

# Undergraduate Research at Rundu Campus in Recent Years

## —A Cross-Sectional Exploratory Case Study to Understand the Focus of Research at a University of Namibia Satellite Campus

Gurvy Kavei, Erwina Karupu

Department of Economics and Management Science, University of Namibia, Rundu, Namibia  
Email: [gkavei@unam.na](mailto:gkavei@unam.na)

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### Abstract

For 11 years since its existence, the Rundu Campus of the University of Namibia hasn't created a simple and accessible database of undergraduate student research scholarship. Taking a longitudinal (2016-2021) exploratory approach, this research compiled a primary database of research topics (N = 256) to understand the areas of research interest students have been focusing on over this period. Over 40% of the Campus research targets students as subjects of research while the campus research is largely interpretative (13.1%), exploratory (13.3%) and seeking to evaluate the knowledge (28%) of students across a large spectrum of health, education, and business-related issues. The study recommends extending future research beyond just the "Research Topics" to cover a full breadth of Campus research work up to their conclusions and recommendations. Furthermore, the study recommends the Campus academic society do more than merely studying on "students" and cover broader socio-economic aspects within the Kavango East region to have more scholarly relevance.

### Keywords

Ungraduated Research, Rundu Campus, Database, Repository, Focus Area

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## 1. Background and Introduction

The 12 years old Rundu Campus of the University of Namibia is primarily an undergraduate centre where teaching, learning and research are the mainstay of its business. The purpose of this paper is to identify the primary areas of campus's research interest carried by its undergraduate students from 2016 to 2021,

their similarities, differences, and overlaps, with the view to suggest a scholarly repository of such research outputs as part of improving research practice in general. The University of Namibia is made up of 12 Campuses (UNAM, 2022). Rundu Campus is one of these. Like two other Campuses of Oshakati and Katima, Rundu Campus was transitioned from the former colleges of Education in 2012 and inherited over 200 students and 28 lecturers in the field of Education. Because of this, the Faculty of Education was the only one represented on Campus. By 2013, the Faculty of Economics and Management Science (now the Faculty of Commerce, Management & Law) was introduced to the Campus. Later, in 2017, the Health Science Faculty (now the Faculty of Health Sciences & Veterinary Medicine) also found its way to the Campus, with an initial intake of 70 students.

Overall, both the student and staff numbers increased over the years on which at the inception year of 2012, only one academic staff held a doctorate. Ten years later, the Campus recorded 20 PhD holders. Today, the student number has gone over 3400. The first graduates to complete their 4-years degree courses occurred in 2015, with 233 students walking across the aisle on 20 April. This is the first cohort to undertake their undergraduate Research in part fulfillment of their course requirements. In subsequent years, this number of students undertaking Research would invariably grow due to the increased enrolment across all three faculties.

Because of the growth in the size and nature of Research, a Campus Research Coordination Committee was formed in 2016—focusing not only on student research work but on academic staff as well. In addition, each faculty has a clear outline and structure that student research must follow. A campus-based faculty research coordinator would oversee the research process. Except for Research in the Faculty of Health Sciences, where students must obtain clearance at the national level, most of the Research for the faculty of commerce and Education are usually cleared at the campus level by the faculty coordination committee.

## 2. Significance of the Study

In an environment where research is a primary activity, it is worth creating and maintaining a repository that enables researchers archive their own research output while improving visibility, usage and impact of research carried out by both students and academics (Adebisi, 2022; Day & Rosemary, 2010; Mass-Hernandez et al., 2022). This may be viewed as translational research aimed at improving and making research relevant to achieve national and international development goals. Finally, a study of this nature can be viewed as part of the broader knowledge management (at the campus level) where students will be in a better informed position to identify suitable supervisors, based on known records, where supervisors will be in an informed position to guide and effectively supervise student to research novelty and avoiding duplicity, especially where research funding is limited.

### 3. Problem Statement

Although there has always been a Campus Research Committee, there has not been a time since the existence of the Campus where a comprehensive collation of all undergraduate research work was put in one single inventory to avoid duplication for subsequent Research. Because of this, each year, research supervisors go through a strenuous exercise of manually having to verify the proposed students' research topics. Also, other than lecturers complaining of student research being repetitive (in most cases) they increasingly encounter incidents of research plagiarism year-in-year-out, as there is no centralised research repository for internal checks and controls. For students, they conduct their Research without a privilege of an electronically available database of past research topics they could mine for comparative enrichment of their research knowledge. Overall, research novelty and originality at the campus remains worryingly poor.

### 4. Research Objectives

Given the above problems, this research aims to create a database of all past Campus undergraduate research topics between 2015 and 2021.

