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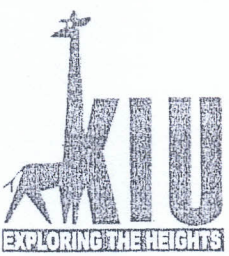

IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper examined the concept of research and the relevance of research undertakings to research practitioners and the society at large. Consequently, the paper explored those areas where challenges of research could be found and suggests strategies on how to resolve the problems among which are that federal and state governments and operational arm of non-governmental organizations should help funding research in Nigeria and that a healthy relationship should be established between the supervisors and supervisee in other to ensure that mentor actually transferred essential and useful rudiments of research for sustainable development to the mentee who would carry on the duty of effective research after they have stepped aside. Finally, the paper also highlighted some viable area of focus for researchers and research practitioners that are most likely to benefit and assisted in carrying out research for sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Introduction

The relevance of research undertakings to developmental practitioners, industries, government and indeed the society at large cannot be over emphasized. Researchers have defined research differently each from their own perspectives. Egbule (2008) simply defines research as an examination, inquiry, investigation or an experiment which is aimed at discovering facts. To him, it is the discovering and interpretation of facts that are known to exist and it is also the revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new forms or developments. Udegbe & Odigwe (2008) citing Nworgu see research as a systematic search for new knowledge, for solution to

problems and answer to questions. When answers to such facts are found, the target is to solve existing identified problems, hasten progress and development, promote advancement of knowledge, increase understanding of new phenomena and raise standard of living. A research is a systematic process of problem analysis in an effort to find solution to such problem. Whatever data that are generated or discoveries that are made automatically become contribution to stock of existing knowledge (Whawo, 1992). To him, the nature, scope and objectives of research and its associated methods depend on the objective of a particular discipline or field. Generally, all researches utilize a scientific procedure or approach, in addition there is usually a central problem which needs to be investigated and solution sought to. There must be objectivity in the scientific approach since standardized and precise methods or measurement is used to guide against personal subjectivity.

According to Kothari (2004), motivation for research include: the quest to find solutions to unresolved problems of the society; the desire to provide useful service to the society, creativity and contribution to national development. He agrees that research is: 'systematized effort to gain new knowledge' p.1 and conclude that research can be seen as 'systematic method consisting of enunciating the problem, formulating the hypothesis, collecting the facts or data...towards the concerned problem or in certain generalizations foe some theoretical formulation'. The implication is that research is a serious effort aimed at problem solving through a complex but systematic process of contributing meaningfully to national development.

Research in education is a field which has become of paramount important in educational growth and development and it is a very vital instrument for educational assessment and evaluation as well as tool for making decision concerning education. Educational research aims at improving educational delivery to the benefit of the society. Nworgu (2006) defines educational research as systematic approach to the solution of educational problems. It involves the application of scientific methods of finding solutions to educational problems and by extension to national development as education is known to be a veritable tool for engendering national development [Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2004]. In fact, Levin (2004) perceives educational research broadly as the structures, processes, products, and persons that are part of the systematic

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developments of knowledge of education. Educational research, therefore, includes pure basic research, pure practice-oriented research and all forms of research (Furlong and Oancea, 2005; National Research Council, 2002). The main objective of educational research is to discover general principles that can be utilized in the explanation, prediction and control of issues relating to educational practices or development. Egbule (2008) affirms that educational research has some unique characteristics and peculiarities, it should be noted that an individual interested in educational research should be aware of the peculiarities and ensure that adequate care is taken to reduce their effects.

Having established the meaning of research and its implications in educational development, it becomes imperative for researchers generally and educational researchers in particular, to carry out research that would lead to sustainable national development. A large community of people sharing common language, culture, history and having a common constitution is said to be a nation. Development can be described as growth plus changes which involves materials, mental and psychological, physical, institutional and organizational innovations. It, thus implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. National development, according to (Kanu, 2008), is the overall political, economic, religious, educational and general social growth and development of a nation to a level whereby at least the basic necessities of life of the generality of the population of that nation is satisfied. The development is about self-reliance in every aspect of national life. It is necessary to develop the individual and also researchers to be in a position to develop the society in which he lives; as soon as this is done, we can expect the nation to become developed.

Scholars such as Ifamuyiwa (2004), Badru (2007), Adetayo (2011) have made efforts to organize and identify research trends in all areas of education. Their works was organized around researches in the area of achievement, instructional techniques, learning strategies, teacher effectiveness, attitude and evaluation of programmes (including public examinations), measurement in science and mathematics aptitude, and researches in the non-cognitive domain. However, despite the efforts of these scholars to find lasting solutions to some identified problems through their

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various research findings, a lot of grounds have not been covered because some of the challenges, being encountered in the field of research and educational research in particular.

