

THE PRACTICE AND CHALLENGES OF HIGHER
EDUCATION RESEARCH IN UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study examined the practice of higher education research in university and the level of integrity in the practice. It examined the challenges facing Higher education research in Universities in Nigeria. A total of 100 university lecturers were selected using multistage and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using self-constructed questionnaire titled: Practice and challenges of higher education research (PCHER). Three research questions were raised and answered. Analysis of variance was used to test the two hypotheses generated at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study revealed that the practice of research was not adequate, it followed negative trend. It also revealed the challenges facing research as: non-utilization of research outcomes, fabrication and falsification of data, and dominance of individual in research. It also showed that the level of integrity in the practice of research was moderate. Further more academic status and years of experience of researchers were important factors in their perception of practice of research. It was recommended that orientation should be given to researchers, on the importance of higher education research , that it is not mainly for promotion and academic exercise but a real business for the development of education and society, and that experienced researchers should set pace and act as mentors for inexperience ones so as to improve on the practice of research, and enhance its integrity.

Introduction

The practice of research in higher education is receiving the attention of researchers and educators. Research for the development of society especially for educational improvement has been the focus of researchers in education. Higher education research is the practice and mandate of higher education researchers to extend their own frontiers of knowledge, develop new knowledge, contribute to practice and improvement of education, and subsequently for sustenance of career of university academics. Higher education research in education seems to receive the attention of educational management, the outcomes of the research could be a ready and useful tool in the hands of educational administrators. It has been the practice of Higher education to engage in research, not only among the academia but also the higher education students. Higher education research is of great importance in the development of our society and education in particular. The practice of higher education research is expected to meet certain standard, so as to make its results acceptable for societal usage. It is therefore, very important to adhere to ethical norms in research so as to bring out quality research of high integrity. The need for high level of integrity is desired in the process and procedure of gathering data, analysis and findings. Integrity in research is the quality of embarking on research with act of sincerity, avoidance of bias in data analysis and interpretation, and honesty in reporting data and results.

Many different disciplines, institutions and professions have norms for behaviour that suit their particular aims and goals. The norms help the members of the discipline to coordinate their actions or activities and to establish the public trust of the discipline. Ethics are norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. According to David and Resnik (undated), ethics is defined as a method, procedure, or perspective for deciding how to act and for analysis of complex problems and issues. The people in our societies recognize some common ethical norms but different individuals interpret, apply and balance these norms in different ways in light of

their own values and life experiences. Most societies have legal rules that govern behaviour, but ethical norms tend to be broader and more informal than laws. An action may be legal but unethical or illegal but ethical (David and Resnik (undated). Adherence of research to ethical norms enhances its integrity. Ethical norms promote the aims of research, such as knowledge, truth, and avoidance of error. Prohibitions against fabricating, falsifying, or misrepresenting research data and; promote the truth and avoid error. Research often involves a great deal of cooperation and coordination among many different people and different institutions, hence the ethical standards promote the values that are essential to collaborative work, such as trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness.

In global perspective, there have been series of codes and policies for research ethics. The importance of ethics in the conduct of research is so significant to the extent that different professional associations, government policies, and universities have adopted specific codes, rules, and policies relating to research ethics. These are some of the ethical principles: striving for honesty in all scientific communications, honesty reporting data, results, methods, and procedures, and publication status. Objectivity in research design , data analysis, data interpretation, peer review, and avoid or minimize bias or self-deception. Integrity and carefulness in the conduct of research, openness in research by sharing data, results, ideas, tools and resources and new ideas are included in ethical principles . Respect for intellectual property, copyright and other forms of intellectual property, do not use unpublished data, methods, or results without permission, give credit where credit is due and proper acknowledgement for all contributions to research.

