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Some Epistemological Issues in the Conduct of Social and Behavioural Studies in the Faculty of Education of Nigeria Universities

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Abstract

A predominantly positivistic quantitative research tradition is uncovered through a survey of selected Nigerian universities with particular reference to the faculty of education. This predominance of what appears to be a one sided research enterprise and the neglect of the qualitative approaches is born out of the self-evident lack of history of research methods as well as the epistemological undertones underpinning research conduct. Important issues resulting from this lack of knowledge of the historical antecedents surrounding the adoption of the various methods are highlighted in this article. While concluding that the revelations here are not idle ones, this paper noted that unless issues are looked at from both sides of the coin, research within the Nigeria research tradition as well as in any other tradition where such problems exist will not only appear too didactic but could be made to appear as speculative and as deceptive as findings from such enterprise.

Keywords

Nigerian Research Tradition, Method of Data Collection, Method of Data Analysis, and Emerging Issues

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Some Epistemological Issues in the Conduct of Social and Behavioural Studies in the Faculty of Education of Nigeria Universities

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A predominantly positivistic – quantitative research tradition is uncovered through a survey of selected Nigerian universities with particular reference to the faculty of education. This predominance of what appears to be a one sided research enterprise and the neglect of the qualitative approaches is borne out of the self-evident lack of history of research methods as well as the epistemological undertones underpinning research conduct. Important issues resulting from this lack of knowledge of the historical antecedents surrounding the adoption of the various methods are highlighted in this article. While concluding that the revelations here are not idle ones, this paper noted that unless issues are looked at from both sides of the coin, research within the Nigeria research tradition as well as in any other tradition where such problems exist will not only appear too didactic but could be made to appear as speculative and as deceptive as findings from such enterprise. Key words: Nigerian Research Tradition, Method of Data Collection, Method of Data Analysis, and Emerging Issues

Introduction

The study upon which this article is based is derived from a survey research conducted by these authors between the 4th of December 2001 and the 7th of January 2002. The study aimed first at assessing the state of the art in relation to the methodological trends of research in the faculty of education of Nigeria's universities through some selected first, second, and third generation universities within a specified period of time. Secondly, the study aimed at demonstrating following Jones (1997) that the nature of the phenomenon under investigation will have important implications for the nature of the research design and the methodology used for investigating such social phenomenon. The survey was warranted by the researcher's academic commitment, which is inclined towards popularizing the qualitative research. It follows, therefore, that the researchers are interested in understanding what informs research orientation within the Nigeria universities.

Methodology

A survey research design was adopted in the conduct of this study. The study was conducted in five Nigerian universities selected through the purposive sampling, “a situation in which the researcher simply hand picks the sample because to his (or her) judgment they are typical to what he (or she) wants. In essence, the researcher selects the sample, which simply satisfies his (or her) specific needs” (Ofo, 1994, p. 15). These universities are the University of Lagos, University of Nigeria Nsukka, University of Benin, University of Port Harcourt and the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka Anambra State.

These universities were selected with the idea of generation in mind. Following this, the Universities of Nigeria Nsukka and that of Lagos represented the first generation universities. The University of Benin and that of Port Harcourt represented the second generation universities and the Nnamdi Azikiwe University representing the third generation universities. A major reason for this mode of selection was to investigate in what ways the span of the universities have influenced the methodological orientation within the chosen faculty.

The journey to these universities began with a request to the researcher’s university librarian (which is the University of Nigeria Nsukka) for an authorization note to facilitate easy access to the libraries of the various universities. One advantage gained from the use of the authorization and/or identification letter was that it enabled the researchers to gain access to some of the areas in the universities’ libraries where ordinarily access would have been most difficult. At the end of each visit, the researchers ensured that the university librarian or one of his/her assistants signed a space on the identification letter as confirmation that the researchers actually visited and used the university’s library. In qualitative research, this procedure would serve as the first test for validity defined as the technique employed by the researcher to indulge a Socratic distaste for self-deception (Wainwright, 1997).

