NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

CARL VON OSSIETZKY universität OLDENBURG

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DEVELOPING BEST PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND MANAGEMENT AT EAST AND SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

Paul Webb & Anne Pabel
Nelson Mandela University

Eugenia Kafanabo
University of Dar es Salaam

Karsten Speck & Malve v. Möllendorff
Oldenburg University

CONTENT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The 'best practices' that appear in this report originate within the context of a trans-institutional research project funded by the government of Lower Saxony (Germany) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) on 'Exploring and Developing Best Practices in Educational Research and Management at East and South African Universities (January 2017-December 2017). The participants were mainly drawn from the East and South African German Centre of Excellence in Research and Management (CERM-ESA) partnership between Oldenburg University, Nelson Mandela University, Moi University, the University of Dar es Salaam, and the Uganda Management Institute. The guiding research question was: Which evidence-based research approaches, as well as measures and strategies of research promotion, are best suited to improve research practices in education in South and East Africa?

The overall methodology included workshops and discussions and a qualitative survey completed by research managers and leaders from each participating institution. The design of the expert survey was informed by the overall project research question. The participant responses provided details of what they considered to be collated in order to present a trans-institutional collective of measures that are believed to have been proven successful in the contexts of the partner universities and to stimulate critical thought as to how partner institutions could benefit from these practices. In order to explore options for replication, the workings and intended aims of each practice are explained in detail.

In order to initiate the discussion, a joint workshop with research managers and researchers of each partner institution was organised at Oldenburg University in September 2017. The workshop started with presentations of best practice examples for research support that work in the context of German Universities before looking at the East and South African contexts.

In total four 'best practices' were received from Nelson Mandela University and Uganda Management Institute respectively, while the University of Dar es Salaam and Moi University identified two practices per institution. These practices range from various forms of capacity building and skills development to measures of structural support and institutional policies. The fact that the perceptions of best practice were generally similar across institutions suggest that the participating institutions share similar needs, which highlight the importance of inter-institutional engagement and exchange of ideas in terms of measures that are effective in specified contexts.

The following sections provide a framework for the report, introduce details of the survey, present key elements of the practices grouped by institution, and provide a number of recommendations for utilising the findings. Grouping by institution was selected to maintain a clear structure for subsequent discussion of practices that might be presented as a trans-institutional constellation on which recommendations can be made. Problematic issues, such as the need to provide more detailed evidence of best practice, are also considered

II. FRAMEWORK

The 'best practice' reports from each institution were generated using a semi-structured questionnaire for completion by the participants at each institution on a voluntary basis. The questionnaire was designed in order to allow each participant to reflect on the research support practices and to identify what they thought were the most effective and fruitful practices in place at their respective institutions. The structure of the questionnaire was both guiding and open, thereby providing sufficient room for a detailed depiction of the factors that make a particular practice a 'best practice', and to allow other institutions to potentially benefit from the description. The questionnaire also made possible a trans-institutional analysis and comparative evaluation as the in-depth and step-by-step description of particular practices lends itself to the compilation of a practical 'best practice guide', which could be made available across institutions.

However, it is important to note that these 'best practice' reports are based on, and derived from, experiences at a particular institution, which means that they only are of a suggestive and advisory nature. They do not provide a step-by-step manual with guaranteed outcomes, but, rather, the intention is to share ideas that have proven successful in a specific context and seem recommendable. On a structural level, the comparative constellation of ideas that were attained allow for identifying certain context-specific difficulties and possible ways of resolving them. Lastly, the practice of identifying and sharing particularly effective practices with partner institutions could perhaps lead to a continuous best practice exchange with the aim of constantly and critically exploring avenues for mutually beneficial research and research supervision support.

Since each institution was expected to have several effective practices that could potentially be interlinked, participants were asked to complete separate templates for each practice they identified in order to ensure that the workings of each practice are clearly delineated. The questionnaire was structured as follows:

- Provision was made for the participants to provide a clear and self-explanatory name of a 'best practice' they had identified at their institution.
- They were asked to present a detailed description of how the selected practice operates. It was made explicit that this description should provide the reader with enough information to understand the topic in general and that the description should be detailed and in-depth so that this practice can be replicated at other institutions.
- In order to ensure an adequate level of detail in the presentation of a particular practice, the questionnaire distinguished between a description and an explanation of how a practice operates and why it is particularly effective.
- Moreover, the questionnaire asked for empirical evidence to support the claim that a certain practice can be classified as a 'best practice'.
- If the participants were unable to identify any recommendable practices at their own institution, the last section of the questionnaire asked them for potential 'best practice' examples from other universities or from literature which they may have heard.

