

DEARTH OF QUALITATIVE PRACTITIONERS IN CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE METHODS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: NEED FOR PARADIGM SHIFT

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Abstract

In Nigeria, universities have experienced a dearth of qualitative methods practitioners. The scarcity of these scholars is problematic when one considers the flourish nature of these experts in Europe, Americas and Asia. It is on this basis that the study seeks to explore the dearth of qualitative experts in Nigerian universities. To address why this 'glitch' happen in our university system, two research questions were posed. Qualitative method was adopted, interpretive paradigm was used to understand participants' reasons of not adopting qualitative methods in their research. Focus group was applied and semi structure interview was adopted to gather the information for this study. Thematic analysis was used in the study. Findings indicated among others that the scarcity of qualitative researchers aside from being a new course in Nigerian university system, it is completely rigorous and robust in all its ramifications. In light the findings, it was recommended among others that students should be introduced to qualitative methods at the early stage of first-degree level just like we engages them in quantitative methods, by so doing, qualitative methods will gain prominent like its quantitative methods' counterpart in Nigerian universities.

Keywords: Dearth of qualitative scholars, Nigerian universities, qualitative methods, paradigm shift

Introduction

The adoption and application of research methods the world over by scholars and researchers has been compartmentilised into three sections, namely: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. While western, European and Southern African scholars/researchers significantly rooted their research on qualitative and mixed methods approaches. However, the Sub-Saharan scholars and researchers still concentrate their effort on adopting quantitative approach in carrying out their research. The researcher's engagement in a conversation with majority of western and European scholars and researchers submit that Sub Saharan African researchers and scholars feared using qualitative and mixed methods approaches due to dynamics involved. Aside from this conversation, Peng, Kanthawala, Yuan and Hussain (2016); Mansouri, Bigdeli, Dehnad,

Sohrabi, Alizadeh and Keshavarzi (2020); Cao, Kadir, Chen, Chen, Li and Hassan (2025) held that many experts in health, science and technology and other related field respectively adopted qualitative methods in conducting their research, they wonder why researchers and scholars in Sub-Saharan countries still flooded journals with quantitative studies. In fact, Akpan (2020) argued that Nigerian scholars and researchers, especially historians, sociologists, anthropologists and medical experts, to mention but a few, who ought to have engage meaningfully with qualitative research methods, often choose the path of quantitative approach in conducting their studies. This is absolutely regrettable and unfortunate, this is because the research results in quantitative methods are often objective and generalized, whereas, in qualitative methods the findings is subjective and specific.

Contrary to the application of qualitative methods by Western, Eastern, Northern European and Southern African countries, the Sub-Saharan countries refused to join the trend of applying qualitative methods in their research. In fact, a glance at various academic journals in the world clearly indicated that the majority of scholars, researchers, and doctorate students are comfortable with the application of quantitative methods. From all indications, it is appropriate to say that it is easy to count the number of qualitative and mixed methods experts across universities in Nigeria. However, it is absolutely impossible to do the same in the context of experts in quantification. Before this submission, Akpan (2024) had earlier contended that universities in Nigeria are over-represented by quantitative researchers and scholars. Moreover, it is absolutely unacceptable and out of place to witness Nigerian scholars, researchers and doctorate students in philosophy, history, comparative education, languages, mass communication, and cyber security employing quantitative methods, instead of qualitative approach. However, one does not or would never canvass for the use of qualitative or mixed methods approaches in a ‘mismatch’ situation. Rather, what one is saying is the application these three methods in conducting research method. The above conversation, however, problematise the dearth of qualitative or mixed methods’ scholars, researchers and doctoral students in Nigerian universities. In light of the above discourse, this study <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

explores reasons for the dearth of qualitative and mixed methods experts in the universities across the length and breadth of Nigeria. To achieve the objectives of this research study, the researcher formulated two research questions to aid in arriving at valid findings of the study.

- a. How many Nigerian university scholars, researchers, and doctoral students understand how to adopt qualitative methods in conducting research?
- b. Why Nigerian universities experience drought of qualitative methods scholars, researchers and doctoral students?

Literature

Conceptualisation of Qualitative Methods

Qualitative partitioners have tried to reach amicable consensus on the meaning of qualitative methods. From all indications, they were not able to agree on definite definition of the concept. However, scholars such as Denzin and Lincoln (2003), Seaman (2008), Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011), Moriarty (2011), Gerring (2017) to mention but a few wrote a lot of texts on qualitative methods when they say that is a type of research which explores and provides deeper insights or understanding into real-world situation and does not need numerical data, intervening or introducing treatments just like in quantitative research. Be that as it may, one would say that qualitative methods are methodological approaches that try to unravel an in-depth understanding or meaning of phenomena under investigation without the use numerical data, but textual data. Here, the issue of epistemology which is the procedure through which a researcher comes to know the ‘real’ truth and reality of the phenomenon comes into focus. In fact, it connotes the nature of the relationship between the researcher, the knower, and understanding that can “possibly be acquired through different types of inquiry or alternative methods of investigation (Hartas, 2010, p.36).” In qualitative studies, the sources of information as data for research are from dairies, pictures, textbooks, colour, stories, experiences, cultures and other intangible things (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Furthermore, under qualitative research methods, there is no room for objectivity and generalisation of the findings, whereas, in qualitative methods subjectivity and context specific is the focus.