Some of these challenges identified by Udegbe and Odigwe (2008) include:

Inadequate Funding

Inadequacy of funds discourages the few well qualified researchers from spearheading meaningful researches in education. There is hardly any provision for nation fund projects, the type that can really result in meaningful national development and enable the less experience researchers to participate and increase their experience in planning and executing researches and also efforts has not been made at all by the management of our higher institutions of learning to fund educational researches by scholars (Nworgu, 1991; Udegbe & Odigwe, 2008). And occasionally when efforts are made to support researchers and resource persons, it is done on one shot basis sponsorship only for conference attendance in a year mostly with regard to junior cadre academic staff. Onuka and Onabamiro (2010) and Onuka (2011) believe that inadequate funding as a major constraint to researching in Nigeria and respectively proffer that research endeavours should be properly and collaboratively funded for researching in education and other sectors of the economy.

Non-Implementation of Research Findings

Research findings are hardly utilized in Nigeria (Harbor-Peters, 1997). This is due to the inability to disseminate the studies to the appropriate audience, who will then apply findings as may be necessary. Educational operators utilise educational research findings haphazardly and irresponsibly (Enwefa, 2008). Egbule (2008) observes that the effectiveness of any research endeavour is its ability to use the knowledge acquires for the solution to the practical problems of the developing society. Therefore, inadequately disseminated research findings cannot but be haphazardly applied. Lack of research data/research findings bank has served as a hindrance to educational research effectiveness (Onuka and Onabamiro, 2010). They proposed that research data/findings bank be established to harnessed research findings for dissemination to the appropriate audience for application to engender development of each sector particularly the education sector is which the chief

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vehicle of national development. This, of course, is the only function to promote sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Printing and Cost

The inadequate publicity given to research findings is due to the high cost of printing in Nigeria. As most of these findings are either kept in the library of institutions where it was carried out or on the pages of the reputable journals in which they were published, which often have restricted circulation rather than, in addition these, disseminate the findings through workshops/conferences and seminars. No efforts are made by the government and the Nigerian corporate world to subsidize some printing and publication of research findings costs whereby important research findings can be published and distributed to users nor are the interested sponsoring other fora of disseminating research findings such as conferences, workshops, seminars or research fairs.

Improper record keeping

Nigeria, being a developing nation does not possess the basic facilities in adequate quantum, for instance, well equipped libraries for obtaining information for researches. Ngenegbo (1997) states that accurate data are indispensable to real research work, though libraries that are the repository of information storage or research data bank are unable to keep up-to-date research information, a situation of dearth of useful research data, therefore, arises. Nigerian libraries do not stock up-to-date journals. Even in some establishments where reasonable information could be collected, the compilers of such information do sometimes hoard them and are unwilling to release them to those who need to user for research. It, therefore, becomes difficult to collect the right type of information from such establishments for meaningful research exercise to take place, most especially because findings from such researches are often kept within the four wall of the institutions' libraries either at the departmental or faculty levels.

Poor Quality of Educational Research

Another major challenge facing educational research is that the scientific quality of educational research and evaluation is usually poor and so it cannot yield useful results because education is too complex and users and researchers do not have the time and the

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means to use the results of educational research (Labaree, 1998; Willinsky, 2001; Berliner, 2002). This is so because the resources needed to carry out quality educational research is often out of reach of researchers and resource person such as financial support, readily availability of data, printing materials etc.

Publish or perish syndrome

Due to the publish or perish syndrome at the tertiary institutions, many amateur researchers undertake ill conceived researches; just to have some published materials to enable them get promoted. This happens because lecturers are required to research and publish papers before they are promoted from one cadre to the other. Publish or perish syndrome is not just a Nigerian phenomenon as according (Akrono and Pajibo, 2008) states that it is also a cankerworm to academic progress. The import of this syndrome is that academics in these climes possibly engaged in researches in order to gain promotion with the concomitant effect of their ability to embark on development oriented researches which takes quality time as opposed to promotion-oriented researches. To ameliorate this anomaly, quality rather quantity of research report published and widely disseminated.

Ineffective training of researchers

Most post graduate students in higher institutions of learning are ill-equipped by their supervisors because the attitude of most are not encouraging, there is need for these supervisors to have a change of attitude and really instill into these young researchers the rudiments of educational research and investigations. Many an education researchers are ill-trained and inadequately equipped to carry out quality development oriented education research. To improve this situation, there is the need to inject more research content into teacher education curriculum at the first and second degree levels.

Previously Proffered Solutions to the Identified Challenges of Research in Nigeria

Udegbe and Odigwe (2008) submitted as part of identified solution to the problems of research that the federal and state government should allocate and make available adequate fund for research in Nigeria. Concerning cost of printing and publication,, efforts need to be made by the Nigerian government and corporate Nigeria to

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subsidize some printing facilities to aid the dissemination of important research findings through publication and other fora such as workshops, training programmes, conferences and seminars as well as through the establishment of research data bank to the ultimate users of research findings.

Concerning non-implementation of research findings, Eyibe (1991) said that "the effectiveness of any research endeavour is its ability to use the knowledge acquired for the solution to the practical problems of the developing society. One of the reasons for inadequate utilization of research findings is poor system of dissemination of information acquired from research. Efforts should be made to disseminate some of the important researches to the reach of the intended users. This can be made possible through mandating all research establishments and education institutions to deposit a copy of all their research reports at the Research and Evaluation branch of the Federal Ministry of Education and a copy with Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC).