The survey covers works completed between 1991 and 1999, a period of nine years in seven departments within the faculty of education spread across the selected universities. These departments are: Educational Foundations; Adult Education; Curriculum Studies; Educational Psychology; Educational Administration, Vocational Teacher Education and Educational Measurement and Evaluation. Works reviewed were selected through the purposive sampling. In this case, the researchers simply hand picked from on the shelf, four completed and displayed works from each of the selected universities. In all, 20 works were selected and reviewed by this researcher.

A Critique On Methodology

The survey concentrated on studies carried out at the doctoral level within the selected universities. Well interest on only doctoral studies is fundamental. The major reason for this is that works at this level must abide by certain conventions. One of these conventions is that doctoral research must be reason-bound and therefore must be ready to make some kind of new contributions to the existing body of knowledge. More so research at the doctoral level must be informed by the fact of prediction, understanding,

emancipation, and deconstruction (Lather, 1994). But how these conventions will be achieved through a particular research project depends to a great extent on the methodological orientation informing that study.

In the review of the 20 theses, emphasis was placed only on the methods used by the authors of the various studies reviewed. Common issues of general concern in all the papers have been presented in this article under a general sub-title "Emerging Issues". But where particular comments or critique became inevitable, these have been done individually in relation to the differential issues as they emerged in the various studies.

Thus, the first of these papers to be looked at here is this one by Odogwu (1993), which looked at the concept of time among primary school pupils and factors related to its development. The study was intended to cover all primary five and six pupils in Lagos metropolis out of which a total of 206 pupils were sampled for the research. The researcher (Odogwu, 1993) developed a number of instruments, which include: The Integral Time Concept Test; Mathematical Time Concept Test; Socio-Economic Background Questionnaire and Questionnaire on Teachers' Method of Teaching Time.

The researcher in analyzing the various scores obtained from these questionnaires used both the descriptive and inferential statistics. In all, a total of 64 statistical tables were constructed and in spite of the enormous work evidenced in the findings, the author of the work under review did not say for how long the study lasted.

The function of this paper is not to discredit any particular approach to investigating the empirical social world of man, but it is important to add as well that conventional wisdom holds that the investigation of certain social phenomenon demands a particular kind of fitting approach. Following this, a study, which was informed by the desire to understanding the young children's understanding of time, should have sought for an approach that enables the researcher (Odogwu, 1993) to ascertain the deeper meanings and explanations of the concept of time amongst those children, who took part in the study. It is the argument of this article that the unstructured in-depth interviewing used effectively would have enabled the author of the work under review to achieve this task. Equally the observational technique may have offered a more useful clue toward the understanding of the young children's practice of time because every activity within a school setting is time-guarded.

It is, therefore, the argument of this article that the weaknesses of the various questionnaires developed by Odogwu (1993), lie mainly in their failure to ascertain the deeper underlying meanings and explanations of the concept of time and the various factors related to its development even when the research findings are significant, valid, and reliable (Jones, 1997). In addition to the above, it is important to add following Collins (1998) that life does not consist of data, it consists of stories, and these stories are negotiated during social interaction involving another life. Consequently, to approach the study of the "young children's understanding of time" through pre-constructed and structured questionnaire will not only deny life that unique quality, but they may also conceal more than they intend to reveal.

Furthermore, the researcher's use of 64 statistical tables to represent the test scores gives one the impression that in spite of the constructed character of these instruments and the potential errors that are built into them, there is a sense in which these statistical techniques are used as if they constitute a machine for transforming information from data into valid conclusions (Hammersley & Gomm, 1997). One is

therefore tempted to ask what case these weaknesses make for the quantitative claims to the principle of generalisability, validity, and reliability?

