

UNICAF[®]

RESEARCH

NEWSLETTER

MARCH – JUNE 2026

CONTENTS

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Editor's Note	3
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Research activities at Unicaf University, Zambia	4
--	---

Research activities at Unicaf University, Malawi	9
--	---

Research activities at Unicaf Federal	11
---------------------------------------	----

Students' Hub	12
---------------	----

Eyes to the Future	17
--------------------	----

Recent Unicaf Publications	22
----------------------------	----

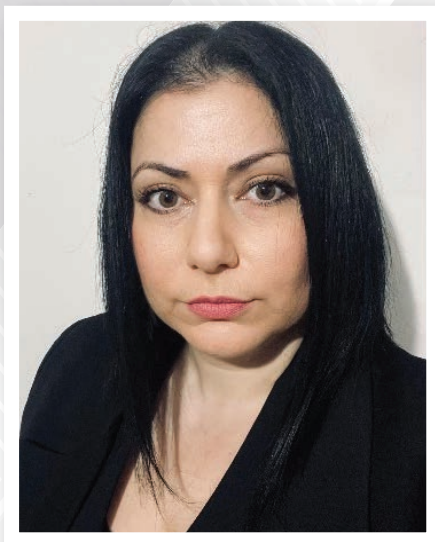
Funding Opportunities	24
-----------------------	----

Fellowships / Awards / Courses	25
--------------------------------	----

Calls For Conferences And Events (Workshop / Webinars)	27
--	----

Other News	28
------------	----

EDITOR'S NOTE



Dear Students and Colleagues,

Welcome to Issue 15 of the Unicaf Research Newsletter (March–June 2026). This edition reflects our continued commitment to promoting research excellence, fostering scholarly collaboration, and supporting academic development across the Unicaf community.

A key feature of this issue is our Research Insights article, *The Art of Asking Better Questions*, which explores the importance of developing clear, focused, and meaningful research questions. The article provides practical guidance for researchers at every stage of their academic journey, emphasising that strong research begins not with sophisticated methods, but with asking questions that address significant and answerable problems.

This edition also highlights research and stakeholder engagement activities across the Unicaf network. From collaborative initiatives with government institutions and development partners to field-based research and knowledge product development, these engagements demonstrate the University's contribution to evidence-informed policy, community development, and sustainable societal impact.

We are pleased to feature the latest opportunities available through the Unicaf Online Journal (UOJ), including Calls for Papers across our established disciplines and the forthcoming launch of the Unicaf Online Journal of Business. We also invite experienced academics and professionals to join our growing pool of volunteer peer reviewers and contribute to maintaining the high standards of scholarly publishing within the Unicaf community.

We are also delighted to announce the Annual Unicaf Master's Conference (UMC) 2026, which will be held online from 16–20 November 2026. We encourage our Master's students to save the date and take advantage of this opportunity to present their research and engage with the wider Unicaf academic community.

This edition concludes with recent publications, opportunities for publication and peer review, and reminders on how members of the Unicaf community can engage with the University's growing research ecosystem.

As always, we encourage our faculty members, researchers, doctoral candidates, and postgraduate students to continue sharing their research outputs and academic achievements with the Research Office. By showcasing your publications, conference participation, and professional engagements, we strengthen the visibility of research across our institution while celebrating the diverse contributions of our academic community.

Thank you for your continued dedication to advancing research, innovation, and academic excellence. We hope this edition informs, inspires, and encourages you to pursue research that creates meaningful impact within your discipline and beyond.

Kind regards,

Dr Elena Papadopoulou

Pro Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning

Principal Editor, Unicaf Online Journal & Unicaf Research Newsletter

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AT UNICAF UNIVERSITY, ZAMBIA

COMMUNITY DEMENTIA AWARENESS INITIATIVE PROMOTES KNOWLEDGE AND COMPASSION

Between 22 January and 19 February 2026, Unicaf University delivered a series of weekly dementia awareness sessions held every Thursday at Marian Shrine Catholic Church in Lusaka. Supervised by Dr Attridge Mwelwa, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, and facilitated by Dementia Care Coaches, the initiative sought to improve public understanding of dementia while equipping community members with practical caregiving skills through interactive, evidence-based learning.

The programme addressed common misconceptions surrounding dementia, explored the different forms and risk factors associated with the condition, introduced practical caregiving techniques, and concluded with a clinical session led by Dr Moses Mataa of Chipata Level One Hospital. Participants engaged in discussions, practical demonstrations, and myth-busting activities that helped reduce stigma and strengthen confidence in supporting individuals living with dementia.

Feedback from participants demonstrated increased awareness, improved caregiving knowledge, and a greater appreciation of dementia as a medical condition rather than a cultural or supernatural phenomenon. Many reported feeling more confident in supporting family members and neighbours living with dementia, while also requesting additional educational resources to continue learning within their communities.



The initiative reinforced Unicaf University's commitment to translating research into meaningful community impact by applying academic knowledge to address pressing public health challenges. Through programmes such as this, the University continues to bridge research, education, and community service, fostering socially responsive scholarship that improves lives and strengthens communities.



RESEARCH PHILOSOPHIES OPEN LECTURE STRENGTHENS RESEARCH CAPACITY AT UNICAF UNIVERSITY

On 5 February 2026, Unicaf University hosted an online Open Lecture on Understanding Research Philosophies, bringing together postgraduate students, faculty members, early-career researchers, and members of the public to deepen their understanding of the philosophical foundations that underpin high-quality academic research.

