

RESEARCH UTILISATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

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What was the purpose of the study?

- (i) To determine the features of certain research projects conducted at the University of Ibadan (UI). These included the demographic profile of participating researchers, project triggers, funding, collaboration, research communication, expected outcomes and intended beneficiaries.
- (ii) To identify ways in which research findings are communicated to intended beneficiaries.
- (iii) To assess perceived levels of research utilisation (RU) and to identify factors that enable RU.
- (iv) To determine interdisciplinary relationships.

Why are the findings of this study useful?

- (i) They provide baseline information for comparison with future research findings from similar studies.
- (ii) They will have an impact on how RU processes at UI are assessed and how research is communicated to users.
- (iii) They show that RU was higher where projects were funded from international sources, when compared with projects that did not receive such funding.
- (iv) They show that increased funding translates into higher levels of RU, and that dissemination costs should be built into proposals and grants.
- (v) They indicate that researchers at UI require increased support and guidance via institutional structures on how to plan and implement RU activities.
- (vi) They show that collaborative research enjoys higher levels of RU than non-collaborative projects.
- (vii) They indicate that collaborations between researchers and end users need to be carefully managed, and outcomes and expectations explained at the outset.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers play a major role in the generation of knowledge, but the extent to which research is utilised is often unclear. While studies in other parts of the world have explored knowledge utilisation from a research perspective, limited information on the subject is available in Nigeria, despite large volumes of research available. Likewise, literature on how RU is perceived across disciplines is scarce. This suggests that the current understanding of the

disciplinary variations in RU at the University of Ibadan (UI) is limited.

In attempting to assess the utilisation of research findings, it is important that disciplinary variations are taken into account. RU is further influenced by other factors, such as researchers' opinions about the value of applied research and investing in the processes required to enhance RU.

This case study examined the issue of knowledge utilisation from the perspective of researchers at the UI. It explored how research

is communicated at UI and identified various factors that influence RU. The findings will have implications for assessing RU processes at the university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One school of thought suggests that research findings can be utilised in three ways¹:

- (i) *Instrumental use* applies research results in specific, direct ways. Findings are of interest to policymakers and can be applied directly to decision-making and policy interventions².
- (ii) *Conceptual use* applies findings for general enlightenment. This means results influence actions or policy indirectly—policymakers can't identify a specific research finding that shaped their decision, but they are aware that research has provided them with a set of ideas on which they based their decisions.
- (iii) *Symbolic use* applies results to legitimise or maintain predetermined positions³. In other words, policymakers are not influenced by research findings, but simply use it for political ammunition.

RU can further be categorised into six stages⁴.

- (i) *Transmission*: Results are transmitted to relevant practitioners and professionals.
- (ii) *Cognition*: Research reports were read and understood by relevant practitioners and professionals.
- (iii) *Reference*: Work was cited as a reference in reports, studies and strategies of action elaborated by relevant practitioners and professionals.
- (iv) *Effort*: Efforts were made by relevant practitioners and professionals to adopt research results.

(v) *Influence*: Research results influence the choices and decisions of relevant practitioners and professionals.

(vi) *Application*: Research results gave rise to applications and extension by relevant practitioners and professionals.

This scale is cumulative, with cognition building on transmission, reference on cognition, effort on reference, and so on, along the spectrum.

METHODOLOGY

An online survey was conducted to obtain information from academic staff. The questionnaire sought information on a single research project, completed in the 10-year period prior to the survey (2004–2013). If still ongoing, the project must have already generated results, and most of the research had to be done while affiliated with the UI. Researchers' perception of RU was classified as per types of use and the six stages of use as described in the literature review. Associations between selected variables and RU were also explored.

Out of 1,536 academic staff approached to complete the survey—and after cleaning the dataset—206 responses were analysed, which represents a response rate of 13,4%

LIMITATIONS

The findings of the study are based on the self-reported responses of participants, with respondents providing answers they deemed appropriate in the context of the survey. Researchers were also required to assess the end-users' choices and actions relating to RU even though they may not have had any interaction with the users. Consequently, participants' perceptions were determined without validation from users.

¹ Pelz (1978)

² Weiss, 1979

³ cf: Beyer, 1997:17

⁴ Landry et al. (2001a)

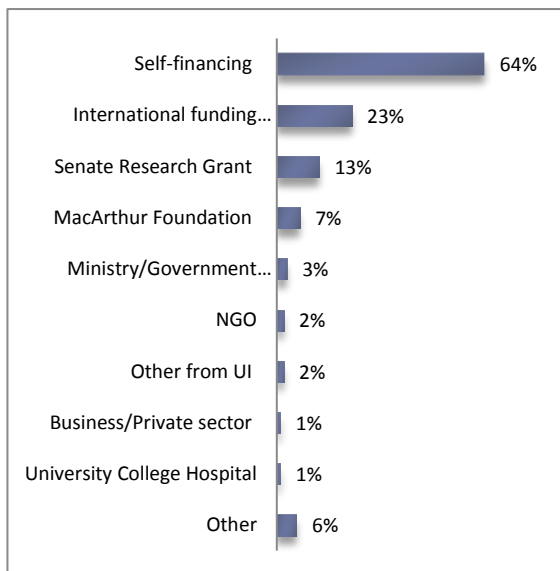
Respondents may have viewed RU as relevant to their work, so an element of selection bias may be present. They also represent a wide range of disciplines with different emphases on applied research. The type of research, the degree of technicality and the applicability of results could lead to varying degrees of RU across disciplines. Finally, at 13.4%, the response rate was lower than reports of similar studies conducted elsewhere.

