

Collaborative research in higher education: Benefits for scholars in tourism

Kezia Herman Mkwizu

Independent Researcher, Tanzania

*Corresponding author's email: kmkwizu@hotmail.com



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ABSTRACT

Higher Education (HE) plays a key role in disseminating knowledge to the research community and society at large. In Africa, production of research output is a challenge. Past scholars have highlighted that collaboration in terms of co-authorship is needed to increase the research output. To expand literature on collaboration among scholars from different disciplines, this paper's main objective was to explore collaborative research in HE focusing on the benefits for scholars. Specifically, this paper explores multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE with a focus on the benefits for scholars in tourism. The research methodology applied in this paper is a Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) method to avail experiences of collaborative research from the perspective of an African tourism scholar. Content analysis was used to provide relevant themes that address the objective of this paper. Findings reveal that multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE has benefits. Some of the benefits include "networking", "sharing workload", "integrating research skills" and "supporting team". The outcome implies that HE institutions in Africa should encourage multidisciplinary collaborative research as a way of increasing knowledge production to benefit the academic community and non-academic community for the development of Africa.

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher Education (HE) plays a key role in disseminating knowledge to the research community and society (Andalecio, 2021). In HE, collaboration in terms of co-authorship is needed to increase research output (Mkwizu & Ngaruko, 2019). Globally, (Barker et al., 2023) noted that collaborative research is key in uncertain times. In contrast, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is calling for more educational data and statistics that can guide towards knowledge-based societies (UNESCO, 2024). The uncertain times include pandemics like the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has motivated a number of scholars to contribute knowledge on collaborative research in the post-pandemic (Kartika et al., 2021). For example, El Kirat El Allame et al. (2022) mentioned academic collaboration between Africa and Asia, citing that South-to-South cooperation is attracting the

attention not only among states but also among policymakers and academics. Further findings from El Kirat El Allame et al. (2022) showed that in the post-pandemic era, the digital divide between these two continents impacts future academic collaborations.

More literature on collaborative research in HE reveals that there were 7100 articles reviewed through a systematic review effort between 2013 to 2016 on collaborative research studies in Africa (Nyangulu, 2023). These findings are only from health research, which shows the existence of collaborative research in HE within Africa. According to UNESCO (2023), demand for HE in Africa is increasing given the large youth population comprising 70% under 30 years old. Therefore, universities need to ensure the environment for collaborative research is conducive. Within university settings, the field of tourism has had to borrow concepts and theories from other disciplines. At the same time, scholars such as McCabe (2024) opined that the approach should be towards developing and advancing the theory of tourism. However, the study has not explored how collaborative research may foster the development and advancement of theory in tourism using collaborative research. Hence, the area of collaborative research requires more research.

Collaborative research literature in Tanzania exists. For instance, Ngussa and Muneja (2015) noted that trends in collaboration research for HE showed that there is less international collaboration. In general, scant studies are exploring collaborative research in HE, focusing on the benefits for scholars, particularly the Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) of a tourism scholar. Hence, to expand the literature on collaboration among scholars from different disciplines using the SPN approach, this paper's main objective is to explore collaborative research in HE. The specific objective of this paper is to explore multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE with a focus on its benefits for scholars in tourism.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Multidisciplinary Collaborative Research

Research is essential in HE. In fact, Mkwizu (2022) noted that research in HE is diverse and touches on various issues, while Zuo & Zhao (2018) opined that scientific research relies heavily on collaboration to address complex real-world problems. In reference to research, Gilmour (2023) added that the implementation of collaborative research should ensure that research remains useful towards informing curriculum and assessing outcomes. Collaborative research refers to a scientific activity that takes place between two or more research groups (Morrison, 2017).