III. BEST PRACTICE REPORTS

Amongst the partner universities of CERM-ESA which participated in the identification of effective and recommendable practices at their respective institutions, a total of thirteen practices were suggested. Out of these 'best practice' suggestions, four originated from Nelson Mandela University and four from the Uganda Management Institute. The University of Dar es Salaam and Moi University provided two reports each. The following overview of the central aims and key elements of each practice offers insight into the different areas and dimensions of research and/or supervision support at a particular university and outlines the central structures and aims of each practice. They also provide context-specific observations and allow comparative analysis of similarities and differences that can be identified across contexts. The following 'best practices' were identified by the participating institutions.

NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

The four best practice reports from the Nelson Mandela University included writing retreat for emerging and experienced researchers; Faculty support for academics to attend (inter)national conferences and to publish articles/book chapters/books; research associate supervision and mentoring of emerging academics; and research sabbatical and research leave for academic and support staff.

Writing retreat for emerging and experienced researchers (NMU 1)

Aim of the practice:

- It is the aim of this practice to provide emerging and experienced academics with the necessary support they need to produce an article for publication in an accredited journal. The Faculty of Education holds and funds writing retreats approximately two to three times a year, at an off campus venue for two to three days. During the academic year, both emerging and experienced academics have to attend to busy teaching schedules, their students' needs and administrative tasks. As a result, it can be challenging to simultaneously produce academic output in the form of publications. Therefore, the writing retreats provide academics with dedicated writing time, in which they can make significant progress on potential publications.
- This practice is aimed at candidates who already have a draft of a publishable document or who have already done substantial work on a particular topic. Preference is given to these candidates.

Key elements of the practice:

- It is held during a time of the year when academics have time to spend up to three days at a secluded and off campus venue to focus exclusively on their writing (e.g. at the beginning of the examination period).
- The structure/schedule of the writing retreat is flexible and is tailored to accommodate the participants' needs most effectively.
- Within three months of attending the writing retreat, candidates have to submit a report.
- The writing retreats are funded by the Faculty of Education through the 10% of the amount received for research input which the university pays to the Faculty of Education.

Faculty support for academics to attend (inter)national conferences and to publish articles/book chapters/books (NMU 2)

Aim of the practice:

- It is the aim of this practice to increase the research output within the institution by supporting academics to attend (inter)national conferences and to produce a publishable document thereafter. The academic gains exposure through presenting on a relevant topic at an (inter)national conference and has the opportunity to advance their career by developing the presentation into a publishable paper. This simultaneously increases the research output of the institution which, in turn, makes it possible for more academics to benefit from this funding.

Key elements of the practice:

- The funds are available only to permanent academics and academics on a 3-year contract or three years' consecutive employment in a full-time capacity in the Faculty of Education with insufficient research funds (or at the discretion of the RTI committee). An academic may apply for funding once in three years.
- An applicant will be awarded to a maximum of R 20 000.00 within a three-year cycle by the Education Research, Technology and Innovation Committee (ERTIC).
- A tangible output must be identified in the application with an envisaged date of attainment. The output must be related to the criteria indicated.
- Funding is subject to the ERTIC financial assistance budget for the particular year of application.

Research associate supervision and mentoring of emerging academics (NMU 3)

Aim of the practice:

- The central aim is to mentor emerging academics without experience in supervision in order to develop their capabilities as supervisors for postgraduate projects. In order to do so, retired professors with extensive experience in supervision and publishing become research associates. In implementing this practice, a research associate with extensive experience and a novice academic work together in supervising a postgraduate project. In this working relationship, the research associate is the main supervisor and the novice academic is the co-supervisor.

