

RESEARCH IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS



Dayo Oloruntimehin

*Department of Curriculum & Instruction,
Federal College of Education,
Okene.*

Abstract

Research is one of the basic functions of tertiary institutions. This paper therefore examines the challenges to research activities in tertiary institutions. These challenges among others are poor funding, corruption, inadequate educational facilities, misplacement of priority, etc. Qualitative education, national development, improvement in standard of living, solutions to contemporary problems are identified to be gains of research work. Recommendations such as steady supply of electricity, training of academic staff, provision of grants and funds are advanced to enhance productive research work.

The conduct of research is one of the basic functions of tertiary institutions, which comprised of Universities, Polytechnics, Monothechnics and Colleges of Education. The academic staff of these institutions are compulsorily required to carry out research activities as their promotions are primarily based on their research outputs. Apart from the academic staff being promoted through research publications, research activities enhance their credibility, status, and also add value both to their immediate community and the larger global community.

The quality of research being carried out by Nigerian academics has been adjudged to be of low standard, when compared to their counterparts in other parts of the world (Emunemu, 2009). 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 that lecturers of tertiary institutions in 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 well being in the immediate environment and globally (Ajayi, 2009).

In this era of globalization with its attendant competitiveness, the nations of the world no longer live in isolation from one another and so, almost every product now faces global comparison and competition. The products of Nigeria education system are being compared with the products of other universities all over the world.

It is necessary to note that no university in Africa features among the two hundred in the world (Owan, 2005). This is a likely indication of the low quality of teaching and especially research in this part of the world. The international community normally set very high standards which have to be met. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria should through qualitative research, meet these standards. As a great nation, the set standards should not only be met but also maintained and surpassed. By implications, without the insistence and maintenance of standards, global competitiveness will be dangerously undermined.

It is against the above background therefore, that this paper aims at examining the challenges militating against quality research among the academic staff of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

The Concept of Research

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010), research is a careful study of a subject especially in order to discover new facts or information about it. Fawoel, Egbokhare, Itiola, Odejide and Olayinka (2006) 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. The focus of a research can range from physical thing, an event, a process, a social institution of a social condition, biological condition, etc. Irrespective of the subject, research basically seeks to understand what is being researched into through observation, experimentation and analysis in order to arrive at a better understanding or a definite conclusion on the subject matter (Adebola, 2009).

Research in the Global World

From all available evidences, research issues on economic development and recovery have been the major concern of the nations of the world. In the face of the present global economic crisis, research development remains the tool for national socio-economic development, wealth creation and poverty reduction. Countries of the world with poor or inadequate research capacities will become poorer since knowledge creation is the key to sustainable socio-economic development.

Universities around the world today are differentiated by, among other criteria,

- a. the level of their involvement in search,
- b. the type of problems they attempt to solve and,
- c. the impact of any results they obtain on their societies and the world at large (Emunemu, 2009)

This explains why many tertiary institutions all over the world are doing all they could do to promote research activities as not to be considered inferior or

relegated to the bottom. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria cannot afford to pay mere lip service to research but must stand up to justify the purpose of their establishment and existence by getting involved in ground-breaking researches.

The Benefits of Conducting Research

The benefits which accrue from research activities include the following:

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.

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. 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 over all 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 well being 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 teaching situations today and many more will still take place as long as educational research is being conducted. 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.

Overall National Development and Progress

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, 1986). To Bell (1978), development involves a process of establishing people to accomplish things that they could not do before that is, to learn and apply information, attitudes, values and skills previously unavailable to them. The summary of all these is that development helps people to accomplish things by applying what they have learnt for the satisfaction of human wants and aspirations. Development is a product of research. National development therefore, is a state in which people in a country, through learning, are stimulated to achieve satisfaction by applying themselves to overcome problems of living (Owan, 2005). As a matter of fact, results or findings from several research works have greatly accelerated human development over the years.

Knowing fully well that a lot of benefits accrue from research activities, the nation cannot go to sleep when the nations of the world are breaking new and fallowed grounds through their research activities.

The Challenges of Conducting Research in Tertiary Institutions

There are many challenges that inhibit carrying out meaningful research work in the nation's tertiary institutions. These clogs in the wheel of progress include:

Incessant Power Failure

The prevalent epileptic and anaemic kind of power supply cannot support meaningful research activities in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Available statistics has shown that poor electricity supply in the country is endangering the growth of the critical sectors of the economy in which the education sector is not singled out. In the education sector, only a trickle of daily electricity production reportedly goes in to the country's 93 higher institutions of learning (Odiegwu, 2009). The situation is still the same today and has no doubt, rendered research equipment dysfunctional especially the ICT systems. The results and effects is that some tertiary institutions resort to diesel propelled generators which on their own, are expensive and environmentally unfriendly. Also, research processes are disrupted as they only work for a limited period.