In addition, some scholars view the concept of collaborative research as a process. For example, Gilmour (2023) mentioned that collaborative research processes need to be transformative so as to improve the research and teaching practices. Stock & Burton (2011)

described multidisciplinary by stating that multidisciplinary is a way of providing assessments which are required for problem-solving. Likewise, Dalton et al. (2021) confirmed that collaborative research is famous but also defined multidisciplinary as an activity that consists of many disciplines. Therefore, this paper combines the concepts of multidisciplinary and collaborative research by stating that multidisciplinary collaborative research is defined as a scientific activity done by two or more researchers from different disciplines.

Concept of Higher Education

Higher Education (HE) as a concept has been used and documented widely in articles and reports. Other scholars, such as Miranda et al. (2021), have viewed HE from the perspective of the Education 4.0 concept with four proposed core components, which are competencies, learning methods, infrastructure, and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Whilst Miranda et al. (2021) from Mexico examined HE from the concept of Education 4.0, scholars from other continents like Africa have also documented HE. In Africa, a study on HE by Alemu (2018) in Ethiopia mentioned that HE constitutes a wider range of higher learning institutions, including universities. In addition, Alemu (2018) defined HE in modern times as organized tertiary learning, training activities, and institutions, including conventional universities. Within Africa and particularly in Tanzania, Rupia (2017) noted that HE is important in national socio-economic development through knowledge creation for both national and international sustainable growth as well as development. Due to the importance of HE, as mentioned by Rupia (2017), this paper considers HE to embrace the aspect of multidisciplinary collaborative research.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts a network theory to explore collaborative research in HE with benefits for scholars. In networking, Grewal (2008) argued that there should be shared norms that facilitate cooperation among the actors in a network. It is worth noting that the concept of networks originates from organic systems theory, which incorporates issues of open systems (Uys & Jessa, 2017). Additionally, Uys & Jessa (2017) mentioned that flexibility and collaboration are among the elements that underpin the network theory. Hence, it is appropriate and suitable for this paper to deploy network theory that emphasizes collaboration in order to explore collaborative research in HE.

Furthermore, past scholars have used the networking approach to analyze collaborative research. For instance, Zuo & Zhao (2018) applied a framing of social network analysis of 90,000 publications in the USA from 100 academic institutions to investigate institutional multidisciplinary and research collaboration. The study by Zuo & Zhao (2018) found that

multidisciplinary institutions are more interdisciplinary. In tourism studies, the network theory has been used to investigate issues like volunteer tourism and digital information. Examples are studies by Tomazos & Murdy (2023) and Yuan (2023) that have used network theory from an actor point of view and thus applied the actor-network theory. In investigating digital transformation, Yuan (2023) found that there are group dynamics involved in the information coproduction process for virtual communities. Whilst Yuan (2023) applied the network theory using actor-network theory to analyze virtual communities in a digital space, this paper utilizes network theory to guide in exploring the phenomenon of multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE.

Zinilli et al. (2023) comprehended that knowledge networks and research have specific modes that help to establish and show the evolution of connections. On the other hand, collaborative research involves scholars with different disciplines who interact to achieve a common goal of doing research. The interaction of two or more scholars to collaborate in research can be viewed as a network of scholars and thus the application of the network theory for this paper. The network approach allows scholars to forge collaborations within their disciplines as well as other disciplines. Therefore, in this paper, the network theory guides in exploring how multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE actually benefits scholars, particularly scholars in the tourism field.

Collaborative Research in Higher Education and Benefits for Scholars in Tourism

At a global level, there are studies on collaborative research in HE, including those by Huang & Brown (2019), Perovic (2014), and (Yemini (2021). Collaborative research exists in HE, and the study by Huang & Brown (2019) highlights some of the challenges of collaboration in Singapore's research, including harnessing differences and optimizing team size. Likewise, a study in the UK by Gilmour (2023) used a qualitative approach and recommended that HE explore collaborative technologies in order to enhance research collaboration. Therefore, even at a global level, there are calls for more research, as further evidenced in the study by Johnston et al. (2020).

