

Dystrophies and Associated Crises in Research and Academic Publications in Nigerian Universities

Ebele J. Egwunyenga

*Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, Delta State University,
Abraka, Nigeria
E-mail: jebele247@yahoo.com*

KEYWORDS Dystrophies. Associated Crises. Academic Publication. Research Outcomes. Nigerian Universities

ABSTRACT The study investigated the dystrophies and associated crises in research and academic publications in Nigerian universities. A sample of 1,420 academic staff from the three categories of universities was made. The questionnaire titled "Academic Staff Questionnaire on Associated Crisis in Research and Publication" was the instrument employed to collect data which were later analysed using simple percentage statistical tool. The result revealed that: lack of utility of research outcome and feedback, non-involvement of research findings consumers in research activities, lack of centres for research findings dissemination, exodus of outstanding scholars from the system (brain-drain); lack of adequate funds for research; obsolete library and laboratory/workshop facilities; ignorance of foreign research outcomes; lack of adequate remuneration for researchers; leadership-associated problems as well as "Publish or Perish" syndrome were identified by more than 50% of the respondents as sources of dystrophic problems in research and publications among Nigerian academics. Arising from the above, some recommendations were made.

INTRODUCTION

Research publication is an important device in the expression of proffered solutions to carefully identified problems. It is a fundamental tool for knowledge development, the essence of which is to find solution to human problems. Hence universities expect academicians to publish often in the most prestigious journals with a high "impact factor" which is a measure of how many times articles published in journals are cited in other journals. The emerging knowledge of an economy in which intellectual knowledge is seen as an important source of wealth is changing the way knowledge is generated, diffused or disseminated through different vehicles to a broad range of consumers, including practitioners, industry, public policy-makers and the general public. The seriousness with which universities all over the world perform this function through its academic staff is expressed in Nigeria with a popular slogan "Publish or Perish".

However, the rationale for academic staff involvement in research publication transcends job retention and growth to satisfying economic, social and psychological needs of the researcher at the expense of teaching. This has resulted in a paradigm shift from teaching and research to "research excellence" epitomized in the use of these papers for assessment, promotion and economic gains. In an attempt to satisfy the need

to publish instead of perishing or stagnating, some unethical practices are being perpetuated, resulting in dystrophy in research and academic publications which this paper is out to address. This study was therefore carried out to identify the sources of the problems/crisis associated with research and publication in Universities in Nigeria.

The Nature of Research and Publications in Nigeria

With the advent of self-rule in Nigeria and bearing in mind the importance of research activities in nation building, the government took a bold step to institutionalize research by establishing the Cocoa Research Institute at Ibadan, Nigerian Institute for Oil Palm Research near Benin, the Veterinary Research Institute, Vom near Jos etc. Be it as it may, the greatest focal point of research activities in Nigeria is in educational institutions at the tertiary level, i.e the Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Technology and Colleges of Education. This is because research is made compulsory for both teachers and students either by job description or by prescribed programmes of study. Every graduating student at every level is actively involved in research activities for the fulfillment of partial requirement for the certificate/degree being sought or as terminal thesis or dissertation. It is, therefore, expected that volumes of research reports from graduating students and academics addressing

problems of the Nigerian nation would have lifted the nation from poverty to greatness. But the reverse is the case as the deposited research reports are left to gather dust in the various departmental offices.

For the academics, once their researched work are published in reputable journals, copies are kept only to be produced for appraisal for necessary promotion. What becomes of the findings does not really matter any more. The general feeling is that findings of the academic researches carried out in tertiary institutions continue to be recycled with the institution as those who ought to apply these reports hardly buy them. Thus, the indispensability of research in national development is being called to question particularly in the developing economies of the world. This informed the NUC's recent organization of first Nigerian Universities Research and Development Fair in November, 2004.

Although strong statistical information are not available on trends in academic publications in Nigeria, Okebukola (2000) was able to give the following information on research and publication in Nigeria between 1962 and 1988 which he said witnessed a steady rise of one to ten in article publications by Nigerians in International Journals. After 1988, he reported that there has been a steady decline from ten to one between 1988 and 2000, a trend he says has continued till date in the field of science. This is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Trend of international publications by Nigerian academics between 1962 and 1998/2000 in the field of science education

<i>Date (Year)</i>	<i>No. of publications</i>
1962	1
1964	1
1968	2
1970	3
1972	3
1974	3
1976	3
1978	4
1980	4
1982	4
1984	6
1986	8
1988	10
1990	8
1992	4
1994	2
1996	1
1998	1
2000	1

Adapted from Okebukola, 2002: 94 in Refocusing Education In Nigeria.