The key objectives of doing this are to:

- 1) Identify the primary areas of interest student research focuses on.
- 2) Determine similarities and differences in student research projects.

### 5. Literature Review

In this section, we review aspects that surround undergraduate research. As [Mass-Hernandez et al. \(2022\)](#) posits, scientific research is highly essential in the lives of undergraduate students during their careers as university students and as professionals beyond their studies. Furthermore, the involvement of undergraduate students in research takes centre stage in preparing them for a knowledge-driven world economy ([Adebisi, 2022](#)). For the institution and the country at large, ([Ahmad & Al-Thani, 2022: p. 1](#)) opines that undergraduate research enhances the research capital and authenticates a country's educational outcome, respectively. It is therefore very essential for this research to explore the nature of undergraduate research at the Rundu Campus.

Because of this, the University of Namibia has, like many others, over the years, developed a standard format that researchers (both students and professionals) should follow. The guideline helps researchers to point out several salient aspects a research proposal should cover ([University of Namibia, 2022](#)). These aspects include: 1) Research Topic, 2) Orientation to the Study, 3) Statement of the Problem, 4) Research Question/Objective of the Study, 5) Hypothesis of the Study (if Applicable), 6) Significance of the Study, 7) Limitations of the Study, 8) Literature Review, 9) Research Methodology, 10) Research Ethics, 11) References. Each one of these research aspects poses its respective challenges to both students and supervisors during any given research process.

As established earlier already, the purpose of this research is to create a data-

base of the Rundu Campus Undergraduate Research Topic between 2015 and 2021 with the view to determine the nature of students' research interests. Therefore, the very first aspect of Research Topic Selection or Identification becomes critical and almost prerequisite to the rest of the research process undertaken by a student. In this case, (Intjaa & Nauyoma, 2019: p. 480) acknowledge that supervisors can complete a research project if the research topic suggested to them by the student is pertinent, among others. However, supervisors have limited tools and resources from which and with which to validate the research topic proposed to them by supervisees. With limited exposure to the usage of a research repository, both research students and research supervisors will certainly have limitations in confirming the validity and feasibility of a research title suggested or proposed by a student. Hence the need to pay attention to the significance of an institutional repository in this regard.

Many studies (Sucheth, 2021; Vattulainen & O'Connor, 2018; Sabharwal, 2021; Takaingenhamo & Chiparasha, 2021; Sweeper & Ramsden, 2020) pointed to the importance and architecture of how knowledge repository should be approached. There is thus, a need for the Rundu Campus to warm up to intensified use of the existing research repository for its undergraduate research scholarship. That statement does not, in any way, presuppose deficiency or absence of an institutional repository at UNAM. On the contrary, UNAM has a fully developed, interactive and one of the modern online library systems where several types of publications can be accessed by both internal and external end users. Be great as it may, the issue at hand is rather a stark invincibility of undergraduate scholarly research work on the UNAM repository. Rundu Campus end users are no exception in this anomaly not least because the campus offers only undergraduate programs, but perhaps they are less engaged and their needs less understood to realise any such benefits (Day & Rosemary, 2010). For that reason, both academic researchers and students may not fully enjoy the privilege of utilising the state-of-the-art repository UNAM is endowed with. Students are generally having a low rate of usage and adoption of institutional repositories as they are not highly motivated or incentivized to have their research information placed on or shared within academic communities like professional researchers would (Nunda & Elia, 2019).

Even though the students are a weak link in this aspect, one would expect their supervisors to be the ones bringing their student research work into sharp visibility through the institutional repository—the UNAM Library, to be specific. However, this still does not seem to be the case, perhaps because of a limited translation of undergraduate research work into full-fledged peer-reviewed articles. Mismatches between student research topics and the expert knowledge of their assigned supervisors (Intjaa & Nauyoma, 2019) could be a compounding drawback in this space.

## 6. Research Method

The issues of research duplicity, diversity, plagiarism, and archiving raised earli-

er at the Rundu Campus cannot be best understood by simply looking at a single year of incidents. Therefore, in keeping with the tradition of none-interference with the subject of study or data, enhance of both the quality and quantity of data as wells as reduction of bias (Baikady, Khan, & Islam, 2022), a cross-sectional approach was preferred for this study. This covered the period from 2015 to 2021, exhaustively collecting and analysing all (N = 256) past research topics in the three faculties of Commerce, Health, and Education at the Rundu Campus of the University of Namibia. Although each faculty has a pre-completion list of research topics (at the proposal stage), none had a comprehensive list of finished research topics. With that state of sketchiness, getting the Campus Undergraduate research projects captured on the university repository encounters its first hurdle. Therefore, the approach was to collect all cases into a single inventory. A literature search to identify a similar study didn't yield much of what was needed in this research. As such, there wasn't any readily available model to use in this work.

