



WWJMRD 2018; 4(7): 67-72
www.wwjmr.com
International Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal
Refereed Journal
Indexed Journal
Impact Factor MJIF: 4.25
E-ISSN: 2454-6615

Orim, Samuel Orim
Department of Special
Education University of
Calabar, Nigeria

Orim, Matthew Ashike
Department of Special
Education University of
Calabar, Nigeria

Lazarus Udie I
Department of Special
Education University of
Calabar, Nigeria

Challenges of Research on Persons with Disabilities in Nigerian Universities

Orim, Samuel, Orim, Orim, Matthew Ashike, Lazarus Udie I

Abstract

This study investigated challenges of conducting research on persons with disabilities and by extension in special needs education in Nigerian Universities. The participants consist of 10 academic staff, 10 post graduates and 15 undergraduates purposively sampled from five Federal Universities who run special education programmes. Survey design was adopted; a 24 item questionnaire validated by experts in relevant fields with reliability of 0.78 determined through test-retest method was used as instrument for data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, findings revealed that poor internet services, cost of publication, power supply, lack of funding, attitudes of university community, myth about disability and non-utilization of research findings are obstacles to the conduct of research on disability. It was recommended among several others that stakeholders like Tertiary Education Trust Fund should make special allocation for research in special education in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Disability, research, challenges, special education

Introduction

Research is one of the most used instruments for solving problems and acquiring knowledge in the society. The fact that man on daily basis is confronted with problems and desires knowledge means research should be a life style and not an event. The difference between developed and developing countries, academics and businessman is the value attached to research. Major inventions that have brought comfort and convenience either in business, academics, farming, leisure, sports etc are products of research. Historically, it has developed over the years. For instance in Ebuasu native community in Cross River, Nigeria snake bite was a problem that threaten the existence of people and a grand patriarch decided to research into the use some herbs on victim and got result, he became source of medication for snake bites in the community. As valuable as the procedures he used were, they are not very relevant in modern treatment of snake bites. From the foregoing it is obvious a good research is problem and solution focused as well as being centric to all fields of human endeavors. Modern research must be scientific, objective, systemic and verifiable to be able to solve the identified problem. This is gives research advantage over other sources of knowledge like tradition, and personal experience. It is commonly understood as a systematic investigation to gather and analyze information that can be generalized to a larger population with similar property. Harold (n.d) sees it as systemic investigation into and study of materials, sources etc in order to establish facts and reach conclusions. The author also holds that it is an endeavor to discover new or collate old fact by scientific study of a subject. In a more comprehensive way Mcmillan (2000) defined research as systemic investigation into a problem or phenomenon through generally accepted procedures which are, identification of problem, stating a testable hypothesis or research question, choosing appropriate design, gathering of data from dependable sources, analyzing data to generate results and drawing of conclusions based on findings.

From the above, it evident that research and problems are bed mate. This means that where there is a problem(s) they should be research. According to Andy (2016) educational system in Nigeria is still bedeviled with many problems that require urgent, critical and specific

Correspondence:
Orim, Samuel Orim
Department of Special
Education University of
Calabar, Nigeria

attention because of poor attitude to research. If this is true about educational system in Nigeria it means that special education as aspect needs action research to address issues that has held it bond from developing at par with other countries like Canada, USA, the Czech Republic to mention but a few. This implies that to move education system forward in Nigeria generally and special education in particular stakeholders must embrace culture of research. That is, they must apply scientific research procedures in solving problems peculiar to special education and its clients, persons with disabilities (PWDs). Special educational needs is an aspect of general education that is concern with the practice of systemic arrangement of material, procedures adapted, equipment, curriculum in accessible setting to meet individual needs of children who are exceptional and cannot learn in conventional instructional setting or procedures. The word Exceptional as used here means significant deviations in the development and growth of children generally accepted in a particular society, such deviations could be in the anatomy, physiology, intellectual, emotions, behaviours of the children. These deviations could result in making a child either positively (gifted and talented) or negatively (those with disabilities) exceptional. The implication of having a child who is exceptional is there is a problem(s) to be solved (Orim, 2015). The mandate of Nigerian universities is to provide high level manpower, conduct research and carry out community services. These cannot be achieved without research in all areas including persons with disabilities.

Among its many programmes is special education designed to increase access to education and equalize life opportunities to all irrespective of ability or disability in line with global policies like inclusion, SDG goal 4. On the basis of this Nigerian Universities admit student with /without special needs (Unical, 2015). To achieved this mandate is instructive to research into areas of difficulties to improve the quality of programme and services. This is why study on challenges of research on persons with disabilities and by extension special needs education has become every imperative.

