

On NUC Ranking of Nigerian Universities and collection of ORCID, Scopus and Google Scholar IDs

An opinion-paper written on Sept 8th, 2021 by

Olumuyiwa S. [ASAOLU](#)

Associate Professor of Systems Engineering, University of Lagos

1.0 Introduction

This treatise is to examine the subject matter indicated in the title due to the ramifications for individual academics and the Nigerian university system. Towards the end of August 2021, university administrations made requests unto lecturers to submit their profile IDs in ORCID, Scopus and Google Scholar. They premised the request on need for visibility of individual/institutional research works and a quest to be well positioned for “RANKING OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES BY NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION (NUC).” Deans of Faculties were mandated by universities to encourage lecturers to register on the relevant websites to create researcher identifiers (IDs) on the desired platforms. It has become a matter of hushed-discussion amongst many Nigerian academics. The requests reportedly vacillated between appeals and harassments across universities in an effort to get academics to comply. In some institutions, Deans were to collate the IDs while some institutions switched to the use of Google Forms plausibly to make it appear as a survey that attracted voluntary submissions. The author is of the opinion that staff-education or orientation is paramount to get academics buy-in and cooperation. There is a need to ensure proper data is collected for institutional assessment and assurances that such will not be misused against the individuals or universities.

2.0 Proposed NUC Ranking of Nigerian Universities

That the NUC ranks Nigerian Universities is welcomed though the criteria for now seems sketchy to many stakeholders especially University staff (academic and non-academic), students, industry and society at large. If such entities are not involved in the evaluation then the exercise might be flawed. Chasing World Universities Ranking carried out periodically by various bodies requires circumspection. The mandate of a university encompasses: *Teaching, Research and Innovation & Community Service*. Any comparative ranking necessarily should evaluate performance and strides made in these directions. Consequently, the NUC ought to auto-collate data from institutions on the indicative parameters rather than call for submissions on few or over-emphasize Research output as it presently appears. For instance, the NUC ought to have a section on its portal where it pulls information from each Nigerian university records system on issues such as:

- i. The total number of academics available, the percentage which have PhDs and the distribution across cadre e.g. Professors, Senior Lecturers, and others.
- ii. The acceptable scholarly publications of each academic, library staff and research technologist including books, journal articles, etc.
- iii. The relative number of patents, commercialized intellectual works or spin-off companies emanating from the staff or institution.
- iv. The percentage and list of staff serving on local/national/international boards or agencies, including those on special assignment in government or industry (with or without Leave of Absence).

- v. The subscription rate or quantum of application by prospective students at the undergraduate and graduate levels and the percentage admitted yearly.
- vi. The attrition rate via percentage of students who finish their courses as originally expected on yearly basis; indicative of dropouts and delayed graduations.

Other factors could be separately collated from industry, students/graduates, on employability, satisfaction with services, etc. aside popular variables such as student to staff ratio, internationalisation of faculty and students, cited research publications and awards won by scholars. The ranking exercise by NUC was to be resuscitated in 2019 after a 14-year lull [1, 2]. It is now being planned for execution after a recent meeting with university Directors of Academic Planning.

Assuming that the management of universities were reasonably briefed and accepted the ranking criteria proposed by NUC, why the focus on the particular indicators of research enumerated and how are these to be used towards arriving at a rank? What is the weight of Research in the grand scheme? Why ORCID, Scopus, and Google Scholar in particular? Why NOT ResearchGate, Web of Science, LinkedIn, Altmetrics, etc.? The fact is these are all akin to Social Media interfaces where scholars have profiles and the creators of those websites aggregate some data to project one's contributions.

ORCID [3] is an organization that provides a unique identifier to each member (firm or individual) with the aim that such ID could be linked to all their intellectual outputs, it facilitates communication between subscribers. **Google Scholar** Profiles [4] “provide a simple way for authors to showcase their academic publications. You can check who is citing your articles, graph citations over time, and compute several citation metrics. You can also make your profile public, so that it may appear in Google Scholar results when people search for your name.” **Scopus** [5] is an abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed research literature managed by the publishing outlet Elsevier Inc. for itself and its partners. Scopus is one out of several Indexing outlets and only includes articles published within its consortia unlike Google Scholar which crawl the web for all articles attributable to a scholar.

One cannot be compelled against their wish to register on any third-party website. Registration on Facebook or LinkedIn or ORCID or Google Scholar, etc. is a matter of personal preference. One may not patronize such unless persuaded a platform is beneficial as well as comfortable with its End-User License Agreement. Duplicating one's profile across competing social cum academic websites may not be attractive for reasons of time-consumption, privacy or potential data breach, etc. Submitting such profiles to university management and educational regulators has wider ramifications!

Universities request the list of one's publications during *Annual Performance Evaluation Review*, and assess only the selection deemed valid as part of the process of gauging staff productivity. That exercise contributes to decisions about annual salary increment or periodic promotion. It actually underpins the maxim “*Publish or Perish.*” Are the NUC and our Universities positing that any publication featured on ORCID, Scopus, and Google Scholar is henceforth acceptable to every university Appointments & Promotions (A & P) Committee? To harvest all the works attributable to a scholar alongside the citations for institutional ranking purposes when some of those works are rejected for appointment or promotion purposes seems a travesty. How is this to be resolved?