The work of Johnston et al. (2020) examined collaborative research in HE with a focus on interdisciplinary collaborative research. A systematic literature review and content analysis were used to extract information from faculty professional academic development in HE, and results showed that technology supports HE in terms of collaborative research structures (Johnston et al., 2020). Although Johnston et al. (2020) confirmed that collaborative teams are key to professional academic development in HE, there were recommendations and suggestions for more research to be done in order to understand and promote cross-discipline and cultural collaborations with attention given to opportunities for women. This paper provides

collaborative research in HE with benefits from scholars, particularly an African female scholar from a tourism discipline.

In Africa, studies on HE related to collaborative research have been documented. For instance, El Kirat El Allame et al. (2022) compared academic collaboration between Africa and Asia by proposing strategies that go beyond these two continents for the future to be of North-South, North-South-South, and South-South academic collaboration. However, El Kirat El Allame et al. (2022) pointed out that despite the need for South-South academic collaboration as key to the overall growth of the Global South, there is a digital divide within and across these two continents, which can impact the future modalities of academic collaboration. Within Africa, the study by Nyangulu (2023) confirmed that collaborative research between actors in the global North and global South is growing but focused on collaborative research projects by highlighting the need to have mandates that increase opportunities for authorship in collaborative research.

Apart from studies in Africa, another study by Zinilli et al. (2023) mentioned factors affecting collaboration networks in HE. The study by Zinilli et al. (2023) explored organizational factors that affected collaboration networks from 2011 to 2016 using Exponential Random Graph Models (ERGMs) and found that research capability is the main factor in collaboration for HE. These findings are crucial in building knowledge about collaboration in HE. Zinilli et al. (2023) have limited their scope of study by exploring factors affecting collaboration networks as well as placing concentration on Western scholars. However, this paper expands knowledge by exploring collaboration research in HE with benefits for scholars. The specific objective of this paper is to explore multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE with a focus on its benefits for scholars using SPN. Furthermore, the use of Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) focuses on benefits from a tourism scholar in an East African Country, namely Tanzania.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this paper is a SPN approach which avails the scholar's experiences of collaborative research from the perspective of an African scholar. The SPN approach has been used by past studies to understand personal narratives on experiences or issues that need sharing in order to create knowledge as indicated in Dena (2012), and van Doeselaar & Reitz (2023). In examining self-esteem and life satisfaction, van Doeselaar & Reitz (2023) found that using SPN revealed higher levels in narrative agency are associated with higher stability in daily self-esteem when transiting from education to work. Likewise, Dena (2012) applied SPN to investigate students English Speaking Language (ESL) and the

findings showed that students do exhibit understanding of both science vocabulary and concepts.

Similarly, this paper finds SPN suitable for understanding multidisciplinary collaborative research and its benefits in HE from a female Tanzanian tourism scholar engaged in research activities of writing scholarly work contributions via research papers, book chapters, and conferences. The question to address the specific objective of this paper is “*What are the scholar's benefits from multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE?*” On the other hand, content analysis is described as a method which is used to summarize patterns in literature (Madeira et al., 2023). Past literature shows that Berg (2009) defined content analysis as a way of examining and interpreting materials to identify patterns and themes. The use of content analysis in tourism studies is increasing (Camprubi & Coromina, 2016). Hence, content analysis is used to provide relevant themes that address the objective of this paper.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings reveal that multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE has benefits, as indicated in Figure 1, which are “networking and exposure”, “sharing workload”, “research skills and supporting team”, and “volunteering, mentoring, appreciations, certificates, awards and invitations”. The benefits are discussed in separate headings.



