

Fixed-Term Contracts and the Composition of Academic Research Output

Atsushi Inoue, Kuniko Matsumoto, and Ryuichi Tanaka

January 28th, 2026

Abstract

This paper studies how contract type among university researchers—fixed-term versus open-ended employment—is related to both output quantity and the quality composition of research. We combine microdata from the 2020 Laboratory Panel Survey conducted by the National Institute of Science and Technology Policy (NISTEP) with bibliometric records and control for prior research performance. We find that fixed-term researchers publish in higher-quality journals and have higher normalized citation impact. By contrast, we find no significant differences in refereed publication counts or collaboration patterns. Fixed-term researchers also report higher research effort, and the estimated quality/impact differences attenuate when we additionally control for effort shares. Overall, the findings indicate that contract type is more closely associated with the quality margin than with publication counts, and the quality differences are consistent with fixed-term researchers allocating more effort to research.

Keywords: Fixed-term contracts; Academic labor market; Research productivity; Bibliometrics; Japan
JEL codes: I23, J41, O31