A look at Table 2 shows the number of active Journals in Nigeria with particular focus on the "Education" discipline.

If academic publication is an index of scholarly research, then one can safely conclude from these tables that there is crises in research and academic publications in Nigeria as Table 2 equally shows that there was a rise in the number of active Journals between 1970 and 1988 from humble 6 to 22 respectively. But between 1988 and 2000, decline set in from the established 22 down to 3 in 2000. Arguing in line with the above, Adu (2003) established the low volume of research and publication in Nigeria when he said that even though Nigeria has the largest number of (accredited) universities in sub-Saharan Africa, made up of 26 federal, 20 state and 7 private universities (NUC Approved Academic Programmes in Nigerian Universities, August, 2005), she had the lowest number of scientific publications in 1995 which was 711 as against 3,414 of South Africa, 14,883 of India and 5,440 of Brazil. Also, a recent survey of 138 journals published in Nigerian universities, only 4 (2.8%) were adjudged qualified for international standards and 10(7.2%) adjudged to meet prospective international standards (NUC, 2005). Arising from the above analysis, it is clear that something is wrong with research and publication in Nigeria tertiary institutions which has given rise to what may be termed dystrophies/crises in the context of this research.

Table 2: Number of active journals in education between 1970 and 2000

<i>Date(Year)</i>	<i>No. of Active Journals</i>
1970	6
1972	8
1974	8
1976	8
1978	10
1980	12
1982	19
1984	20
1986	21
1988	22
1990	10
1992	6
1994	4
1996	4
1998	4
2000	3

Adapted from Okebukola 2002: 94 in Refocusing Education In Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The population for this study includes all academic staff in all Nigerian universities with staff strength of about 10,400 (Academic Staff Union of Universities, 2001). From this figure, a total of 1,450 were sampled, using the simple random sampling technique in the ratio of 6:4:2 for federal, state and private universities. This number took into consideration the various categories of lecturers. A questionnaire titled "Academic Staff Questionnaire on Associated Crises in Research and Publication", validated by experts with a reliability coefficient of 0.78 through the test-re-test method was the instrument employed and only 1,420 of the respondents filled and returned same which were used for data analysis. The instrument was divided into 2 broad areas-Sections A and B. Section A basically sought for information of sources of the crises while Section B, recommendations of strategies to redress the situation. The analysis was done by frequency distribution/item-by-item analysis. Any score that was 50% and above, was regarded as a strong source of dystrophic problems in publications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study clearly show the likely sources of the dystrophic problems/crises in research and academic publication in Nigerian universities with all sources listed in Table 3 scoring above 50% positive response from the respondents which is the point of upholding an identified source. The first source indicates lack of utility of research findings as solution(s) to societal problems. The end product of research is deposited at the appropriate department to gather dust. Sadly enough, it does not find its way into the knowledge economy to be perused, criticized or useful suggestions made to improve it.

It, therefore, has the capability to cause low quality (dystrophic problems) cum crises in research and publication as its reoccurring decimal pattern limit its focus with less empirical proof of generalization. Such research lack feedback and value as to improve the system, thus necessitating a support from Longe's Commission on Review of Higher Education (1992).

On non-involvement of research findings

Table 3: Opinion of Nigerian academics on research and publication in Nigerian universities (N = 1,420)

<i>S. No. Sources of Dystrophic Problems/Crises in Research & Publication</i>	<i>No. Positive</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Lack of Utility of Research Outcomes and Feedback	1,110	78.5
2. Non-involvement of Research-finding Consumers	1,126	79.3
3. Lack of Centres for Research Findings Dissemination	1,001	70.5
4. Exodus of Outstanding scholars from the System.	1,243	87.5
5. Lack of Adequate Funds for Research Activities.	1,324	93.2
6. Obsolete Library and Laboratory/Workshop Facilities	1,345	94.7
7. Ignorance of Foreign Research Outcomes	1,410	99.3
8. Lack of Adequate Remuneration	1,121	78.9
9. Leadership-associated Problems	1,342	94.5
10. "Publish or Perish" Syndrome	1,256	88.5

consumers in research activities, the respondents believe it is source as it recorded above 79.5% positive response. It is common knowledge today that most researches are carried out in complete isolation of the practitioners who are expected to utilize the findings for the overall improvement of the system. For the academics, their research effort is no longer on long term collaborative effort or integrated in concept as to impart positively on educational practices. Even researches on educational practices do not involve the teachers who are expected to use the research outcomes to improve education. The current practice is at variance with Tabachnick (1998) who observed that positive change will occur in schools if teachers are involved in research exercises.