There are two main theories about why researchers commit misconduct. According to the "bad apple" theory, most scientists are highly ethical. Only researchers who are morally and economically desperate or psychologically disturbed commit misconduct. It was argued that a course in research ethic will have little impact on "bad apples". According to the "stressful" or "imperfect" environment theory, misconduct occurs because various institutional pressures, incentives, and constraints encourage people to commit misconduct. It is often cited that there is pressure to publish or obtain grants or contracts, career ambitions, the pursuit of profit or fame, poor supervision of students and trainees, and poor oversight of researchers. Misconduct probably results from environmental and individual sources. People who are morally weak, ignorant, or insensitive are placed in stressful or imperfect environment. It was suggested that a course in research ethics could still be useful in helping to prevent deviations from norms even if it does not prevent misconduct. Many of the deviations that occur in research may occur because researchers simply do not know or have never thought seriously about some of the ethical norms of research (David and Resnik)

It has been the mandate of higher education to demand for high involvement and practice of research of university undergraduate and more importantly the post graduate students. Higher education research mandate has to do with careers of university academics in many parts of the world. Hornby (1963) defined research as an investigation undertaken in order to discover new facts or get additional information about an existing fact that is related to better livelihood for mankind, knowledge or learning. Much importance is attached to research and publication in career of academics. Benedict (1981) noted that promotion of academics in Berlin is mainly dependent on a good record

of research and publications. Universities globally are established for research and consultation among others. Mwamwenda (1994) emphasized the importance attached to research and publication in determining academics upward mobility in Ghana. Jimoh (1995) was of the view that promotion seems to be the major motive behind most academics engagement in research activities in Nigeria Universities. The mandate of Higher education has constituted challenges in its practice. The attempt to meet the mandate has affected the level of integrity.

Accessibility and utilization of research outcomes have constituted challenges to higher education research. Oladunni (1998) revealed that despite the fact that secondary schools were used for research purpose, teachers hardly get access to the results of the research. He further revealed that suggestions on research findings are in most cases, locked up in university libraries. Poor dissemination of research outcomes was also explained by Olowolaiye (1987) that information flow across libraries and institutions are either non-existent or very slow where they are available, and that journals published in Nigeria are not subscribed by libraries and individuals and such educational journals do not survive for long. Akomolafe (2000) was of the view that utilization of research outcomes has become difficult because they are not disseminated to appropriate places. Okebukola (1998) identified the reason for low quality of research work as the lack of problem solving focus of the researchers and their findings. The amount of money released for the research is grossly inadequate for any meaningful research work. This was buttressed by Dzvimbo 1994, he said African researchers, unlike their counterparts in Europe, America and Asia, operate in a resource - starved environment. Olasehinde (2000) explained that the only major source of funding for educational researches in Nigeria Universities is the senate Research grant which was inadequate to meet the task of quality research.

The practice of Higher education research is expected to pay attention to its quality and integrity. The purpose and goal of research should be focused and met. It seems the objective of higher education research is not accomplished, the process of research does not meet the ethics of the practice. It seems there are inhibiting factors militating against the practice of higher education research. This study was to examine the practice of Higher education research in university, to find out the approach in the practice and to examine the level of integrity in the practice. It was also to examine the challenges facing Higher education research in Universities in Nigeria

Research questions

- 1) What is the practice of Higher education research in Nigeria?
- 2) What are the challenges of Higher Education Research in Nigeria?
- 3) What is the level of integrity in Higher Education Research in Nigeria?

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were raised and tested.

- 1) Academic status of researchers will have no significant influence on their perception of practice of research.
- 2) Years of experience of researchers will not significantly influence their perception of practice of research.

Research Method

Research design employed in this study was a descriptive type. The population of the study consisted of lecturers from Universities in Nigeria. Multi-stage and simple random

sampling techniques were used to select a sample of 100 lecturers from the Faculties of Education, in four Universities in south west Nigeria. Twenty five subjects were chosen from each universities. The questionnaire titled: Practice and Challenges of Higher Education Research (PCHER) was the instrument used to gather data for the study. The face and content validity of the instrument were certified as truly asking required questions. The reliability of the instrument was established using test - retest method. The reliability coefficient of 0.67 was obtained.

Results and Discussion

Research question one:

What is the practice of Higher education Research in Nigeria?

