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# PERCEIVED CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN IMO STATE

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## Abstract

The study investigated the perceived challenges encountered by the undergraduate students in conducting research in tertiary institutions in Imo State. Two hundred and fifty undergraduate students that were randomly selected from five (5) tertiary institutions in Imo State participated in the study. A validated researcher designed questionnaire was used for data collection in the study. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The result indicated that insufficient time allocated to research project and practical skills in designing, analyzing and interpreting research data are students challenges in conducting formal research. It also revealed that students conduct of research in tertiary institutions is to satisfy institutional requirement rather than knowledge extension and societal transformation. Hence it was recommended that students should be equipped with reflective and action research skills for them to see the connection between emphasis in their degree programme and their research work in the field.

## Introduction

Research is a systematic process of finding out an answer to a critical question or searching for the solution to a problem that engages the interest and attention of a researcher. Problem in research is any obstacle or hindrance which causes worry and tends to prevent people from realizing desired goals (Chukwudire 2005).



Social systems, institutions and organizations have their unique problems which could be investigated to proffer solutions. These problems, through research, could be minimized or removed completely in order to ensure success and progress, for individuals, institutions and society at large.

The role that research plays in education cannot be over-emphasized. The root of any solution to educational problems lies in detailed, rigorous and practice-related research (Egbujao, 2010). According to O'Brien and Gies (2003), research is the most important tool for advancing knowledge, achieving progress, and enabling people to relate more effectively to their environment, accomplish their purpose and resolve conflicts. It also plays important roles in institutions as it helps to generate classroom practices which are appropriate to the social, cultural and physical contexts needed for national transformation.

The requirements for research in tertiary institutions involve identification of research problem, proposal submitted to a research committee, and presentation of a final report. Studies such as Agbo and Ogbe (2004) and Uzoma and Dimson (2008), have shown that the quality of some research reports is often far from desirable. Most of the researches are usually assessed as acceptable or good, either because those responsible want to help the students to graduate with their mate, or those in-charge do not have the appropriate expertise to properly supervise and evaluate the reports. At the end, most of these reports, whether good or bad remain unutilized (No one seems to make use of them).

The idea of conducting research to many students is just to satisfy institutional requirements for award of degrees or diplomas and thus making them carry out research in superficial way. According to Pham (2006), many students believed that they themselves cannot generate knowledge through conducting research for national transformation, that research project seems to be reserved for those considered experts or professional researchers. They believe that with their heavy workload (lecture hours), students do not have enough time to do research for national transformation or even think about it.

In addition to student factors the current way Nigerian institutions evaluate research project is inadequate, it encourage students to conduct superficial research only for academic qualification interest. There are procedures that a researcher must go through if they want to conduct a formal research. However many supervisors/evaluators see these as just the formalities which did not help to ensure the quality of research.

It is against this background that this study investigated the challenges of conducting research for national transformation in Nigerian higher education. This is with a



view of making relevant suggestions that bother on conducting formal research by students of Nigerian tertiary institution. To guide the study, the following research questions were raised.

#### Research Questions

- (1) What problems do students encounter in conducting research work?
- (2) What are the general attitudes of students toward research work?
- (3) How do students perceive the supervision/evaluation of research work in tertiary institutions in Imo State?

#### Methodology

The study was a descriptive survey research. There was no manipulation of any variable in the study. Five tertiary institutions in Imo State were selected for the study. These are Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State University, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Owerri, Federal Polytechnic Nekede and Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo. Two hundred and fifty final year undergraduate students (who are writing their research reports) were randomly selected for this study. The questionnaire used for the data collection had a 4 point response format with 15 items. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of reliability obtained was 0.73 meaning. Means and standard deviation were used for data analysis. Scale means of 2.5 was used for interpretation of the items.

#### Results

The results of the data analysis are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

**Research Question 1:** What problems do students encounter in conducting research work?



**Table 1: Summary of the problem encountered in conducting research work**

S/n	Problems encountered in conducting research;	Mean	SD	Ranking
1.	Insufficient time allocated to research project	2.63	1.06	2 <sup>nd</sup>
2.	Problem of initiate and complete original research work	2.29	0.99	4 <sup>th</sup>
3.	Practical skills in designing, organizing and interpreting research information.	2.54	1.01	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4.	Problem of accessing and using information effectively.	2.09	0.96	5 <sup>th</sup>
5.	Insufficient fund needed for carryout research	3.13	1.18	1 <sup>st</sup>

**Table 1** shows the problems encountered by the students of tertiary students in conducting research work. It revealed from the table that insufficient fund needed for carryout research, insufficient time allocated to research project and practical skills in designing, organizing and interpreting research information with mean values of 3.13, 2.63 and 2.54 respectively were seen as major problems encountered by the undergraduate students in conducting research in tertiary institutions in Imo State.