The lecture addressed a common challenge faced by researchers-selecting and justifying an appropriate research philosophy-and explored how philosophical paradigms influence research design, methodology, and the interpretation of findings. Participants were introduced to the major research philosophies through practical, discipline-based examples, enabling them to make more informed methodological decisions in their own research.

The event featured opening remarks by Dr Attridge Mwelwa, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), an introductory session by Mrs Abigail N. Chisala, Dean of Students, and a keynote presentation delivered by Dr Pelekelo P. Kabundula, with interactive Q&A sessions throughout the lecture.

The webinar attracted more than 500 registrations and was attended by over 70 participants, who actively engaged in discussions and sought clarification on the practical application of research philosophies, with the interactive format reinforcing the importance of philosophical consistency in producing rigorous and methodologically sound research.

The lecture concluded with recommendations to integrate similar research methodology sessions into the postgraduate academic calendar and to strengthen collaboration between faculty and students in organising research-focused events. Overall, this initiative reflects Unicaf University's ongoing commitment to enhancing research excellence by equipping its academic community with the conceptual and methodological tools needed to produce impactful, high-quality research.

FIELD RESEARCH SUPPORTS EVIDENCE-BASED IMPROVEMENTS IN ADOLESCENT HEALTH SERVICES

Dr Nachizya Edith Namukanga-Mulenga, Acting Doctoral Coordinator in the School of Health and Applied Sciences and Associate Researcher at Unicaf University, Zambia, recently contributed to a major implementation research initiative under the Reducing Adolescent Pregnancies and New HIV Infections in Zambia (RAPHIZ) programme, led by Dr Margarate N. Munakampe. From 2-13 March 2026, qualitative data collection, field coordination, and the development of knowledge products documenting programme implementation and community experiences were carried out as part of a 12-day field assignment in the districts of Katete and Monze.

The field exercise brought together health professionals, district officials, community leaders, and adolescents through key informant interviews and focus group discussions across Chibolya, Chimtende, Monze Urban, and Bweengwa Rural. The research examined the delivery of adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) services, identifying barriers to access while documenting successful community-led approaches to inform future programming.

The findings highlighted important differences in service accessibility between urban and rural communities, emphasising the need for context-specific outreach strategies. The research also demonstrated the value of community ownership in sustaining ASRH initiatives and identified privacy and confidentiality as continuing concerns for young people seeking HIV and reproductive health services. Rigorous ethical standards and daily data quality reviews ensured that the evidence collected will contribute to high-quality knowledge products and implementation learning.

The evidence generated through this work will inform recommendations to strengthen adolescent health services, improve referral pathways, and guide future interventions. By contributing to practical, evidence-based knowledge products, Dr Namukanga's work reflects Unicaf University's commitment to research that addresses pressing public health challenges and translates evidence into meaningful improvements for communities across Zambia.



STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS TO ADVANCE DEMENTIA RESEARCH AND CARE

Unicaf University, Zambia continues to expand its contribution to health research and community impact through active engagement with national stakeholders addressing dementia care. On 4 April 2026, Dr Attridge Mwelwa, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, participated in the Stakeholders Meeting on Dementia Care in Lusaka District, organised by Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias in Zambia (ADDIZ) as part of the Civil Society Organisation LEADS initiative supported by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR).

The meeting convened representatives from academia, healthcare, civil society, and development organisations to explore collaborative approaches to strengthening dementia care systems in Zambia. Discussions highlighted the need for interdisciplinary partnerships, evidence-based policy development, improved data collection, and capacity building for healthcare professionals and caregivers.

Participation in the meeting aligned with Unicaf University's strategic priorities of advancing research excellence, fostering external partnerships, and promoting community-engaged scholarship. The engagement also identified opportunities for collaborative research projects, joint grant applications, specialised training programmes, and multi-sector initiatives focused on dementia, ageing, and mental health. These partnerships have the potential to enhance research capacity, increase institutional visibility, and contribute to evidence-informed healthcare policies in Zambia.



DRIVING RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

On 14 May 2026, Dr. Attridge Mwelwa, Unicaf University, Zambia Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation, represented the University at a high-level stakeholder engagement meeting organised by Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias in Zambia (ADDIZ) under the Local Empowerment and Development–Civil Society Leads Project. Held at Cosmic Lodge, Lusaka, the meeting brought together government representatives, civil society organisations, academic institutions, and development partners to strengthen collaboration and align development initiatives with the Lusaka District Integrated Development Plan (2024–2034).

The engagement underscored the importance of evidence-based research, multi-sectoral collaboration, and policy-informed planning in addressing Zambia's development priorities. Discussions highlighted opportunities for higher education institutions to contribute through research, innovation, monitoring and evaluation, policy analysis, and capacity building across sectors including public health, governance, education, and environmental sustainability.

The meeting also identified several opportunities for Unicaf University, Zambia to establish strategic partnerships through collaborative research projects, grant applications, professional training programmes, and community-based research initiatives. These engagements reinforce the University's growing role as a trusted academic partner supporting national development through impactful research and innovation.

