

PERSISTENT UNIFORM RESOURCE LOCATOR USAGE AND RESEARCH VISIBILITY AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between persistent uniform resource locator (PURL) usage and research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar, Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 2,422 postgraduate students admitted during the 2024/2025 academic session, from which a sample of 332 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure involving stratified and accidental sampling techniques. Data were collected using the “Persistent Uniform Resource Locator Usage and Research Visibility Questionnaire” (PURLURVQ). The instrument was validated by experts, while reliability was established using Cronbach’s alpha, with coefficients of 0.74 and 0.79 for PURL usage and research visibility respectively. Data were analysed using simple linear regression at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed a strong, positive and significant relationship between PURL usage and research visibility ($R = .721$, $R^2 = .520$, Adjusted $R^2 = .518$, $p < .05$). The study concluded that increased PURL usage is associated with improved research visibility among postgraduate students. It recommended regular training and increased awareness on the effective use of PURLs for accessing, sharing and disseminating postgraduate research.

Keywords: persistent uniform resource locator; research visibility; postgraduate students

Introduction

Research visibility has become an important concern in postgraduate education because the value of scholarly research is connected not only with its production but also with its ability to reach potential users. Research outputs need to be identifiable, discoverable and accessible if they are to participate effectively in scholarly communication. Turki et al. (2023) explained that the visibility of scholarly publications is affected by their inclusion within systems that support identification and retrieval. This is particularly important for postgraduate students who produce theses, dissertations, journal articles and other scholarly works as part of their academic development. Where such outputs cannot be easily located or accessed, their potential contribution to subsequent research becomes restricted. Poor research visibility can therefore create a situation where useful postgraduate research exists but remains outside the effective flow of scholarly information (Anele et al., 2024; Adie et al., 2026a).

The increasing movement of scholarly communication to digital environments has changed how research is identified, accessed and disseminated. Researchers now depend considerably on web-based systems for locating publications and following references to scholarly resources (Idaka et al., 2024; Eze et al., 2026). However, the continued availability of resources on the web cannot always be guaranteed because online materials may disappear or their locations may change over time. Klein and Balakireva (2020) explained that scholarly web resources are affected by reference rot because resources can disappear or undergo substantial changes after they have been referenced. This creates a problem for research visibility because a scholarly output may initially be available online but subsequently become difficult to retrieve. The ability to maintain stable connections to research outputs has consequently become an important consideration in digital scholarly communication (Ita et al., 2025; Ogba et al., 2025; Otu et al., 2026).

Poor research visibility is especially significant where theses and dissertations are concerned. Postgraduate students devote substantial intellectual effort to research, yet completing a thesis or dissertation does not automatically ensure that the work becomes visible to researchers outside the institution where it was produced (Uchegbue et al., 2024; Otu et al., 2025; Ubi et al., 2026). Adetoro Salau et al. (2020) examined electronic theses and dissertations in Nigerian federal universities and linked weaknesses in their management and accessibility with the poor global visibility of these research outputs. Their work indicates that the availability of postgraduate research in electronic form must be accompanied by appropriate systems for its organisation, preservation and retrieval. Research visibility among postgraduate students should therefore be understood in relation to the ability of other researchers to locate and continually access the scholarly outputs produced by these students.

From the global perspective, persistent identification has become increasingly relevant to the visibility of scholarly publications. Turki et al. (2023) observed that the absence of Digital Object Identifiers can limit the visibility of publications within global scholarly communication, particularly publications originating from developing countries. Persistent identifiers provide a means through which research outputs can retain an identifiable reference even within a changing digital environment. Turki et al. further argued that unique persistent identifiers deserve greater attention because of their importance to the global visibility of scholarly publications. This suggests that the visibility of postgraduate research is connected not only with placing research online but also with providing reliable mechanisms through which such research can continue to be identified and retrieved (Adie et al., 2026b; Adie et al., 2026c).

The issue assumes particular importance in developing countries because unequal representation within scholarly information systems can affect the international visibility of locally produced knowledge. Turki et al. (2023) found substantial differences in the availability

of Digital Object Identifiers across the global publishing environment and noted the implications of these differences for publications from developing countries. Where scholarly outputs are not adequately represented within persistent identification systems, they may have reduced opportunities for inclusion in the global circulation of scientific information. This situation is relevant to postgraduate research in African universities, where theses, dissertations and other locally produced scholarly outputs may contain valuable knowledge but require effective digital mechanisms to become consistently discoverable (Anele et al., 2024; Adie et al., 2026d). Poor visibility can therefore restrict the extent to which postgraduate research contributes to wider scholarly conversations.