Nonetheless, the entire study population of cases in the period (2015-2021) was captured using SPSS. Because of the faculty-by-faculty inconsistencies in keeping their data on finished student research work, a few cases would be missing across the board. However, these missing cases were very insignificant to materially compromise the outcome integrity of the study.

## 7. Findings & Discussions

As already indicated, a total of 256 research titles over the study period were identified and captured. 17%, 22% and 62% of these titles came from the faculties of Commerce, Education and Health, respectively (see **Table 1**).

As per **Table 2**, 2020 (38.2%) and 2021 (27.2%) were the years with a large number of reported research titles while 2016 (0.4%) and 2017 (3.5%) recorded lower cases of research titles. The number of research titles identified has no correlation to the sequence of years Pearson Chi-Square Test = 0.252).

### Research Topic Categories

Out of the 256 Research Topic Cases identified, 90 Sub-group Topics were determined. These are shown in **Table 3**.

These research topic categories have no correlation with Faculty, Academic Year of Study or even Program of Study as attested by the insignificant Pearson Correlation Statistics of 0.863, 0.459 and 0.931 respectively exhibited in **Tables 4-6**.

36 cases of the 90 are focused on *Student-Related Issues* which represent 40% of the research conducted on campus over the review period (2016-2022). *Investigative Research Topic* (whether they are investigating case studies, challenges, Effects, COVID, Students, Factors, Impact, Learners, and Perception) constitutes 13.1% of the 90 clusters of research categories across the period of evaluation. Research topics in the cluster of *Exploratory Studies* constitute 13.3%. Those research topics seeking to determine the *Knowledge* of the subjects

**Table 1.** Research titles by faculty.

<b>Research Titles by Faculty</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Commerce	43	16.8	16.9	16.9
	Education	55	21.5	21.6	38.4
	Health	157	61.3	61.6	100.0
	Total	255	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	0.4		
Total		256	100.0		

**Table 2.** Research titles by year.

<b>Research Titles Year</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2016	1	0.4	0.4	0.4
	2017	9	3.5	3.5	3.9
	2018	23	9.0	9.1	13.0
	2019	27	10.5	10.6	23.6
	2020	97	37.9	38.2	61.8
	2021	69	27.0	27.2	89.0
	2022	28	10.9	11.0	100.0
	Total	254	99.2	100.0	
Missing	System	2	0.8		
Total		256	100.0		

**Table 3.** Research topic categories.

<b>Topic Categories Focusing On</b>				
#	Categories	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Assessing Student Experiences	1	0.4%	
2	Assessing Student Practices	1	0.4%	
3	Assessment of Knowledge, Attitude & Practices on HIV	1	0.4%	
67	Assessment of Student Knowledge	3	1.2%	
4	Assessment of Student Knowledge & Practices	1	0.4%	
5	Assessment of Student Knowledge & Practices on Parents	1	0.4%	
48	Assessment of Student Knowledge, Attitude & Practices	2	0.8%	
72	Case Study	4	1.6%	

**Continued**

49	Case Study Effects	2	0.8%
6	Case Study Knowledge Effect	1	0.4%
7	Case Study of Student Challenges	1	0.4%
77	Challenges	5	2.0%
8	Challenges of Student COVID Experiences	1	0.4%
9	COVID Assessment	1	0.4%
10	COVID Challenges	1	0.4%
78	Effect	5	2.0%
50	Effects & Challenges	2	0.8%
11	Evaluate	1	0.4%
51	Evaluating Case Studies	2	0.8%
12	Evaluating Effects in Case Studies	1	0.4%
13	Evaluating Impact in Case Studies	1	0.4%
14	Evaluating Impact of COVID on SMEs	1	0.4%
79	Experience	5	2.0%
52	Exploring	2	0.8%
15	Exploring Challenges & Experiences	1	0.4%
53	Exploring Effects	2	0.8%
16	Exploring Factors	1	0.4%
54	Exploring Practices	2	0.8%
68	Exploring Student Challenges	3	1.2%
55	Exploring Student Experiences	2	0.8%
80	Exploring Student Factors	6	2.3%
17	Exploring Student Knowledge, Attitudes & Practices on Effects of Alcohol	1	0.4%
18	Exploring Student Perceptions	1	0.4%
19	Exploring Student Perceptions & Challenges	1	0.4%
20	Exploring Students	1	0.4%
86	Factor	11	4.3%
69	HIV	3	1.2%
21	HIV Factors & Effects	1	0.4%
81	Impact	6	2.3%
73	Impact in Case Studies	4	1.6%
22	Impact in Learners Case Studies	1	0.4%
23	Impact of COVID	1	0.4%