By participating in this strategic forum, the commitment of Unicaf University, Zambia to produce research that informs policy, strengthens community engagement, and contributes to sustainable development was reaffirmed by Dr Mwelwa. The insights gained will help shape future research priorities, interdisciplinary collaborations, and knowledge exchange initiatives that address Zambia's most pressing development challenges.



RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AT UNICAF UNIVERSITY, MALAWI



**FEBRUARY
2026**

LAUNCH OF THE PhD RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT CLINIC

On 27 February 2026, UUM officially launched the PhD Research Development Clinic, a monthly initiative established to strengthen doctoral research quality through structured presentations, expert feedback, and peer learning. The launch session attracted 45 participants, including 38 PhD candidates and 11 academic panelists, among them the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), Director of Academics and Quality Assurance, programme leaders, supervisors, and senior academics.

The inaugural Clinic featured research presentations by Ms Queen Manthimba Phiri, whose study focused on developing an AI-powered predictive maintenance framework for industrial operations in Malawi, and Mr Joel Phalazi, who presented research on the technical efficiency and financial performance of medium enterprises in the Lilongwe District. Through structured discussions and expert critique, the Clinic established itself as a cornerstone initiative for improving doctoral research quality and fostering scholarly dialogue across the University.



**MARCH
2026**

STRENGTHENING GRANT-WRITING CAPACITY AND RESEARCH PARTNERSHIPS

On 19 March 2026, Dr Levison Manda, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Dean of Postgraduate Studies, represented Unicaf University, Malawi at a Grant Proposal Writing Workshop organized by the Copyright Society of Malawi (COSOMA) in Lilongwe. The workshop brought together authors, poets, musicians, performers, and other creative practitioners, with Dr Manda as the only academic in attendance.

The training focused on preparing competitive grant proposals for the Copyright Fund, covering proposal development, needs assessment, budgeting, curriculum vitae preparation, and adherence to application guidelines and submission deadlines. Dr Manda also engaged with officials from the Copyright Society of Malawi, creating opportunities for future collaboration in areas such as copyright awareness and research ethics. The knowledge gained from the workshop will be shared with University staff to strengthen institutional grant-writing capacity and enhance the ability of Unicaf University, Malawi to attract external research funding.



**APRIL
2026**

PROMOTING SCHOLARLY DIALOGUE AND RESEARCH QUALITY

The second PhD Research Development Clinic, held on 23 April 2026, brought together 50 PhD students, senior academics, and designated discussants from across the University. The session featured presentations by Mr Kalyana Sundaram Pillai, who explored factors influencing secondary school students' academic achievement in science subjects, and Mr Richard Chikalipo, whose research examined policy implementation for Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) value chain integration in Malawi.

Through detailed academic discussions, participants explored methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks, policy relevance, and conceptual clarity, with the Clinic providing valuable learning opportunities not only for the presenters but also for the wider doctoral community by exposing participants to rigorous scholarly critique and interdisciplinary dialogue.

**MAY
2026****CONTINUING DOCTORAL
RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT**

On 29 May 2026, Unicaf University, Malawi hosted the third PhD Research Development Clinic, attended by 49 doctoral students representing various academic programmes, alongside senior University leaders including the Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research), Director of Academics and Quality Assurance, programme leaders, and moderators.

The session featured a presentation by Mr Archangel Bakolo on strengthening tax revenue generation in local councils through improved tax administration, with participants receiving detailed feedback on research design, conceptual frameworks, methodology, and policy implications, further reinforcing the University's commitment to research excellence and academic mentorship.

**JUNE
2026****LAUNCH OF THE RESEARCH
LAB SERIES**

On 19 June 2026, Unicaf University, Malawi expanded its research capacity-building initiatives through the launch of the Research Lab Series, beginning with a workshop on Designing and Moderating Effective Focus Group Discussions. The online session attracted 70 participants, including undergraduate students, postgraduate students, researchers, and members of the public interested in strengthening their qualitative research skills.

The workshop was facilitated by Dr Levison Manda, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Dean of Postgraduate Studies, with additional reflections from Dr Mondywa, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning). Participants received practical training on designing focus group discussions, participant recruitment, moderation techniques, ethical considerations, qualitative data management, coding, and thematic analysis. Following this, an interactive Q&A session enabled participants to engage directly with experienced researchers on practical challenges encountered in qualitative research.



RESEARCH ACTIVITIES AT UNICAF FEDERAL

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION: TEACHING FRACTIONS IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOMS

During the 12th I.A.K.E. International Scientific Conference, held from 5–10 May 2026 and organised by the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences in Heraklion, Crete, Dr Anastasia Datsogianni, Dean of the School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences at Unicaf, delivered an online presentation under her Unicaf affiliation entitled “Teaching Fractions in Multilingual Classrooms: Teachers’ and Parents’ Perspectives on the Role of Pictures” (presented in Greek). The presentation was accepted without revisions.

The presentation reported on a study exploring teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of how multilingual primary school pupils learn fractions, with particular emphasis on the role of visual representations in supporting mathematical understanding. Conducted within the Cypriot educational context, the quantitative study examined the impact of different types of images on pupils’ comprehension of mathematical vocabulary and problem-solving. Initial findings highlighted the importance of visual representations as effective learning supports while revealing differing perspectives on which types of images contribute most effectively to learning. The study concluded by emphasising the need for the systematic integration of visual representations and language support in mathematics teaching for multilingual learners.