**Research Question 2:** What are the general attitudes and aspirations of students, toward research work?

In addition to student factors the current way Nigerian institutions evaluate research project is inadequate, it encourage students to conduct superficial research only for academic qualification interest. There are procedures that a researcher must go through if they want to conduct a formal research. However many supervisors/ evaluators see these as just the formalities which did not help to ensure the quality of research. It is against this background that this study investigated the challenges of conducting research for national transformation in Nigerian higher education. This is with a



**Table 2: Summary of the attitudes and aspirations of students toward research work**

S/n	Item	Mean	SD	Ranking
1.	Conducting research in tertiary institution is just to satisfy institutional requirement.	3.17	1.01	1st
2.	Undertaking a formal research work is reserved for professional researchers.	1.91	1.00	5th
3.	Project writing has remained the most disturbing aspect of degree and if possible should be removed.	2.48	0.98	4th
4.	Students themselves cannot generate knowledge through conducting their own research.	2.56	1.17	2nd
5.	Formal research procedure such as project defence is a distraction, and a waste of time and resources.	2.52	1.12	3rd

Table 2 shows students attitude and aspirations toward research work. It revealed that students perceived carrying out research in tertiary institutions as just to satisfy the institutional requirements. They also believed that students themselves cannot generate the knowledge to carrying out their research and also seen project procedures such as defense as a distraction and waste of time.

**Research Questions 3:** How do the students perceive the supervision and evaluation of research work in Imo State tertiary institutions?



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S/n	Problems encountered in conducting research;	Mean	SD	Ranking
1.	Insufficient time allocated to research project	2.63	1.06	2 <sup>nd</sup>
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Table 2 shows students attitude and aspirations toward research work. It revealed that students perceived carrying out research in tertiary institutions as just to satisfy the institutional requirements. They also believed that students themselves cannot generate the knowledge to carrying out their research and also seen project procedures such as defense as a distraction and waste of time.

**Research Questions 3:** How do the students perceive the supervision and evaluation of research work in Imo State tertiary institutions?



**Table 3: Summary of perception of students on supervision and evaluation of their research work**

S/n	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Those in charge of research evaluation do not have the appropriate expertise to supervise and evaluate research reports.	1.98	1.16	Reject
2.	Some supervisors seem to encourage forms of unethical/corrupt practices in project writing i.e. plagiarism	2.6	1.03	Accept
3.	Many supervisors/evaluators see research formal procedure as just the formalities which do not ensure the quality of research.	2.27	1.10	Reject
4.	Project supervisors most times frustrate student researchers by not given them enough attention.	2.98	.98	Accept
5.	Supervision of project in some tertiary institution is a money making avenue.	2.83	.06	Accept

Table 3 shows how the students perceived supervision and evaluation of their research work. It revealed from the table that students perceived supervision and evaluation of their research work as a money making avenue and a means of frustrating student researchers by lecturers. They also seen some supervisors encouraging forms of unethical/corrupt practices in project writing.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study revealed the challenges encounter by undergraduates in Imo state in conducting research work. As shown in table 1, respondents indicated insufficient time allocated to research project, practical skills in designing organizing and interpreting research information, and insufficient fund needed in research as their challenges in conducting research. The study was supported by Sawyer (2004), who argued that successful research cannot be conducted in an environment



devoid of effective system of information retrieval and utilization, funding and sponsorship, and research management. It is pertinent to note that these challenges may discourage students from conducting formal research and settle for alternatives. Also the result showed the general attitude and aspiration of students toward conducting research. students conduct of research in tertiary institution is just to satisfy institutional requirement, because they believe that they themselves cannot generate knowledge through conducting their own research and also categorized formal research procedures such as proposal and report defence as waste of time. This was supported by Pham (2006) who opined that many students believed that they themselves cannot generate knowledge through conducting research for national transformation, that research project seems to be reserved for those considered experts.

It was also indicated from the study, the perception of undergraduate students on supervision and evaluation of their research reports. As shown In table 3, students perceived that some supervisors encourage forms of unethical practices in project writing, such as plagiarism, frustration of students researchers by not given them enough attention, and turn project supervision to money making ventures. Thus the students are capable of indicating the institutional challenges in term of supervision that affect writing quality research. This result therefore must have been the reason why some graduate students prefer conducting superficial research.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations were made.

- Students should be equipped with reflective and action research skills for them to see the connection between their degree concentration and research work.
- The students should realize that information gained from research could boost their knowledge in relation to national transformation.
- More time should be allocated to preparing students to write and conduct formal research work.
- They should encourage to make domestic issues the focus of their research to debunk the insinuation of only experts or professional researchers could do research.



- Supervisors of projects should expose their student researchers to local, regional and even international journals to enhance their skills of real research conduct
- Finally, evaluation of research reports should be based on standard procedure of conducting research

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