

APRAISAL OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IN DEVELOPING NATION, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

BY

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Introduction

Research is a compound word which comprises of “re” and “search” which means to find again and again. Research in mass communication can be seen as a systematic process of collecting information or data on matter concerning man, and his environment. But because of the subject matter in question i.e Communication Research, this academic discuss set to explain the position of the subject with the aid of 1973 Kerlinger definition of research which shall bring the issue in communication research into limelight. Kerlinger defines research as “Systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of hypothetical proposition about the presumed relations among natural phenomena”.

Besides, some keywords of the definition above required explanation for better understanding of the subject matter called communication research. Those keywords include Systematic, control, empirical, critical investigation, and hypothetical proposition.

Communication research is systematic because it follows a process which eventually lead to end result. It is controlled because it is subject to control by researcher especially social science research where communication research belongs, one cannot exhaust everything. For example one sample must be adequately representative. Research is empirical in nature. It must have widen application and must be universally accepted. Therefore all the procedure must be scientific. It is also critical investigation because subject must be considered beyond ordinary meaning but extended by proving it scientifically. There must be a problem which is hypothetical and requires scientific audience.

Research involves finding out information about things. It involves finding solutions to unsolved problems. Providing answers to questions that probe the mind in the bid to provide the society with answers. Fawole, Egbokhere, Itiola, Obejide, Olayinka (2006).

From a global perspective, the importance of research in contemporary human society is not negotiable. Nwakpa (2015) observes that in the face of current global crisis in diverse sectors such as Economy, Politics, Migration, Health, etc. and other spheres of the human society, research plays key role in the search for answers to probing questions. Chukwu, Ebue, Obikeguna, Arionu, Agbawodikeizu and Agwu (2016) opine that existence in a world of such dynamism can only be attained through constructive adaptation which is a product of research. Research serves as the catalyst for achieving national development through the production of manpower required for the labour force. Development means improving the total circumstances of man on this earth, satisfying his spiritual and material needs and granting him mastery of his environment (Aminu, 2009).

Chikwe, Ogidi, and Nwachukwu, (2015) disclosed that research has found application in many areas of human endeavor. In Agriculture, economics, law, media, education, etc., there are probing questions that require answers. These answers can only be provided through adequate and systematic research.

The conduct of research is one of the basic functions of tertiary institutions, which comprised of Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Colleges of Education. One of the chief requirements for post graduate students in higher institutions is research. Desmennu and Owoaje

(2018) opine that there is no doubt that postgraduate/doctoral research affects a country's research output which in turn affects the community.

The quality of research being carried out in developing nations, which Nigerian is included, has been adjudged to be of low standard, when compared- to their counterparts in other parts of the world (Emunemu, 2009). Odi (2013) equally observed that the quality of research in the developing nations is growing speedily due to the recent incisive nature of researching for solutions to challenges in the recent time. Since the world is a global village, it is expected that research findings from the nation's tertiary institutions meet international standard. That is to say, research from developing countries Post Graduate Students of tertiary institutions like Nigeria should be able to develop the skills required to effectively embark upon and successfully complete researches designed to understand and explain various aspects of society or nature; provide solution to the social and natural problems that impinge on human wellbeing in the immediate environment and globally (Ajayi 2009).

The point to note here is that, this paper looks at the issues and challenges of communication research in developing nations.

The Concept of Research

According to Chikwe, Ogidi and Nwachukwu (2015), research is the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Essentially, this is what differentiates scientific research from the form of research mentioned earlier in the introduction because the methodology used at arriving at the answers or data are thoroughly organized.

Fawoel, Egbokhare, Itiola, Odejide and Olayinka (2006) in Nwakpa (2015) defined research as a systematic investigation including development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or to contribute to generalizable knowledge. They further asserted that research is a curiosity-driven activity that has the purpose of discovery and advancement of knowledge. To Ajoku (2006), research is the search for knowledge, truth, similarities and relationships, and the process of finding solutions to problems through the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data.

On the other hand, Oyesola (2010) views research as the application of the scientific method to attain or prove new and exciting theories. He further explained that it is search, invention, discovery and establishment of new knowledge, facts, principles theories and methods. It is also acknowledged as a systematic, and objective search for knowledge, to establish theories and prove the truth of ideas, hypotheses and assumptions. It is a search which requires care and diligence for new facts.

