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Challenges of conducting and publishing communication research in selected tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria

Livinus Jesse Ayih, Woyopwa Shem* and Siman Lazarus

Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies,
Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

*E-mail address: shem.woyopwa@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This research study examined the challenges of conducting and publishing communication research in selected tertiary institutions in Taraba State, Nigeria. The study was guided by three research objectives which are; to identify whether research conducted by communication scholars in selected tertiary institutions in Taraba State is tilted toward solving practical communication problems; to find out whether staff promotion/gratification is the motivating factor for conducting communication researches and to identify the challenges associated with conducting communication researches in the selected tertiary institutions. The study adopted a phenomenology research design and the population of the study comprised lecturers, reviewers, and editors in the field of communication research. The findings of the study revealed that lately, communication researches in local journals have minimal or no relevance in addressing pragmatic communication-related problems in Nigerian society. The study also found that that promotion is one of the catalysts that stimulate communication scholars to conduct and publish research studies. Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that the government has not prioritized funding for research activities, which has made it difficult for communications researchers to carry out their work effectively. The study recommend among other things the need the government allocate more funds to support researchers who are interested in conducting communication research.

Keywords: Research, Communication, Publishing, Challenges, Taraba State

1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of universities in the development of a nation cannot be underestimated. The veracity of the above claim hinged on the fact that universities are meant to proffer solutions to practical issues in society. Ahmed, Umar, and Paul (2015) substantiate that universities in particular among other higher educational institutions are bestowed with the responsibility to carry out quality research that will have a positive impact on national development. However, the situation is quite distinct in Nigeria because the evidence in extant literature revealed that researches in Nigerian universities especially among students are most often than not plagiarized.

In 2019, the former executive secretary of the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) Professor Peter Okebukola claimed that about sixty per cent of research especially project reports in Nigerian universities were plagiarized works. Ahmed, Umar, and Paul (2015) corroborate that lately, the quality of research in Nigerian tertiary institutions has declined drastically as compared to the 1980s when Nigeria was one of the best countries in sub-Saharan Africa in the area of research.

Shreds of evidence from extant literature revealed that most academics are in dire need to publish in journals even when these studies are not tilted towards solving practical problems and such a situation is inimical to development. Talabi, Adaja, and Adefemi (2017) note mockingly that:

The era of 'publish-publish-publish' has made academics rush for whatever is available in the name of writing journal publications. In the early days of academic work, hardly could anybody, even a professor boast of 30 publications in his kitty before becoming a professor but today – there are young academics with 100, 200, or 300 academic papers while some have surpassed 300 publications... we look forward to who becomes the first to break the record of over 1,000 publications in Nigerian universities.

From the foregoing, it is apposite to infer that researches in Nigerian universities are more of rituals carried out periodically for promotions and the gratifications that come with it. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to proffer a novel approach to conducting communication research that will be tilted towards providing solutions to practical communication-related problems by examining the challenges of conducting and publishing communication research in selected tertiary institutions in Taraba state

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria as a country is bedevilled with an avalanche of communication-related issues ranging from fake news, conspiracy theories, misinformation, and hate speech amongst others. The aforementioned problems are inimical to the development of Nigerian Society as they have the potency to hamper the peaceful co-existence of Nigerian society. Hence, communication researchers must conduct studies that can proffer practical solutions to communication-related issues in Nigerian society. However, it is pathetic that research in most Nigerian tertiary institutions is conducted either for promotions or the gratifications that come along with them.

Commenting on the horrible quality of research in Nigeria, Yusuf (2012) lamented that "the "publish or perish" syndrome associated with the higher education system in general and

the university system, in particular, could be said to have plunged academics in these institutions into a career-long survival race for promotions and positions within their institutional hierarchies and perhaps beyond". The above situation implies that research is more of a ritual than research in tertiary institutions in Nigeria instead of providing practical solutions to problems. It is in light of the above that this study will examine the challenges associated with conducting communication research in tertiary institutions in Taraba State with particular reference to communication scholars.