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION: 2026 SAZ STANDARDISATION AND BUSINESS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Dr Reginald Dennis Gwisai, Pro Vice-Chancellor of UNICAF University Zimbabwe, attended the 2026 SAZ Standardisation and Business Leadership Conference and the Inaugural Standards Symposium, held from 6–9 May 2026 at Elephant Hills Resort in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. Organised by the Standards Association of Zimbabwe (SAZ), the conference was held under the theme “Innovate, Collaborate and Transform: Shaping the Future Together for Easier, Safer and Better Lives.”

The conference brought together leaders from academia, industry, government, and standards organisations to explore the critical role of standardisation in fostering innovation, business excellence, and sustainable development. Through keynote presentations, technical discussions, and networking sessions, participants examined how standards can support safer products, improved quality systems, and economic transformation.

Dr Gwisai’s participation reinforced Unicaf University Zimbabwe’s commitment to research excellence, quality assurance, and strategic engagement with regional and international stakeholders. The conference also provided valuable opportunities to strengthen professional networks, promote collaborative research, and align the University’s academic and research activities with emerging best practices in standardisation and sustainable development.



STUDENTS' HUB



In this issue, Dr Margarita Olympiou, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor of Unicaf Federal, provides practical guidance on one of the most critical stages of the research journey—developing effective research questions. Drawing on contemporary research methodology and best practice, the article explains how well-formulated research questions underpin rigorous study design, shape methodological choices, and contribute to producing original, impactful research. It also offers practical advice to help students and early-career researchers formulate clear, focused, and meaningful questions that lay the foundation for successful research projects.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS EXPLAINED

Developing Research Questions: The first step towards meaningful research

“A problem well stated is a problem half solved”

Charles Kettering

Every successful research project begins with a question. Yet, developing a strong research question is often one of the most challenging stages of the research process, particularly for novice researchers. A well-formulated research question not only defines the focus of the study but also guides the literature review, research design, methodology, data collection, analysis and interpretation of findings. In essence, it is the thread that connects every stage of the research journey.

Recent research methodology literature increasingly argues that the research question is not simply a procedural requirement, it is the foundation upon which rigorous, original and impactful research is built (Willis, 2023; Covvey et al., 2024).



Why does the research question matter?

A common misconception among new researchers is that choosing an interesting topic is sufficient. However, a topic merely identifies a broad area of interest, whereas a research question transforms that interest into a focused study or investigation.

Consider the following example:

Research Topic: Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education

Research Question: How does the use of generative artificial intelligence influence postgraduate students' critical thinking during online collaborative learning?

The research question example clearly identifies the phenomenon, the population, and the educational context. This clarity enables the researcher to conduct a focused literature review, select an appropriate methodology, and determine exactly what evidence is needed to answer the question.

According to Willis (2023), poorly formulated research questions are among the most common reasons for weak study designs and may ultimately affect the credibility and the publication potential of research findings.



What makes a good research question?

Although disciplines differ in their methodological traditions, researchers generally agree that high-quality research questions share several important characteristics.

A strong research question should be:



Focused: investigates one clearly defined issue;



Researchable: can be answered using evidence rather than personal opinion;



Feasible: achievable within the available time, resources, and access to participants;



Novel: contributes something new to the existing body of knowledge;



Relevant: contributes to knowledge or addresses a real-world problem;



Ethical: can be investigated while respecting ethical research principles;



Clear: avoids vague or ambiguous language

These characteristics are reflected in the widely used FINER framework (Feasible, Interesting, Novel, Ethical, Relevant), which continues to be recommended in contemporary research methodology literature as a practical tool for evaluating research questions before a study begins (Willis, 2023; Covvey et al., 2024, Hulley et al., 2013).



Research Tip

Before finalising your question, ask yourself:

“If I successfully answer this question, will anyone learn something important that is not already well established?”

From “finding a gap” to asking interesting questions:

One of the most significant developments in recent research methodology is a shift away from the traditional advice of simply **“finding a gap in the literature.”**

Alvesson and Sandberg (2024) argue that relying solely on identifying unexplored topics often leads to incremental research that contributes little to advancing knowledge. Instead, they encourage researchers to engage in problematisation, critically examining the assumptions that underpin existing theories and accepted ideas.

For example, instead of asking:

“What factors influence student engagement in online learning?”

a more thought-provoking question might be:

Do current measures of student engagement accurately capture meaningful learning in AI-supported online environments?

The second question does not merely fill a gap; it challenges an existing assumption and has greater potential to generate innovative insights.

For researchers seeking publication in high-quality journals, originality increasingly depends not only on studying something new but also on asking questions that encourage new ways of thinking.



Aligning research questions with methodology:

A well-developed research question naturally points towards the most appropriate research design.

For example:



Descriptive research:

What are postgraduate students' perceptions of AI-assisted assessment?



Comparative research: How do learning outcomes differ between students using AI-supported feedback and traditional tutor feedback?



Correlational research:

What is the relationship between academic self-efficacy and engagement in online learning?



Qualitative research:

How do doctoral students experience the use of generative AI during the research writing process?

As Barroga and Matanguihan (2022) emphasise, research questions should drive methodological decisions, not the other way around. Choosing a method before defining the research question often results in studies where the design and objectives are poorly aligned.



Research questions evolve:

Many students assume that their research question should remain unchanged throughout the research process. In reality, refinement is both common and desirable.

