africa.”

¹⁰ Aileen Fyfe et al., “Untangling Academic Publishing: A History of the Relationship between Commercial Interests, Academic Prestige and the Circulation of Research,” 2017.

¹¹ P. Blackmore, *Prestige in Academic Life: Excellence and Exclusion* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

¹² Angela Brew, “Conceptions of Research: A Phenomenographic Study,” *Studies in Higher Education* 26, no. 3 (October 25, 2001): 271–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070120076255>; Blackmore, *Prestige in Academic Life: Excellence and Exclusion*; Paul Blackmore, “What Can Policy-Makers Do with the Idea of Prestige, to Make Better Policy?,” *Policy Reviews in Higher Education* 2, no. 2 (July 3, 2018): 227–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322969.2018.1498300>.

¹³ O. K. Osunsan et al., “Publish or Perish’: A Systematic Review,” *Journal of Social Sciences and Management* 1, no. 1 (2021): 1–22; Vurayai and Ndofirepi, “‘Publish or Perish’: Implications for Novice African University Scholars in the Neoliberal Era”; E. Uzobo, “Predatory Journals: A New Dimension to the ‘Publish or Perish’ Syndrome in Nigeria,” *Otukpa: A Journal of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Federal University Otuoke* 1, no. 1&2 (2019): 53–82.

¹⁴ Icy Lee, “Publish or Perish: The Myth and Reality of Academic Publishing,” *Language Teaching* 47, no. 2 (2014): 250–61.

¹⁵ Daniele Fanelli, Rodrigo Costas, and Vincent Larivière, “Misconduct Policies, Academic Culture and Career Stage, Not Gender or Pressures to Publish, Affect Scientific Integrity,” *PLOS ONE* 10, no. 6 (June 17, 2015): e0127556, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0127556>.

¹⁶ Uzobo, “Predatory Journals: A New Dimension to the ‘Publish or Perish’ Syndrome in Nigeria.”

¹⁷ Dan N Stone, “Post-Hunton: Reclaiming Our Integrity and Literature,” *Journal of Information Systems* 29, no. 2 (2015): 211–27, 222.

¹⁸ Dennis Tourish and Russell Craig, “Research Misconduct in Business and Management Studies: Causes, Consequences, and Possible Remedies,” *Journal of Management Inquiry* 29, no. 2 (2020): 174–87.

¹⁹ Mats Alvesson and Hugh Willmott, “On the Idea of Emancipation in Management and Organization Studies,” *Academy of Management Review* 17, no. 3 (1992): 432–64; Chris Lorenz, “Fixing the Facts: The Rise of New Public Management, the Metrification of ‘Quality’ and the Fall of the Academic Professions,” *Moving the Social* 52 (2014): 5–26.

²⁰ Jeremias J De Klerk, “‘The Devil Made Me Do It!’ An Inquiry into the Unconscious ‘Devils within’ of Rationalized Corruption,” *Journal of Management Inquiry* 26, no. 3 (2017): 254–69.

against quantity in research output because it is promotive of a neoliberal discourse, whose sole purpose is to transform African academics into knowledge factories.²¹

While there is a temptation to accept and advocate a ‘publish or perish’ mantra in teacher colleges, the position taken by Van Dalen is that scholarly specialization and clout are evidenced by knowledge legitimated through measurability (numbers) and quantification of research.²² There is however a need to tread a very precarious pathway and recognize that it is groundless to condense knowledge to numbers and promote a deeply faulty conjecture that scholars should focus more on quantity than quality.²³ This pathway resonates well with the view that the performative climate in HE spaces, currently grounded on measurement mechanisms, has diverged from the primary reasons why academics publish. Such a performative climate is arguably based on an inappropriate rationalization localized in a surveillance system based on specified research output targets.²⁴ While this paper ostensibly encourages emerging researchers to publish, the negative implications of promoting a neoliberal agenda are all too real and will require HE in Zimbabwe to tread cautiously and therefore require a balanced approach.