A second paper to be brought into discussion here is this one carried out by Ewulonu (1991). This was a correlational survey, which aimed at establishing the relationship between stress management ability of secondary school principals and their organizational effectiveness. Of the 462 principals in the then Imo State secondary schools, 115 principals were sampled for the study. The researcher (Ewulonu, 1991) developed the Stress Management and Organisational Effectiveness Questionnaire (SMOEQ) on the basis of the hypotheses. The questionnaire was structured, and the author claimed to have used some research assistants in the administration of the questionnaires. In the analysis that followed data collection, both the descriptive and inferential statistics in which the Pearson product moment and the t-statistics featured. Again the author said nothing about the location of the study other than the fact that it was conducted in Imo State of Nigeria.

A similar study was conducted in Western Australia to uncover the dilemmas experienced by principals in dealing with the contradictions and pressures of school restructuring. The author of the study (Wildy, 1999) revealed that the aim of her study was to find out what is it about school restructuring that principals find so difficult. The author claimed that she collected data from three data sources namely: in-depth interviews with 10 principals selected from a group of a 1000 of them, and data was also collected from the longitudinal study of one of the principals. The third set of data was the 90 cases generated from her involvement in developing a standard framework for school principals.

This comparison becomes necessary in line with an earlier submission that the nature of the phenomenon under investigation determines to a great extent the nature of the research methods that will be adopted in its investigation. Central to these two studies (Ewulonu, 1991; Wildy, 1999) is the understanding of the organizational dynamics contingent upon effective running of particular school system. It then follows that where emphasis is placed on the understanding of the cultural context from which people derive meanings; and where such phenomena are complex and social in nature, the qualitative methods are deemed fit. In the case of the principal's stress management ability, this submission should have applied.

The complex nature of stress, a psychosocial phenomenon is such that may not be readily "susceptible to quantification and aggregation" (Liebscher, 1998, p. 669). Therefore to adopt the quantitative statistical approach in researching such phenomenon would not only hide more than it intended to uncover but pursued in this manner could possibly lead to deceptive, distorted, and banal findings made just for personal gains than for reality's sake.

This article thinks that one major expectation from research is a more richer understanding of the aspects of our "systems" that are considered problematic. This, therefore, calls for caution in the way that researchers apply research methods in investigating these problematic phenomena within the social system otherwise research could possibly turn away wittingly or unwittingly from its traditional knowledge seeking, knowledge enriching enterprise into a speculative and an endangered species.

Yet, another study that requires mention here is that carried out at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka Anambra State of Nigeria. The study investigated the “effectiveness of hazard exposure awareness and moral sensitization techniques in modifying adolescent pre-marital and adult extra-marital sexual attitudes” (Nwankwo, 1998). The author said he adopted the quasi-experimental design because one of the independent variables was manipulated under carefully controlled conditions as the situation permitted.

Control in research parlance is a situation in which a person or group of persons are used as a standard of comparison for checking the results of a scientific experiment. The skillful operations and workings of this control is what researchers, who use it refer to as manipulation. But, it appears (from common sense knowledge) that researchers embark upon the study of a particular phenomenon because it has been identified as a social problem, in order to understand the nature of such problem, and consequently attempt some solutions towards eradicating such social problem or adding to what researchers already know about it. In that wise, social research can be seen as an attempt to investigate and discover the historical and cultural context of a social phenomenon with the aim of understanding the dynamics of such phenomenon; through the interactional processes that may occur; meanings and solutions are made manifest.

But, if one is led into believing that manipulation and control are acceptable fundamental canon within the quantitative research tradition, then one may equally be forced to agree with the fact that the random sampling and most especially the statistical scoring which occasion such practice according to (Wainwright, 1997) may not be immune to the manipulative skills of an unscrupulous quantitative researcher.

That not with standing, Nwankwo (1998) carried out her study in the Awka Metropolis of Anambra State with a population consisting of all the married teachers and unmarried senior secondary school students in the area. From an unknown number of married teachers, 39 male and 81 female teachers were selected. Also from the number of unmarried students, an equal number of 90 males and females were selected. The instrument for the study was the People’s Attitudes Towards Sex Outside Marriage Questionnaire.