Also, research should not only be a criteria for promotion of academic staff in tertiary institution instead, promotion of academic staff should also be based on dedication to duty, administrative responsibilities, effective delivery of lectures, practical innovation in teaching and learning process and teaching workloads. Supervisors of post graduate students should be made to develop friendly and cordial relationship with their supervisee and be a mentor to them rather been harsh and unruly.

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Some Previous Suggestions for Improving Educational Research for National Development

In this section, some previously suggested are highlighted to help researchers in the field of education to improve educational research to engender sustainable development.

These include:

There is the urgent need for researchers in education to start to employ a philosophical approach, value-based approach as well as systematic approach that can inform education for sustainable research. This view is tandem with that of Dewey (2009) who advocates that educational practice needs to have a serous philosophical foundation. In a similar vein, educational research has to be underscored and informed by a critical discourse on research

methodology and thereby helping to frame and analyze philosophical problems specific to education (Moses, 2002). Pointing to a value-based research approach, Howe (2008) suggests that educational research should be rooted in and guided by the values associated with a genuine form of democratic politics. According to Moses (2002: p.14) the "philosophers of education may also alert educators to the value and right headedness of some movements, and thus to the need for changes in policy and practice". Even if "we are entrenched in a particular way of thinking about the world, one in which we have been trained, one that seems to suit our ends and our dispositions" (St. Pierre, 2006, p. 257), we need not only be willing to hear others, but also develop a common language to understand each other and thereby facilitate a constructive and critical dialogue across a diversity of perspectives and circumstances, a situation that promotes effective education researching.

Researchers participating in research for sustainable development should employ both qualitative and quantitative methods in solving the identified problems depending on the type of research questions raised in their study. The issue of the methodological dichotomy is linked to the multi-disciplinary nature of education for sustainable development research but there must methodology-specific for the discipline as every discipline has its own research methodology even though they all search for a common future. The specific types of research more suitable for educational research are action research and holistic education research which, must be seen as consistent with the qualitative point of view and the recognition that action research has, for a long time, warranted its potential as a tool for diminishing the hindrances to the solutions of complex issues in society (Salite, 2008).

There is also the need to establish the relationships among theory, research and professional practice, thus bringing about the integrative aspect of educational research. Both the combination of theoretical and applied aspects of education for sustainable development and practical implementation of results at the post-research stage is essentially necessary. Researchers need go beyond the statement of facts and trends and move towards the suggestions of means, approaches and methods which would improve the current situation. The integrative aspect of educational research is illustrated by the six models of Research Practice in Education presented by Burkhardt and Schoenfeld (2003) as follows:

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- teachers read about research and implement it in their classrooms;
- summary guides (professional organization regularly produce research distillations);
- general professional development;
- the policy route;
- the long route of the productive relationship between educational research and practice;
- experimental design.

Those undertaking research for sustainable development should also think about doing collaborative study, by engaging research participants (students, education legislators, mentors, teachers and teacher educators) as co-researchers and by creating teams and networks to conduct collaborative inquiry. Thus, thereby encourage a democratic practice in educational researching, if all participants in a study are co-researchers as they would have participated in designing the research to the collection of data and the analysis of the data to the production of report. Also, literature on educational research stresses the importance of collegiality and collaboration and the development of more democratic, multi-professional, inter-disciplinary, and cross-gender social relationships in research for sustainable development (Lagemann, 1997). Educational research relies on relationships between researchers and those engaged in professional practice as critical to success, for instance, teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, university deans, school board members and a host of other (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002).

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Conclusion

The importance of educational research for sustainable national development cannot be over emphasized, because education is acclaimed as a veritable instrument for national development. It is obvious that research leads to new discoveries and to obtaining prompt solution to seemingly difficult problems in any nation. Therefore, all efforts should be made by Governments, researchers and research practitioners, corporate Nigeria as well as philanthropists and all stakeholders to ensure that all research related problems were solved and research for sustainable national

development campaign be encouraged in Nigeria higher institutions of learning.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion and conclusion above, the following recommendations were made:

- That there should be an all collaborative public-partnership in educational research undertaking in terms of planning/designing educational research, executing it, funding it, reporting and utilizing the findings in development.
- That multidisciplinary or holistic educational research must always be undertaking with the view of promoting sustainable development the Nigerian nation, as education sector is the engine room for propelling economic growth and development.
- That educational research should no longer an all-comers' business, but specialist are adequately trained in the art and science of educational research. Thus, all Institutes of Education be mandated to make training in research their core function and be equally empowered and equipped for the purpose.
- All stakeholders must devise a means of storing research findings for retrieval for utilisation at any point in time; it could be research data institute/bank
- Sustainable channel of disseminating to the appropriate audience who will utilize the results for development should be established to engender the utilisation of research for sustainable national development. This can be done by establishing regular for a or body such as Nigerian Educational Research Summit Group an equivalence of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group.

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