Status of Research Publication in Africa

Despite the critical value of research, the literature reveals that there is a dearth of quality research publications by African academics in HE.²⁵ This confirms the argument that in reality there is more perishing than publishing for the majority of research academics.²⁶ Asare, Mitchell, and Rose indicate that between 2010 and 2018, African scholars contributed a meagre 25% of the open-access education research publications and that for the most part, the quality of such publications, mainly located in low-impact factor journals was questionable.²⁷ A worrying pattern was that African research accounted for just below 2.6% of the world’s scientific output,²⁸ yet Africa, home to 12% of the global population had an output of less than 1% of the global research output.²⁹ On the other hand, Akuru adds that “when compared to the rest of the world, research papers generated from sub-Saharan Africa stood at 0.72 % as of 2012, with a global citation index of 0.12 % during the same time.”³⁰ The foregoing statistics are a discouraging expose.³¹ Barring the neoliberal discourse which places a premium on quantity in publications, this lack of research output however does call for serious introspection among African academics, who include lecturers in teachers colleges.

Dilemmas Experienced by Emerging Researchers

In a quest to publish, emerging researchers or early career academics (ECAs) navigate difficult terrain. Kwanya indicates that Kenyan academics are inhibited by the lack of research and publishing skills.³² Emerging researchers rate a lack of writing skills as a major hindrance,³³ exacerbated by poor training in statistical methods, and lack of

²¹ Hlatshwayo and Ngcobo, “‘Doing Just Enough to Get By’: Voices of Black Women Early Career Academics on Navigating the Publish or Perish Discourse in South Africa.”

²² Hendrik P Van Dalen, “How the Publish-or-Perish Principle Divides a Science: The Case of Economists,” *Scientometrics* 126, no. 2 (2021): 1675–94.

²³ Hlatshwayo and Ngcobo, “‘Doing Just Enough to Get By’: Voices of Black Women Early Career Academics on Navigating the Publish or Perish Discourse in South Africa.”

²⁴ Suriamurthee Moonsamy Maistry, “(Re) Counting the High Cost of Predatory Publishing and the Effect of a Neoliberal Performativity Culture,” *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, no. 75 (2019): 5–19.

²⁵ Elijah Dickens Mushemeza, “Opportunities and Challenges of Academic Staff in Higher Education in Africa,” *International Journal of Higher Education* 5, no. 3 (2016): 236–46; Tom Kwanya, “Publishing and Perishing? Publishing Patterns of Information Science Academics in Kenya,” *Information Development* 36, no. 1 (March 10, 2020): 5–15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666918804586>; Vurayai and Ndofirepi, “Publish or Perish’: Implications for Novice African University Scholars in the Neoliberal Era.”

²⁶ Lynn P. Nygaard, “Publishing and Perishing: An Academic Literacies Framework for Investigating Research Productivity,” *Studies in Higher Education* 42, no. 3 (March 4, 2017): 519–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1058351>.

²⁷ Samuel Asare, Rafael Mitchell, and Pauline Rose, “How Accessible Are Journal Articles on Education Written by Sub-Saharan Africa-based Researchers?,” *Development and Change* 52, no. 3 (May 29, 2021): 661–69, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12639>.

²⁸ Jake Lewis, Susan Schneegans, and Tiffany Straza, *UNESCO Science Report: The Race against Time for Smarter Development*, vol. 2021 (Unesco Publishing, 2021).

²⁹ C. Duermeijer, M. Amir, and L. Schoombee, *Africa Generates Less than 1% of the World’s Research; Data Analytics Can Change That* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Connect, 2018).

³⁰ Udochukwu B Akuru, “Research Funding Issues in African Universities: Penalties and Pathways,” *Journal of Sustainable Development Studies* 12, no. 2 (2019): 316.

³¹ Appiagyei, Fenyi, and Awogyia, “Challenges in Conducting Academic Research and Publication: Exploring the Experiences of Language Teachers in Higher Education Institutions in Ghana.”

³² Kwanya, “Publishing and Perishing? Publishing Patterns of Information Science Academics in Kenya.”

³³ Philisiwe Charity Cele and Lawrence Mpele Lekhanya, “Research Output Level at Durban University of Technology (DUT) in South Africa: Contributing Factors and Their Implications,” *Problems and Perspectives in Management (Online)*, 2014.

mentorship.³⁴ Some have challenges with research methodology³⁵ which makes them struggle to frame interrelated ideas when writing.³⁶ Furthermore, fear makes them mystify issues surrounding research and lay an arguably false claim that research is difficult and is a preserve for an elite few. Others view research as an intricate, problematic, complicated, stressful, erudite and thought-provoking enterprise.³⁷ Hlatshwayo and Ngcobo posit that some ECAs, particularly women, question or reject the publish or perish intonation as untenable given the uncertainty surrounding the impact their work will have on society.³⁸ In light of such fears, the prospect of writing will engender trepidation among a significant constituency of emerging researchers, leading to low or no writing output.