Table 1: The practice of higher education research in Nigeria

| S/N | Items | N=100 Mean | SD | Remarks | Decision |
|-----|---|---------------|------|----------|----------|
| 1 | Over-reliance on the use of questionnaire | 2.37 | 1.02 | High | Accepted |
| 2 | Inadequate use of interview in collecting data | 2.47 | 0.92 | High | accepted |
| 3 | Little attention on the use of observation in research | 2.28 | 1.12 | moderate | accepted |
| 4 | Non utilization of experience in research data gathering | 2.06 | 1.03 | moderate | accepted |
| 5 | Research is for academic exercise by the academic personnel mainly | 2.49 | 1.01 | High | accepted |
| 6 | Research by higher education students is perceived as academic exercise | 2.78 | 0.87 | High | accepted |
| 7 | Genuine intention to proffer solution to problem situation is uppermost | 2.60 | 1.10 | High | accepted |
| 8 | Collaboration in research is encouraged by the institutions | 1.99 | 1.00 | Low | rejected |
| 9 | Research is done for the purpose of promotion | 2.02 | 0.97 | moderate | accepted |
| | Average | 2.34 | | | |

The response on the items indicated the practice of higher education research. The total average rating of items is 2.34. All items that are rated above average score was high, while rating score that falls between 2.00 and 2.34 are moderate. The analysis from the table indicated that almost all the items were agreed upon to be acceptable. There was over-reliance on the use of questionnaire , there was inadequate use of interview in collecting data. It was also indicated that there was little attention on the use of

observation. A large number of respondents rated that research was for academic exercise by the academic personnel. However the encouragement given to collaboration in research was rated as moderate. It was therefore concluded that the practice of higher education by researchers in universities were inadequate, the approach was poor and researchers' intention was inadequate, it followed negative trend. Therefore there was poor practice of research in higher education.

Research Question Two

What are the challenges of Higher education Research in Nigeria?

Table 2: The mean and Standard deviation of respondents on challenges of Higher Education Research in Nigeria.

| S/N | Items | N=100 Mean | SD | Remarks | Decision |
|-----|---|---------------|------|----------|----------|
| 1 | Fabrication and falsification of data and results | 2.80 | 0.91 | High | Accepted |
| 2 | There is institutional pressure on researchers | 2.77 | 0.76 | High | Accepted |
| 3 | There is financial constraint | 2.67 | 0.92 | moderate | Accepted |
| 4 | Individual research dominates | 2.52 | 1.00 | moderate | Accepted |
| 5 | Research carried out are relevant to practice and reality | 2.74 | 0.96 | High | Accepted |
| 6 | Non utilization of research outcomes | 2.97 | 0.88 | High | Accepted |
| 7 | Plagiarism is prominent | 2.86 | 0.88 | High | Accepted |
| 8 | Career ambitions overshadows | 2.42 | 1.14 | Moderate | Accepted |
| 9 | Ignorance of ethical issues in to research is widespread | 2.52 | 1.20 | moderate | Accepted |
| 10 | Non-dissemination of research findings | 2.84 | 0.87 | high | Accepted |
| | Average | 2.71 | | | |

The responses from the table 2 showed that there were series of challenges facing higher education research. They include: non -utilization of research outcomes, non-dissemination of research funding, plagiarism was prominent, and fabrication and falsification of data, were all rated high. The study also revealed that institutional pressure on researchers, financial constraints, dominance of individual research, ignorance of ethical issues and career ambition as other challenges of higher education research. It is worthy of note that research carried out were relevant to practice and reality, therefore it did not constitute a challenge to the practice of higher education research.

Research question Three

What is the level of integrity in Higher Education Research in Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of Respondents on level of integrity in Higher Education in Nigeria

| S/N | Items | Mean | SD | Remarks | Decision |
|-----|---|------|------|----------|----------|
| 1 | Honesty in reporting data and results | 2.54 | 0.99 | High | Accepted |
| 2 | Bias in data analysis and data interpretation | 2.54 | 0.99 | High | Accepted |
| | Bias and staff deception | 2.41 | 1.11 | Moderate | Accepted |
| 4 | Act with sincerity | 2.11 | 1.03 | Moderate | Accepted |
| 5 | Careless errors and negligence | 2.59 | 1.10 | High | Accepted |
| 6 | Keep good records of research activities | 2.78 | 0.87 | High | Accepted |
| 7 | Openness to criticism and new ideas | 2.60 | 1.10 | High | Accepted |
| 8 | Give proper acknowledgement or credit for all contribution to research | 2.24 | 1.09 | Moderate | Accepted |
| 9 | Plagiarism | 2.06 | 1.03 | Moderate | Accepted |
| 10 | Publishing the same paper in two different journals without telling the editors | 2.61 | 0.93 | Moderate | Accepted |
| 11 | Including a colleague as an author on a paper in return for a favour | 2.80 | 0.80 | High | Accepted |
| 12 | Collegiate relationship in research is encouraged . | 2.81 | 0.75 | High | Accepted |
| | Total average | 2.51 | | | |