Note that this research instrument arguably appears to be a one-sided information-seeking questionnaire. Only those that are married qualify to answer the questions on the questionnaire as according to the title of the instrument, it was designed to elicit information on a particular kind of lived experience “sex outside marriage”. Yet, part of the participants was unmarried students. But if this argument does not succeed on the grounds that sex outside marriage defines sex with an unmarried partner (single and married persons inclusive), such acceptance may likely open the entire study to a very serious and fundamental problem. This is because it could be possible that from common sense experience, what informs sex in the life of a single person may differ at least on psychological and emotional grounds, from what informs sex in the life of the married persons. Bearing in mind that only one instrument was used in the study, questions are likely to be asked over how the above differences were taken care of by the one instrument.

Moreover, the researcher informed us that he trained four (4) counselors “adequately” as research assistants for the purpose of the study. But, although the researcher did not tell us for how long the training lasted, his claims to adequate training

becomes more problematic when one wants to operationalize his notion on the concept, as he failed to tell us what constitutes adequate training for such role in research. Also, the researcher was silent over the duration of the study. For the analyses, the researcher adopted the T-test in answering the research questions and the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) for the testing of the null hypotheses.

In her study, Ogheneakpobo (1997) attempted an investigation of the management strategies of inter-group conflicts in Nigeria universities. The researcher working from the University of Benin said that the design of the study was an ex-post-facto one because the independent variables such as the university type, location, management, and training had occurred. She equally informs us that the targeted population was all the students, staff, and members of the non-academic staff, who occupied managerial positions in Nigeria universities as at the 1995-96 academic session. But, the sample of the study was made up of 520 participants of whom 143 were students, 138 academic staff, 119 non-academic staff, and 120 respondents from the university management offices. This sample was from six universities.

To generate data for the study, the researcher designed the "University Administrators Inter-group Conflict Management Strategy Questionnaire". The researcher and her trained assistants administered the questionnaire and noted that the process was adopted to avoid the difficulty in collecting data through the mail. Personal contacts enhanced a better understanding of the questionnaire, the researcher claimed. Two important issues are prominent here. One is that of conflict, and the other is management. If this researcher has been exposed to the qualitative research methodologies, such as the unstructured in-depth interviewing, focus group discussions and the use of diaries, and if she has been aware of their usefulness in researching such lived experience as she chose to investigate, and had ignored them all, then something appears to be fundamentally wrong.

The word qualitative implies emphasis on process and meanings that are not measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency according to Carney, Joiner, and Tragou (1997). But the researcher's adoption of the "UNICMSQ" instrument in the study, gives one the impression that she engaged herself in such measurements in spite of the immeasurable nature of human behaviour. Earlier, Chenail (1992) has argued that a very important reason why researchers engage themselves in research activities is for them to be able to know something more of the phenomena from the emic aspects of the research-participant and not through the researcher's own pre-constructed instruments that have not been influenced by the nature of the research participants themselves.

Ogheneakpobo's (1997) study involved the cognitive and affective components of the selected participants of the study, and because conflict and the management of it were both involved, one would suggest that what was required in the study was an understanding of the longitudinal changes that characterize such social phenomenon as Jones (1997) has suggested. It follows, therefore, that such investigation needed an empathetic understanding of the dynamics of conflicts and of the management of it. Of course, such empathetic understanding has remained the key principle of the concept of "verstehen". Only methods which respect such principle methods, which will not measure the behavioural characteristics from the outside but from the in-depth meanings and interpretations that human being attach to their actions would count; anything short of that may likely lead to findings that are banal.

Although the researcher claimed to have used some research assistants, she did not tell us how many of them were involved. Equally, the researcher did not say anything on the duration of the study. However, the collected data were analyzed using the percentages, Z-test, the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and the Chi-square. The researcher also informed us that the statistical analyses were computer-aided through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Before examining some of the issues, which emerged from the survey, let us look at this last paper, this time one conducted at the University of Nigeria Nsukka. Ella (1993) carried out a study into the Idoma value systems with an attempt to understand the implications of these for Western education. This was a survey research because according to the researcher, the participants were reached in their natural environment. The study covered four (4) of the six (6) local government areas in Idoma land of Benue State. These included Otukpo, Okpokwu, Ado, Apa, and the population of the study according to the researcher, covered all the literate and non-literate adults and youths living in the districts. The population also included post-primary school heads and the zonal education officers serving in the districts.