Challenges Experienced by Emerging African Researchers

The massification of teachers colleges has seen massive enrolments of students and an expansion in the courses offered leading to increased workloads. A recent teachers' college study confirmed that lecturers have huge workloads, made more stressful by understaffing and large classes.³⁹ Another study indicates that besides added workloads, lecturers worked with stringent deadlines which exposed them to long working hours caused by an expansion in university activities.⁴⁰ Distractions and lack of time due to teaching duties, and committee work, often force academics to relegate publishing to the lower end of their priority lists, which makes them concentrate on routine duties rather than research.⁴¹ Lack of research funding inhibits many emerging researchers. African researchers are burdened by high publication costs, which puts off a large segment of such researchers from publishing and disseminating their findings.⁴²

A Zambian study found that African academics funded research from their resources.⁴³ Amutuhaire points out that in such circumstances, publication assumes the least priority among these academics.⁴⁴ The language used for publishing, particularly English, also presents an overwhelming barrier for some emerging researchers.⁴⁵ Most journals are monolingual which entails that only those academics who are proficient in the stipulated language have the opportunity to publish. Another barrier is perhaps the perceived discriminatory nature of publishers, particularly in the developed North. Tarkang and Bain note that a commonly held perception is that African academics present mediocre papers both in terms of substance and author visibility.⁴⁶ Given the foregoing obstacles, it is evident that research productivity in African academia will be low.

³⁴ Esau G Mbewe et al., "Publish or Perish: Challenges Faced by Academicians in Research Publications at the University of Zambia," *Multidisciplinary Journal of Language and Social Sciences Education* (2664-083X, Online ISSN: Print ISSN: 2616-4736) 2, no. 2 (2019): 211–28.

³⁵ L. Bellour, "Publish or Perish: Scholarly Publishing Challenges in Africa," *Journal of Studies in Language, Culture, and Society (JSLCS)* 4, no. 2 (2021): 132–42.

³⁶ Rachael Cayley, "Using Genre to Teach the Publication-Based Thesis," *Diverse Approaches to Teaching, Learning, and Writing across the Curriculum: IWAC At*, 2020, 153.

³⁷ Fawaz Ali Ahmed Qasem and Elrasheed Ismail M Zayid, "The Challenges and Problems Faced by Students in the Early Stage of Writing Research Projects in L2, University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia," *European Journal of Special Education Research*, 2019.

³⁸ Hlatshwayo and Ngcobo, "'Doing Just Enough to Get By': Voices of Black Women Early Career Academics on Navigating the Publish or Perish Discourse in South Africa."

³⁹ P. Senderayi, "Personality as a Predictor of Job Stress among Teachers College Lecturers in Zimbabwe" (University of KwaZulu Natal, 2021).

⁴⁰ Sofie Masuku and Stella Muchemwa, "Occupational Stress among University Lecturers: A Case of Zimbabwe," *US-China Education Review* 5, no. 4 (2015): 258–66.

⁴¹ Barbara Burns, "Working Together to Ease the Pressure to Publish in Higher Education," *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal* 8, no. 4 (2010): 80; Newman Wadesango, "Publish or Perish: Impediments to Research Output and Publication," *International Journal of Educational Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2014): 57–63.

⁴² Tibelius Amutuhaire, "The Reality of the 'Publish or Perish' Concept, Perspectives from the Global South," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (June 22, 2022): 281–94, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-022-09879-0>; Juliet Nabyonga-Orem et al., "Article Processing Charges Are Stalling the Progress of African Researchers: A Call for Urgent Reforms," *BMJ Global Health* (BMJ Specialist Journals, 2020).

⁴³ Mbewe et al., "Publish or Perish: Challenges Faced by Academicians in Research Publications at the University of Zambia."

⁴⁴ Amutuhaire, "The Reality of the 'Publish or Perish' Concept, Perspectives from the Global South."