Challenges of Research on Persons with Disabilities in Nigerian Universities

Research as potent approach to solving problems anywhere or field and in every field has challenges. What makes the difference is how these challenges are handled. One the principal aim of universities is to conduct research primarily to bring solutions to problems and valuable ideas for improve service delivery. Special educational needs as discipline or programme in Nigeria is still at its infant stage compare to what is obtainable in other universities in developed countries. This is the major reason research why effort to carry out research in this area should be a priority to stakeholders. Unfortunately, experiences have shown that there are challenges that hinder research involving persons with disabilities or special educational needs which are peculiar. It is on this basis that Davis (2014) recommends that Nigerian Universities should embrace a good research culture as apriority.

A reflection on author's experience during the conduct of research on prevalence of learning disabilities among pupils in Calabar metropolis was reminder that lack of conducive research environment is one of the cardinal

issues that should attract the attention of concerned stakeholders in universities. Internet facilities are very paramount in contemporary society especially in an academic environment like the university. McDonal (2000) opined that internet has become a household word, it has blossomed in the past decades with the potentials of connecting millions of people for varied purposes, it is very quick, inexpensive access to hundreds of valuable educational research documents, journals, reports and websites are provided to enhance research and other activities. As an institution with research mandate it is rational that every necessary facility especially most pressing ones like internet should be uninterruptedly provided for at least staff and students for academic activities. Unfortunately, this is stills a dream, meaning that researches including those involving PWDs suffers a setback. At best individuals who must conduct good research subscribed heavily to internet services with their modem. The task of linking professional colleagues to share ideas, experience, source for very current materials, participating on online conferences is roll out. To compound the above problem availability of power (electricity) is a night mare. Additionally publishing research findings is very expensive beyond the reach of average researcher.

Attitudes towards persons with disabilities in Universities are generally negative and like Helen Keller remarked, their problem is not their impairments but the dispositions of the university community. This is expressed when research focused on disability, participants delay or make data collection difficult even when research ethics are observed. This is worst when the researcher is a primary stakeholder. The absence of adequate services of interpreters to communicate with participants who have hearing impairments make researcher – participants' relationship very difficult. Good research ethics demands that instrument(s) should be barrilled when dealing with the visually impaired but embosser and other assistive technology are not available even for official use. This is why Orim and Orim (2014) noted that conducting research involving PWDs is in itself a problem that requires research. Yinka (2015) studied interaction pattern among students researchers in Nigerian Universities and find out that those without disabilities are reserved in their interactions due misconceptions that interacting with them could result to have a child with disabilities especially with visually impaired. This is one of the challenges inclusive education is designed to properly and promptly address among members of the University community in Nigeria. Research that will solve problems is costly. Conducting research that involves these clients is twice the cost of working with those without disabilities. To be able to cope the cost funding opportunities are needed and most unfortunately funding the funding culture is lacking, this affect the quality of research done. While in some universities in developed countries research in special education needs adequately and promptly funded it is contrary in Nigerian Universities (Brown (2015). Studies further indicate that funding research in special education is not a priority in universities. It has been observed that this is most common when early career researchers are involved. However, it is generally believed that under funding of education in Nigeria is partly responsible for this situation. This does not only hinders the growth of

special education and improve service for PWDs it also prevent Universities for becoming visible in the global research community and a research center on disabilities (Peters, 2014). It has been urged that university that has not embrace the culture of funding research irrespective of the field of study is gradually becoming absolute because it is increasingly evident that research extremely critical and important to the growth of any university irrespective of location. For a knowledge-driven world, investment in research and development is sine quo non for a nation building. Orim (2015) posits that although Federal government through Tertiary Education Trust Fund is sponsoring research such effort has not yielded the desired result due to sharp practices among stakeholders.

Research up take is the primary reason for conducting research, in developed countries industries sponsor researches so that they use their findings to improve their products or services. It is amazing that the percentage of research uptake among stakeholders in special needs education is less than 2% in Universities in Nigeria. One could ask, what is the essence conducting research when the findings will be end in shelves? Hens (2015) in a study on the usability of research findings among Universities discovered that it is partly because researchers cannot widely publish findings of their research due cost and lack visibility of most Journals in the system. The implication of this is that problems that would have been addressed are still stirring and reducing the productivity of the system. It will not be over statement if one concludes that special education programmes and services are still where they were decades ago because of issues articulated above.