Benefits of Research to the Society

The benefits of research to the society cannot be overemphasized. In fact, research meant a lot to the development of humanity. Countries like American, Great Britain, China, Japan to mentioned but few developed nations, are at their present position of development because of advancement in research Ajoku (2006). However, developing countries are not up to the task and the reason why they are still lacking behind. It is now time for developing nations to buckle up efforts and get the benefits of their own time with the aid of the benefits of research listed below:

Quantitative Education

Quantitative education that makes acquisition of useful skills, desirable values, knowledge, attitudes, ideas and competencies necessary for self-reliance can only be possible through adequate research work. It also results to qualitative instruction, articulate and confident graduates for the society's developmental activities. The quality of the citizens of a country depends on the quality

of their education. When research work leads to quality education, the desired manpower required to serve in the various sectors of the economy is guaranteed. Onuka, Onabamiro (2009).

Liberation from Ignorance and Poverty

Research activities and findings liberate man from poverty and ignorance. Research findings can liberate man from the restraints and limitations of ignorance and dependency through exposure. Ignorance and illiteracy are serious leading causes of socio-economic retrogression and poverty in the countries of the world including Nigeria Dickson (2010). The advanced countries of the world like Japan, America, etc., are flourishing economically because of their exposure to research. In fact, they are said to be advanced because of the progress they have made in the various fields of human endeavors. No nation in the world has ever thrived on the wings of illiteracy. Adequate research leads to the discovery of new techniques, ideas and ways of doing things which will in turn, lead to wealth creation.

Improvement in Standard of Living

Research findings that are worth-while do transform the society positively and also improve the overall quality of life. Without research, old knowledge will only be recycled and at a point will become anachronistic. It is Important then that research work should show novelty of ideas and not repetitive but reproductive so as to have impact on the life of the society. The variety of results that come from research will expose facts, provide evidence, discover the unknown and ultimately, expand the frontier of knowledge in the different areas of studies (Emunemu, 2009). All these will improve the standard of living, increase chances of employment, pave way for economic opportunities and upward social mobility.

Provision of Solutions to Counterparty Problems

When researchers effectively embark upon and successfully complete researches designed to understand and explain various aspects of society or nature, there will be solutions to the social and natural problems that impinge on human wellbeing in the immediate environment and globally (Ajayi, 2009). Take for instance, the nation can benefit from research findings or discoveries that will provide solutions to some naughty issues like climate change, HIV/AIDS and other related health problems. Through scientific explorations, means of curing myriads of terribly devastating sicknesses and diseases can be discovered and consequently, reduce the mortality rates.

Improvement in Educational Practices

Through research, relevant strategies and methods of learning and teaching new concepts can be learnt from other nations and adapted to improve instructional effectiveness. A lot of changes have taken place in leaching situations today and many more will still take place as long as educational research is being conducted. Igun (2010).

Educational research is an academic endeavour which is geared towards finding new ways in which the approaches used in providing educational activities in the school system can be improved (Ayodele-Bamisaiye,2005). An educational research is also conducted to develop new approaches in the professional practice of education in personality of the learners.

Challenges Facing Communication Research in Developing Nations

Earlier studies, Ekhaguere, Olayinka, Taiwo, Alomge and Obono (2006) have shown and bend their argument on the challenges facing research in developing nations to post graduate students, the argument is that a significant number of graduate students fail to complete their programmes due to various challenges. For instance, Ismail, Abidden and Hassan (2017) noted that students experience challenges during their research process. Some of the identified challenges include not

being familiar with research process, difficulties in topic selection and lack of knowledge about research methodology. Sometimes students' problems could be personal, or family difficulties, financial pressure and problems associated with employment.

Duze (2017) undertook an analysis of problems encountered by postgraduate students in Nigerian universities. The result showed that the most highly identified problem areas were in the order given as follows:

- (1) Problem of lack of equipment;
- (2) Academic problem;
- (3) Financial problem;
- (4) Problem of data collection;
- (5) Problem of supervision;
- (6) Problems related to university administration;
- (7) Accommodation problem;
- (8) Family background;
- (9) External examiner's problem and
- (10) Personal problems.

Igun (2010) in a study on difficulties experienced by postgraduate students in some Nigerian universities found that majority of respondents were encountering challenges. The most commonly cited problem was that of elongated durations caused by strike action. This was followed by lack of research materials and research topic challenges. In the study more than one-third of respondents (35% of respondents) had problems in selecting good topics as well as having access to research materials. Seventy percent (70%) had difficulties in research interaction, well over half of the respondents identified institutional factors as having the most negative effect on them.

Furthermore, Desmennu and Owoaje (2018) opine that another well know challenge among doctoral students is the challenge of not knowing how to write good proposals to access grants (be it foreign or domiciliary).