Key elements of the practice:

- It allows for collegial teaming opportunities for two (or more) supervisors with similar research interests. In some cases, newly appointed lecturers are former students of the research associates.
- The student who is being supervised by two (or more) supervisors has the advantage of receiving extensive feedback from multiple perspectives.
- A definite ratio split between the supervisor and the co-supervisor is determined. The default split indicates a ratio of 70%-30% for the supervisor and co-supervisor, respectively. However, percentages can be negotiated among the supervisors, e.g. 50-50 or 60-40.
- During the process of supervision, the co-supervisor receives feedback on their progress in supervising a particular project.

UGANDA MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

The four best practice reports from the Uganda Management Institute included effective management of proposal defence for master's students; capacity building for research supervisors; revision and operationalization of external examination of master's dissertations; and collective participation and centralized management of research workshops for improved quality of research methods training and student researchers.

Effective management of proposal defence for Masters students at Uganda Management Institute (UMI 1)

Aim of the practice:

- It is the aim of this practice to implement an effective system for managing the research proposals of Masters students by focusing on the following elements: orientation and research support workshop for the Masters students to ensure understanding of research skills, guidance in identifying research areas, supervisor allocation, submission of the draft proposal to the Research Centre and the proposal defence before a committee. The students receive feedback according to which they can productively amend their draft proposals.

Key elements of the practice are:

- The Masters Participants are required to attend mandatory five research workshops which focus on various aspects of research skills and knowledge. During these workshops, students are supported to conceptualize their research, know how to review literature, learn scholarly writing and presentation skills.
- Each student is allocated two supervisors: one supervisor who is always the main supervisor must be a PhD holder and the second supervisor may be a Master's degree holder. The main supervisor provides leadership and methodological guidance to the supervision. The second supervisor is always a person who knows the subject of research very well and can give technical support to the student on the issues of the subject of research
- At the proposal defence, the Masters student makes a presentation in Power Point, after which the reviewer is given opportunity to make his/her submission on the work of the candidate in a detail report.
- When the Chairperson is convinced that all the issues that were raised during the proposal defence are addressed, he/she can then issue a letter of authorization to the candidate to proceed to the field for data collection.

Capacity building for research supervisors at UMI (UMI 2)

Aim of the practice:

- The aim of this practice is to improve the capacity of academic staff to offer quality supervision and effectively manage the supervision process. This is done through a four pronged approach; a) career development/doctoral studies; b) short term performance improvement trainings; c) sponsorship for international conferences and exchange and; d) in built mentoring process for young supervisors.

Key elements of the practice:

- Staff members acquire skills and experience to supervise, manage the supervision process and examine student's research products. Through the co-supervision/pairing of senior supervisors with young supervisors, supervisors learn from one another i.e. methodology and content, appreciate working in teams, and students get regular supervision even when one of the supervisors is not available at the Institute.
- Each of the four related capacity building practices follows a distinct process. The components are: career development/ doctoral studies, short term performance improvement trainings, sponsorship for international conferences and staff exchange and mentoring process for young supervisors.

Revision and operationalization of external examination of master's dissertations (UMI 3)

Aim of the practice:

- This practice aims at improving the procedure for nominating and appointing External Examiners, the examination tool, conditions for External Examination, and procedure for External Examiners. These guidelines are in operation, and this has led to improved external examination of Master's Degree theses.

Key elements of the practice:

- The External Examiner (EE) has to be an accomplished academic with at least a PhD. They have at least one year of experience in examination of dissertations or thesis and they should be a subject matter specialist in the field of the student's research. Furthermore, the external examiner should not bear any conflict of interest with regard to the research work or student to be examined.

- The academic members of the Department /School Research Committee (SRC) study the Curriculum Vitae to satisfy themselves that the nominee has the necessary expertise, experience and seniority to serve as an external examiner.
- External Examiners are appointed to serve for a period of three years with a possible one-year extension.
- The performance of examiners is assessed annually by the IRC against the stipulated standard and procedures. Examiners whose performance is found wanting are relieved from the examination responsibility. Similarly contracts are terminated.

Collective participation and centralized management of research workshops for improved quality of research methods training and student researchers (UMI 4)

Aim of the practice:

- Students participate in research methodology training through in-house workshops to build their knowledge and skills to design and execute research projects. The best practice in this is the centralized management of the research methods workshops institutionalized by Senate. Each workshop engages different players including the facilitators who prepare and deliver teaching content, the Quality Assurance Department which controls quality through quarterly evaluation of performance of facilitators. Quality Assurance also gives feedback to the facilitators and informs management for appropriate decision making.