In table 3, the integrity in higher education research manifested in honesty in reporting data and result, act with sincerity in the process of research, keep good records of research activities, openness to criticism and new ideas, collegiate relationship in research was encouraged and giving proper acknowledgement or credit for all contributions to research. It was also revealed that there were still moderate level of integrity which manifest in: bias in data analysis and interpretation, plagiarism, publishing the same paper in two different journals without telling the editors. In the final analysis the level of integrity in higher education research was moderate. The average percentage for the level of the integrity is 2.51. therefore there was moderate level of integrity in higher education research.

Hypothesis one:

Academic status of researchers will have no significant influence on their perception of practice of research.

Table 4: One way ANOVA on the influence of academic status of researchers on their perception of practice of research.

| | Sum of squares | Df | Mean squares | F | Sig | Total value |
|---------------|----------------|----|--------------|---------|------|-------------|
| Between group | 97382.083 | J | 32460.694 | 421.872 | .000 | 2.87 |
| Within group | 2462.222 | 32 | 76.944 | | | |
| Total | 99844.306 | 35 | | | | |

The hypothesis was tested using one way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The F-calculated of 421.872 was greater than F-table of 2.87. The hypothesis was significant at 0.05 level. The hypothesis was therefore rejected. The result showed that academic status of researcher was significant. In other words, academic status of researcher was important in their perception of practice of research.

Table 5: Scheffe Comparisons

| iGPPB | jGRP B | Mean difference i-j | Std error | Sig |
|-----------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|-------|
| Prof | Reader | .6667 | 4.1351 | .999 |
| | S.L | .3333 | 4.1351 | 1.000 |
| | Below S.L | 119.7778* | 4.1351 | .000 |
| Reader | Prof | .6667 | 4.1351 | .999 |
| | S.L | .333 | 4.1351 | 1.000 |
| | Below S.L | 120.4444* | 4.1351 | 1.000 |
| S.L | Prof | .3333 | 4.1351 | 1.000 |
| | Reader | .3333 | 4.1351 | 1.000 |
| | Below S.L | 120.1111* | 4.1351 | .000 |
| Below S.L | Prof | 119.7778 | 4.1351 | .000 |
| | Reader | -120.4444* | 4.1351 | .000 |
| | S.L | -120.1111* | 4.1351 | .000 |

* Mean difference is significant at 0.05 level.

The result further revealed that the researchers with higher academic qualification have more negative perception of practice of research than researchers with lower qualifications. The professors have more negative perception, than readers, senior lecturers, and researchers below the senior lecturer. The results indicated that researchers below the status of senior lecturer have less negative perception than senior lecturers and above. In other words, Assistant lecturer, lecturer two and lecturer one did not have similar perception like other researchers with higher academic status. In other words the lecturers with higher education qualification have more negative perception of practice of higher education research.

Hypothesis Two:

Years of experience of researchers will not significantly influence their perception of practice of research.

Table 6: The influence of the years of experience on their perception of practice of research.

| | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | F | Sig | Table value |
|----------------|----------------|----|-------------|--------|------|-------------|
| Between groups | 21281.000 | 3 | 7093.667 | 15.675 | | |
| Within groups | 14481.556 | 32 | 452.549 | | .000 | 2.78 |
| Total | 35762.556 | 35 | | | | |

The hypothesis was tested using one way Analysis of variance (ANOVA). The F-calculated of 15.675 was greater than the table value of 2.87. The result was significant at 0.05 level, therefore it was rejected. Hence the result showed that years of experience of researchers would significantly influence their perception of practice of research. In other words years of experience of research was important in their perception of practice of research.