⁴⁵ Vurayai and Ndofirepi, "'Publish or Perish': Implications for Novice African University Scholars in the Neoliberal Era"; Katherine Carter and Judy Aulette, "Publish, Don't Perish: Ten Tips," in *English Teaching Forum*, vol. 54 (ERIC, 2016), 20–28.

⁴⁶ Elvis Enowbeyang Tarkang and Luchuo Engelbert Bain, "The Bane of Publishing a Research Article in International Journals by African Researchers, the Peer-Review Process and the Contentious Issue of Predatory Journals: A Commentary," *Pan African Medical Journal* 32 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2019.32.119.18351>.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is premised on the Integrated Theoretical Model of Research Productivity (ITMRP).⁴⁷ This theory is an extension of the Academic Literacies Theory which argues that academic writing is a social practice which encompasses power relations, identity and ideologically inscribed knowledge.⁴⁸

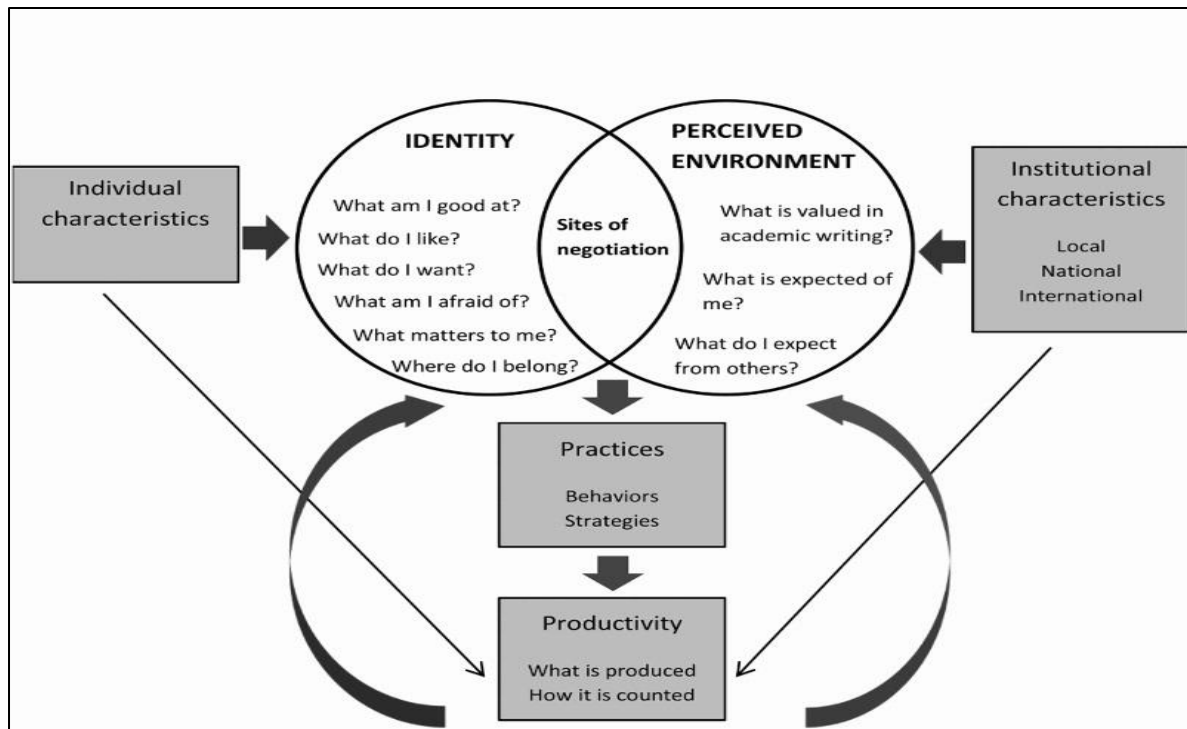


Figure 1. An integrated theoretical model of research productivity
Source: Nygaard, 2017, p. 529.