Key elements of the practice are:

- Two or three facilitators with an edge in particular aspects of research methodology focused under a specific workshop are identified by the workshop leader and approved by the overall Research Manager at the Institute Research Centre which is the central coordination unit of all researches in the institute.
- Engaged of quality Assurance provides and independent assessment of performance of the facilitators who are identified and allocated by the Workshop Leader in Liaison with the Research Manager. Engagement of the Research Manager in overseeing activities of the facilitators including the leader of the workshop creates a sense of commitment among facilitators to deliver quality.
- This collective participation and centralized management of the Research methods training has improved the quality research of methods training, fostered learning and improved quality of students' research.

UNIVERSITY OF DAR ES SALAAM

The two best practice reports from the University of Dar es Salaam encompass an anti-plagiarism policy and the provision of a data laboratory (dLab).

Anti-plagiarism policy at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM 1)

Aim of the practice:

- Eliminating academic dishonesty including plagiarism at the University of Dar es Salaam has been one of the priorities aspects of quality assurance of the institution. The university has developed guidelines on plagiarism that intend to first warn students about plagiarism and its consequences in their academic carrier, secondly eliminate the plagiarism practices by detection and penalties.

Key elements of the practice are:

- Subscription to Turnitin Software and all academic staff and students are required to make use of their accounts.
- For the University of Dar es Salaam the cut-off point is set at 30% which falls within the low-scale of plagiarism.
- All assignments, concept notes and other academic related documents are subjected to Turnitin test. Final dissertations/theses submitted to the Directorate of Postgraduate Studies by the Units must incorporate the anti-plagiarism report.
- Thus far, about 396 lecturers have been trained and the exercise is ongoing. Detected plagiarism in academic work has declined remarkably.

Data Lab (dLab) (UDSM 2)

Aim of the practice:

- The dLab is an open working space where data from multiple sectors and sources can be combined, processed and shared to inform policy, planning and decision making. The overarching objective of the dLab is to unlock value from open /raw data, develop data driven solutions and provide data infrastructure for better targeted public policies and plans. The dLab strategic activities include training in data literacy and analysis, content area data analytics, and the development of 'use cases' to show case how data can be used to solve problems and improve lives.

Key elements of the practice are that:

- dLab is implemented through a consortium of partners that have pooled together their Human Capital and associated resources to meet the overarching objective of dLab.
- dLab functions to promote innovation and data literacy through a premier centre of excellence and collaboratively with other three initiatives to strengthen the availability and use of data and the overall data ecosystem.
- There are three main components, namely engagement, training, resource and space.

MOI UNIVERSITY

The two best practice reports from Moi University focused on departmental and institutional support for supervision of postgraduate students and strategic administrative support in submission and examination of theses.

Departmental and institutional support for supervision of postgraduate students (MOI 1)

Aim of the practice:

- The aim of this practice is to improve the management of postgraduate students through new university rules and regulations governing postgraduate studies.

Key elements of the practice:

- This practice includes regular and uniform progress reviews, such as regular supervisor/student meetings and progress reports and the creation and enhancement of institutional databases on students via a Web-based system to track student progress, such as online milestone tracking systems and annual progress reports.
- Surveillance of the level of postgraduate student engagement in promising practices and professional development activities.
- Promotion of faculty and staff participation in conferences and workshops focused on graduate student services, retention, and development.
- Evaluation of the services that each department provides to graduate students and determining specific needs and appropriate approaches.
- This practice is well managed through various committees formed at various levels as provided for in the Rules and Regulations Governing Post Graduate Studies.

Strategic administrative support in submission and examination of theses (MOI 2)

Aim of the practice:

- Postgraduate students are supported through an elaborate and established ‘thesis submission and examination’ process. This process is guided by the Rules and Regulations governing Postgraduate Studies.

