TOWARDS CHOOSING RESEARCH TOPIC

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May, 2010

Abstract

The paper revisit the concept and essence of research especially in academic environment. It discusses what it takes to decide on the choice and formulation of relevant and researchable topic in an area of study. Strategies to adopt in the choice and formulation of research topic were highlighted. It concludes that since research is obviously necessary for the existence, survival and advancement of any system, establishment and society, what is needed is the ability and capacity to identify relevant area of research for the choice and formulation of relevant and researchable topic which by-product would bring about the much needed change for continued existence, survival and advancement of the target audience.

Introduction

It is generally agreed that man, by his nature and characteristics, is inquisitive. He has an inquiry mind that continues to motivate and stimulate him to consciously and/or unconsciously seek to find out more about his immediate environment and sometimes beyond it in order to be relevant, control, maintain, sustain, improve and advance it for his individual and/or collective benefits and gains as well as cope with the exigencies of the time. Similarly, man's adequacies or inadequacies in any given circumstance and at all times due to availability or inavailability of requisite information, education, knowledge, skill and experience, more often the not, continually lead to engaging in conscious or unconscious exploratory processes, procedures, exercises and activities aimed at finding out 'Where', 'What', 'Why' and 'When' about anything imaginable. It may also lead to engaging in the experimentation of ideas, thoughts and experiences about any imaginable phenomenon, procedures or processes with the view to finding out 'What', 'If', 'Why', 'How', and 'When' about it so as to respond to, conclude or take any appropriate action or decision on the matter or issue at stake.

The Concept of Research

Essentially, the exploratory and/or experimental activities, procedures, exercises and processes carried out consciously or unconsciously to find out about something or appropriately respond to a given stimuli for a given purpose can be referred to as 'research'. Conventionally, it is a systematic search for approach to solving problems, finding solutions to problems, getting to know more about something or getting to discover new thing. According to Suleiman (2007), 'It is a systematic approach for providing answers to questions' and ' a systematic careful enquiry or examination to discover new knowledge for a specified purpose'.

By and large, research can be conceived as scientific and unscientific. A research is said to be unscientific especially when it is unsystematically or unconsciously carried out without due regard to the conventional method and procedures of conducting research even when the desired or expected results were obtained. On the other hand, a research is said to be scientific when it is consciously or systematically carried out taking into consideration all the conventional methods and procedures of carrying out research even when the desired expected results were not obtained.

The Essence of Research

The essence of research, especially scientific is to find out, verify, discover, investigate, identify, establish, examine, determine and assess issues, circumstances, phenomena, events, etc with the view to respond to, nurture, improve upon, establish relationships, modify, sustain, maintain, advance, treat, develop, correct, implement, introduce, experiment, educate and inform. The purposes/objectives of research obviously point to the fact that the level of existence, advancement and relevance of man will largely depend upon the extend

of his involvement in research (scientific and unscientific) and how he is able and willing to utilise the outcome of the research to his advantage.

The importance and relevance of research as a formal way and means of enquiring for the overall development and advancement of systems, institutions and establishments can be appreciated with the establishment sections, units or divisions titled 'Research and Development' in such organisations to continually engage in formal research for variety of strategic purposes that would make it meet up to expectation or become a leader among others. Corrorarily, academic institutions, particularly the tertiary institutions, have as a policy that as part of requirements for the award of any type of degree and postgraduate diploma, the awardee must conduct and submit the report of an independent research on any area of interest or choice within one's area of specialization in form of project, thesis or dissertation. Unlike projects, theses and dissertations are usually defended before a panel of specialists. This expectation presupposes that the student must have to have the basic skills and knowledge to successfully carryout formal/scientific research to qualify for the award of the certificate in view.

Choosing Research Topic

The first step in carrying out a successful scientific research for any purpose at all, regardless of where and when, is the determination of a suitable topic of research in an area of interest/choice. This is also the case with students vying for a given certificate at the end of the programmes they are pursuing. In order to come up with suitable and researchable topic of research, it is important that the researcher decides on:

(A) **Area of Study**

Researcher, as a policy and strategy, must identify and decide on an area of study from where research is to be conducted. Such area of research could be suggested for the researcher or chosen by the researcher himself/herself. An area of study could be identified and chosen due to:

- Its relevance to the area of specialization of the researcher.
- The urge to specialize in an area.
- The zeal to have a breakthrough in the area.
- The need to solve a problem especially when it is parenial.
- The need to improve upon an existing state of affairs.
- The need to identify or discover the causal relationships of issues, phenomena, actions, etc.
- The need to discover differences between or among issues, phenomena, state of affairs, etc.
- The need to confirm, re-affirm, experiment, re-establish or corroborate an existing finding in the area of study.
- The need to have a paradigm shift in the state of affairs of or contemporary thoughts in the area of study.

(B) The Type of Research to Conduct

A researcher may decide to conduct either:

- Basic Research when it essentially focuses on searching for new facts and evidence, or
- Applied Research when it involves collecting and using available facts, data and information to address issues or find solutions/answers to given problems.

