

Research in the Nigerian Society: The Missing Links

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Abstract

Modern societies have appreciated and shown considerable interest in research as demonstrated by their penchant to invest in their universities and other higher education institutions and evidently, have reaped enormously from commercialization of research outcomes. However, Nigerian society through its universities and other research institutions, has not taken full advantage of research and its extensive benefits. Several militating factors ranging from poor funding of research outlets, lack of motivation for researchers, non-availability of research-facilitating infrastructure and soon have stood on the way of developmental research thereby stultifying societal growth and development. The paper interrogated these identified missing links by employing the use of secondary data which were qualitatively analysed. It concluded that Nigerian government and other stakeholders should brace up and leverage on the enormous benefits accruable from cutting-edge research, while recommending for a repositioned vision that will put research in the service of development in Nigerian society.

Keywords: *Research, Nigerian Society, Growth and Development, Missing Links*

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Background to the Study

Research as an “enterprise” in the modern world is generally recognized as a fundamental process exemplifying characteristics that can change, transform, illuminate and continuously renew the society. The locale of research is usually in universities or other higher education institutions as well as designated departments/units of organizations where intellectuals and experts that are endowed and trained in the 'art of researching' embark on this enterprise for the realization of its objectives.

Essentially research in this context may be viewed as a way of creating acquiring, applying and transferring knowledge that is impactful to the society for its development. In essence, research is concerned with the development and application of critical and systematic methods of enquiry in finding solutions to existing, imagined or expected problems through critical body of knowledge and applications for societal growth and development.

The inalienable goals of every modern society is among other things, creation of wealth for its teeming population or citizens to live away from poor and brutish experience (Hobbes, 1588-1679). Hence, the quest for knowledge that is development-driven becomes expedient as the pursuit of knowledge and applying creatively the outcome of such knowledge gained, determines largely the level of development of any society. This underscores the significance of research to every modern society.

From the literature, some scholars (Yesufu, 1996, Abioye et al, 2014 and others) have attested to the significance of research to the Nigerian society and the need for the nation to strengthen institutions (Universities, Institutes and others) regarded as melting points of research in the country for innovation and economic growth. Specifically, Abioye et al (2014) posit:

Indeed, it was through research institutions that breakthrough in technologies such as radar, penicillin, the computer, the internet and global positioning systems to name a few were discovered. Additionally, talented graduates have created and populated many new businesses that have gone on to employ millions which have transformed the world in areas of health, communications, security and arts and many more. Many new technologies and businesses are waiting to be discovered and built.

Despite the universally acclaimed significance of research to national growth and development, the Nigerian society has not seriously leveraged on its utility as the domains of research (universities and other higher education institutions) have not been well funded and researchers and their research findings have not been accorded deserved recognition and support. Hence, most of the knowledge disseminated by researchers hardly get to the culmination point of commercialization for society's benefits accounting for low level of socio-economic growth and development (Chikwe et al, 2015).

Research: History and Goals

Research etymologically is generally believed to be derived from the middle French word “recherchier” which means “to go about searching”. The earliest recorded use of the term was in 1577. The term research like any other intellectual construct or concept is always a subject

of diverse intellectual opinions owing to the universality of research and its extensive connection to almost all academic disciplines. In spite of this, the sacred ingredients therein in research-creativity, investigative nature, knowledge-centred, problem-solving, discoveries, new applications, sophistication and others are inextricable from research as a highbrow intellectual and social enterprise. The value of research became accentuated from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries several centuries after the establishment of the first recognized university – University of Bologna – in the world in 1088 and from this period, research became accepted as a core-mission of universities and other higher education institutions with palpable values and relevance to societies (Clark, 1995).

Higher education institutions all over the world are therefore generally regarded as “store houses” of knowledge where research are conducted on every area of human life and existence impacting positively on the students and indeed on the society and thereby facilitating personal, organizational and national development (Chikwe et al, 2015). Similarly, Armstrong and Sperry (1994) opined that research is mostly domiciled in “academic institutions” and the major responsibility of an academic staff and indeed institutions is to conduct research that will affect the society. Research provides scientific information and theories for the explanation of nature and the properties of the world. Further, scientific research is funded by public authorities, by charitable organizations and by private groups, including many companies.