Lack of centres for the dissemination of research findings for the benefit of policy makers, practitioners or the commercial-industrial managers etc, is the third source with a score of 70.5% agreeing. Publishing research findings in journals and proceedings of conferences is not enough. They should instead, be fed into the information highway, to be accessible to one and all inclusive of the universities which ought to be on-line. This is in consonance with Birdsall (2004) who believes that research findings should be adequately disseminated for the benefit of all.

Exodus of outstanding scholars from the system carried a score of 87.5%. Many senior academic staff who should have given academic

leadership to the younger ones left the tottering ivory towers for foreign universities or the private firms, thus occasioning the brain-drain syndrome and leaving the beginner academics with no guidance. Those who could not leave were distracted into pursuits aimed at their survival, while some others took to part-time teaching in other tertiary institutions, yet some other found solace in staff club and/or union activities (Olukoju, 2002).

Lack of funds/research grants is another major lubricant of the dystrophic problems in research and publication in Nigeria with a high score of 93.2%. By the mid-1980s, Nigeria entered a period of economic crises culminating in the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). An immediate consequence of this is the continuous devaluation of the Naira from exchange rate of \$1.00 (U.S) to #1.00 in 1986, to official exchange rate of \$1.00 to #135.00 today! And in the black parallel market, it is #150.00 to \$1.00 (US). Education generally, and tertiary institutions in particular, were thus neglected struggling only to pay salaries and wages of staff as a result of the repressive military regimes. Prolonged and intermittent strikes, violent demonstrations and inevitable closures then became the lot of these institutions. Equally too, was the drying up of funds for international conferences and personal researches. For example, Okebukola (2004) regrettably remarked that since 1999, there has not been any research grant allocation to any of the federal universities, thus leading to a hell in research activities.

On obsolete libraries, laboratories and workshop facilities, 94.7% of the respondents seriously agreed that it has had a very negative effect on research activities. It is no longer news that most Nigerian tertiary institutions have merely big buildings housing out-dated books/journals and laboratories/workshops which have been stripped of common chemicals and those that had foreign exchange implications were completely non-available, thus making research activities almost nil. Olukoju (2002) equally shares this view in his study.

Other sources identified include ignorance of foreign research outcomes which are sources of good literature for researchers. 99.7% respondents agreed to this because they claimed ignorant of foreign research outcomes even in their own areas due to lack of foreign exchange. Worst still, even with the advent of the

information highway, not all Nigerian universities have been hooked to the website, thus limiting the access of Nigerian researchers to information from the global website village. There is also the issue of lack of adequate remuneration with 78.9% agreeing. Most researchers are not given the required incentives to encourage them. They are left to operate in pitiable conditions with unreliable infrastructure of transport, power, energy etc. The study also established that the older generation of scholars no longer provide the leadership required of them for the younger ones. This issue was addressed by leadership-associated problems with agreement of 94.5% of lecturers sampled. It is now common to see young academics saddled with administrative responsibilities instead of concentrating on teaching and research. Consequently, many of these young scholars pride themselves as members of numerous university committees and have been described by Okon (1995) "as file carrying young men and women who are glorified for their involvement in non-scholarly engagements at the detriment of the system". The consequence of this will be a generational gap between quality researchers of old, now pre-occupied with administrative positions and external politics, and the researchers currently in the saddle not much exposed to what research in all its ramifications, is all about.

Finally, the "Publish or Perish" syndrome. 88.5% of the respondents have attested to this. It is an academic culture that is tied to promotion of academic staff. It has been established to have its own effect on the issue of discussion as it has led to a great deal of sharp practices by researchers. Many journals sprouted in departments and faculties in universities, some of which did not go beyond the first volume before they collapsed either because of poor subscription, funding, internal contradictions or having realized their immediate objectives of presentation for promotions. Many of such journals are products of "emergency" publications which did not pass through the rigours of peer review and through copy-editing. In some cases, editors include as many as three of their own essays in a collection of about paper!. There have also been cases of articles published in these journals without assessment; and worse than that, emergence of contractor research paper writers who are paid fee to write for lazy academic staff who, without shame, claim authorship of such papers. In

addition to the above problems, many academic researchers are financially handicapped and they are required to fund the publications of their articles when accepted by national or international journals. This is unlike Canada and other developed countries where scholarly journals publication depend on government subsidies for survival. It is on record that the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada operates a programme of support by distributing a total 1.6 million Dollars annually among 154 journals (Birdsall, 2004). Arising from the above discussion, it can be concluded that these sources are actually either partly or fully responsible for the decay/crises (dystrophies) in research and publications in Nigerian universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To promote meaningful research and publication culture in Nigerian universities, the respondents and researcher make the following recommendations:

- (i) The proprietors of tertiary institutions particularly the Federal and State Governments should devote substantial amount of their national and state budget to research that will add value to the National economy.
- (ii) In fact, the enabling environment should be created in the universities through the provision of up-to-date teaching and research facilities.
- (iii) In more settled economies, industrial research and development, which is the power house of new innovations, depend on close collaboration between the organized private sector or the industry and the university system. Many universities in the developed/developing world that appreciate the value of research, now carry research efforts to development companies that translate such results into consumer goods and services. This is strongly recommended for Nigerian academic researchers. In addition, Nigerian industries should be encouraged to patronize the university research output and at the same time, provide research grants to university scholars.
- (iv) There is also the need for researchers to seek affiliation with specialist research networks and professional associations which fund research and ensure participation in

international conferences e.g. the New West Africa Network, which uses electronic and Internet facilities to call for papers/abstracts, if successful, qualifies one for full/partial support; membership of or affiliation with the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA) which can qualify one for the CODESRIA Grant for Thesis Writing in African universities.

- (v) There is serious need for improved infrastructural facilities, libraries and laboratories which are necessary for a conducive research environment.
- (vi) Finally, it is important that university authorities establish regulations for the operations of local journals that are usually floated in departments and faculties. This will help check incessant sprouting of low quality journals that usually will not stand the test of time.

CONCLUSION

The 10 factors considered in this study constitute important sources of the dystrophic problems/crises in research and publications in Nigerian universities. It also highlighted the adaptive and survival strategies of the Nigerian academics caught in the web of these problems/crises. While some have been salutary, others served to compound the bad situation by perpetuating unethical practices in the process.

In view of the formidable constraints on research and academic publications in Nigeria universities, this paper calls for an action plan that will provide adequate funding for research and assistance towards academic publications, as well as other outlets academicians can exploit to network their accessibility to research grants as to publish their academic products and stay afloat in the midst of competitively globalized knowledge ecosystem. As Shaw (2002) pointed out, "to take care of the two fundamental interests essential to academic careers, scholars need to partition some of their patience, persistence wisdom to cultivate human relations and to strategize a constructive relationship with stakeholders as well as ordinary players in the funding of publication process". It is the researcher's opinion, however, that publishing in international journals within or outside Africa is not the only test of scholarship for Nigerian scholars, nor does it ignore the politics of international publishing.

The point has to be made that Nigerian scholars must strive to confront and overcome obstacles and endeavour to make their mark even where the cards are so blatantly stacked against them.

REFERENCES

- Adu, F.I.: Challenges of University Management in Contemporary Nigeria. *An acceptance speech at the "Best Vice-Chancellor of the Year 2002" award ceremony at Abuja, Nigeria* (2003).
- Birdsall, W.: *A Report Prepared for the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL). Optimizing the Transformation of Knowledge Dissemination Towards a Canadian Research Strategy*. University of Ottawa, Ontario (2004).
- Igborgbor, C.G.: Refocusing Education in the Context of Research and Publication in Educational Institutions. Pp. 17-21 In: *Refocusing Education in Nigeria*. S. O. Oriafio (Ed.). Da-Sylva Influence, Benin (2002).
- Iyela, A.: Publish or Perish Syndrome: Fraudulent Practices Perpetrated by some Lecturers. Pp. 22-26. In: *Refocusing Education in Nigeria*. S. O. Oriafio (Ed.). Da-Sylva Influence, Benin (2002).
- National Universities Commission: Quality Assurance of Publications of Nigerian Academics: How do Nigerian Local Journals Measure with Regard to International Standards?". *Monday Memo*, Vol. 4 No. 24, June 13 (NUC, 2005).
- Okoh, P.N.: In Search of the Nigerian Academics. *Text of the 2nd Convocation Lecture of Delta State University, Abraka* (1995).
- Okebukola P.: Refocusing Education in the Context of Research Publication Trends. Pp. 42-47. In: *Refocusing Education in Nigeria*. S. O. Oriafio (Ed.). Da-Sylva Influence, Benin (2002).
- Okebukola, P.: Strategies for Stimulating Research and Development in Nigerian Universities. *Paper presented at the First Nigerian Universities Research and Development Fair* held at the International Conference Centre, Abuja: November 22 – 26 2004 (2004).
- Olukoja, A.: The Crises of Research and Academic Publishing in Nigerian Universities: The Twentieth Century and Beyond. *Paper for the 28th Annual Spring Symposium*, University of Illinois/ CODESRIA, Dakar, April, 25th – 27th 2002 (2002).
- Shaw, V.N.: Counseling the University Professor on the Securing of Research Grants and the Publishing of Research Products. *Education Today*, **123(2)**: 68-76 (2002).