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Moreover, it is absolutely out of place to use paradigm such as positivist, pragmatism or post-positivism paradigm, rather, qualitative researchers employ interpretive, socially constructivism, radical and critical paradigm in order to make sense of the phenomena under inquiry. The understandings and beliefs of interpretivism or constructivism users is that qualitative research seeks to understand what it is to be human, significance and meanings people ascribe to life events (Ayton & Tsindos, 2023). Whilst the “radical and critical paradigm challenges the notion of objective, value-free research and emphasizes the role of social, political, and cultural contexts in shaping knowledge and understanding (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2024, p.)”

Data Analysis in Qualitative methods

Any researcher who adopts qualitative methods usually immerse his/herself in a culture of observing people, interactions with participants, participating in activities, using individual or focus group interview, taking life histories, constructing case studies, and analysing documents or cultural artefacts. From all indications, these are the modes in which an individual source for information in qualitative methods. Whereas, in quantitative methods researcher(s) need to adopt experimentation, questionnaire and other statistical tools that needs numbers to arrive at the valid findings. Ernest, Fonkem and Jude (2023) argued that the goal of qualitative methods is to use ‘special lens’ to understand the insider’s view of the participants under investigation. In addition, a researcher adopting qualitative methods usually applies small sampling size to conduct inquiry. The essence of small sample size is for in-depth understanding the phenomenon under enquiry. However, quantitative researchers use large sample size, the choice of large sample size is based on verify and valid generalization. Young and Casey (2019) opine that the main reason why large sample size and questionnaire or experimentation are use is because the findings reached on quantitative research by the researcher(s) is apply in another context.

In qualitative studies, the researcher wants to inform the audience about the six most popular analytical tools researchers employ and there are listed below; content analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, thematic analysis, grounded theory (GT), <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and conversation analysis. It is worthy to note that each of the analytical tools in qualitative methods has its own unique way it is used. For instance, content analysis is out to evaluate patterns within a piece of content (words, phrases or images) or across multiple pieces of content or sources of communication (Smith and Firth, 2011; Sgier, 2012). Narrative analysis deals with listening to people telling stories and analysing their meanings. In fact, stories serve a functional purpose of helping the researcher to make sense of the world (Sgier, 2012). In the content of discourse analysis, Ernest, Fonkem and Jude (2023) opine that it is a written or spoken language or debate. Therefore, it focuses on analysing language within its social context. Additionally, thematic analysis explores the designs of meanings in a data set. Lochmiller (2021) submit that it assists the researcher to make sense of the content and derive meaning from it. In another vein, grounded theory is an important research method aim at creating a new theory (or theories) using the data at hand, through a series of tests and revisions (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Finally, Smith and Fieldsend (20 21) viewed that Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is out to aids the researcher to understand the personal experiences of a subject concerning a major life event, an experience or a situation. The phenomena may range from relatively common events like childhood, or being involved in a movie to those which are extremely rare (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Methods

As the case may be, the study adopts qualitative research approach. The adoption of the method is in line with topic under exploration, the researcher uses interpretive paradigm to understand the reason why there is drought of qualitative researchers in universities in Nigeria. Similarly, the sample size for the study is hundred participants purposively selected from twenty federal universities located across Nigeria. Based on the large number of participants for the study, the researcher adopted focus group interview. The choice of focus group is to reduce the large number of participants to a manageable size as required by the qualitative research (Nyumba et.al. 2018). As the name implies, therefore, the researcher grouped the participants from ten federal <https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/jtese>

universities into groups of ‘A’ to ‘G’ for the interview. The universities that fall into this focus group are as follows; National Open University of Nigeria, University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, University Calabar, University of Nsukka, University of Kano, Usman Danfodio University, Federal University of Technology, Minna, Federal University Lokoja and Federal University Dutse.

The instrument for the study is a semi-structured interview. The basic reason for the use of semi-interview is based on Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik’s (2021) position who argued that “semi-structured interview allows researchers to acquire in-depth information and evidence from interviewees while considering the focus of the study.” For ethical consideration, the researcher wrote a letter of permission to interview the participants and they all agreed to be involved in the study. Additionally, a ‘Consent Form’ (CF) was designed by all the participants on their willingness to participate in this study. Before the actual date for the interview, the researcher trained two research assistants (RA) on how to conduct an interview with the participants in qualitative methods. After the training, audio records were purchased for the RA for the interview. One of the interviewers was assigned to the Northern of Nigeria, while the other was assigned to Western part of Nigeria and the researcher took the Eastern and South South Nigeria. The interview lasted for two months, the data from the field was subjected to transcription, and transcribed textual data was subjected to open coding. The data was categorized till saturation point, thereafter, the themes emerged. The themes that emerged were analysed using thematic analysis (TA). The choice of thematic analysis is drawn from Christou (2022), Braun and Clarke’s (2024) position who argued that TA assists qualitative researcher to make sense of the content, uncover meaningful patterns, insights from complex and nuanced data.