These limitations in no way undermine the validity of the results—they merely point to the need for caution when generalising findings more widely.

RESULTS

The research projects covered a wide range of domains, but medical (31%) and agricultural (26%) research was predominant. Main triggers for research were respondents' curiosity (45%), previous research (37%) and postgraduate work (23%), and most of the projects were personally funded.

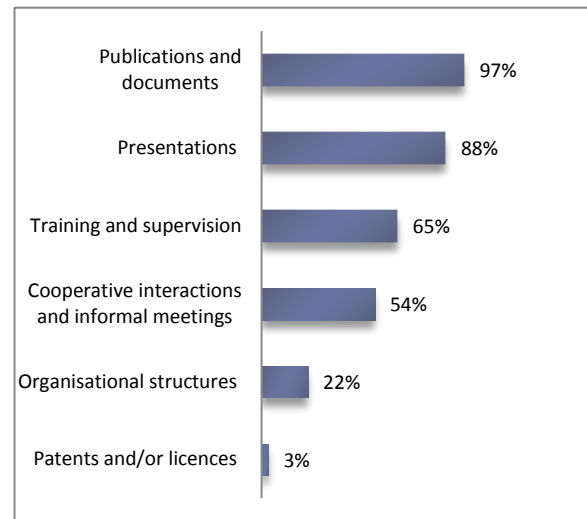
MAJOR SOURCES OF FUNDING (N=202)



The intended users of the findings were mostly academic peers (61%), with government bodies and industry mentioned by fewer researchers. Most of the projects (64%) were conducted in collaboration with other researchers, mainly within Nigeria (72%), and

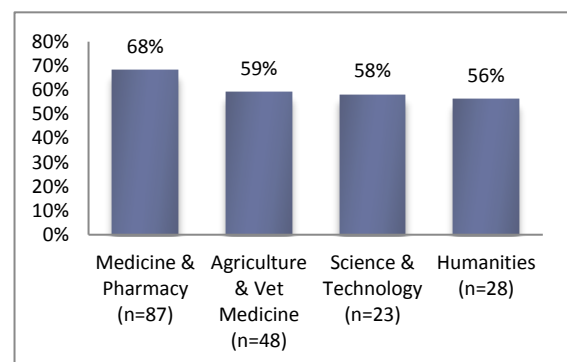
the principal expected outcome was the advancement of knowledge (82%). Predominant channels of communication of findings were academic publications (97%) and scholarly presentations (88%).

CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION (N=206)



Seventy per cent of the researchers indicated that beneficiaries used their results. The commonest types of use reported were conceptual (50%) and instrumental (44%).

PARTICIPANTS WHO DID NOT COMPLETE SIX-STAGES SCALE



Using the six-stages measurement of RU to assess success, most researchers passed the transmission (81%) and cognition (80%) levels. Fewer passed the reference (59%), effort (57%), influence (55%) and application (56%) levels. Overall, fewer than half of the researchers reported that their findings had completed all six stages of RU. A higher proportion of those in the medicine and pharmacy group (68%) failed to pass all levels

of the scale compared with their colleagues in humanities and social sciences (56%).

Factors that affected RU were related to participants' disciplines, research funding, collaboration with colleagues, and the nature of intended beneficiaries—be they colleagues

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Researchers at UI engage in RU activities and appear to be committed to disseminating the findings of their work. Traditional academic channels of communicating findings, such as articles in publications and presentations, still dominate. While levels of RU vary across disciplines, participating researchers in the humanities, social sciences and education perceive higher levels of utilisation among users compared with their colleagues in other disciplines. This perception could be related to the engagement of these researchers with end users. Funding for research and institutional support are major requirements for effective RU. Researchers at UI also require increased support and guidance via the institutional structures on how to plan for and implement RU activities.

Researchers at UI should ensure that audiences outside academia get to know about and use their research results. The UI administration could support these researchers by providing more access to research funding and establishing institutional platforms to facilitate interaction between researchers and the users of their research.

or specific interest groups such as farmers, doctors, teachers, nurses and consumers.

The main reasons given by researchers for non-utilisation of their results were the absence of supportive institutional platforms and inadequate research funding.

AUTHOR'S REFLECTIONS

Researchers at the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry have made their findings more visible to users outside academia, specifically to local farmers.

A better understanding now exists about RU and translational research, and the knowledge gained so far can be incorporated in training on grant writing. Researchers will furthermore be trained to include RU in their research projects and to make findings available to audiences other than colleagues. They will also be taught to use channels other than publishing in peer-reviewed journals to disseminate findings.

Processes may now be promoted and fostered to improve research visibility. These would include the production of policy briefs, and conducting research days and science fairs.

The importance of simplifying research to provide feedback to users and non-academic audiences cannot be overstated. It is essential to engage with users during the research process to find out how best to adopt findings.