The researcher used both the simple random and purposive sampling techniques in selecting the participants for the study, and it is important that the various numbers of participants used in the study are mentioned here. These numbers included 156 district heads, 118 kindred heads, 118 elderly women, 236 youth leaders of equal number of males and females, 24 officials from the zonal education offices and 92 principals and their deputies. In all, 744 individuals participated in the study.

The researcher (Ella, 1993) went ahead to develop research questionnaire for data collection in which he claimed to have trained some assistants adequately and also to have translated some of the questions into Idoma native language for those, who could neither read nor write properly. Note that part of the population for the study was non-literate Idoma men and women. Note also that the researcher claimed that a major reason for adopting the survey approach was to reach the Idoma people in their natural habitat. Given these reasons, one would suggest that a study that aimed at the improvement of knowledge of this unique type, should have offered it the life history approach made popular through the qualitative research paradigm. This type of study enjoys the emancipatory status of research. It, therefore, needed an approach that would help capture the historical and cultural context of the social phenomenon.

An emancipatory research would aim at making strange things familiar. It would also make open the hidden aspects of the dominant ideologies and in the case of the issue in question, this kind of study would have aimed at exposing the contradictory dominant ideologies that have shackled not only the minds of the people of Idoma land but also (with due respect) that of every citizen of this great nation since imperialism. If these were the aims of this great study, then 744 "subjects" may not have been necessary.

Ella's (1993) study needed an approach, which would get beneath the surface of some everyday common sense but also contradictory assumptions embedded in the Idoma tradition and of course, also, in the western values maintained through the pedagogy and in fact sustained through the pedagogic practices. In this way, the author would have been able to arrive at a deeper level of understanding that will not only be of academic interest to the researcher but also in the words of Wainwright (1997), will contribute to the development of critical consciousness amongst all concerned groups. In

that wise, a life history approach and/or the focus group discussion methods would have been most desirable.

However, with the questionnaire administered and data collected, the researcher set out to analyze the result using the means and standard deviation (descriptive statistics) approach. Note that the questionnaire was designed to elicit information regarding the traditional Idoma values, the determinants of these values, effects of western education on the traditional values and the new values in Idoma land, and the role of education in all. To reiterate, it has been established in the current research study by this researcher following evidence from published materials (Jones, 1997; Wildy, 1999) that the nature of the social phenomenon under study has very important implications for the designs and methods to be used in investigating such phenomenon.

It appears that some of the characteristics of the qualitative research, which qualify it to be most appropriate for a study of this kind are the following: qualitative research is naturalistic, and the researcher of the work under review informed us that he was interested in the natural habitat of the Idoma people. It equally draws upon multiple methods that respect the humanity and the individualities of participants in a particular study. These methods would have respected the differential mental and educational characteristics of the chosen participants of the study, such as the researcher experienced with the participants comprising both literate and non-literate indigenes of Idoma land.

The Emerging Issues

Now, the first major issue raised from the review of the unpublished doctoral theses is that of the role of theory to research. It was not quite clear what role theory played in the reviewed theses. What is a theory and how does it influence research? A theory is a statement of verifiable facts that creates awareness of a kind of situation (adverse or otherwise) linking its effects to the cause or causes with an attempt to offer some panacea. Theory provides the analytical concepts and the language to use in describing how we think. It gives us the background for research and also directs the way we conduct our studies. McCotter (2001) says that theory does not direct to one particular place rather theory opens for the researcher, a multi-dimensional approach at the level of explanation.

At the level of analysis according to Thio (1989), three types of theory are identifiable. The first is the low level theory in which we find very specific explanations or descriptions. The second type of theory is the middle level in which theories are developed that are broad enough to take in a whole class of events specific enough to be tested through observations and experiments. The third level of theory is that in which the picture of what the society is like is presented. These three levels taken together are called theoretical perspective. Theories “orient or direct us toward what is assumed to be the real nature of society” (Thio, 1989, p. 13).