Research Objectives

- i) To identify whether research conducted by communication scholars in selected tertiary institutions is tilted towards solving practical communication problems
- ii) To find out whether a promotion is a motivating factor for conducting communication research
- iii) To identify the challenges associated with conducting communication research in selected institutions in Taraba State

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Research

Research has been defined by different scholars/researchers differently. However, almost all these definitions are tilted towards the fact that research deals with finding or unravelling something hitherto unknown for solving practical life problems or acquiring knowledge on the subject under investigation.

According to Creswell (2008), research is a sequence of processes used to acquire and analyze information to expand our understanding of a topic or situation. The above definition emphasises the fact one of the traits that make research is the fact that it is carried out in stages. To put it another way, it is a sequential process.

In his view Shuttleworth (2008) define research as doing a methodical investigation to confirm a theory or answer a specific (research) question is the strict definition of scientific inquiry. He continues by saying that the main objective of the majority of scientific research is to come up with a conclusive solution to a problem. This implies that a typical research study is supposed to solve a practical life problem unlike what is obtainable among scholars in Nigeria where research sometimes are carried out for promotion purposes.

Ørngreen, and Levinsen, (2017) share the same opinion as Shuttleworth when he defines research as the process of arriving at reliable solutions to issues through the planned and methodical collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, he continues by saying that study is focused on figuring out how the occurrences of our world relate to one another.

Communication Research

According to Donsbach (2006), communication research as a field of study has been around for either 2000 years or 100 years, depending on your degree of erudition. The rhetoric of the ancient Greeks and current times share some parallels, although much has changed since then.

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), the goal of communications research is to conduct a scientific investigation into the communication process.

As such, it is impartial, deterministic, and frugal. It is interdisciplinary because it extensively draws on psychology, sociology, and anthropology in terms of theory and methodology. In essence, it entails using social and behavioural science methodologies to examine communication-related topics and difficulties.

Suffice it to say that communication research is concerned with understanding how we communicate differently with varied audiences, users, and groups (Chikwe, Ogidi, & Nwachukwu, 2015).

Treadwell and Davis (2019) believed that communication research has three primary pillars: problem-posing, problem-solving, and peer persuading. This implies that valid communication research should be able to identify and solve communication-related problems.

Review of Related Literature

There is existing literature that tried to examine the nature of research in tertiary institutions across the globe. One of the usual labour practices of research universities, according to Osifila, and Abimbola, (2020); Ogunode, and Ade (2023), is the hiring, compensation, and promotion of faculty members based on the quality of their research output.

Ahmed, Umar, and Paul (2015) substantiate that universities in particular among other higher educational institutions are bestowed with the responsibility to carry out quality research that will have a positive impact on national development. However, a shred of evidence from extant studies revealed that the original purpose of research in Nigerian tertiary institutions is retrogressing as the “publish or perish” syndrome is the order of the day. Yusuf (2012) bemoaned the poor calibre of research conducted in Nigeria thus:

The "publish or perish" mentality prevalent in the higher education sector in general and the university sector, in particular, has driven academics in these institutions into a lifelong race for positions and promotions both within their respective institutional hierarchies and possibly beyond. For an academic to succeed in such a race, they must conduct research and/or grow creatively to produce the papers they sorely need. As a result, the only real reasons to enter this race are for the sake of one's professional and intellectual standing. The argument being made here is that, by orientation, topic, and primary purpose, the majority of the research being conducted at our universities at this time is neither connected to nor influenced by the demand and priorities. (p5).

From the foregoing, it is apposite to infer that lately, research is conducted to solve practical life problems but rather for promotion and perhaps the gratifications that come with conducting research such as grants or fame (Moses and Shem, 2022). The above situation presents a paradox to the Nigerian state considering the avalanche of problems that are bedevilling the country in which research would have served as a panacea.

Despite the above challenges, it is quite unfortunate that there are limited extant studies that seek to examine the challenges of conducting and publishing communication research in Nigeria.