In Figure 1, research productivity is an interplay between the identity (including abilities, desires, and fears) a researcher creates, and a subjectively perceived environment (including expectations and values), in which the researcher is.⁴⁹ The researcher belongs to multiple organisations with different competing demands and objectives which creates sites of negotiation in the production of scholarly writing.⁵⁰ A site of negotiation is where writers encounter contending demands from external voices, implying that lecturers have to develop coping skills (strategies and practices) to make choices before, during, and after the production of academic text, as well as in the text itself.⁵¹ The outcome of the negotiations reflects concrete practices for some researchers.⁵²

In the model, the researcher's experience of publishing (or not publishing), and whether this output is valued, will feed back into the researcher's beliefs about (a) the self, regarding publishing competence and (b) their environments which can be perceived as either fair or unfair). Therefore, this experience is likely to have a renewed effect on beliefs and practices.⁵³ In the current study, this will be reflected by how the participants express the challenges in the light of college environments which either promote or preclude lecturers from publishing and membership to the wider body of researchers outside these environments at the national or international level. This theory has relevance in the current study because it encourages the researcher to look beyond the institution of employment and gaze at local, national and international organisations and the beliefs that they reflect, which in turn will determine publishing behaviour.

⁴⁷ Nygaard, "Publishing and Perishing: An Academic Literacies Framework for Investigating Research Productivity."

⁴⁸ Mary R Lea and Brian V Street, "The "Academic Literacies" Model: Theory and Applications," *Theory into Practice* 45, no. 4 (2006): 368–77; Theresa Lillis, "Student Writing as 'Academic Literacies': Drawing on Bakhtin to Move from Critique to Design," *Language and Education* 17, no. 3 (2003): 192–207.

⁴⁹ Nygaard, "Publishing and Perishing: An Academic Literacies Framework for Investigating Research Productivity."

⁵⁰ Franziska Trede, Rob Macklin, and Donna Bridges, "Professional Identity Development: A Review of the Higher Education Literature," *Studies in Higher Education* 37, no. 3 (2012): 365–84.

⁵¹ Linda Flower, *The Construction of Negotiated Meaning: A Social Cognitive Theory of Writing* (SIU Press, 1994).

⁵² D. Barton, M. Hamilton, and R. Ivanič, *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context.* (Psychology Press, 2000).

⁵³ Janet H Lawrence, Lois C Trautvetter, and Robert T Blackburn, *Predicting Faculty Publication Output: Evaluation of a Model across Institutional Types* (US Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement ..., 1989).

While research on challenges facing university lecturers in writing and publishing is abundant in the extant literature, this study uniquely contributes to a growing body of literature which addresses a largely under-researched academic community of teachers colleges in an African context.

METHODOLOGY

Design and Participants

The study applied a qualitative single-case study research design drawing from the ontological and epistemological tenets of constructivism. The methods applied in this research were taken to be consistent with the constructivist paradigm as explained in the sections that follow. The researchers opted for a qualitative approach to gather research and publishing experiences of lecturers, interpret them and retell them using their own experiences through thick rich descriptions. They were particularly concerned with assessing and evaluating how the lecturers constructed their world, and what significance they assigned to their experiences.⁵⁴ Eight emerging researchers were purposively chosen because they could provide rich information on dilemmas they faced with research and publishing. The researchers deliberately chose those who had completed their higher degrees (Masters or PhD) and had at least five years of teaching experience in the college system. The focus was also on researchers who had presented research papers at the TERC 2019 edition. The sample profile is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample profile

Participant	Sex	Highest qualification	ZNQF Level	Teaching experience in years	Conference papers presented	Papers published
1	F	MSc	9	12	1	0
2	F	MEd	9	15	2	0
3	F	MEd	9	12	1	0
4	F	MEd	9	13	1	0
5	M	MEd	9	11	2	1
6	M	MEd	9	13	1	0
7	F	PhD	10	17	4	6
8	M	MEd	9	11	1	0

Table 2 shows that save for one PhD holder at level 10 in the Zimbabwe National qualifications framework, all the lectures were at level 9. The PhD holder was the only participant with six (6) publications. All participants had presented at least one (1) paper at a TERC conference. The mean teaching experience of the participant was thirteen (13) years. This indicated that the participants were very knowledgeable lecturers.

Data Collection, Presentation and Analysis

Data was collected through an in-depth face-to-face interview to enable the emerging researchers to express their views on research-related challenges they faced. A common interview schedule gleaned from a questionnaire used in a quantitative study was developed.⁵⁵ The interview focused on five variables; budgetary, infrastructural, professional, scholarly, and personal factors. A deductive approach was used for the thematic analysis which involves approaching data analysis with predetermined themes, and categories according to which the data are evaluated. Thematic analysis that is entirely deductive does not require the generation of new codes and themes as it commences with a set of themes prior to data collection and analysis, taken directly from a previous study in the topic area and then seeks to apply those to a new sample.⁵⁶ Written permission was obtained to conduct the study from the relevant Ministry. Participants also gave their written informed consent for the interviews to be audio recorded. For privacy, interviews were conducted in the lecturers' offices.