Figure 1. Multidisciplinary Collaborative Benefits for the Scholar

Networking and Exposure

The findings show that there is networking and exposure of the Tanzanian scholar with researchers within and outside Tanzania. In addition, the networking and exposure for outside Tanzania involved the female Tanzanian tourism scholar engaging with international collaborators from various countries including Botswana, Kenya, India, Netherlands, Philippines, Uganda and the USA are displayed in Figure 2. This implies that through multidisciplinary collaborative research, the tourism scholar benefited and was exposed to

fellow researchers in different countries. The findings from this study differ from similar studies on collaborative research, such as those by Huang & Brown (2019), which were conducted in Singapore. The study by Huang & Brown (2019) concentrated on the challenges rather than the benefits of collaborative research. Furthermore, in line with network theory, this study's findings show that the network of the tourism scholar is not just with local researchers but also international researchers; thus, the aspect of collaboration is evident from the tourism scholar's collaborative research. Hence, the findings of this study on networking leading to exposure validate the use of network theory not only for network but also exposure.



Figure 2. Collaborative Research Countries

Sharing Workload

Sharing workload involves sharing research activities. These research activities can range from conceptualizing, literature review, and methodology to analysis. As research activities are shared among researchers, this allows for exchange of skills. This finding suggests that as the tourism scholar shared the workload, there was an exchange of skills between the collaborators of research. The result of this study is in line with Barker et al. (2023) that more research is needed to understand collaborative research. This study's findings have shown that a tourism scholar can enhance collaborative research by sharing workloads related to research activities ranging from conceptualization to analysis. In validating network theory, this study is guided by the use of network theory, which shows that networking can be through sharing workload.

Integrating Research Skills and Supporting Team

In this study, the SPN findings have shown that when engaging in collaborative research, research skills, including writing styles, ideas, approaches and analysis techniques are integrated, which contribute to exhibiting research skills exchange. These exchange approaches, such as the autoethnographic approach, are used in research. In addition, the Tanzanian tourism scholars engage with other researchers and share research skills to achieve common objectives, such as collaborating in publications for research papers in journals, conference papers and even book chapters (see a few examples in Table 1). Furthermore, the tourism scholars have been able to engage with scholars from multiple disciplines, which is beneficial for multidisciplinary collaborative research. Supporting teams in terms of collaborative research with researchers from different disciplines can be a source of databases that help gain access to literature. The findings in this paper differ from Zinilli et al. (2023), which showed that research capabilities as an organizational factor affect collaboration in HE. On the other hand, this paper implies that the capabilities of a scholar lie in research skills and a supporting team for multidisciplinary collaborative research, enabling publications within the tourism discipline but also with other disciplines like finance, ICT, entrepreneurship sustainability, business management, education, community economic development and geography.

Table 1. Collaborative Research by Mkwizu (A Female Tanzanian Tourism Scholar): Research Papers/Book Chapters/Conferences

Collaborative Research	References	Multidisciplinary
Research Papers in conferences/journals	Matama & Mkwizu (2021) Mkwizu & Monametsi (2021) Mkwizu , Matama & Atuzarirwe (2018) Kagoya & Mkwizu (2023) Kidere & Mkwizu (2023) Mkwizu & Ngaruko (2019) Kimeto & Mkwizu (2023) Garcha, Mkwizu & Sharma (2020) Mkwizu et al. (2020) Schultz et al., Comer, Cooper, Mkwizu ... & Chapman (2018)	“Tourism” and “Finance” “Tourism” and “Finance” “Tourism” and “Finance” “ICT” and “Tourism” “Tourism” and “Entrepreneurship Sustainability” “Tourism” and “Development Economics” “Tourism” and “Tourism” “Education” and “Tourism” “Tourism and “Business Management”
Book Chapters	Mkwizu & Mtae (2023) Bordoloi, Junio-Sabio & Mkwizu (2023) Mkwizu & Mhache (2023)	“Tourism” and “Community Economic Development” “Tourism” and “Education” “Tourism” and “Geography and Environment Management”

Volunteering, Mentoring, Appreciations, Certificates, Awards and Invitations

The findings also show that the tourism scholar's benefits from multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE can be themed as cultivating "volunteering" and "mentoring qualities" via training and peer to peer reviews. Other benefits include "appreciations, awards, certificates and invitations" as indicated in Table 2 and Figure 3. For instance, the invitations in various conferences had benefits in terms of roles played by the female tourism scholar ranging from a moderator, conference chair, keynote speaker, editor for conference proceedings to being part of the scientific committee. Other invitations indicate participation as a discussant at a University Faculty presentation in South Africa. In addition, there are invitations to podcast and consultancies which are all part of the benefits from multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE.