Hence, this study seeks to fill the gaps by examining the challenges associated with conducting communication research in tertiary institutions in selected tertiary institutions in Taraba State.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study adopted the phenomenology research design. Astalin (2013, p.119) revealed that "phenomenology is a way of describing something that exists as an integral part of the world in which we are living." It is a qualitative research design that helps to explain a phenomenon, its manifestation and its implication or impact on humanity which may not have been adequately understood before the research endeavour. The application of this design in the study helped the researcher to document perspectives on the challenges of conducting and publishing communication researchers in selected tertiary institutions in Taraba State.

In-depth interviews were conducted among 60 participants which allows researchers to have an intimate engagement with the respondents on the subject matter under investigation. In other to maintain the customary method of qualitative research, the participants were promised to be given anonymity to encourage them to discuss issues in-depth and detailed (Kontagora, Watts, & Allsop, 2018).

The advantage of the in-depth interview as a research method that makes it suitable for this study (as discussed above), however, does not exonerate it of the numerous deficiencies or shortcomings that it has, such as the use of a small sample size that does not support generalization, the prevalence of researcher's bias, difficulty in handling the voluminous data arising from the method, and the difficulty of accessing respondents who are suitably qualified to participate in the study due to their tight schedules. These limitations make the method problematic to implement in a study, and always force researchers willing to adopt the method to devise mitigation strategies to effectively overcome the limitations and successfully conduct the research as expected.

In this current study, to overcome the limitations of the method, the researchers will earmark a large number of respondents to engage in the study (far more than the eventual sample size for the study), and eventually use some to replace/substitute others that proved too difficult to access. In terms of handling the voluminous data that may be aroused from the method, the researchers co-opt four research assistants who helped to transcribed the oral interviews into written notes for elaborate discussion.

3. 1. Participants and Sample Size

The participants for this study comprised communications lecturers in selected tertiary institutions in Taraba State. These institutions include; Taraba State University, Jalingo, Taraba State University, Suntai, Federal University Wukari, Federal Polytechnic Bali, and College of Education, Zing.

The precise number of people that constitute the population is unknown to the researchers due to the absence of an available database of communication lecturers in the selected tertiary institutions in Taraba State. However, sixty (60) participants were drawn from the study population to form the sample size of this study. Although the sample size is not numerically representative of the study population, the emphasis in qualitative studies is not on the adequacy of the sample size in terms of number, but on the capacity of the sample size to supply the required data.

A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the sample for the study.

This enabled the researchers to select lecturers, reviewers, and editors in the field of communication research in the selected tertiary institutions in Taraba State.

3. 2. Data Collection

The researcher conducted interviews to elicit data from the responses of the interviewees. Therefore, the researchers used digital recording midgets to capture the various interview sessions. Writing materials- pen and notebook- were utilized to take notes in the course of the interview sessions. The interviews took place in the offices of the respondents or their preferred locations based on their convenience. Each interview session took approximately 20-30 minutes. The interview was conducted between January 2023 and April, 202.

3. 3. Data Analysis

This study adopted Braun and Clarke's (2013) six thematic data analysis procedure. In order words, the researcher transcribed the recorded interviews, reread the transcriptions to find emergent themes from the recorded data, reviewed the themes, defined the themes, labelled the themes, and finally produced the results in tandem with the research objective.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This segment presents a detailed discussion arising from the data retrieved via in-depth interviews. The discussions are categorized into themes in tandem with the research objectives. In other words, each theme addresses a research objective.

Theme 1. Whether local communication research is tilted towards solving practical communication

Communication research is an essential tool for understanding the dynamics of communication in any society. In Nigeria, local communication research has been conducted over the years to understand the practical communication challenges faced by Nigerians. The question, however, is whether these researches are tilted towards solving practical communication problems in Nigeria. The findings of this study revealed that lately, communication researches especially in local journals that have no online presence have minimal or no relevance in addressing pragmatic communication-related problems in Nigerian society. One of the participants who is a reviewer with more than fifteen years of experience in reviewing communication related research works revealed that:

The truth is that the quality of our research especially in our local journals is decreasing drastically. Lately, they will send you a paper to review and even if you reject the paper due to its unscientific nature, sometimes such papers will still get published, perhaps due to the relationship between the editorial board and some of the authors. I'm tempted to say that the quality of our local journals needs to be upgraded. At this point, we should be thinking of how to use our research studies in our polytechnics and universities to solve pragmatic problems in society [Participant 10]

A participant who share a similar opinion said:

I don't think our research in recent times is targeted at solving societal problems. The truth of the matter is that most of the studies emanating from tertiary institutions

in Nigeria, especially local journals are recycled works. The data for most of these studies are doctored just for the papers to get published and submitted for promotions ([Participant 15])

Another participant who is also a reviewer subscribed to the above view when he posit that:

Look, generally speaking, communication research in recent times especially in our local journals are not encouraging. We keep on recycling research. Sometimes, when papers are sent to me to review I keep on asking myself why our local journals keep on receiving such papers. Some of the research papers hardly identify any gap and some of the research are unacademic. The bottom line is we need to step up, especially in the communication domain. Our local journals must also set up high standards like their counterparts in developed societies, they should learn to accept and publish researches that contribute to the body of knowledge and also have the potential [Participant 54]

A participant who has a contrary opinion revealed that:

While there is no yes or no answer to this question. Even though the publish-or-perish syndrome is still an order of the day among academics these days, there are still genuine scholars with novel scientific hunches aimed at solving pragmatic problems. [Participant 44]

The above findings are in tandem with the findings of Chiemekwe, Longe, Longe, and Shaib (2009) who confirm that the quality of research outputs in Nigerian institutions has declined dramatically. In the same vein, Moses and Shem (2022) expressed concern over the quality of research studies conducted by Nigerian academics. The researchers explicate that it is perplexing that academics at Nigerian tertiary institutions are desperate for journal papers, even when these publications are not geared toward solving practical issues or adding anything relevant to the body of knowledge.

The above submission could be associated with the fact that many Nigerian universities lack access to up-to-date research materials, making it difficult for communication scholars to keep up with the latest research developments. Therefore, recycling ideas and doctoring research data become an alternative to keep up with the requirement of publishing papers for promotion.

Theme 2: Whether promotion is the motivating factor for conducting communication research

The above theme aimed at unravelling whether academic promotions form part of the core motivating factor for conducting communication research among communication scholars in Taraba State. To probe the above subject matter aptly, the study participants were asked whether they conduct public research studies even without expecting any academic promotions. Here, the majority of the participants revealed that promotion is one of the catalysts that stimulate them to conduct some of these studies. In his words, one of the participants captured it thus:

Look, let me be sincere with you, most of the papers I published, I published solely because I hope to use them someday for promotion and also to upgrade my curriculum vitae so that whenever I want to apply for a lecturing job elsewhere, it will be an added advantage. Hence, I write and publish research papers due to the gains attached. [Participant 19]

In the same vein, another participant noted that:

Yes, promotion is one of the factors that motivate some of us to conduct research or publish academic papers. As for me personally, I must confess that I only publish when I am expecting a promotion in one year or so. The thing is that we are in a critical situation where our salaries are hardly paid and we don't have a conducive environment to write. Hence, someone like me only writes and publishes academic papers to pursue my promotion. [Participant 20]

Another participant who shares similar sentiment unravels that:

To be sincere, promotion is indeed a catalyst that triggers me to research because I know that it's a requirement that I must fulfil to make progress in my career. Ordinarily, if publishing is not a yardstick for promotion, I may not devote so much time to writing and publishing academic papers. [Participant 9]

Even though the majority of the participant share similar sentiment regarding the factors that motivate them to carry out research studies, another participant who has a different opinion revealed that he conduct and publish academic papers to contribute to the body of knowledge hence he publish papers not just because of promotion but to contribute his quarter in building the communication corpus. In his words, he revealed that:

...I won't say promotion is not a factor that motivates me to publish academic papers. However, I am someone who loves writing and conducting research, therefore, with or without promotion, I would have still write and publish. I conduct and publish academic papers to identify and fill gaps. ...look research is beyond promotion, it is all about problem-solving and developing human society. [Participant 33]

Another participant who also share similar sentiments revealed that:

Ultimately, while promotion may not be the noblest reason for conducting research, it is a reality that cannot be ignored. By acknowledging this motivation and working within its constraints, one can still make valuable contributions to the existing body of knowledge while advancing the academic career. [Participant 48]

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that the majority of the participants revealed that they conduct research studies and publish academic papers for the sake of promotion. According to Endurance (2019), the rise of predatory academic publishing in Nigeria is the outcome of the "publish or perish" attitude connected with academics. "Publish or perish" is a

term used to characterize academics' pressure to publish research articles to progress in their careers. Endurance (2019) found in his study that sometimes even professors in Nigerian rush to submit their research to predatory journals to fulfil the demand of submitting scholarly articles for promotion. Moses and Shem (2022) corroborated that “research in Nigerian universities especially among academics is more like a ritual that is performed regularly for promotions purposes”. The above situation has diverse adverse implications for Nigerian society because a nation which does not give priority to research will lack direction on how to solve its challenges.

Theme 3: Challenges of Conducting Communication Research in Taraba State, Nigeria

Communication research is a crucial aspect of any society, as it helps to identify and address communication challenges. However, the findings of this study revealed that in Taraba State, Nigeria, conducting communication research has been a daunting task due to poor funding. The findings of this study revealed that the government has not prioritized funding for research activities, which has made it difficult for researchers to carry out their work effectively. The majority of the participants revealed that lack of funding has affected the quality of research conducted among communication scholars in the state. It was found that researchers do not have access to the modern equipment and facilities needed for effective data collection and analysis. This has resulted in inadequate data that cannot be relied upon for decision-making purposes. In his words, one of the participants captured it thus:

I think the major challenge we encounter whenever we want to conduct any research study is funding. I have been a communication scholar for the past ten years and I have never benefited from any research grant from the institution I worked for. It is a miracle for one to get a good research grant in this part of the world. We use our funds to conduct research studies and that is why we hardly conduct serious research. [Participant 17]

Another participant who subscribe to the same opinion also unravelled that:

...We are faced with funding issues, sometimes to even get our basic salary is a problem more talk of research grants. It is not hidden that most academics in Nigerian universities were denied salaries for seven months last year. How do you expect someone working in such a toxic environment to conduct and publish quality research studies? [Participant 23]

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that poor funding remains one of the significant challenges facing communication research in Taraba State. Baro, Bosah, and Obi (2017) found in their study that relatively few academic staff at Nigerian institutions had access to research grants. Most Nigerian professors used a portion of their merger wages to write scholarly papers because it is a requirement for progression in their academic careers.

The above implies that there is a need for the government to prioritize funding for research activities to attract skilled researchers which will improve the quality of data collection. Additionally, private organizations should also support communication research by providing grants and other forms of financial assistance to researchers in the state.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Communication research is an essential aspect of any society, as it helps to understand the communication patterns and behaviours of people. However, in Taraba State, Nigeria, conducting communication research can be challenging due to funding constraints. In light of the above, this study recommends that:

- 1) The government should increase funding for communication research. The government should allocate more funds to support researchers who are interested in conducting communication research. This will help to improve the quality of research conducted and ensure that researchers have access to the necessary resources.
- 2) Private organizations should also be encouraged to fund communication research. Private organizations can partner with universities and other institutions to fund research projects that are relevant to their industries.
- 3) International organizations can also provide funding for communication research in Nigeria. These organizations can collaborate with local institutions and researchers to conduct studies that are relevant to their areas of interest.
- 4) Researchers should explore alternative sources of funding such as crowdfunding platforms or grants from foundations. This will help them raise funds for their projects without relying solely on government or private funding.
- 5) Collaboration among researchers can also help reduce the cost of conducting communication research in Nigeria. Researchers can share resources and expertise while working together on projects that benefit society.

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