FINDINGS

The study explored research dilemmas faced by emerging researchers in teachers colleges in writing and publishing research. The findings of the study are presented under five deductively determined themes.

⁵⁴ S.B. Merriam and E.J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (New Jersey: Jossey-Bass., 2016).

⁵⁵ Cele and Lekhanya, "Research Output Level at Durban University of Technology (DUT) in South Africa: Contributing Factors and Their Implications."

⁵⁶ Oliver C Robinson, "Conducting Thematic Analysis on Brief Texts: The Structured Tabular Approach.," *Qualitative Psychology* 9, no. 2 (2022): 194.

Theme 1. Budgetary Factors

The participants were asked to illuminate budgetary factors which impacted their ability to research and publish papers. There was consensus among the participants that at the institutional level, the college did not provide adequate budgetary support to staff keen on writing and publishing their research. Some of the emerging views were as follows:

There is always talk that we should research and there is a budget for it but when you approach the powers that be, you are told there is no funding for research activities by lecturers. As a new researcher, I find it difficult to get funding and I have no idea how to secure funding outside of the college. I have only attended TERC conferences which are sponsored by the college.

The excerpts reveal that researchers largely depended on the college, but were however not extended any funding to carry out their actual research which would include fieldwork. Funding was limited to attendance at the TERC conference and covered food and accommodation in the main.

Theme 2. Infrastructural Factors

In terms of infrastructural factors, interviewers probed participants to verbalize whether they were under the ambit of knowledgeable research support staff or skilled and efficient co-researchers. The researchers were also intent on understanding whether there existed active research niche areas in the institution, what research materials (equipment, software) were available to them, and access to adequate scholarly references (libraries, scholarly database subscriptions). One participant remarked:

Yes, there is a shortage of knowledgeable people to assist us. The college at one point invited two professors to staff develop us, but that was not enough. We need continuous mentoring as we go on this journey.

Other participants corroborated this finding by saying:

We have three colleagues with PhDs but there is only one who tries to assist those who approach him. So, yes, I can safely say there is a lack of knowledgeable research support staff at the college.

The participants experienced a myriad of challenges which included the absence of collaboration with colleagues, worsened by a lack of support and mentoring from colleagues with PhD qualifications. This is however to be expected as the academy is extremely competitive and individualistic.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the emerging researchers lamented the lack of equipment and resources needed when doing research. These handicaps found expression in some of the following excerpts:

The Administration does not support us with equipment or even bond paper to print our drafts.

A very worrisome problem at the college is that our library does not subscribe to any online journals. We are therefore limited to using search engines like Google Scholar for material. Again, we have a challenge with laptops.

Theme 3. Professional Factors

Extant literature has extensively examined the impact of heavy load of administrative work and inadequate time for research, including difficulty in participating in professional development opportunities, and lack of networks with other research universities. Some participants confirmed that they had burdensome workloads and administrative duties as shown in the following expression:

We do have excessive work to do. Some of us have to teach the primary and secondary school groups. We find very little time to do research. There is also a culture of unscheduled meetings in the college. These disrupt our daily routines, and for many of us doing research in such a climate is impossible.

It was however encouraging to note that there was some appreciation that all researchers could attend some conferences from which they could draw some lessons.

We attend TERC conferences, but I have never attended any seminars or conferences anywhere else. I can say our professional development in research is very minimal.

Participants lamented the lack of research training. Some of the remarks expressed the following common feelings:

⁵⁷ Laurel Johnson et al., "Challenging the Productivity Mantra: Academic Writing with Spirit in Place," *Higher Education Research & Development* 36, no. 6 (September 19, 2017): 1181–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1300140>.

I think our growth as inexperienced researchers is being stifled. Interestingly, the college administration is always insisting that we come up with innovations, but where can innovations come from if there is no research to initiate the process?

The preceding expression indicates that there were no research links outside the University of Zimbabwe. This reveals the existence of a very constricted research realm for the lecturers which does not promote the development of a wider worldview of the research landscape stemming from interfacing with various academics from other similar HE institutions.