Statement of the Problem

Special needs education and its clients persons with disabilities have not benefit from the potentials that research has to move it from the present level of development characterized by recycled problems like poor service delivery, lack innovation in the design of its programmes, use of non-research based pedagogical procedures and principles. Despite the professional competence and acquired research skills practitioners in Nigerian universities are yet to optimally benefit from research grants, their personal efforts to conduct research to

improve on professional practice is hindered by lack of reliable internet access, frequent power outage, negative attitudes to special education/ PWDs among other challenges. Students particularly those with special needs are not properly and professionally prepare to compete with their peers globally due absence of research facilities and conducive environment. Thus, the problem of this study focuses on challenges of conducting research that involves PWDs in Nigerian Universities.

Research question: The study is guided by a research question framed as, what are the challenges that hinders the of conduct research that involves persons with disabilities in Nigerian universities?

Methodology: This study adopted a survey as its design to give the researcher opportunity to investigate the problem under focus in five Federal universities that runs special education programmes. Purposive sampling was used to select 35 participants which consist of 10 academic staff, 10 post graduate and 15 undergraduate students in the department of special education, university of Calabar, Jos, Ibadan, Uyo, and Kano. The researcher formerly wrote the HOD got approval, sought and got the consent of each participant. Research ethics were complied with. Sampling technique used is most appropriate because according to Mcmillan (2000) it entails the use of participants that are knowledgeable in the subject matter of the research and will provide accurate amount of information needed by the researcher. Questionnaire was designed by the researcher, validated by experts in special education and educational measurement, reliability of 0.78 was determined using test-retest method and considered good enough to be used as instrument for data collection. The instrument was email to the participants and return same to the researcher. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of percentage and mean to enhance understanding by readers irrespective of his/her background.

Presentation of Results

Research question: what challenges hinders conducting research that involves persons with disabilities in Nigerian Universities?

Table 1: shows participants response (percentage) on challenges of conducting research involving PWDs

S/NO	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
	Internet facilities				
1	Internet services is always available for my research work	N=3 8.6%	N=5 14.4%	N=7 20%	N=20 57%
2	There are no internet services for staff and students use in the University	N=19 54%	N=5 14.5%	N=8 23%	N=3 8.6%
3	The use of modem is not common in the university	N=4 11.4%	N=4 11.4%	N=6 17.2%	N=21 60%
	Conducive research Environment				
4	Staff and students have comfortable offices/reading rooms where they carry out their research activities	N=2 5.7%	N=7 20%	N=8 23%	N=18 51.3%
5	There are no electronic and print textbooks on special education in the library	N=19 54%	N=8 23%	N=4 11.5%	N=4 11.5%
6	There are no accessible computers for staff and students use for research purposes	N=17 48.6%	N=9 25.7%	N=6 17.1	N=3 8.6%
	Cost of publication				
7	I publish my research work easily/frequent	N=5 14.3%	N=5 14.3%	N=5 14.3%	N=20 57.1%
8	There are high impact factor Journal in Nigerian Universities	N=6 17.1%	N=3 8.6%	N=8 22.9%	N=18 51.4%

9	Journals in the universities are very accessible online	N=1 2.9%	N=2 5.7%	N=3 8.6%	N=29 82.9%
Electric Power Supply					
10	There is limited power supply in the University	N=17 48.6%	N=7 20%	N=6 17.1%	N=5 14.4%
11	I depend completely on the use of generator to do my research	N=20 57%	N=7 20%	N=3 8.6%	N=5 14.4%
12	I always fail to meet publication datelines due to non-availability of light	N=14 40%	N=5 14.4%	N=10 28.6%	N=6 17.1%
Funding of research on persons with disabilities					
13	I personally fund my research publications	N=22 62.9%	N=7 20%	N=4 11.4%	N=2 5.7%
14	Universities fund researches conducted by students with disabilities	N=0 0%	N=0 0%	N=5 14.4%	N=30 85.6%
15	National association of Exceptional children conferences are sponsored by my University	N=0 0%	N=1 2.9%	N=5 14.4%	N=29 82.7%
Attitudes towards research in the field disability					
16	I do not always like to participate in researches that involves persons with disabilities	N=13 37.1%	N=6 17.1%	N=10 28.6%	N=6 17.1%
17	I think that there is nothing to research about in special education	N=12 34.3%	N=13 37.1%	N=8 22.9%	N=2 5.7%
18	I feel that research in the field of disability is not important	N=8 22.9%	N=5 14.3%	N=10 28.6%	N=12 34.3%
Myth of working with PWDs					
19	Collaborating with persons with disabilities in research work reduces the quality my research work	N=10 28.6%	N=10 28.6%	N=5 14.3%	N=10 28.6%
20	The intellectual contributions of persons with disabilities in collaborative researches is not relevant	N=8 22.9%	N=9 25.7%	N=10 28.6%	N=8 22.9%
21	Working with persons with disabilities inhibits my career development	N=9 25.7%	N=9 25.7%	N=10 28.6%	N=7 20%
Research uptake (utilization)					
22	Policies on special education in universities are product of research findings	N=4 11.4%	N=7 20%	N=6 17.1%	N=18 51.4%
23	University management do not consider research recommendations in providing required facilities	N=20 57.1%	N=10 28.6%	N=2 5.7%	N=3 8.6%
24	Research finding in special education is not disseminated to the University community in Nigeria.	N=16 45.2%	N=6 17.6%	N=10 28.6%	N=3 8.6%