At the doctoral level, therefore, an awareness of the various functions of theory becomes imperative. Students working at this level are expected to show a link between their works and the established theory or theories in their various areas of specialization and interest. This is called the theoretico-analytical framework from which the researcher will or has derived explanatory power. Any work that does not therefore abide by this convention may hardly receive academic approval. It will however be difficult to

conclude from the reviewed theses, how established this convention is within the faculty of education of Nigerian universities.

Theoretical perspective is the same thing as theoretical framework, which is different from theoretical review—a comprehensive study of related literature or works in a particular area of interest that the researcher has elected to investigate. Theoretical review may also refer to an exercise embarked upon by the researcher in order for him/her to show the existence of theories within a particular chosen field of learning. Showing the existence of theory is not enough. A good research it may be assumed should be able to show how a particular theory has influenced the entire research process from literature review until the research report is written.

This explanation is very important because the survey upon, which this research is based has shown that research students in the faculty of education of the sampled universities, did not show enough understanding of the role of theory to research. The effect of this is not only that these works contain evidence of lack of explanatory power but also some of them contain some fundamental mix-up between theoretical frameworks or perspectives and theoretical review, which is another name for literature review.

Related to the above is the issue of the history and geographical location of the study site. None of the works reviewed said anything about the history and location of the schools where these studies were conducted. Research has shown that the knowledge of the history and location of a study site can be a source of rich data for the study. In a recent study carried out to identify and investigate the meanings that West Australian high school teachers of English language attribute to critical literacy (CL), the authors (Stewart & O'Neill, 1999) claim that of great importance to them was the historical and geographical background of the study area. According to them, “the fact that the school was a state institution with a reputation for being in a ‘rough’ area provided a context that was also relevant to this study” (Stewart & O'Neill, 1999, p. 79).

In addition to the above, most of the works reviewed said nothing on the duration of their studies. Information on the duration of the study is very vital. A good research should be able to say something about the duration of the study and what the research-student or researcher has done at every stage of the process. By so doing, the researcher not only gives credibility—the canon upon which qualitative research findings are judged according to Carney, Joiner, and Tragou (1997) but also allows the reader to make sense out of what the researcher, (him or her) has done during the entire research process.

A third issue raised by this survey is that works reviewed, revealed some kind of gender feel. Every thesis reviewed during the survey is implicated in this gender play. One needs not check for the full names of the author or researcher before he/she is able to discover whether the reporter was a male or female researcher. The feminine gender predominated the analysis when the reporter is a female and vice versa. This sort of gender play is no longer acceptable in contemporary educational and academic writings.

Related to the above is the issue of dated materials used by the researchers of the reviewed works. Works reviewed were carried out between 1991 and 1999, and surprisingly some of these works (if not all) made use of materials published between 1950 and 1975. One impression that could be drawn from this kind of dated feel is that these researchers might be out of touch with certain changes and realities within the academic grounds.

Over reliance on old and outdated materials does not only hinder the growth of knowledge within a given research institution but also gives the critical reader the impression that the researcher has not done enough to merit the publication of such work. One supposes that research is simply conducted so that the researcher – he or she and the general public could have a richer understanding of some aspects of our experience, culture, and the environment. To achieve this, the researcher must be aware of the changes that have taken place overtime within his/her area of interest.

The fourth and perhaps most important issue raised by this survey is that of what Kanpol (1997) calls intellectual cynicism. Kanpol (1997) argues that some educational theorists have carried some air of cynicism not only to the works of others but even to their own works and into the entire body of knowledge, doubting and rejecting every idea they have fallen out of favour with. But, the cynicism being discussed here arising from the reviewed works, grew out of the impression that rigorous research is one that is statistically interpreted and that anything short of that is simply a mere activity. This sort of conclusion appears to be nothing other than a mere display of extreme skepticism and may not be very healthy for the growth of knowledge. The effect of this impression according to evidence from the reviewed works is that there is great emphasis on statistical representation of fieldwork data rather than on the need for in-depth search for the discovering of new knowledge or an addition to the existing ones.