Suggested solutions to this poser include:

- i. Assess every peer-reviewed publication for its contribution to knowledge rather than reject some, *ab initio* because a university A & P Committee is unfamiliar with or ill-disposed to the publisher!
- ii. Provide uniform and national guidelines on what constitutes an ‘acceptable publication.’ The NUC should thereafter implement Automated Programming Interfaces (APIs) to track and aggregate across the web, the scientometrics of acceptable publications of staff. Institutional subscription to Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, etc. across all universities would become expedient.

Since each academic seeks to be globally competitive, it behooves us to somewhat participate in forums and portals where our works are showcased and monitored for their impact. It is this latter reason, and the sentimental affinity to promote our respective institutions that should make us comply with the recent request to furnish researcher IDs across various platforms.

That the NUC and invariably the universities may adopt scholarly indicators such as quantum of publications and citations as showcased in ORCID, Scopus and Google Scholars is worthy of scrutiny. Anything that is not properly understood would be misused and abused. It is noteworthy that:

- i. Those foreign entities showcase visibility of research works from their own perspective and defined metrics (e.g. Citations per paper, CiteScore, h-Index, etc.) which they deem suitable within their context but that are controversial when compared across various fields of study and disciplines. Thus, caution is required in adoption, aggregation and interpretation of such metrics.
- ii. Nigerian scholars, journals and educational institutions are new entrants in online presence and automation of activities. Not all their relevant operations or archival records are properly documented or easily retrievable in the digital space. Hence, over-reliance on foreign detected or endorsed scholarly output of our universities for national ranking may not necessarily be optimal.

It is hoped that the IDs being harvested will be used to collate publication portfolio data that would be harmonized and normalized per person or per institution in a truly discipline-independent manner [6]. Derived metrics could at least initially be used to incorporate additional reward system for academic publishing e.g. monetary prizes, grants, etc. rather than as punitive measure to stifle or delay promotion and appointments in our universities or to deny some institutions of relevant funds needed for development. Logically, if NUC ranking of universities is dependent on number of publications and their citations in foreign repositories, with time individual local researcher assessment could be predicated on same. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) need not be caught unawares.

The misuse of such listing and metrics is already manifest given the recent row at the University of Liverpool and the crisis over the selection of a new Vice Chancellor for Osun State University. Nature News [7] stated: ‘*an e-mail seen by Nature that was sent to University of Liverpool staff by the local branch of the University and College Union, which represents academics across the United Kingdom, says that managers identified employees who are at risk of redundancy using two key metrics and did not take other aspects of their day-to-day work into account.*’ The Nigerian Tribune [8] reported: ‘*one of the complaints on the process is that criteria established by the university council were deliberately set to exclude prospective candidates in disciplines such as Law, Humanities, Education (Arts) and Social Sciences. An aggrieved source said the university council, while stating the acceptable*

qualifications for eligible candidates , ignored scholarly books and book chapters and instead said it would consider only articles published in high impact journals recognised by Thomson Reuters ISI and Web of Science which are both pure and applied science-biased. “The council even set a research benchmark of 800 citations and 15.00 ResearchGate score for candidates. The criteria used for even the incumbent vice-chancellor in 2016 are not the same as the ones set now. The current demand is deliberately made for only professors in the sciences and is above the bar of the criteria being used at Nigeria’s premier university, the University of Ibadan, and even at Harvard University.”

Ideally, there should be real-time assessment of a lecturer’s publications aside evaluation of other aspects of their job. Administrators or regulators imposing metrics on scholars without robust debate, critique and general acceptance may be counter-productive. There must be minimal national standards and NUC is well-positioned to drive it. Neither the pursuit of excellence nor inclusiveness is an excuse for arbitrariness or lopsidedness. Sadly, some persons appointed as full professor in certain Nigerian university would hardly qualify as Senior Lecturer in a university located in another region of the country. Perhaps this is correlated to JAMB admission policy? What a thought-provoking hypothesis!

3.0 Conclusion

It is okay to submit profile IDs for the proposed NUC Ranking BUT the universities should engage NUC on proper analysis of extracted data since the platforms provide varying indices for same feature e.g. number of reads or citation of a specific work. To properly quantify research output and total educational impact surpass the parameters listed on the three named socio-academic websites of interest to the NUC. There is need to develop a comprehensive, homegrown framework for ranking Nigerian universities. Indeed, Africans could equally challenge the various global ranking of universities and propose additional factors where we have comparative strength such as indicators of the *loco parentis* activity of staff, provision of financial support to indigent students, etc.

References

1. Premium Times [January 19, 2019], *NUC plans first Nigerian universities ranking in 14 years*, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/306576-nuc-plans-first-nigerian-universities-ranking-in-14-years.html>
2. NUC News, *NUC Has Not Ranked Nigerian Universities - Prof. Rasheed* <https://www.nuc.edu.ng/nuc-has-not-ranked-nigerian-universities-prof-rasheed/>
3. About ORCID, <https://info.orcid.org/what-is-orcid/>
4. Google Scholar Profiles, <https://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/citations.html>
5. About Scopus, https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus?dgcid=RN_AGCM_Sourced_300005030
6. Olumuyiwa Asaolu: The Conversation Africa [May 24, 2020], *We think there’s a better way to assess the research of African academics: here’s how*. <https://theconversation.com/we-think-theres-a-better-way-to-assess-the-research-of-african-academics-heres-how-132287>
7. Holly Else: Nature 592, 19 (2021), *Row erupts over university’s use of research metrics in job-cut decisions*. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-00793-7>
8. Nigerian Tribune [Aug 14, 2021], *VC selection wars rage in LASU, UNIOSUN* <https://tribuneonlineng.com/vc-selection-wars-rage-in-lasu-uniosun/>