In addition, awards are revealed as benefits of multidisciplinary collaborate research in HE for the female tourism scholar in Tanzania. Some of the awards include "Best Paper Award" in recognition of research paper contribution by three authors. Apart from awards, there are also appreciations as evident in the certificate for Editors' Best Reviewer Award 2020-2021 issued by the Asian Journal of Distance Education (AsianJDE). Another appreciation made to the female tourism scholar is indicated as the Emerald Awards 2023 Literati for Outstanding Reviewer. These findings imply that awards and certificates are also benefits of multidisciplinary collaborate research in HE.

Additionally, the findings suggest that it is possible for an African scholar, particularly a tourism scholar, to benefit from multidisciplinary collaborative research through networking and achieve international collaboration via publications like research papers or book chapters. This finding validates Ngussa & Muneja (2015), who recommended that Tanzanian scholars engage in international collaboration. Whereas studies by El Kirat El Allame et al. (2022), Johnston et al. (2020) and Nyangulu (2023) have commonly mentioned challenges in collaborative research in HE, the findings from this paper differ and imply that there are benefits for scholars from the perspective of a tourism scholar. In reference to network theory, the findings of this paper show that there are benefits for the tourism scholar's networks with researchers from other disciplines.

Table 2. Invitations: Roles played

No.	Invitations	Roles
1	Conferences in Tanzania	Presenter, Moderator, Conference Chair
2	Conferences in China	Presenter, Conference Chair, Editor for Conference Proceedings
3	Conferences in the USA,	Contributor of research papers, Reviewer
4	Conferences in Kenya and Tanzania	As one of the Panelists for PhD Colloquium
5	High-Level Conferences in Kenya/Zambia/Zimbabwe	Delegate
6	Online workshop	Contributor

No.	Invitations	Roles
7	Conferences in China and Turkey	Keynote Speaker
8	Conference in Turkey	Paper Presenter
9	Podcast	Scientific Committee Member
10	University Faculty Presentation-South Africa	Scholar Guest
11	Consultancies	Discussant
		Proposal and inception writing/bidding/mentoring/report writing/data analysing/enumerating/data collecting



Figure 3. Awards 2018, 2020/21 and 2023

In general, the application of the SPN to explore collaborative research in HE focusing on benefits for scholars in tourism has revealed interesting findings from the perspective of a female tourism scholar in Tanzania. Therefore, multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE has benefits in terms of networking and exposure; sharing workload; integrating research skills and supporting team; and volunteering, mentoring, appreciations, certificates, awards and invitations. Overall, these findings differ from past studies such as El Kirat El Allame et al. (2022), Johnston et al. (2020) and Nyangulu (2023) and the differences in results are attributed to the use of SPN and content analysis in this paper.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper is motivated to explore collaborative research in HE and specifically explore multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE, focusing on benefits for scholars in tourism. Therefore, this paper concludes that by using the SPN approach, the findings have shown that from a tourism scholar perspective, there are benefits from multidisciplinary collaborative research in HE. These benefits are “networking and exposure”, “sharing workload”, “integrating research skills and supporting team”, and “volunteering, mentoring, and

appreciations/awards/certificates/invitations". The outcome of this paper has a practical implication for HE institutions.

Practical implication

The HE institutions in Africa should encourage multidisciplinary collaborative research among scholars. The encouragement towards multidisciplinary collaborative research will serve as a way of increasing knowledge production in various fields, including tourism, to benefit the academic community and non-academic community for the development of Africa.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Studies

This study has limitations in using the SPN approach with content analysis. Future studies may be conducted to understand the patterns of multidisciplinary impact on collaborative research within HE institutions in Africa.

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