A second fundamental problem (and the fifth issue) resulting from this cynicism borders on the fact that because emphasis is on the statistical representation of the interactions between variables, most of the works reviewed are expressed in line with the fears allayed by Ndu (1990). According to the author, the over representation of works in statistical terms and over reliance on statistics make these researchers to “lack the ability (and descriptive power) to adequately explain the contributions of these variables to the problems facing our educational organization” (Ndu, 1990) (cited in Ohuche and Anyanwu, 1990, p. 116).

From this analysis, one may be tempted to argue that some students/researchers simply embark on research in order for them to show their statistical prowess and then earn academic recognition for doing so. Well, this author is not arguing here that the statistical representation of data from a research process is wrong or unacceptable, rather the suggestion is that where it becomes absolutely impossible for statistical representation to offer meaningful and realistic findings, the qualitative canon embedded in the humanistic ideals should be respected in order for progress to be made within that particular field of knowledge. Presently, statistical representation appears to dominate research undertaking within this side of the globe.

No one person steps into the same water twice. So is the human life. The world is in a constant motion, nothing in the world is motionless and nothing is meaning – stagnant. This dictum takes us to the sixth issue. This issue is that of the concepts of manipulation and control of variables. Viewed from the deconstructionist perspective, the reality of the usage of these two concepts in relation to research validity, reliability, and generalizability, gives room for serious doubts, more so, when one tries to reconcile the meaning/usage of such concepts with Wards’ (1999) claims over the changing nature of meanings. According to the author, “the meaning of each thing concrete or abstract is not fixed... it is constantly changing... and because we are in constant engagement with the

world, meaning is constantly being modified if not completely changed” (Ward, 1999, p. 54).

Now let us consider the definition of variables given by Ofo (1994). A variable can be defined as:

anything changeable that could vary at different times or quantity or a quality that could vary which the researcher is interested in. The most important thing in attribute of the variable is its changeability. A variable has the ability of showing different samples. It is the behaviour of the variable that the researcher wants to find out. (Ofo, 1994, p. 45)

Variables are drawn from human social interactional activities that are meaning bound. It is these interactions that define the meanings that human beings make out of situations that are before them and these meanings are in constant state of flux. This dynamism inherent in human social behaviour is “influenced more by experience, social learning and reasoning than by physiological reflexes” (Obikeze, 1990, p. 6).

These constant state of flux in which variables are located raise fundamental questions when researchers speak in terms of manipulation and control. Variables could be better studied under natural conditions – a situation in which the researcher could observe without any artificial creations of whatever conditions that could influence the result of such an enterprise. Otherwise, too many manipulations and control could lead to results that may appear deceptive. Earlier, Ali (1990) has cautioned researchers on the manner with which research conditions are said to be manipulated and controlled. This is the way the author puts it,

Many empirical studies suffer from too many manipulations of the independent variables that the research conditions arising from such manipulations are so contrived and artificial that they cannot naturally occur or be expected to occur in any classroom situation. (Ali, 1990; cited in Ohuche and Anyanwu, 1990, p. 23)

Human behaviour cannot be likened to that of atom and molecule that are changeable if and only when their state is altered by another substance. The nature of human beings is such that they are engaged in constant sense-making processes of change. Given this, it will appear that the function of a good research, therefore, will be an engagement through appropriate methods in a search for in-depth understanding of these processes. It is only through this in-depth quest for understanding that the researcher can achieve what has been established in qualitative research as “*verstehen*” – an empathetic understanding of the social nature of the individuals.

Another important issue arising from the review of unpublished doctoral theses during the survey is that of student deskilling – an unintended outcome of what appears to be a one-sided research approach. One major aim of the programme of research methodology at the postgraduate level is to produce students, who will not only be knowledgeable in the processes of research practice but to apply same in carrying out their own research programme. Also the programme is aimed at equipping students, who on graduation would serve as professional researchers within their areas of specialization; those professionals, who would learn to use the skills they have learnt from school to

conduct research works either as independent researchers or as employed research fellows within existing academic or research institutes.