Theme 4. Scholarly Factors

The emerging researchers also reported inadequate skills in computer software and hardware, inadequate skills to identify, analyse and process research problems, and knowledge of where to search for articles using e-journals. Some researchers had grasped the basics of academic writing, but had challenges with statistical analysis as shown in the following reflections:

As a new researcher, I still need to understand the basics of scholarly writing. Currently, I am not very confident in the use of statistical software such as SPSS.

I have presented two papers at TERC so far and I can say I am slowly developing my research skills.

The participants indicated that they lacked adequate computer exposure, but had fair confidence in identifying research problems.

I still need to improve my computer skills so that I am able to use a variety of software in the research process.

I cannot say at a higher level, I am confident since I have not published any research yet.

The participants also indicated that their interface with research project students offered them an opportunity to hone their problem-identification skills and if mentored by more knowledgeable colleagues they could develop further confidence leading to the publication of papers.

Theme 5. Personal Factors

To write and publish a researcher needs to be motivated. However, such motivation should be coupled with a positive and team-oriented attitude which allows for collaboration with other researchers. The following reflections summarize the divergent viewpoints of the participants:

I think we are self-centred in the college. There are no research collaborations to talk about. Because people want to go to TERC and get the \$50 for presenting a paper, colleagues prefer to do work as individuals.

I am motivated to learn. One of our colleagues who has a PhD is always encouraging me to try writing. The way he simplifies research has made me want to publish a paper as well.

There was evidence that the researchers were bothered by the absence of financial rewards and promotions for engaging in research.

I have however noticed that when we go to TERC, it is each man for himself. we do not work together at all.

If we could form teams to do research, I am sure I can learn from others.

Some participants were wary of the lack of collaboration which describes the research climate in the college and therefore did not actively seek to write and publish.

DISCUSSION

Overall, there is evidence that currently there is no writing culture in teacher colleges. Our findings resonate with other studies which have reported that a large constituency of emerging researchers is deterred by a lack of research writing skills compounded by insufficient knowledge of research theories and practices, such as statistical tests.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Cele and Lekhanya, "Research Output Level at Durban University of Technology (DUT) in South Africa: Contributing Factors and Their Implications"; Mbewe et al., "Publish or Perish: Challenges Faced by Academicians in Research Publications at the University of Zambia."

Emerging researchers were hindered from writing because they operated in a competitive environment which largely inhibited their potential to write and publish. This is also confirmed in Dwyer, et al's study which revealed that the academy is highly competitive and idiosyncratic.⁵⁹ While Dyer and colleagues argue that the self-centred nature of the academy arises from competition for outputs and research funds, this study indicates that emerging researchers are more concerned about individual visibility based on egocentrism.

The research findings contradict the ITMRP framework which views academic writing as being essentially a social enterprise. To counteract individualism and lean towards the social dimension of writing, a paradigm shift which stimulates and promotes the development of writing groups is evidently required at both individual and institutional levels. Given some of the attendant fears expressed by the emerging researchers, the creation of writing groups will assist in minimizing individualism and demystifying scholarly writing, through sharing writing, writing skill development and regular engagement with writing.⁶⁰ In the ITMRP framework research productivity results from an interaction between the identity a researcher creates, and a subjectively perceived environment in which the researcher is in. Writing groups can therefore provide a 'zone of proximal development' in which the emerging researchers can act as the 'more knowledgeable others' within their groups. The lack of a collaborative research environment in the teacher's college was compounded by the absence of institutional funding for research activities, which has been revealed extensively in the literature.⁶¹ Given that the Zimbabwean economy is in a state of flux, negotiating funding may continue to be an obstacle for emerging researchers.