Inadequate Funding of Research Projects

Insufficient funding is one of the major banes of the education system in Nigeria. As observed by Nwoye (2002), 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. Funding has always been the major constraint to research development and their implementation. The replacement of infrastructure, tools, machines, and recruitment of qualified staff that can make research work meaningful and relevant to the needs of the modern day Nigeria all need money which is not always available. Grants are also difficult to come by.

Dilapidated Infrastructure

One of the consequences of poor funding of education is dilapidated infrastructure. Research infrastructure in institutions of higher learning is grossly inadequate and generally weak. There is a dearth of modern equipment, the old ones when available, are no longer serviceable because the manufacturers have long phased them out of their production lines. Workshops, libraries, laboratories are ill-equipped and obsolete educational facilities are difficult to replace if not impossible. These hinder research activities and findings.

Poor Quality Staff

There is generally shortage of skilled manpower to manage ICT equipment/facilities effectively in the nation's higher institutions to gear up and aid research. Without experts to handle these facilities, some of them will be rendered redundant and this obviously, can jeopardize the efforts of researchers. In some cases

where equipment is available, the technicians to handle them are either not available or incompetent to operate it. Training and re-training of the academic and supportive staff is not regularly carried out to update their knowledge. Also, resistance to change by some lecturers is a great problem to research development. According to Braimoh (2008), the ever-present problem with the Nigeria teachers is their resistance to change. Despite the change in the educational systems all over the world, some Nigerian lecturers still prefer to hold on to their crude traditional methods of doing things. Their failure to embrace the latest skills, methods and techniques of carrying out research work, negatively impact on their research capability.

Misplacement of Priority

The general social, economic and political environment prevalent in the society seriously militate against research development. The government does not consider education a priority or care for research findings. This explains why funds are not generously released to the education sector to engage in breakthrough research activities. While the tertiary institutions in the country are still grappling with obsolete equipment in this period of very rapid change, the government takes delight squandering money on politics. The government nor the society care to find-out research discoveries talk-less of making use of them. A visit to most of the institutions of higher learning will show many research works that have been done over the years rotting away. Due to low level of scientific culture and interest, the general public and politicians prefer not to invest in research activities but on politics which is their main area of interest. This attitude does not encourage researchers to continue with good research work.

Corruption and Mismanagement

Nigeria's problem of funding education is not lack of sufficient money but that of too much money wasted through mismanagement and fraudulent practices. According to Lamido (2013), the level of corruption in the country has assumed a threatening dimension which is also disastrous and destructive to the economy. This definitely has negative effects on education and research. Corruption has eaten so deep into the fabrics of the national life that even the education sector is not spared. Ultimately, this has affected the quality and quantity of scientific findings, up-to-date equipment and infrastructural facilities for good research.

The removal of these constraints will bring a glorious future to Nigeria.

Prospects for a Fruitful Research Work

Even though there are myriad of problems confronting research development in higher institutions in Nigeria, it is believed that the pathetic situation is redeemable. For instance, the federal government in the National Policy on education (2004), has

promised that ICT facilities will be provided for the advancement of knowledge and skill in the modern world.

Educational funding as observed has gradually been on the rise as there is improved budgetary allocation to the sector. This is an indication of government's commitment to the provision of qualitative and functional education.

The government has shown her solidarity with rest of the world by being signatory to many international accords to improve the quality of education. In respect of this, the government has struggled to meet the 26 percent allocation recommended by UNESCO in order to comply with international best practices in education.

In spite of severe resources constraints, the federal government has improved the financial welfares to lecturers in tertiary institutions and made education grants available to encourage the advancement of knowledge and skills. The government has also pledged his readiness to remove observed inadequacies in the area of funding in the higher institutions.

Education Trust Fund (ETF) is doing marvelously well in the country as regards the supply of relevant educational facilities to institutions of learning. In another development, non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and educational foundations are springing up to assist educational endeavours in the country. Alumni of institutions of learning have been known to finance great projects in their alma mater.

In view of the foregoing, there is hope that research activities will survive, thrive and meet global competitiveness.

Conclusion

The challenges facing the conduct of research among academic staff of institutions of higher learning as observed are legion. However, there is the need for re-orientation and repositioning of academics with respect to conducting ground-breaking 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

There should be adequate training for academic staff to equip them with the necessary training to plan and implement research projects.

The government should generously release funds to tertiary institutions for research purposes. The funds released for educational research projects should be

seriously monitored to avoid diversion. Provision of adequate research grants should be made to enable the academic staff to carryout qualitative research.

The government should endeavour to provide functional generating sets as an alternative source of power supply for schools. Provision and access to ICT-based facilities for qualitative research should be supplied to all higher institutions of learning. Capacity building for academic staff in the areas of research and development should be organized on regular basis.

Philanthropists and alumni of tertiary institutions should rise to assist educational endeavours in the country. This will reduce the financial constraints facing educational research in the institutions.

The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) should extend their operation to the education sector to free it from the grip of looters. Sanctions that would have deterrent effects on would be culprits should be applied and recovered loots invested in research work.

Researchers should learn how to write grant-winning proposals to attract the highly needed finances to execute their research projects.

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