Funding research is very significant to achieving the goals and utility of research as research is conducted to respond to a particular problem from which knowledge is gained and applied for society's benefit. Nwakpa (2005) corroborates this position as he avers that:

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 development.

The significance and utility of research as a concept leaning on transformational theory remains a contending issue in intellectual discourses and may be consistently so in a long time to come because, all societies in the world have become immersed into the “waters” of research as a transformative mechanism that attends to almost all facets of human existence. In essence, conducting research come with great benefits and the benefits as posited by Nwakpa (2015) ranged from qualitative education for citizens, liberation from ignorance and poverty, provision of solutions to contemporary societal problems, improvement in the standard of living, improvement in the status of the researcher and the research institutions and, overall national development and progress. This position as espoused by Nwakpa (2015) clearly reinforces the submission of Clancy and Dill (2009) especially, on the utility of research as they averred that the earliest science-based industry developed in late nineteenth century in Germany was a university based research. The German federal and state government as well as universities activity encouraged the application of research discoveries in organic chemistry to industry. The increase support for chemistry in German universities and the adoption of new

laws protecting the private rights of private businesses were the principal reasons German industry led the world in the production of synthetic dyestuffs and organic chemical products.

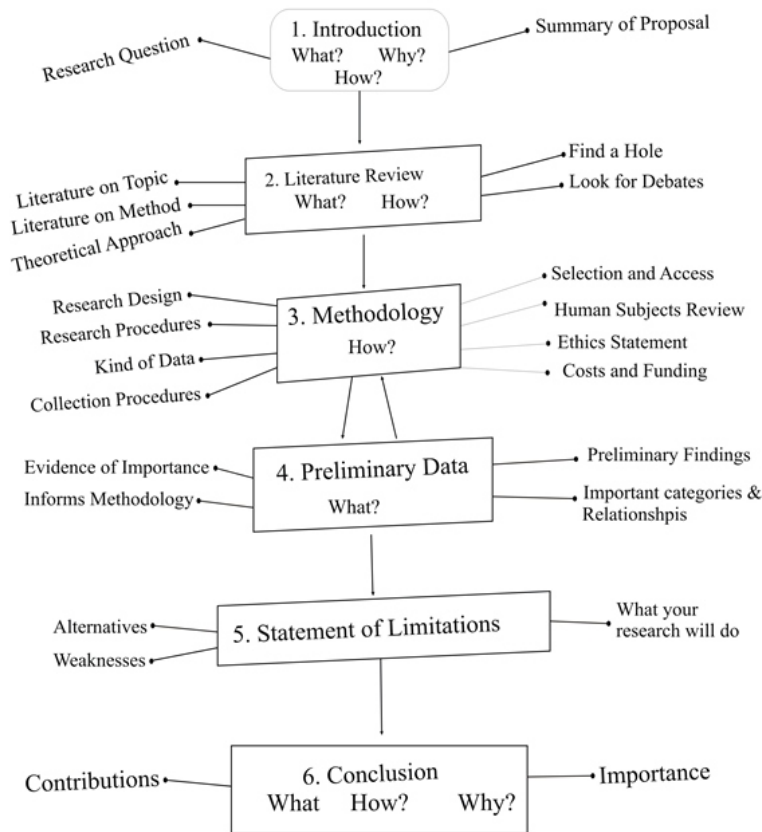
Research in Nigeria

Research in Nigerian society is recognized as an enterprise that could accelerate societal renewal, transformation and development. It is however regarded as mostly higher education institutions responsibility. This is not unconnected to the fact that there is that general belief that research is for intellectuals, knowledge carriers and knowledge endowed persons who operate in higher education institutions especially universities (Eweniyi, 2015). It is therefore understandable why the Nigerian state has developed the penchant to liberalise the system of establishing universities after independence to address the problems of nation-building and national development which universities stand capably to solve (Clark, 1983).