(C) The Nature of Research to Be Carried Out

A researcher may decide to carry out

- Empirical Research when it is designed to be based on observations, deductions and reasoning which may sometimes lead to speculative judgments or conclusions especially when it is not tested.
- Theoretical Research when it seeks to logically relate propositions to explain causal relationships in a subject matter or seeks to summarise or articulate especially complex observations and deductions in abstract forms or terms.
- Cumulative Research when it tries to extend or build upon the existing knowledge, skill and experience in order to correct, modify, extend, refine, re-define, affirm, re-confirm or re-establish older procedures, skill, knowledge and experience.
- Non-ethical Research when it does not focus on or is not keenly interested in the goodness or otherwise of a given social action related to the subject matter per se.

(D) Reasons for Conducting Research:

Variety of reasons could stimulate the conduct of a research; be it commissioned, non-commission, academic, collaborative, etc. Thus

- Research may be conducted purely for academic exercise and advancement of knowledge and intellectual horizon especially when it is intended to know more or understand more about something, phenomenon or issue for mere self satisfaction, education, understanding, information and actualization or have a breakthrough.

- Research may be conducted due to desire to do something better or improve upon the existing situation of a given phenomenon or system in order to make it more effective, efficient and responsive.
- Research may be conducted to resolve, solve or have solution to methodological, procedural, historical, technological, technical, economic, social, political and managerial/administrative problems or encumbrances.
- Research may be conducted to provide final answers/solutions to recurring or persistent problems especially when they are cogs in the wheel of progress of systems, phenomena, issues and society resulting into perpetual structural imbalances, unsatisfactory state of affairs, continued resistance to change, etc.

The foregoing expectations for conducting any typical research will largely assist researcher to determine the delimitations of the research as they would:

- Create a better understanding of the phenomenon and issues in focus;
- Define properly the problems so as to garner available but relevant data, facts, ideas, knowledge and information;
- Analyse and interpret collected data accordingly; and
- Package and communicate the outcomes of the research to the target audience.

(E) Issues of Concern

Other issues to consider in the choice of research topic by researcher include the capacity and ability to:

- Determine interested area of research/area of study single handedly without the assistance of anyone or with the assistance of someone

especially the supervisor(s), colleagues, other staff/specialists and individuals knowledgeable in the area regardless of their location.

- Determine and identify differences in time, location and circumstances when an identified area of research had been studied much earlier.
- Determine and identify the key variables and concepts that may influence the choice of research methodology, research design, population, sampling procedures/size, statement of problem, research questions and hypotheses, methodology of data collection and analyses and the likely limitations.
- Identify and determine the time and timing of the research accomplishment to fall within when the required data can easily be collected, analysed and report written and presented within the given time schedule.
- Identify and determine the extent and relevance of the requisite human and material resources needed to successfully accomplished the research.
- Provide at least simple but reasonable answers to such mundane questions as:

❖ 'Why embarking on the study';

❖ 'What is the likely outcome and benefit of the research?'

❖ 'What is the relevance of the research to your area of interest, study or specialization?'

❖ 'What is the difference between your research and that of .....?'

❖ 'Who stands to gain directly, indirectly' or more from the likely outcome of the research?'

- ❖ 'What contributions would the research or its outcome make to the existing knowledge and literature in the area?', etc.

Strategies for Choosing Research Topic

Regardless of which type and nature of formal research to conduct and for what purpose, there is the need to employ some strategies in the choice of appropriate and researchable topic. This is necessary due to the numerous expectations before the researcher to hit the jackpot and avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts. Some of the strategies required of researcher to choose wisely a researchable and relevant topic include:

- ❖ Studying the generated titles of research conducted in one's relevant area of interest/choice within and outside the department.
- ❖ Studying print and electronic bibliographies and dissertation abstracts compiled by indexing and abstracting services for researches conducted in the area of study.
- ❖ Consulting with colleagues, specialists and staff knowledgeable in the area of study in both formal and informal relationships.
- ❖ Checking from libraries and digital institutional repositories for reports on researches conducted in the area of interest/study.
- ❖ Checking from the Internet and other relevant on-line network environments for possible information on reports of researches conducted or are being conducted in the area of study.
- ❖ Studying both electronic and print media including the websites/pages of institutions, organisations and individuals to identify possible areas or research.

- ❖ Developing self confidence and determination to conduct research in the area of study.
- ❖ Being educated/knowledgeable in the interested area of research so as to be able to carryout environmental scanning for definite decision on the area of study from where to formulate research topic.
- ❖ Checking from the section of previous research reports for the heading on 'Further Research' to identify interested area of research from where topics could be formulated.
- ❖ Introducing new concepts/variables such time, area of location, research methodology, etc so as to adopt previous topic of research earlier conducted.
- ❖ Collaborating with supervisor for guidance in the choice and formulation of research topic (Mohammed: 2001).

Goodness of Research Topic

Research topic is said to be good when

- ➢ It is researchable.
- ➢ It is relevant to the area of focus/study.
- ➢ It contains relevant concepts and variables
- ➢ It is devoid of misconcepts or misinterpretations of facts and ideas.
- ➢ Its population and respondents can easily be determined.
- ➢ The suitable research methods to adopt can easily be determined.
- ➢ The type and nature of data to collect can easily be determined.
- ➢ The research instruments to use can easily be determined.
- ➢ It can easily be distinguished from other researches conducted in the area of research/study.

Concluding Remarks

It is a known fact that the by-product of any research conducted and for what purpose has some significant effect on the level of existence and survival of the target audience, system, establishment or society. What is therefore needed is the ability and capability of the researcher to identify relevant area of research for the choice and formulation of relevant and researchable topic which by-product would bring about the much needed change for continued existence, survival and advancement of the target audience,

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