Developing a research question is an iterative process. Preliminary reading may reveal that the original question is too broad, already answered, or impossible to investigate with the available resources and/or time. Revising the question demonstrates intellectual engagement with the literature rather than indecision.

Recent guidance suggests that researchers should view their research question as something that develops through continuous interaction with existing evidence, and methodological considerations rather than as a fixed statement produced at the beginning of the project.



Common mistakes to avoid:

Some of the most frequent pitfalls include:

- **Questions that are too broad, making the study impossible to complete.**
- **Yes-or-no questions, which rarely generate rich academic evidence.**
- **Questions containing multiple objectives, leading to unfocused research.**
- **Questions based on opinion rather than evidence, limiting scientific value.**
- **Questions that cannot realistically be answered given available time or resources.**



Covvey and colleagues (2024) note that many of these issues only become apparent during peer review. Investing time in refining the research question at the outset can therefore prevent substantial revisions later.

A practical checklist:



Before beginning data collection, ask yourself the following:

- **Is my question clear and easy to understand?**
- **Does it investigate one specific issue?**
- **Can it be answered using appropriate evidence?**
- **Does it address an important or interesting problem?**
- **Is it achievable within my available timeframe and resources?**
- **Does it align with my chosen methodology?**

If the answer to each question is “**yes,**” you have established a strong foundation for your research.

Final thoughts:

Developing an effective research question is both a scientific and creative process. While established frameworks such as FINER provide valuable guidance, recent scholarship reminds us that truly impactful research begins with curiosity, critical thinking, and the willingness to challenge existing assumptions.

Whether conducting undergraduate research, completing a doctoral dissertation, or preparing a manuscript for publication, researchers should remember that the strongest studies are rarely distinguished by sophisticated statistical techniques alone. They are distinguished by asking questions that are focused, meaningful, and capable of advancing knowledge.

In research, the journey begins not with finding answers, but with asking better questions.



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EYES TO THE FUTURE



In this edition of Eyes to the Future, we continue to highlight the research contributions of our graduate students. This series showcases thesis projects that address pressing academic and societal challenges, providing insights into the motivations behind the research and its potential impact. Each month, we feature responses from selected graduates to three key questions:

What was your research about?

What inspired you to choose this topic?

How might your findings benefit Africa?

Recent graduates who wish to share their research are invited to contribute by responding to these questions at the provided [link](#).



DR GLORY M. NGWANA

Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Unicaf University, Zambia.

Dr Glory M. Ngwana is a business leader, researcher, author, and advocate for women's empowerment. With a background in business, technology, and customer experience management, she is the founder of the Anna Nabuh Foundation, which supports girls and women through scholarships and mentorship. Her research focuses on entrepreneurship, sustainable business development, and financial inclusion in Africa.

Title:

EXPLORING THE HINDERING FACTORS OF CREDIT FACILITIES ON SUSTAINABILITY OF SMES IN DOUALA CAMEROON.

Abstract: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) plays a significant role in the development of every economy worldwide, accounting for more than 95% of businesses (World Bank, 2019). These SMEs make up the majority of businesses, and have a significant impact on key economic indicators (Civelek, 2021; Lu, Wu, & Liu, 2020). Cameroon's SMEs comprise most of its businesses and are the country's main engines of economic growth. The Cameroon Tribune interviewed the Cameroon Minister of SMEs on the 25th of October 2017, where it was claimed that SMEs contribute to 95% of the Cameroonian economy. The cultivation of an environment that is suitable for the growth and sustainability of SMEs (Farrell, Oczkowski, & Kharabsheh, 2018) critical, with studies showing the challenges they face in securing easy loan access (Civelek, 2021). The aim of this study

is to explore and analyze the hindrances to credit access by SMEs and the impacts on their businesses with the goal to bring about mitigative solutions for a more favourable credit deal.

This study is based on the economic theories of Macmillan Gap, Credit Admeasure, and Information Asymmetry, with the research adopting a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Targeted participants were owners and managers of SMEs chosen through purposive sampling, with focus group discussions adopted as data collection tools for the following questions: What are the factors hindering easy access to loans?, What are the impacts of these hindering factors on SMEs?, What can be done to improve or gain access to easy loans? - followed by the thematic analysis of said data. The results indicate the need for robust business models and computer and credit bureau systems, client information and credibility, and state protection, in addition to expertise, experience and entrepreneurial spirit in order to address challenges and provide impact-driven solutions. The results would impact on government policy review, financial institution funding schemes and the SMEs. Future studies should consider areas as; duplicating research within financial institutions; exploring other regions of Cameroon; loans without collateral security, etc.



What was your Research about?

My doctoral research involved a deep and thorough investigation into the key challenges that prevent SMEs in Douala, Cameroon, from effectively accessing and utilizing available credit. Beyond simply identifying these obstacles, the study aimed to understand the intricate ways in which they hinder the long-term sustainability and growth potential of these vital players in the local economy. A central focus was to dissect the complex interplay between constraints within the financial sector, the specific vulnerabilities of SMEs themselves, and the broader economic context that contributes to this ongoing issue. The research specifically examined critical areas such as the often-excessive demands for collateral, the hindering effect of high and unstable interest rates, and the widespread problems arising from information asymmetry that impede trust and risk assessment by financial institutions. Furthermore, it explored how institutional weaknesses, unclear regulations, and the limited availability of tailored financial products further compound these challenges for SMEs operating in Douala. Ultimately, the aim was to develop a detailed and evidence-based understanding of these interconnected factors to inform effective interventions.