Table 7: Scheffe comparisons

| iGRP | jGRP | Mean difference i-j | Std error | Sig |
|--------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------|------|
| 1-5 yrs | 6-10 yrs | -43.6667* | 10.0283 | .002 |
| | 11-20 yrs | -33.3333* | 10.0283 | .002 |
| | Above 20 yrs | 16.3333 | 10.0283 | .460 |
| 6-10 yrs | 1-5 yrs | 43.6667* | 10.0283 | .002 |
| | 11-20 yrs | 10.3333 | 10.0283 | .787 |
| | Above 20 yrs | -60.0000* | 10.0283 | .000 |
| 11-20 yrs | 1-5 yrs | 33.3333* | 10.0283 | .022 |
| | 6-10 yrs | 10.3333 | 10.0283 | .787 |
| | Above 20 yrs | -49.6667* | 10.0283 | .000 |
| Above 20 yrs | 1-5 yrs | 16.3333 | 10.0283 | .460 |
| | 6-10 yrs | 60.0000* | 10.0283 | .000 |
| | 11-20 yrs | 49.6667* | 10.0283 | .000 |

*Mean difference is significant at 0.05 level.

The result further showed that researchers with more years of experience have more negative perception than researchers with fewer years of experience. Researchers with twenty years and above have more negative perception of practice of research more than researchers with less than twenty years of experience. 11-20 years have more negative perception than 1-5 years of experience. 6-10 have more negative perception than 1-5 years of experience.

Discussion

The result of this study revealed that there was a poor practice of higher education research by researchers, it was not adequate, and it follows negative trend in the practice. Researchers over-relied on questionnaire, did not make use of interview adequately and that the research was taken as academic exercise mainly, which was not good enough for the practice of higher education research. The encouragement given to higher education researchers by institutions was below average. The practice of research that plays high premium on promotion is not in the best interest. This finding was in line with the view of (Jimoh 1995) that promotion seems to be the major motive behind most academics' engagement in research activities. Contrary to this result, it is expected that the practice of higher education research ought to judiciously make use of questionnaire, observations and interview, furthermore collaboration in research, utilization of experience, and genuine intention to proffer solution are to be uppermost in the mind of researchers.

The study also showed that the practices of higher education research were faced with some challenges. Non-utilization of research outcome was revealed as a challenge, which was supported by (Akomolafe 2000, Oladunni 1998). Fabrication and falsification of data , plagiarism, financial constraints, and institutional pressure on researchers have posed as challenges.

The level of integrity in higher education research was moderate, since there was moderate adherence to ethical norms. Integrity in practice of research manifest in: honesty in reporting data and results, openness to criticism and new ideas, give proper acknowledgement or credit to all contributions to research, and collegiate relationship in research was encouraged.

Academic status of researchers was important in their perception of practice of research. It was their perception that the practice was not adequate and thus followed a negative trend in approach to practice. Researchers with higher academic qualification: the Professors, Readers, and Senior lecturers have more negative perception which was a bit different from that of the lecturers below senior lecturer status who have less negative perception. Their perception might be due to better exposure to ideas and interaction among similar researchers of their academic status. These categories of researchers have Ph.D in their various fields which ought to have made them better and more educated and well exposed researchers.

The experience of researchers was a factor in their perception of practice of research. The researchers who have spent more than five years as researchers have similar perception, of more negative perception which was a bit different from researchers with less than five years of experience. It was expected that experienced researchers have carried out lots of researches, made interactions with researchers, and were able to understand the practice and the trend in research over the years. In contrast the inexperienced researchers might not be able to grasp and have enough understanding on the trend in practice of higher education research.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made:

1 Orientation and seminars should be organized on the understanding of approach to research, for instance, avoidance of over-reliance on only one approach. It should not be restricted to only one of these: questionnaire, observations, research experience, and interview.

2 Orientation should be given to researchers on the reality, that higher education research is not mainly for promotion and academic exercise but a real business for the development of education and society.

3 Collaborative research should be encouraged by institutions. Team spirit and dedication should be imbibed by researchers.

4 Experienced researchers should set pace and act as mentors for inexperienced ones so as to improve on the practice of research, and enhance its integrity.

Conclusion

It was concluded from the findings of this study that the practice of research was poor, because it followed negative trend, The approaches in carrying out research should be varied, the nature of research would determine the choice. The practice of higher education research was facing some challenges which include: non-utilization of research outcomes, falsification of data, individual tendency in research, and plagiarism.

The level of integrity in higher education research was moderate since it was able to adhere to ethical norms. Academic status and researchers' experience were important factors in researchers' perception of practice of higher education research. The negative perception of the practice of higher education, was higher among researchers with higher academic qualification, and more years of experience.

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