In Nigeria, the visibility of postgraduate research has been associated with the development and performance of electronic theses and dissertations within university repositories. Adetoro Salau et al. (2020) reported that electronic theses and dissertation initiatives in the Nigerian federal universities they examined had not developed sufficiently in relation to policy, content and system architecture. They further observed that weaknesses in the management of these electronic theses and dissertations contributed to poor global visibility and accessibility. This is significant because theses and dissertations represent direct products of postgraduate research. When these outputs are poorly organised, inadequately exposed through digital systems or difficult to retrieve, research produced by postgraduate students may remain largely confined to its institution of origin rather than becoming readily available to a wider academic audience (Idaka et al., 2024; Eze et al., 2026; Ndarake et al., 2026).

The problem is not limited to whether postgraduate research is uploaded to an online environment. Continued visibility also depends on whether the digital location through which a scholarly work is accessed remains reliable over time (Nwachukwu et al., 2026a; Nwachukwu et al., 2026b). Klein and Balakireva (2020) established that scholarly resources on the web are vulnerable to disappearance and changes in content, creating difficulties for long-term

referencing and retrieval. A postgraduate research output that is connected only through an unstable web address may consequently become difficult to locate when the structure or location of the hosting website changes. Persistent Uniform Resource Locators are relevant within this context because persistence seeks to maintain reliable identification and access to digital resources despite changes that may occur within the web environment. The issue of persistence therefore has implications for the continued visibility of postgraduate research.

The relationship between persistent identification and research visibility is also evident in the wider scholarly publishing environment. Turki et al. (2023) demonstrated that the availability of persistent identifiers such as DOIs has implications for whether publications are represented within the global flow of scientific information. Persistent identification supports the stable association of a scholarly output with an identifier that can continue to direct users to the resource even when aspects of its digital location change. In contrast, Klein and Balakireva (2020) showed that ordinary web references can experience problems of persistence when resources disappear or substantially change. These concerns suggest that the use of persistent Uniform Resource Locators may be relevant to the discoverability and continued accessibility of postgraduate research outputs.

For postgraduate students, poor research visibility can mean that research completed for academic qualifications receives limited exposure beyond the immediate university environment. Evidence from Nigeria indicates that weaknesses in electronic theses and dissertation systems can affect the accessibility and global visibility of postgraduate research outputs (Adetoro Salau et al., 2020). At the same time, evidence from the wider scholarly communication environment indicates that persistent identifiers can contribute to the visibility of publications by strengthening their identification within research information systems (Turki et al., 2023; Okere et al., 2026). Since unstable web references may also undermine continued access to scholarly resources (Klein & Balakireva, 2020; Ugiokwen et al., 2026), the manner in

which postgraduate students use persistent Uniform Resource Locators becomes an issue requiring closer examination.

Within the University of Calabar, postgraduate students produce research across different academic disciplines, but there is insufficient documented evidence establishing how persistent Uniform Resource Locator usage relates specifically to the visibility of their research. Existing verified literature has addressed the poor visibility of electronic theses and dissertations in Nigerian universities (Adetoro Salau et al., 2020), the persistence problems affecting scholarly web resources (Klein & Balakireva, 2020), and the relationship between persistent identifiers and the global visibility of publications (Turki et al., 2023). However, these studies do not specifically establish the relationship between persistent Uniform Resource Locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar. This leaves a contextual and population gap that requires investigation. It is against this background that the present study seeks to examine the relationship between persistent Uniform Resource Locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar.

Purpose of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the relationship between persistent uniform resource locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students in university of calabar. This study seeks to;

Examine the relationship between persistent uniform resource locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students in university of calabar.

Research question

1. What is the relationship between persistent uniform resource locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar?

Research hypothesis

1. There is no significant relationship between persistent uniform resource locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design to examine the relationship between persistent Uniform Resource Locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. For the purpose of the study, persistent Uniform Resource Locator usage constituted the independent variable, while research visibility constituted the dependent variable. The population of the study comprised 2,422 postgraduate students admitted into the 2024/2025 academic session in the University of Calabar. The population consisted of 336 Postgraduate Diploma students, 1,311 master's degree students, and 775 doctoral degree students. A sample of 332 postgraduate students was selected from the total population using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination formula. A multi-stage sampling procedure involving stratified and accidental sampling techniques was adopted. Stratified sampling was used to divide the postgraduate students according to their academic programmes to ensure representation of the different categories of students, while accidental sampling was used to select available and willing respondents from each stratum until the required sample size was attained.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire titled "Persistent Uniform Resource Locator Usage and Research Visibility Questionnaire" (PURLURVQ). The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A contained items designed to assess persistent Uniform Resource Locator usage among postgraduate students, while Section B contained items designed to assess research visibility among postgraduate students. The questionnaire items were structured on a four-point Likert-type scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The instrument was subjected to face

and content validation by three lecturers in Library and Information Science and two experts in Test and Measurement. A trial test was conducted using postgraduate students from the University of Uyo who were not part of the main study. Reliability was established using the Cronbach's alpha method. The persistent Uniform Resource Locator usage scale recorded a reliability coefficient of 0.74, while the research visibility scale also recorded a reliability coefficient of 0.79, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data collected were analysed using simple linear regression to determine the relationship between persistent Uniform Resource Locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students. The null hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance and was rejected where the p-value was less than 0.05 and retained where the p-value was greater than or equal to 0.05.