Nigerian universities exemplify the universal governance and establishment maxims and the tripodal mandates of “teaching, research and community service”. From the University College Ibadan (UCI) established in 1948 by the colonial government as the first university in Nigeria up to the year 2019, Nigeria has one hundred and seventy four (174) universities (NUC, 2019) and these tripodal mandates have largely been the focus of these universities. However, of the three mandates of universities establishment, research has stood out as the pivot and the fulcrum of university operations. Research has a transitive and eclectic strength that affects the other two mandates (teaching and community service). Supporting and acknowledging the strength of research in the Nigerian milieu, Folorunsho (2018), avers that research in Nigerian universities concentrates on ways of acquiring, generating, applying and transferring knowledge for national growth and development. Research encourages the development and application of critical and concerned with systematic methods of enquiring into and finding solutions to various problems and this could be achieved through basic, research, exploratory research descriptive research, analytical research, productive research and so on.

Identification of problem has been regarded as the instigator of research which invariably precipitates investigation through scientific procedures to arrive at findings and or outcomes thereby creating new knowledge or new applications for commercialization purpose (s) in the interest of the society.

Figure 1: Research Proposal Flow Chart



Source: Lukman (2017)

Moreover, the development in the world from the eighteenth century has motivated countries to invest and prioritize research in their universities and other higher education institutions. Academic staffs were employed to perform the teaching and community service roles but the research role seems as more strategic to hiring and firing of academic staff. Therefore, publications of research materials in form of journals, articles conference papers and other scholarly publications that could disseminate knowledge are important for the faculty member's promotion and for the rating of the institutions (Malner, 2006). Supporting this position, Darko-Ampem (2003), posits that:

Scholarly research and publishing have become an integral component of the academic world. The importance of publishing to any academic is perhaps best described as “published or perish”. Indeed, publishing in the academic world determines a scholar's standing or status both within the local research community and internationally. The centre of the scholarly communication process is the academic reward systems present in most universities which recognizes publication.

Ostensibly, there is no gainsaying the fact that diligence in research by academics come with benefits to the researcher, to the institution of the researcher and to the society as research outcomes or findings are activated for commercialization purposes. (Clancy and Dill, 2009). The performance of academic researcher and the roles played by them in industrial development after the World War II especially, their contribution to military innovation and technology was commended by various governments and this encouraged and influenced many governments to invest in academic research in OECD countries. (Clancy and Dill, 2009).

It is however a matter of concern that inspite of the magnificent status and evidenced contributions of research and researchers to most societies of the world. Nigerian research policy and indeed investment in universities for research by governments and industry could not be described as exhibiting the expected standard. This obviously has, caused the low level of economic growth and development in the country and has negatively impacted on the expected synergy or collaborations between governments-universities and industry. In fact, the opinion of Young (2006), Court and Maxwell (2005) diffused the position of academic-policy (government)- industry relationships. They observed that researchers-policy makers and industry live in a parallel world. Specifically, Stone (2009) argues that researchers and policy makers (government) and indeed industry operate with different values, languages, time frames and so on. Hence, they live in separate worlds. Speaking from the same standpoint, Carden (2009) submits that in the contemporary world of research, it is regrettable that policy makers lack confidence in their own researchers and industries. This awkward relationship and “suspicious” disposition to one another (researcher –government-industry) has affected many developing countries in their quest to translate research findings and outcomes to tangible goods and services. However, Shalley and Zhou's (2008) seeming solution to the researcher-government-industry dichotomy and “mistrust” may be sacrosanct. They aver that:

Until communication and impact are seriously integrated into academic performance measurement systems, it is likely that only a limited number of independently motivated scientific researchers will engage in the time-consuming process needed to disseminate research efficiency.

Also in a similar submission, Court and Young (2006) aver that it is indisputable that research (development) is more likely to contribute to policy if evidence fits within the political and institutional limits and pressures of policy makers and, if it resonates with their assumptions. This position clearly foregrounds the political context on research and policy and practice nexus. Hence, it explains the need for closer relationship (closing the missing links) between researchers and research users (industry, society) and with governments as the enabler and creator of fertile grounds for such relationships to impact into the society for maximum benefits. Speaking in the same line, Kearney (2006) submits:

Knowledge generated by research is the basis of sustainable development which requires that knowledge placed at the service of development be converted into applications and be shared to ensure widespread benefits.

