Research Dissemination Practices in Tanzania: Limitations and Potentialities

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Abstract
Disseminating research findings to both academic and non-academic fraternities is imperative for effectively fulfilling both academic and developmental roles. However, efforts to disseminate research outputs beyond academic circles are still limited, neglected and rarely questioned. This paper explores research dissemination practices engaged by researchers in four Tanzanian universities to establish their limitations and potentialities. The findings indicate that practices towards research dissemination continue favouring academic fraternities and there is growing belief among researchers that research is conducted principally for publication and academic qualification attainment rather than as something that researchers can directly use to change society and bring about development. The paper provides some recommendations for the potential reform and improvement of the dissemination of research findings to both academic and non-academic audiences.

Keywords: Knowledge dissemination; open access; knowledge valorisation

1. Introduction

The ultimate goal of undertaking research is essentially twofold: to advance knowledge frontiers (theoretical contribution) and facilitate the solving of practical problems or issues besetting communities (practical contribution). To attain this noble goal, the knowledge generated from research should be disseminated to reach respective and potential audiences both in academic and non-academic circles. However, researchers commonly direct most of their research/knowledge dissemination efforts towards a small clique of a specialised audience – the academic community. Efforts to disseminate research findings beyond academic fraternities are still limited, neglected, overlooked and rarely questioned (Neylon et al., 2014; Trotter et al., 2014; Ondenge et al., 2015). As such, the disseminated knowledge often does not reach what can be described as non-academic audiences – such as policy-makers, public officials, businesspersons, farmers, service delivery bodies and non-government agencies – that can use and benefit from the knowledge to improve the standard of service delivery and bolster socio-economic development.

A growing body of literature has focused on research/knowledge dissemination; even then, this literature is less informative about how the knowledge dissemination gap is being experienced in different world's regions and across disciplines. In fact, most of the previous studies in this topic are based in developed economies, and have mainly focused on health, business and marketing research (Gray, Ottesen and Matear, 2005; Howlett, 2010; Wilson et al., 2010; Houghton, Swan and Brown, 2011; Olmos-Peñuela, Castro-Martínez and D'Este, 2014; Ondenge et al., 2015). Indeed, previous research has centred on developing our understanding of essential factors necessary for effective research dissemination such as financial and physical resources, incentives associated with research dissemination, positive attitudes towards research dissemination, knowledge of what constitutes research dissemination and the presence of demand in the society for research-based knowledge (Lewis and Simmons, 2010; Wilson et al., 2010; Trotter et al., 2014; MacKenzie, Christensen and Turner, 2015).