This survey has revealed that the authors of the reviewed theses may have been equipped or exposed to the act of research through one single research paradigm. This paradigm the survey has shown is geared towards all or most of the ideals that conflate into what is known today as the quantitative research approach. The big question one may be tempted to ask is – whether a university can afford to graduate students, who are knowledgeable only in one research paradigm?

Thus, rather than being a skilled and thoughtful researcher, knowledge of one single research paradigm be it quantitative or qualitative would prepare the student, a deskilled researcher. For sooner than the researcher has graduated from the institution, he/she would realize that the adoption of the quantitative research methods in an attempt to become legitimate researcher in the narrow sense that research is defined nowadays (Chenail, 1992) would offer little or no assistance to his/her research activities outside of the institution. Only then the individual researcher would realize how deskilled he/she has been.

Within American and European research traditions, literature abound to support the claims that “qualitative methods possess great potentials to provide valuable data that would remain inaccessible by other means; so much so that qualitative research courses are now being offered by graduate schools in departments of education...” (Horn, 1998, p. 603). This is in realization of the fact that, “courses based on a single methodological paradigm are inadequate preparation for the education professionals” (Liebscher, 1998, p. 670).

But, there is a far more worrying situation that the survey has exposed to this research-student. The survey has revealed a gradual but still unnoticed and dangerous situation leading to what the current thesis describes as “saturation syndrome”. Used technically rather than grammatically, saturation syndrome refers to a situation, which will occur when research readers/users may think that nothing new is forthcoming from research endeavors and may decide wittingly or unwittingly to stop reading research findings especially within educational institutions.

One immediate effect of these findings was that these authors were forced to consider a second or repeat survey. This second survey was conducted to ascertain whether there is any significant relationship between the mode of research within the faculty of education of Nigerian universities and the postgraduate research methodology programme/courses. This survey, which also involved the earlier mentioned universities, was a kind of content analysis. The findings of this second survey confirmed the mono-method research orientation as a reflection of the content of the postgraduate research methodology course content.

The findings of both surveys raise fundamental questions on the nature of research conduct at the graduate level. The first major question borders on whether a university can afford to graduate students, who are knowledgeable only in one research paradigm. The second question may like to ask what the implications of research findings that emerge from a mono-method research tradition will be from the perspective of the globalizing world of knowledge. For a research report to gain worldwide recognition or acceptance, such findings must be based on the realities or conventions that are on the academic grounds. Evidence coming from the doctoral theses and the postgraduate

research course content reviewed in the course of these surveys suggest that the methodological approach to research studies within the Nigeria context has important implications in relation to the above questions.

Conclusion

To conclude this article, these authors would like to emphasize that the decision to embark on the surveys that led to this paper was not an idle one. The survey has revealed that research enterprise at the postgraduate and/or graduate levels is severely endangered. Other reasons outside of the need or quest for knowledge, the expansion of it, and the finding of solutions to problems that beset not only the educational lives, but also the national lives have permeated the research tradition. It therefore seems, following Hammersley & Gomm (1997) that there are attempts outside of research communities to define the goals of research in terms other than the pursuit of knowledge. Personal interests seem to have taken over the place of societal interests in the quest for the understanding of the empirical social world.

The survey has not shown any significant difference between the generation classification within which the selected universities fell and the research methods in use, but there are marked differences in the number of works produced by the various faculties of the selected universities. The Universities of Nigeria Nsukka and Lagos had the highest number of works on display and that of the Universities of Port-Harcourt and Benin followed in order of ranking

The survey also revealed the predominance of the descriptive and inferential statistics in the analyses of fieldwork data. The surveys, therefore, reveal that the qualitative research paradigm is not popular within this side of the globe. This lack of popularity is, however, born out of the fact that research professionals lack knowledge of the operational principles guiding the practice of qualitative research. The result of this is that research activity within this tradition appears too didactic.

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