Understandably, research is not insulated from challenges in Nigerian milieu. Nigerian academics in the universities and indeed professionals in the private sector (industry) conduct research and their outcome/findings are applied in solving problems that are both public-sector-centred and private sector-centred. Many of the Nigerian universities, institutes and R&D units of companies have continuously embarked on several researches with plethora of findings that are worthy of commercialization as products and services in many areas of human endeavor.

Appraising the research outputs from Nigerian tertiary institutions, Chiemekwe, Longe, Longe and Shaib (2008) confirmed empirically that Nigerian intellectuals have copious findings and outcomes of their researches in various fields such as: medicine, education, sciences human resources management and so on. However, over time according to the National Universities Commission (NUC), the research outputs of tertiary institutions in Nigeria in terms of quality and quantity in the late 1980s was about the best in the sub-saharan Africa (Karani, 1997). Meanwhile by 1996, the quality and quantity of research had declined to an all-time low (Okebukola and Solowu, 2001). Summarizing the factors that contributed to this decline from late 1988 to 1996 and subsequent collapse from 1997 to date, Okebukola (2002) listed the following as the missing links:

1. Lack of research skills in modern methods
2. Lack of equipment for carrying out state-of-the-art research
3. Overloaded teaching and administration schedules which make researchers to have little time for research
4. Difficulty in accessing research funds
5. Diminishing ability of seasoned and senior researchers to mentor junior researchers due to brain drain

Therefore, the lacuna identified and their prevalence and perpetuation may have obviously impinged on the character and rating of Nigerian Universities among universities in the world. The rating and ranking has been poignantly unimpressive as revealed by 2019 Webometrics report where no Nigerian university was listed among the top 1000 in the world especially, in terms of faithful adherence to governance principles publications conduct of research and using the criteria of Impact Presence, Openness and Excellence. (Webometrics, 2019). Also, the lack of adequate support for research in the country has weakened human capital status of Nigerian graduates who are trained under a deplorable manpower and infrastructural deficiencies and hence, may not exude quality and excellence as “knowledge workers” thereby making them unskillful and unemployable (Sodipo, 2014, Oyesiku, 2010).

The solutions to restoring and rejuvenating research in Nigeria for the country to move away from “factor-driven” economy to an “efficiency-driven” and ultimately “innovation-driven” economy thereby closing the missing links are as below:

1. Creating an increased pool of well-trained intellectuals and professionals
2. Providing adequate resources – funding
3. Improving the relative status of researchers
4. Making research materials and other necessary logistic supports more available

5. Government should introduce new legislation/law that will direct the industry/private sectors to provide both financial and technical supports to research institutions and therefore collaborating and partnering the institutions for development purposes
6. There is need for government to seek for international assistance for the research institutions through provision of fellowships, field trips, linkages, visiting researchers and establishing facilities or research studies.
7. Creating repository for research data. This could be done through having a central research data processing unit where quality research from various institutions could be pulled together as information repository. A group of highbrow scholars of international reckoning should be made to access these information and select the outcomes/findings for commercialization purposes in the interest of the society.

Conclusion

The paper has been able to consider the almost indispensable status and stature of research in every modern society and specifically. It established evidently that the quality research and the commercialization of its outcomes as purveyors of national growth and development. Most of the developed countries of the world were found to have invested heavily on research which had helped them to achieve economic prosperity and through research, societal problems were easily solved. Also, the liberalization of researchers-policy makers and industry relationships through policies that are inclusive and integrating have promoted research performance and impacted on advanced societies positively. Therefore Nigeria as a developing nation need to attach serious importance to research, researchers, research institutions and their relationship with the industry for the country to move up in the ladder of socio-economic growth and development. The deplorable level of funding of research and indeed its findings which has caused the conscription of research outcomes in shelves of various researchers to through deliberate and sustainable government and other stakeholders support gather dust rather than helping to solve the problems of humanity should be reversed for national renewal, economic growth and development.

Recommendation

The paper recommends that Nigerian government and all other relevant stakeholders should prioritise the funding of higher education institutions maximally and also, constitute “wise men” group among the tested researchers to advise the government and other stakeholders on how to reap the great dividends of commercialization of research outputs to fast track Nigeria's quest for socio-economic growth and sustainable development.

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