Key elements of the practice:

- Students write a Notice of Intent to the Dean three months before submission. This notice paves way for the faculty to constitute the Board of examiners for oral examination and nominate the examiners to be approved by the Senate.
- The examiners are provided with criteria for grading which serves to promote uniformity and consistencies in the scores by the three examiners.
- Transparency and consistency in the process are ensured since the conditions are clearly outlined and followed.
- At the end of the examination process, the student is issued with a congratulatory letter for successful defence of the thesis. It indicates the scores awarded. This letter serves as a proof of their successful completion as well as a gateway for them to publicize their work.

IV. OVERVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES

The ‘best practices’ from the four different institutions noted above all address particular needs that have emerged in their respective contexts and demonstrate how each institution has responded in a way that is believed to be critical and effective in terms of their needs. It is possible to abstract from these particular and contextually situated responses generally applicable practices. As the different foci of these suggested practices illustrate, the variety of research support offers many starting points from which to launch practices that could make a contribution to multiple elements in research support. The practices collected in this exercise cover a range of issues from academic procedures to personalised support, which open up a platform on which to discuss both replication and further context-specific optimization of particular practices.

A particularly notable feature that these different practices seem to share is that, while each practice has a core focus, it may simultaneously generate multiple benefits as by-products of fulfilling its central aim. The management and optimization of such dynamics could, in itself, pose another area for potential investigation. What is noticeable is that some practices are implemented at the level of rules and regulations, while others propose formats through which interpersonal working relationships, staff development and, by extension, research output is optimized.

The four practices implemented at Nelson Mandela University (NMU1-4) focus on methods of affording time and money for researchers to produce publishable research. NMU1 identifies and addresses the challenge many academics involved in a number of activities face: the pressure to produce research output while simultaneously having heavy teaching and administrative responsibilities. The format of the writing retreats affords academics dedicated writing time and collegial constructive feedback. Similarly, NMU 2 targets staff development by providing academics in permanent positions with opportunities for conference attendance to present and refine their research for subsequent publications.

The third practice put forward as a recommendable practice by NMU combines postgraduate supervision, interpersonal and staff development. In this practice, an experienced research associate mentors an emerging academic in the supervision of postgraduate projects, thereby strengthening supervision skills and providing the student with two supervisors. NMU 4 addresses staff development and aims at an increase in research publications through the concept of research leave, which provides opportunities for both research and further study towards higher qualifications.

While the cost and time related to the practices mentioned above are variable, the funding procedure, in which research output from previous years are used to fund the current year’s practices, is notable. In South Africa the Department of Higher Education makes funds available to universities according to the research outputs (articles in ‘accredited’ journals, books and book chapters) produced by their academic staff. At the Nelson Mandela University, a portion of the amount awarded is allocated directly to the researcher for research purposes (approximately 27%) and to the Faculty Research Technology and Innovation Committee concerned (10%). It is the latter funding source which provides the money for individuals, mostly those who are emerging researchers and who do not have sufficient funds in their personal research accounts, to attend writing retreats, academic conferences,

etc. These funds become available approximately two years after research articles, book chapters, books, etc. appear in print. This delay is part of an administrative and verification processes. As such, Faculty RTI committees are aware of the amount that they will receive in a given year for past research output and can plan accordingly and the funding required is both transparent and sustainable depending on the outputs of preceding years.

The 'best practices' identified at Uganda Management Institute are concerned with capacity development and the regulation and optimization of academic procedures. In terms of capacity development, improving and facilitating proposal defence skills for master's students via workshops on research skills was emphasised. Supervisor allocation according to their ability to guide the defence of the students' research proposal in a way that equips them with essential skills and feedback on their proposal, which they require for the successful completion of their studies, was also noted as a 'best practice'. A long-term approach to improve capacities at UMI incorporates four separate elements, ranging from career development, short-term performance improvement training, to sponsorship for conference attendance and mentoring of young supervisors. These different components illustrate the importance given to targeting several related areas of importance and developing them as one coherent practice.

In terms of the regulation and optimisation of academic procedures the focus was on the beginning and final stages of a master's project. Such regulation and optimisation begins with the formal processes for the management of student proposal defences and ends with the regulation of the appointment of external examiners through a specific set of guidelines. In implementing the latter practice, the research committee reviews the qualification, experience and expertise of a potential external examiner in a specific research area. After this evaluation, an external examiner is appointed for a period of three years during which annual performance assessments are conducted.