Some of these problems are discussed below:

Research Funding

Insufficient funding is one of the major banes of the education system in developing nations. As observed by Nwoye (2002), Nigeria as a case study, federal and state governments turn deaf ears to financing and supply of essential scientific materials or facilities needed in higher institutions and secondary schools for effective teaching and learning. In a study by Desmennu and Owoaje (2018), virtually all of the respondents (92.7%) indicated that their research was being funded with their personal funds. Slightly over a third of them (36.7%) reported that their research was being funded partially or totally by grants from local or international funding agencies and private corporations. These included in adequate mentoring from senior colleagues (69.3%), lack of funding opportunity information (45.6%), and absence of local research funding opportunities (34.6%). This is also similar to the findings of Onuka and Onabamiro (2009). Besides, thanks to TETFUND intervention through the Federal Government of Nigeria in the recent time. TETFUND provides funds for the training of university lecturers MSc and Ph.D studies.

Absence of Quality Tertiary Education

Tertiary education all over the world are known to be seats of research. They occupy a vital position in the heart of research. They are instrumental to carrying out these researches for contribution to knowledge, and for applied purposes. They also train researchers at different levels. Most research centres are located within these tertiary institutions for the purpose of intelligence, logistics and manpower. Tertiary institutions are supposedly to assume a mentorship position for those at the secondary level of education via exchange of ideas either on special invites, provision of secondary schools' research educators, provision of text materials, to mention but few. It is pathetic that a Nigerian student spends six years all through secondary education without having an introduction or quality experience in proper research ventures. This has adversely affected the quality of social research in Nigeria, in relation to researchers who are expected to know all in a space of four, five or six years as the case may be. It has also affected the quality of social research results especially when these students in these secondary schools are expected to be respondents for a particular study. More so, disciplines like psychology and archeology lack those special equipment and apparatus that make experimental studies veritable, which to a very large extent affect the degree of their productivity in having excellent research results. Adetokunbo (2006). This poses limits on the scope of what they can do, thus, having them to be poorly rated when in comparison with their contemporaries in advanced nations. In a study conducted by Odia and Omofonmwan (2007), they lamented the poor synergy that exists between tertiary institutions and secondary education and those of research outcomes and intelligence for industries. This brings to the fore that social research conducted in Nigeria is mainly for academic purposes and promotional requirements as against proper application by significant persons and bodies to better the lots of the people. The absence of these and many more is no motivation at all. To this end, it is obvious that the absence of quality tertiary education in content, logistics and synergies have clamped on the advancement of social research in Nigeria. As rightly stated by Odia and Omofonmwan (2013), nations in the world that have attained a reasonable degree of development and those who aspire to attain similar height are nations that have identified and embraced the tenets of qualitative education, research and development as well as making their services accessible to its people. Thus, the university serves as a broker between government and private interests. It also has the opportunity to serve the public and common good by provoking public debates with unbiased research (Orbach, 2001). In a study conducted by Odia and Omofonmwan (2013) on Research and Development Initiatives in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects, using the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, a significant large percentage of the respondents concurred to the fact that a nation's level of development is a function of its research initiatives and development structure which is navigated by the works of quality tertiary institutions. Hence, social research in Nigeria would become only as good as the quality of tertiary institutions within the nation.

Implementation of Research Results

The findings of research are hardly implemented. The conservation outlook on the part of the executive and administrative set up in the country account for the inability to implement research results in Nigeria. Well-researched works are lying dormant at the University library shelves. This is not good for our country's development.

Lack of Legal Provision

There is need for the provision of legal frame work in research. Odia, Omofunmwa (2007) observe that death of legal provisions for personal and public considerations constitutes constraints on

research in Nigeria. The staff/personnel in educational institutions, field workers and researchers need legal directions and protection.

Scarcity of Records

Nigeria like other developing countries lack adequate statistics due mainly to the very poor process of documentation. As a result of this, many programmes in Nigeria have failed. Onuka, Onabamiro (2009).

Conclusion

The challenges facing communication research in developing nations as observed are legion. However, there is the need for re-orientation and repositioning of academics with respect to conducting groundbreaking researches which will make them enjoy the same academic rating, status and recognition like their counterparts in advanced nations. When this is successfully done, the nation's higher institutions will be as competitive, respectable and socially relevant as other tertiary institutions in some other parts of the world.

Recommendations

In view of the above, the following recommendations are made to enhance quality of research in developing nations:

1. Providing periodic skill enhancement seminars and workshops on graduate thesis supervision, research methodology and thesis writing for both lecturers and students. This will enhance quality of research.
2. Regular and standardized procedure for assessing the progress of graduate students' research and thesis writing should be institutionalized.
3. Periodic progress reports on each postgraduate student in developing nations should be submitted every semester as feedback and tracking tool to enhance student's completion at scheduled time. In addition, functional research schedule should be put in place for postgraduate students.
4. Also, private organisations as well as public and or governmental organisations should endeavor to support post graduate students in areas of finance and provision of required information necessary for gathering research information.

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