The study also revealed that emerging researchers experienced work overload as they had to attend to other professional duties. Johnson et al. point out that very often when engaged in writing, researchers have to contend with inescapable competing activities such as planning for and presenting lectures, marking, attending staff meetings, supervision and pastoral activities with students.⁶² In light of this, academic writing is often relegated down the 'to-do' list, if altogether not stopped. Despite all the dilemmas identified, the need to inculcate a writing and publishing culture must be at the top of the 'to-do' list for teacher colleges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these findings, teachers colleges need a paradigm shift which recognizes the importance of research. Teachers colleges must adopt a promotive policy which encourages lecturers to research and publish through the creation of institutional journals which will minimize the problem of funding. Furthermore, while mindful that publication pressure is associated with an increased preponderance of engaging in QRPs, teaching colleges must exert some degree of pressure to incentivize researchers to write papers which will enhance the visibility of both the researchers and the institutions to the wider scientific community in HE. Furthermore, to guard against promoting a neoliberal agenda founded on the quantification of publications, teachers colleges should identify and fund research which seeks to promote innovations in the colleges.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the dilemmas which emerging researchers in teacher colleges experience in writing and publishing papers. The researchers lamented a lack of institutional budgetary support knowledgeable research support staff, and inadequate research materials and equipment. Based on the ITMRP framework, the researchers' publishing experiences and the extent to which research output is valued, can positively or negatively impact the researcher's self-belief regarding publishing competence and the institutional environments which can be perceived as either fair or unfair. Emerging researchers lacked professional mentoring, and had a trepidation for writing due to a lack of confidence in the use of statistical applications for data analysis. However, the experience of supervising research project students enabled them to identify, analyse and process research problems with clarity. Generally, the lecturers indicated an encouraging degree of motivation to write but were drawn back by the lack of collaboration among colleagues and the absence of incentives for any writing and publishing efforts in the current teachers college system.

⁵⁹ Angela Dwyer et al., "It's Always a Pleasure: Exploring Productivity and Pleasure in a Writing Group for Early Career Academics," *Studies in Continuing Education* 34, no. 2 (2012): 129-44.

⁶⁰ Maria J Grant et al., "Cross-Disciplinary Writers' Group Stimulates Fresh Approaches to Scholarly Communication: A Reflective Case Study within a Higher Education Institution in the North West of England," *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 16, no. S1 (2010): 44-64.

⁶¹ Amutuhaira, "The Reality of the 'Publish or Perish' Concept, Perspectives from the Global South"; Mbewe et al., "Publish or Perish: Challenges Faced by Academicians in Research Publications at the University of Zambia"; Nabyonga-Orem et al., "Article Processing Charges Are Stalling the Progress of African Researchers: A Call for Urgent Reforms."

⁶² Johnson et al., "Challenging the Productivity Mantra: Academic Writing with Spirit in Place."

LIMITATIONS

The qualitative study was conducted in one teachers college in Zimbabwe with a small homogenous sample of emerging researchers who had had experience in presenting at least one research paper. This precluded the researchers from gaining more insightful reflections on the myriad dilemmas which other researchers in the constituency of teachers colleges face in writing and publishing.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

RESEARCH FUNDING

The researchers did not receive any funding for this paper.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Patrick Senderayi, PhD (UKZN) is a Senior Lecturer at Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Polytechnic, Zimbabwe where he teaches research and psychology courses. He is interested in qualitative and quantitative research, organizational and behavioral psychology, community development, education management and children’s rights. He worked as a Consultant for SOS Children’s Village and World Vision (Zimbabwe) in 2023.

Sihle Patience Senderayi, MEd (GZU) has extensive teaching experience spanning twenty-four years. She is a Senior Lecturer at Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Polytechnic, Zimbabwe where she teaches research and language courses. Her interests are research, counselling, orphans and vulnerable children, children’s rights, language and culture, and indigenous knowledge systems.

Bekithemba Dube is a full Professor in Curriculum Studies currently with the Centre for Diversity in Higher Education, Central University of Technology, South Africa. He holds a PhD in Curriculum Studies from the University of Free State, South Africa. He has written extensively on the area of Curriculum, Politics and Religion in post-colonial African countries. He has published more than 120 articles and book chapters in accredited journals in the past 7 years. He has successfully edited three books on curriculum, politics and religion and edited 4 special issues on education. He is currently the section editor for the *Alternation Journal*, Section Editor for the *Research in Social Science and Technology Journal*, Associate Editor *E-Journal of Humanities, arts and Social Sciences* and Associate Editor for the *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* all accredited with DHET. He has served as a Head of the Department for Education Foundation and Department of Curriculum Studies at UFS. He is a visiting Professor at Appalachian State University (USA) and he has received funding such as Thuthuka, USDP award with Colorado State University (USA) and UKSADP with the University of Highlands and Inlands (Scotland). He has received various excellent awards for being exceptional in research, teaching and engaged scholarship.