Implementing combinations of effective structures, such as UMI 1 and UMI 3, which regulate the most critical stages of master's projects, accommodates the needs of vital stages of the master's degree exercise. While UMI 1 and UMI 3 provide guidelines for effectively managing the initial and the final phase of such projects and thus target significant, but relatively brief, periods within the research process, UMI 4 compliments these short-term practices by demonstrating how students can be given continuous support throughout their project, which is held in place and monitored by centralized management. The format of centrally managed research workshops, held by experts on various elements of research methodology, is believed to be an effective means of developing crucial research skills, which the students can apply immediately to their research.

The central and universal value that belies all strategies to optimize research support and staff development is the maintenance of academic integrity. UDSM 1 emphasizes this aspect, through their anti-plagiarism policy and the use of anti-plagiarism software and disciplinary measures in cases of unethical behaviour. While it may be standard practice for universities to have policies regulating academic misconduct, it appears that at UDSM such policies are considered to be a 'best practice' to ensure an ethical consensus among staff and students. What is recognised in UDSM 1 is that the institution recognises the need to continuously update and improve their methods of detecting plagiarism in times of rapid technological progress. UDSM 2 proposes another recommendable practice in the format of a 'dLab', a data lab, which makes it possible to collect and unlock data from various sectors and sources, thereby opening up opportunities for innovative connections that could potentially advance research in various fields or in interdisciplinary studies. Moreover, the core objectives of UDSM 2 are the development of data driven solutions as well as training in data literacy analysis, thereby providing skills that may lead to an increase in research publications.

The 'best practices' noted by the participants from Moi University operate mainly on administrative and policy levels to ensure effective management of postgraduate students. Moi 2, in particular, regulates the examination process of postgraduate projects. Similar to the practices in place at Uganda Management Institute, both practices focus on providing postgraduate students with support during their research studies and on regulating the examination procedure as effectively as possible. In doing so, Moi 1 employs various means to monitor student progress, provide consistent supervision as well as facilitating conference attendance of faculty and staff while Moi 2 focuses on regulations which structure the examination process and ensure transparency and consistency.

V. EVIDENCE FOR CLAIMING BEST PRACTICE

In evaluating the practices recommended as best practices by the participating institutions, it was necessary to consider the evidence provided in support of each practice. Not only is evidence relevant in order to objectively assess whether a particular practice has been fruitful and warrants investment of resources, but it is also necessary to implement functional methods of improving the practices. In the case of the reports provided in this guide study, it soon became evident that in most cases little or no factual evidence was provided, despite the respondents being explicitly asked to do so in the questionnaire. This lacuna opens up space for exploring ways of researching and documenting the evidence required for monitoring and evaluating each practice effectively.

In the case of the practices put forward by Nelson Mandela University, namely NMU 1 (writing retreats) and NMU 2 (Faculty support for academics to attend conferences) an increase in publication outputs was put forward as evidence of the practice having produced positive outcomes. While the respondents did not provide specific evidence in terms of the effects of these practices, research outputs are recorded in the Nelson Mandela University Research Management Office and traceable over a prolonged period of time. Such data provide a foundation for generating evidence in support of practices NMU 1 and NMU 2. Similarly, no evidence was provided for NMU 4, but it outlines a procedure that can be followed to trace the publication path of research produced during research leave. NMU 3, which focuses on staff development, working relationships and supervision, shares a form regulating the relationship between supervisor and co-supervisor, but does not provide any evidence of the success of the practice. The lack of empirical evidence that exists across NMU1-4 speaks to a broader difficulty of documenting 'best practices', which was also evident in the reports provided by the other institutions who participated in the survey. The difficulties of generating objective evidence appear to be even more difficult in terms of staff development and interpersonal relationships than practices which have measurable outcomes such as research publications.