The charts below shows the percentage challenges of universities research on persons with disabilities in Nigerian

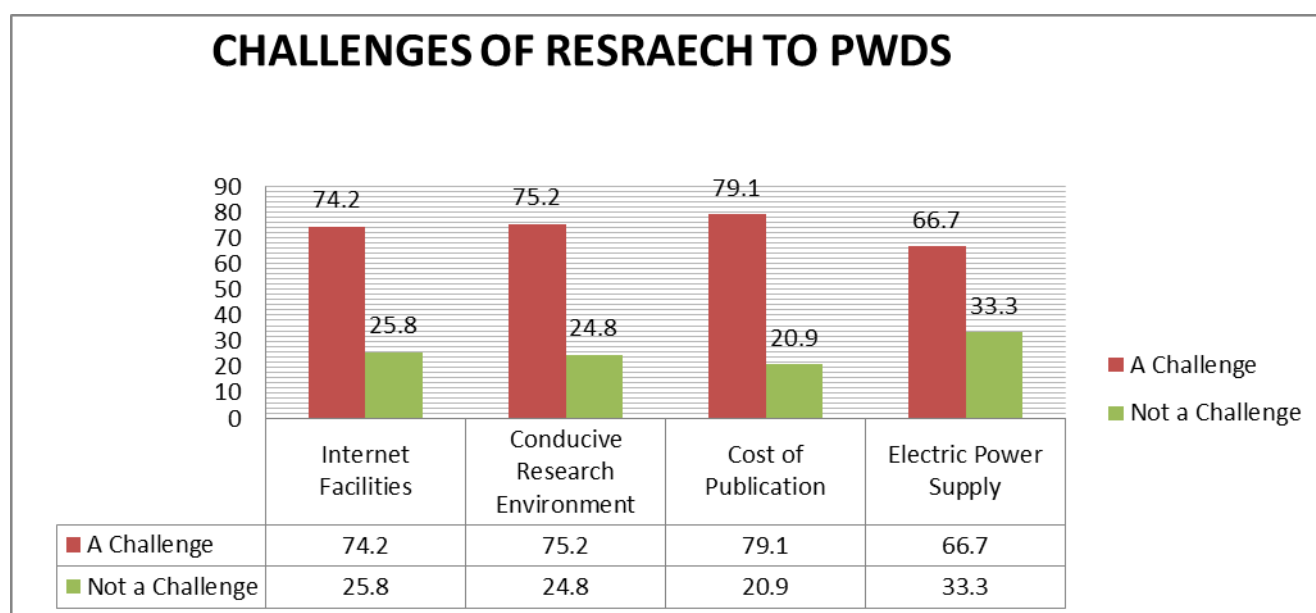


Fig.1:

The Chart above revealed that the provision of internet service facilities in Nigerian universities is a dire challenge that strongly inhibit teaching and research activities in the system. Internet service is a 21st century resource that has

become a powerful force in promoting the both educational and non-educational activities. Internet service facilities promote collaborative researches that have become an evidence-based practice in education system. Little wonder

there is hardly a Nigerian university that has a pride of place in the QS world university ranking. Additionally, findings show that there is lack of conducive research

environment, high cost of publication and inadequate power supply in the university system.