What led you to choose this topic for your PhD research?

My decision to focus on this research area grew from a clear awareness of the crucial role that vibrant SMEs play in driving real economic progress, creating much-needed jobs, and sparking innovation across the African continent. Despite their widely recognized importance as engines of growth, the ability of countless SMEs to expand and effectively operate is frequently hampered by the persistent difficulty of securing adequate and affordable financing. Having observed this significant constraint firsthand within the dynamic, yet often challenging, business environment of Douala, a key commercial and industrial center in Cameroon, I felt a strong motivation to contribute to a more in-depth and context-aware understanding of these deeply rooted obstacles. This localized approach, centering on a major African economic hub, allows for a detailed examination of the complex structural, systemic, and even socio-cultural factors that together limit the financial inclusion and growth prospects of SMEs. Moreover, while existing research often acknowledges the financing gap faced by African SMEs, it frequently lacks the detailed, on-the-ground analysis needed to inform truly effective policy and institutional reforms. My research aimed to address this gap by providing solid evidence and practical insights directly relevant to the Cameroonian situation, with broader lessons for similar contexts across Africa.

In what ways do you believe the findings of your research could be relevant or beneficial to:

- **Your country**
- **The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**
- **The broader African context, if applicable**

The insights generated from this detailed study of how SMEs in Douala access financing have the potential to be highly valuable and widely applicable across Africa by shedding crucial light on a fundamental problem that limits the advancement of a vital sector. While the specific ways these challenges manifest and their intensity might differ across the diverse economies of the continent, the overarching issue of SMEs struggling to secure the funding they need is a common barrier to real economic growth and inclusive development throughout Africa. This evidence-based research can empower a wide range of stakeholders - including government ministries and agencies shaping economic policy, regulatory bodies overseeing the financial sector, commercial banks and other financial institutions looking to better serve the SME market, and organizations dedicated to supporting SME growth – to develop and implement targeted and effective solutions. By providing concrete, localized, and data-driven understanding from a key African economic center like Douala, the research can inform the creation of more effective and inclusive financial policies, innovative financial products tailored to SME needs, and impactful capacity-building initiatives. Ultimately, this can unlock the significant potential of SMEs to contribute more fully to sustainable economic diversification, the creation of quality jobs, and overall socio-economic progress across the African continent.



DR ULONNAM DAVID EBERE

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Dr Ulonnam David Ebere is an Electrical and Electronics Engineer, management professional, and researcher with extensive leadership experience in engineering, information technology, and human resource development. A Fellow of the Nigerian Society of Engineers and several professional institutes, his research examines the role of management information systems in improving organisational effectiveness and technological innovation.

Title:

THE IMPACT OF MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS ON ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT USING THE NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT AS A CASE STUDY

Abstract: My study sought to determine the impact of management information systems on the effectiveness of the Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM). The transition from manual business processes in the pre-chartered era to automated operations in the post-chartered era presented several challenges within the NIM. These challenges highlighted gaps in the existing literature and underscored the need for this study, which investigates the integration of Management Information Systems (MIS) into NIM's operations as a means of enhancing organizational effectiveness.

To achieve the study objective, a conceptual model was developed using ADDIE's model where five independent variables represent management information systems, while one dependent variable represents organizational effectiveness. A mixed method approach was employed as a stratified random sample for 600 respondents

was used through questionnaires (quantitative data), interview and group discussions (qualitative data) to code respondents' information via likert and thematic scales. The multiple regression analysis was used on Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) to analyze the quantitative data, with qualitative data analyzed through thematic analysis.

The multiple linear regression results established the parameters of management information systems with respect to the five independent variables at 5% level of significance, with Durbin Watson falling within 1.5 to 2.5, and P-values of 0.76, 0.84, 0.71, 0.81 and 0.68 having a significant positive impact on the NIM's organizational effectiveness. In addition, the thematic findings with respect to the focus group discussions and interviews fall above 20 and 14 respectively.

Therefore, the study recommends investing and deploying advanced technological infrastructure within the institute's operations to enhance its overall effectiveness. Furthermore in order to facilitate the integration of management information systems, the researcher developed a new technological business model, designated as "Ebere's Remedial Technological Business Model" (ERTBM). The framework leverages emerging technologies to enhance information technology infrastructure and promote organizational effectiveness. It is proposed as an additional framework to guide organizations in the adoption, acceptance, and sustained use of technology, thereby supporting continuous technological development and improved business operations.

Thus, the study further implies that the outcome of this research is also expected to significantly contribute to existing bodies of knowledge and assist officials in appreciating management information systems as a necessary, and effective, organizational human resource development tool.



What was your Research about?

My study sought to determine the impact of management information systems on organizational effectiveness in human resource development using the Nigerian Institute of Management as a case study (Bryman, 2012). To achieve its purpose, this study employed mixed-method of quantitative and qualitative research (Guba, 1990) using multi-factor models to investigate and explain organizational effectiveness by further testing the adherence to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) in the advancement of technological infrastructures responsible for the growth of management information systems.