In support of the proposal defence practice in place at UMI, the first UMI practice of effective management of proposal defences uses the low rate of (0.1%) proposal failure and the procedure of reports as evidence that the practice is effective. However, UMI 2 (capacity building for research supervisors) does not provide factual evidence, but emphasizes the quality of dissertations produced and of presentations given at conferences. UMI 3 provides

a diagram to display the number of dissertations which have been examined by external examiners. While this diagram provides an overview of the numbers of students per external examiner, it is not a qualitative indicator of best practice. The evidence section mentions the high quality of external examiners' reports and the number of dissertations examined by external examiners, but there is still a need for clear factual evidence supporting the status of 'best practice' in this case. UMI 4 provides a diagram displaying students' final grades, in which 74% of students achieved a mark between 65% and 74%, as evidence of research workshops as a best practice. Here, the causal link between the effectiveness of these workshops and the students' final marks are not clearly indicated and should be shown in a more demonstrable manner and in more detail in order to provide more believable evidence as to what makes these workshops a 'best practice'.

UDSM1 emphasizes the key elements of its implementation of mechanisms to detect plagiarism and states that a similarity index of up to 30% is tolerated. However, similarity indexes do not provide any clear evidence of the effectiveness of these measures in preventing plagiarism in a nuanced form. UDSM 2 lists its partners in implementation of the dLab as evidence and makes the statement that evidence for this best practice can be found on the website of the practice itself. While the web link is interesting in providing insight into the workings of the practice, it does not suffice to prove its effectiveness.

Similarly, Moi 1 repeats the procedure of student reports being submitted to the department and supervisor reports being submitted to DGSC/SGSC/GSREC and attaches the progress report template that is used. While the template is useful to the other institutions in CERMESA for replication purposes, the form does not prove the effectiveness of the practice itself. Here, an analysis and evaluation of previous reports could be helpful. The evidence section of Moi 2 consists of an excerpt from the rules and regulations guiding the submission of dissertations and theses, the grading criteria and a template of the congratulatory letter issued to students upon passing. What is evident here is that these excerpts and translations constitute the theoretical dimensions and regulations of the practice, but they do not attest to the successful implementation of the practice.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the ideas expressed in this report demonstrate practices that are considered to be 'best practices' in terms of educational research and management by practitioners in universities in the East and South African German Centre of Excellence in Research and Management cluster (CERMESA). Apart from identifying 'best practices', what is clear from the reports is that there is room for optimisation in terms of providing sound evidence to support claims regarding the effectiveness of each practice. This need requires careful thought, particularly in terms of difficulties of documenting positive effects which do not lead to direct and tangible results, such as publishable research outputs.

This gap, however, opens up the possibilities for devising innovative strategies for collecting evidence both in the implementation and documentation of 'best practices'. In the light of these possibilities the following ways of undertaking further investigations, improving the effectiveness of the practices, and developing workable strategies to provide credible evidence, are suggested:

- A formalized and shared feedback procedure documenting the replication of different practices should be implemented within the partner universities. Shared procedures would allow the generation of more evidence regarding the effectiveness of a practice and would provide opportunities for including context-specific modifications and reflections on how difficulties can be resolved. In turn, these findings could help refine and strengthen the core elements of each practice.
- While each practice has a central aim and implicit benefits, it would be interesting to investigate these implicit benefits and, where possible, examine opportunities for developing more 'best practices' out of, and linked to, these implicit benefits.
- Considering that the co-existence of several practices in one institution generates a structure and, potentially, a dynamic between these practices, monitoring this interplay should be relevant in terms of developing an interlinked and mutually beneficial set of practices. Monitoring these processes holistically could allow for strategically identifying elements for further 'best practices' within the participating universities.
- The sharing of best practices and ways of monitoring their effects between the partner universities should allow for successful replication of practices. A standardised method of creating evidence would also allow for a comparative analysis of evidence in a trans-institutional constellation, which could potentially open up new areas of research.
- While the cost and time related to the practices mentioned above are variable, procedures such as rewarding research output to fund the best practices in a sustainable manner should be investigated.

Lastly, it is recommended that the practice of identifying and sharing particularly effective practices with partner institutions should be implemented in order to lead to a continuous best practice exchange with the aim of constantly and critically exploring avenues for mutually beneficial research and research supervision support practices.

CONTACT

Nelson Mandela University

Prof Paul Webb

Faculty of Education

Paul.Webb@mandela.ac.za

University of Dar es Salaam

Dr Eugenia Kafanabo

School of Education

ekafanabo@yahoo.com

University of Oldenburg

Prof. Dr. Karsten Speck

Fakultät für Bildungs- und Sozialwissenschaften

karsten.speck@uni-oldenburg.de

DAAD Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
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