**Continued**

24	Impact on Learners	1	0.4%
84	Investigating	10	3.9%
56	Investigating Case Studies	2	0.8%
57	Investigating Challenges	2	0.8%
58	Investigating Effects	2	0.8%
25	Investigating Effects COVID on Students	1	0.4%
59	Investigating Effects on Students	2	0.8%
60	Investigating Factors	2	0.8%
74	Investigating Impact	4	1.6%
26	Investigating Impact in Case Studies	1	0.4%
61	Investigating Impact on COVID	2	0.8%
27	Investigating Impact on Learners	1	0.4%
28	Investigating Learners	1	0.4%
62	Investigating Student Perceptions	2	0.8%
29	Investigating Students	1	0.4%
30	Knowledge	1	0.4%
31	Knowledge & Attitude	1	0.4%
32	Knowledge Assessment	1	0.4%
33	Knowledge Attitude & Practices	1	0.4%
34	Knowledge, Attitude & Practice on COVID	1	0.4%
63	Learners	2	0.8%
35	Learners & Parents	1	0.4%
64	Learners Factors	2	0.8%
36	Learners Perceptions	1	0.4%
88	Others	13	5.1%
37	Parents	1	0.4%
80	Parents Knowledge	5	2.0%
75	Perceptions	4	1.6%
38	Perceptions on Factors	1	0.4%
39	Student Attitudes	1	0.4%
40	Student Case Study	1	0.4%
65	Student Challenges & Experiences	2	0.8%
41	Student COVID Assessment	1	0.4%
76	Student COVID Experiences	4	1.6%



**Continued**

70	Student Effects	3	1.2%
90	Student Experiences	18	7.0%
42	Student Experiences & Perceptions	1	0.4%
82	Student Factors	7	2.7%
71	Student HIV Knowledge	3	1.2%
66	Student Knowledge	2	0.8%
83	Student Knowledge & Attitude	8	3.1%
43	Student Knowledge & Perception of HIV	1	0.4%
44	Student Knowledge & Practices	1	0.4%
85	Student Knowledge, Practice & Attitude	10	3.9%
45	Student Knowledge, Practice & Attitude on HIV	1	0.4%
89	Student Perceptions	15	5.9%
46	Student Perceptions & Practices	1	0.4%
47	Student Practices & Experiences	1	0.4%
87	Students	12	4.7%

**Table 4.** Topic-faculty correlation.

<b>Correlations</b>			
		TopCat	Faculty
Topic Categories	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.863
	N	256	255

**Table 5.** Topic-year correlation.

<b>Correlations</b>			
		TopCat	Year
Topic Categories	Pearson Correlation	1	0.047
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.459
	N	256	254

**Table 6.** Topic-program of study correlation.

<b>Correlations</b>			
		TopCat	Progrm
Topic Categories	Pearson Correlation	1	0.006
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.931
	N	256	232

of studies in any element of the study were 25 and this constitutes 28% in the cluster of Research Topics. The remaining 5.6% is comprised of a variety of sub-categories ranging from Learners' Perceptions to Others.

## 8. Conclusions & Recommendations

If this kind of research is to continue every year, it would lead to a robust Campus-based scholarly repository which will eventually enhance UNAM's research capital while authenticating Namibia's educational outcome as argued earlier by [Ahmad & Al-Thani \(2022\)](#). Clearly, the collection of data in this specific case was challenged with sketchiness across all three faculties. It would therefore be absolutely necessary a recommendation for all the faculties on Campus to maintain a comprehensive record of their undergraduate research project throughout the years, going forward.

Notably, this research focus was just on the research topic across the entire period of study. As the Campus aspires to improve its isolated scholarly repository, it is highly recommended that future researchers in this area take into account the full spectrum of research-related issues which were not part of this, such as Orientation to the Study, Statement of the Problem, Research Question/Objective of the Study, Hypothesis of the Study (if Applicable), Significance of the Study, Limitations of the Study, Literature Review, Research Methodology, Research Ethics and References.

So far, this research has illustrated that undergraduate research at Rundu Campus is mainly interpretative, focusing on exploring and investigating knowledge, experiences, perceptions, practices, and attitudes of subjects of study—mainly students in this case, on several issues. This gives the impression that students at this Campus are overly researched, and it would thus be advisable for researchers to begin looking for alternative subjects of research in the future to diversify epistemology and engage the broader society of the region where socio-economic development challenges stand aloof. This would require cross-sectoral collaboration of the campus researchers with public sector organisations within the region, as well as businesses to enhance relevance and impact. Since the challenges of research mapping are perennial (year-in-year-out), it would be helpful for future researchers to apply different methodologies or approaches like Action Research which provides an opportunity for observing evolving research dynamics in real time.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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