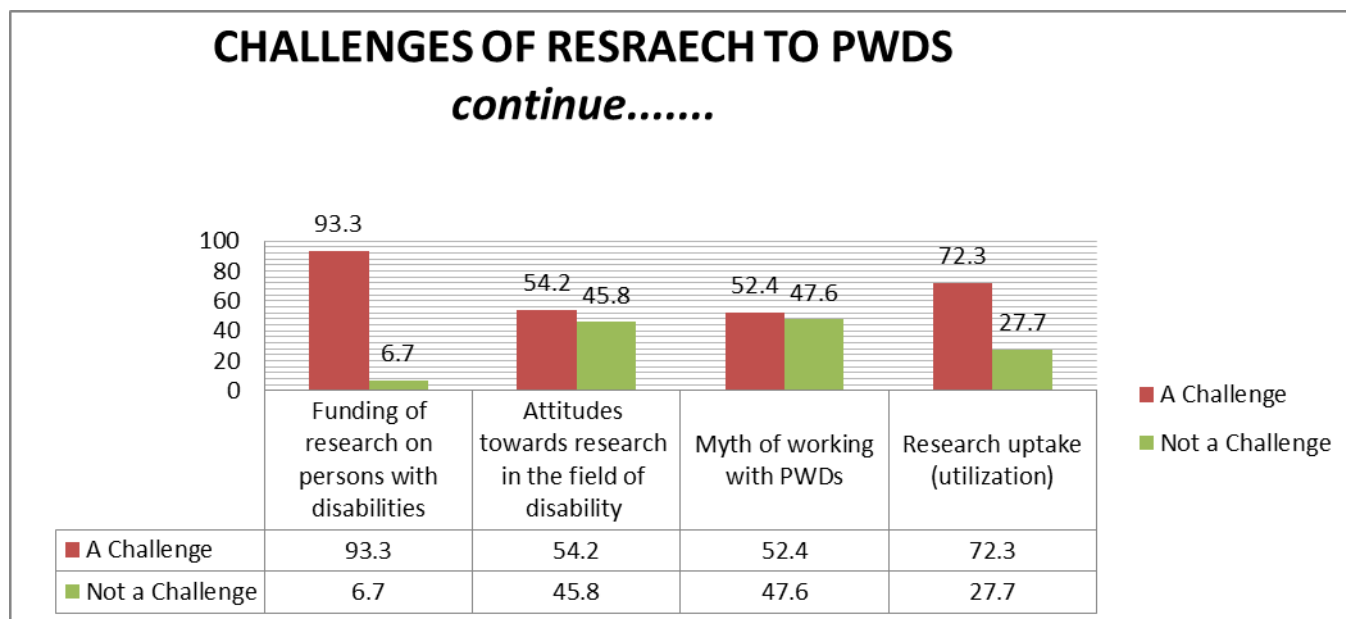


Fig.2:

From the findings in figure 2 above, it has shown that research in the field of disability is given a scant attention and as evident in poor funding in the Universities. Besides poor funding, there is indifferent and negative attitudes to research on disability issues, this is partly resulting from the myth surrounding the field of disability itself. The findings also indicate that recommendations made by researchers in the field of disability are not considered for policy formulation in the universities.

Discussion of findings

This study focused on challenges of conducting research on persons with disabilities in Nigerian universities. The result indicates that internet services are major obstacle to quality research in the system, the findings is in line with Singaje (2016) whose study revealed the culture of world wide web otherwise called internet is still not accessible in some Universities in Africa due to underfunding of university education. The implication of this for research in ICT driven era is poor visibility of the university in global research world, lack of access to current findings, loss of opportunity for collaborative and several others. Findings further revealed that the culture of funding research on disability is yet to be developed in Nigerian universities. It is in agreement with Kelly-Ray (2015) study that indicated that 78% of researches in Nigerian universities are sponsored by individual researchers while 22% is sponsored by TETFund, committee of Deans of respective universities and cooperate bodies in Nigeria. It is also difficult for universities to sponsor staff to attend international conferences that help to expose staff, establish professional partnership and increase visibility in globalized world. While electricity is common problem in Nigerian, the situation is unbearable in the university system couple with negative attitudes of most members of the university community the PWDs the task conducting research in this field is quite challenge irrespective research skills of professionals. Like George (2016), this present

study acknowledges that myth about disability is still common as evident in the attitudes of some individuals when they are requested to participate in research that involves persons with disabilities.

Conclusion

Disability is an integral part of any worthy society including university communities. This has become imperative due international policy and legislation that has open access to education to all irrespective of disability. One of the mandate of Nigerian universities is to carry out research primarily to solve societal problem including those that concern special education and it clients. Unfortunately, the system poses some challenges to research in this sensitive area which has resulted in poor provision of services, under development of special education among others. To put this field and it client on the same level with the rest of world this study has recommended among several that 25% of TETFund allocation be set aside for research in special education, internet services in universities should be improved and attitudinal re-orientation campaign be organized in Nigerian university communities.

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