Presentation of result

Hypothesis one

There is no significant relationship between persistent uniform resource locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar. The independent variable in this hypothesis is persistent uniform resource locator usage, while the dependent variable is research visibility among postgraduate students. Simple linear regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesis. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1. The result of the analysis showed a correlation coefficient (R) of .721, indicating a strong positive relationship between persistent uniform resource locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students. The positive direction of the relationship implies that higher usage of persistent uniform resource locators is associated with higher research visibility among postgraduate students. The R-square (R^2) value of .520 and adjusted R-square value of .518 further showed that persistent uniform resource locator usage accounted for 51.8% of the variation in research visibility among postgraduate students, while the remaining 48.2% may be attributed to other factors not included in the model. The result further revealed an F-value

of 468.251 with a p-value of .000 at 1 and 330 degrees of freedom. Since the p-value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between persistent uniform resource locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar. The regression coefficient also showed a positive relationship ($B = .966$, $\beta = .706$, $t = 10.725$, $p = .000$), indicating that as persistent uniform resource locator usage increases, research visibility among postgraduate students also tends to increase. The study therefore established that persistent uniform resource locator usage has a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship with research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar.

Table 1: Simple linear regression analysis of the relationship between persistent uniform resource locator usage and research visibility among postgraduate students

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F-ratio	Sig.	
Regression	2218.740	1	2218.740	468.251*	.000	
Residual	2051.706	330	4.738			
Total	4270.446	331				
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant		14.252	1.879	-	7.583	.000
Persistent uniform resource locator usage		.966	.090	.721	10.725	.000

*Significant at $P < .05$; $R = .721$, $R^2 = .520$, Adjusted $R^2 = .518$; $N = 332$.

Discussion of Finding

The finding revealed that persistent uniform resource locator usage has a strong, positive and significant relationship with research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar. This means that increased use of persistent uniform resource locators is associated with increased research visibility among postgraduate students. Persistent links provide stable means of identifying and locating scholarly resources within the digital research environment. Their use can make research outputs easier to discover, retrieve, access and share over time, even when changes occur in the location of digital resources. The finding therefore suggests that the appropriate use of PURLs can contribute to maintaining access to postgraduate research and improving the visibility of such research within the wider scholarly community.

A possible reason for this finding is that research visibility depends partly on how easily scholarly outputs can be identified and retrieved within digital information systems. Postgraduate students increasingly interact with research materials through repositories, databases and other web-based scholarly environments where reliable links are required for continued access to digital resources. Klein and Balakireva (2020) observed that scholarly resources available on the web are vulnerable to reference rot because resources may disappear or change significantly over time. Persistent identification mechanisms help to address

problems associated with changing web locations by providing more reliable means of identifying scholarly resources. Consequently, postgraduate students who effectively use persistent links in managing and disseminating their research may improve the possibility that their scholarly outputs remain accessible and discoverable to other researchers.

The finding agrees with Turki et al. (2023), who reported that persistent identifiers are important to the global visibility of scholarly publications and observed that publications without Digital Object Identifiers may be excluded from the wider flow of scientific information, particularly in developing countries. It is also consistent with Santos and Maimone (2023), who examined persistent identifiers in relation to information retrieval and scientific visibility and established their relevance to the identification, retrieval and visibility of scientific information. Similarly, Aghassibake et al. (2023) demonstrated the usefulness of persistent identifier metadata in connecting and understanding institutional research activities. These studies support the present finding that persistent identification and reliable linking mechanisms are associated with the discoverability and visibility of scholarly research. The present study extends this understanding by establishing a strong positive relationship between persistent uniform resource locator usage and research visibility specifically among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar.

Conclusion

The study concluded that persistent uniform resource locator usage has a significant positive relationship with research visibility among postgraduate students in the University of Calabar. Postgraduate students who make greater use of persistent uniform resource locators are more likely to have their research outputs remain accessible and discoverable within the digital research environment. The use of persistent links supports stable access to scholarly materials and reduces problems associated with changing or inaccessible web addresses. Therefore, encouraging the effective use of persistent uniform resource locators among

postgraduate students is important for improving the visibility and accessibility of their research outputs.

Recommendations

1. The University of Calabar, through the University Library and College of Postgraduate Studies, should organise regular training for postgraduate students on the effective use of persistent uniform resource locators in accessing, sharing and disseminating their research outputs.
2. The University Library should create greater awareness among postgraduate students about persistent uniform resource locators and provide practical guidance on how they can be used to improve the accessibility and visibility of postgraduate research.

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