Through the use of a case study design (Yin, 2003), a descriptive research method was employed for the purpose of this study. This descriptive type was used as it enabled the researcher to have direct contact with the sample of the study while also using Dillman (2007) tailor design method accommodating both open-end and closed-end questions. These questions were also accorded with the efficient utilization of questionnaires and interview transcripts specifically designed in a pragmatic way, addressing the research questions (of what and how), as well as the purpose of the study, with the study variables determined by the research questions.

Notably, the sources of data were both primary and secondary, with the primary sources consisting of structured responses to questionnaires and unstructured interviews with members and staff of NIM (Chartered), while secondary sources included books, lectures, journals, newspapers, documents and reliable internet resources. Through the collection of data from both sources, permission sought from the management of NIM to disseminate questionnaires and conduct interviews in the safest possible (either online or physically) to the selected sample of the study. The researcher disseminated the questionnaires solely to members and staff of the organization (internal stakeholders) as well as to the external stakeholders while adhering to the reliability and validity of the research using ethical research principles in data distribution and collection processes.



What led you to choose this topic for your PhD research?

The role of management information systems (MIS) in organizational effectiveness cannot be overemphasized, as it encompasses computing systems that provide organisations with the insights needed to make informed economic decisions and advance their strategic objectives (Yusuf 2021). These systems enhance decision-making processes by ensuring access to accurate, timely, and relevant information, thereby contributing to organisational effectiveness and the achievement of predetermined objectives (Gilbert & Ali, 2000).

However, as an overview, the study came to be in an attempt to identify and appreciate the impact of management information systems on organizational effectiveness in human resources development. Bearing in mind Avegerou (2000), had previously noted that it is the responsibility of human resources within an organization to make sure the operations are running efficiently and effectively, hence this study used the Nigerian Institute of Management as a case study due to its multidisciplinary nature and the need to review differing perspectives.

In what ways do you believe the findings of your research could be relevant or beneficial to:

- **Your country**
- **The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**
- **The broader African context, if applicable**

The significance of the research obtained from this study is important for organizational effectiveness as it builds on positive Human Resource Development which Management Information Systems have had an immense impact on, as compared to the past where many organizations from 2004 and years prior, failed to adapt to an ever-changing organizational landscape as a result of ineffective management procedures, decisions, attitudes and policies (*Vanguard and African Service Newspaper, 2010). Some banks and financial institutions in Nigeria experienced operational challenges as a result of the absence of speed and accuracy within their workflows and procedures.

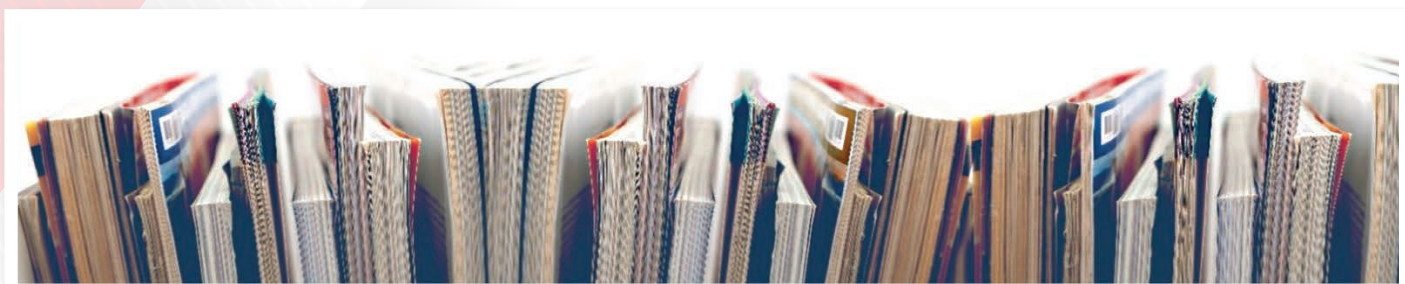
Sadly, most top management teams that served as basic decision makers lacked adequate management education principles and practices. The majority of these teams applied traditional management styles commonly found in traditional or adaptive organisations, relying on non-scientific decision-making approaches based on experience and rules of thumb, which remain relevant in developing economies. (Neuman, 2005).

In this vein, this study will be beneficial to modern interest groups such as financial institutions, educational institutions, public and private companies as it enables enterprises to adopt pragmatic measures such as database management systems, to close previously identified loopholes (Ajayi and Omirin, 2007).

The outcome of this study is expected to help human resource officials and managers throughout the sector appreciate MIS as an effective and necessary organizational tool to identify existing structural strengths and weaknesses, implement corrective measures to ensure business continuity, and facilitate rapid yet accurate decision-making and policy formulation processes (McGraw-Hill, 2012). Also, enterprises can work and pay remotely through a range of digital technologies and platforms by improving their IT infrastructure (Asare et al, 2019). Furthermore, it is also expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and serve as reference material for further studies.

RECENT UNICAF PUBLICATIONS

NEW PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS BY OUR STUDENTS AND FACULTY



STUDENTS:

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<https://www.ijsmr.in>

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IF YOU HAVE THE IDEA; WE CAN HELP YOU WITH FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES



Horizon Europe – International Cooperation in AI

Area/Disciplines/Themes: Artificial Intelligence, digital technologies, international research collaboration and innovation.

Deadline: 18 March 2027

More information: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal>

Enhancing Integrated Research and Healthcare in Sub-Saharan Africa through Digital Innovation and AI (EDCTP3)

Area/Disciplines/Themes: Digital health, AI, health systems, research capacity and EU–Africa collaboration.

Deadline: 23 September 2027

More information: <https://www.globalhealth.edctp.org/funding/>

Supporting STISA 2034: SGCI Multilateral Research Call

Area/Disciplines/Themes: Collaborative research aligned with Africa's Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy (STISA), including health, agriculture, digital technologies and capacity building.

Deadline: 25 September 2026

More information: <https://sgciafrica.org/>

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LIST OF FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS AND COURSES



Cambridge–Africa ALBORADA Research Fund

Area/Disciplines/Themes: All disciplines. Supports collaborative research projects, research training workshops and pilot studies between researchers based at African institutions and the University of Cambridge.

Deadline: 3 September 2026

Link: <https://www.cambridge-africa.cam.ac.uk/initiatives/2026-call-for-applications/>

The Africa Institute – Senior & Postdoctoral Fellowships (2027 Cohort)

Area/Disciplines/Themes: African Studies, Humanities, Social Sciences, Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, Visual Cultures and related disciplines.

Deadline: 30 September 2026

Link: <https://www.theafricainstitute.org/institute-program/postdoctoral-fellowships-program/>

STIAS Iso Lomso Fellowship Programme

Area/Disciplines/Themes: All disciplines. Prestigious early-career fellowship for outstanding African researchers to strengthen independent research careers.

Deadline: Next call opens 15 October 2026

Link: <https://stias.ac.za/fellowships/apply/>

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Deadline: Applications accepted throughout the year (minimum four months before the intended fellowship start date).

Link: <https://miasa.ug.edu.gh/fellowship-programme/>

UNESCO Co-Sponsored Fellowships Programme

Area/Disciplines/Themes: Education, Natural Sciences, Engineering, Communication, Social Sciences and Culture.

Deadline: 31 December 2026 (subject to participating host institutions)

Link: <https://www.unesco.org/en/fellowships>

Advanced Digital Skills for AI Uptake in Health

Area/Disciplines/Themes: Artificial Intelligence, Health Informatics, Data Science, Digital Health and Digital Skills.

Deadline: 1 October 2026

Link: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/work-programmes-digital>

Digital Europe – EdTech Accelerator

Area/Disciplines/Themes: Educational Technology, Digital Learning, Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Higher Education.

Deadline: 1 October 2026

Link: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/work-programmes-digital>

CALLS FOR CONFERENCES AND EVENTS (WORKSHOP / WEBINARS)

UPCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS



Save the Date: Annual Online Unicaf Master's Conference (UMC) 2026

The **Annual Online Unicaf Master's Conference (UMC) 2026** will take place **online from 16–20 November 2026**, with sessions running daily from **09:00 to 17:00 Cyprus time**.

The conference provides an excellent opportunity for Unicaf Master's students to present their research, exchange ideas with peers and

academics, and engage in stimulating academic discussions across a range of disciplines. Participants are encouraged to attend presentations throughout the week and support fellow researchers.

Further details, including the conference programme and registration information, will be shared closer to the event.

Save the date and join us for another inspiring week of research, collaboration, and academic excellence.

UNICAF UNIVERSITY DOCTORAL RESEARCH GROUPS (FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS)

The Doctoral Research Groups (DRGs) aim to foster collaboration, knowledge exchange, and constructive feedback between doctoral researchers and faculty, with a view to advancing original and rigorous research. The initiative is open to Unicaf University doctoral researchers and faculty, providing a forum where doctoral researchers can present their ideas, discuss their research, and share expertise. Through open dialogue with peers and academic staff working in related fields, participants benefit from valuable feedback, interdisciplinary perspectives, and opportunities to strengthen their research.

The next series of Doctoral Research Groups will commence in September 2026. The full programme will be published and updated in August 2026 and will be available on the Doctoral Research Groups webpage, where participants can find the latest schedule and session details.

More information regarding the Doctoral Research Groups can be found on our [webpage](#).

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The Unicaf Online Journal – Education welcomes interdisciplinary research on contemporary issues in education, including language and literacy, pedagogy, artificial intelligence in education, educational leadership and policy, equity and inclusion, STEAM education, and adult and lifelong learning. The journal seeks empirical, theoretical, conceptual, and practice-based research that shapes the future of education.

The Unicaf Online Journal – Public Health is currently inviting submissions for its special issue, “Advancing Public Health Initiatives in Low- and Middle-Income Countries.” Researchers are encouraged to submit original research, reviews, case studies, policy analyses, and evidence-based reports that address public health challenges, strengthen health systems, and promote sustainable health outcomes.

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Researchers are encouraged to visit the Unicaf Online Journal website to explore the current Calls for Papers, author guidelines, and submission requirements, and to contribute to a growing international community committed to advancing impactful, interdisciplinary research.

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research in a related field.

If you are interested, please complete our [Google form](#) with details of your research specialisations. For more information, including guidelines for submitting a paper or becoming a reviewer, visit the [UOJ website](#) and refer to the Call in a [previous edition of the Unicaf Research Newsletter](#). We look forward to your contributions!

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Moreover, we extend the same invitation to faculty members who have publications to share. If you are a faculty member, please send us your publications (with correct reference or DOI) to research.office@unicaf.org. Kindly indicate whether the publication is affiliated with Unicaf / Unicaf University, as this information will assist us in accurately registering your publications in our database.

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