Results

Research Question 1: How many Nigerian university scholar, researcher, and doctoral student understand how to adopt qualitative methods in conducting research?

From the above research question, the themes emerged and presented are as follows; handful of scholars and none in our university.

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Handful of qualitative methods experts

From the analysis, it was discovered that a handful of qualitative experts actually understand how to use methods to conduct research. Focus Group (FG) ‘C’ stated that there is handful of these experts in the field. When asked why there is handful of them in Nigerian universities, they declared that:

The adoption of qualitative methods in research is completely new in Nigeria, unlike quantitative methods where every scholar or researcher used in his/ her research. The adoption of qualitative methods in Nigeria will take a little time before its germination in our university environment.

In a related development, FG ‘G’ held that qualitative experts are few in Nigerian universities (state or federal) because Lecturers who taught Research Statistics in our universities does not understand basics of the methods. They went on to say that some of them who are teaching this course now were not taught by their predecessors when they were students in various universities. Additionally, FG ‘A’ reported that the few qualitative experts available in some departments in our universities were trained in overseas; therefore, they cannot be employed in other university after all, they were not the one who sponsored the said lecturers. FG ‘A’ apparently suggested that more junior academic staff should be sent to overseas to be trained in conducting qualitative methods. FG ‘D’ was of the view that lecturers who taught Research Methods in our universities only know quantitative methods research. One can hear them teaching descriptive research, survey research, correlational research, quasi-experimental research, experimental research, among others. Yet, issue of content, discourse, thematic, narrative, ethnographic, action research, among others which is associated with qualitative methods was never mentioned in the classroom. When this researcher probed further on the reason behind this anomaly; FG ‘D’ declared:

This anomaly is very obvious because these lecturers were not taught when they were students in their individual university. Therefore, one cannot give what he/she does not have.

From the above excerpts, it was found that qualitative methods scholars/ researchers are few in number when one considers their availability in Nigerian universities. It was also discovered that there are many quantitative researchers who specialized in descriptive, survey, correlational, quasi-experimental researches, however, there small proportion of it in qualitative approaches.

No qualitative expert in university

Another theme that was pronounced from the analysis is that, there are no qualitative experts in our university presently. FG 'B' is of the view that if one look at our universities environment, there are no qualitative methods experts who can teach or supervise master degree dissertation or Ph.D thesis in the field. They continued by saying that ninety-nine percent of research done from first to doctorate degree level in Nigerian universities are in quantitative methods. FG 'E' equally informed this researcher that many researchers who are in department of arts, humanities, social sciences and education who supposed to adopt qualitative methods to conduct research in these fields failed in this direction. Instead, they are very comfortable with quantitative approach. Similarly, FGs 'F' and 'G' opined that qualitative methods experts are very scarce in Nigerian universities. In fact, in all departments one can count the number of experts in the field of qualitative methods. Official records available in National Universities Commission (NUC), there are no body who is an expert in qualitative methods. Instead, many lecturers specialize in the field of quantitative methods. From the above narrative, it was discovered that there is no body specializing in the qualitative methods. It was declared that experts in arts, humanities, social sciences and education who could have use qualitative methods in conducting research work are rather comfortable using quantitative methods.

Research Question 2: Why Nigerian universities experience drought of qualitative methods scholars, researchers and doctoral students?

Analysis from the second question has shown that universities are currently experiencing scarcity of qualitative methods' scholars/ researchers in Nigeria based on the following reasons illustrated below.

Qualitative methods is new approach

The participants interviewed indicated that qualitative methods adopted in recent times by majority of western and eastern scholars/ researchers was newly introduced in the Sub-Sahara region in the 1960s, therefore, the first generation scholars and researchers lack fair knowledge on the methods. FG ‘A’ reported that the Professor who taught him research methodology in first degree level did not mention qualitative methods throughout the duration of the course. In a related circumstance, FG ‘C’ and ‘D’ mentioned that first generation university’s scholars and researchers had never made an attempt to introduce qualitative methods to them during their time, therefore, they queried how they would have known the course which was never been taught throughout their stay in the university. In fact, FG ‘D’ was so explicit in their statement, when they declared:

We want to say at this point that it extremely sad and unfortunate that all of us had gone to universities in different parts of Nigeria and have spent between four and six years as the case may be, we never been taught qualitative methods. In fact, it is absolutely impossible to give what you do not have. Moreso, it is unacceptable to say that we have not been teaching our students qualitative methods, how can that be possible when lecturers do not know the course?

From the above narrative, it is obvious that the dearth of qualitative methods scholars/ researchers in Nigerian universities is due to the fact that this course which is widely used now by western and eastern scholars/researchers was completely introduced newly. Furthermore, it was discovered that since the qualitative methods was new, the first-generation scholars/ researchers in Nigerian universities were not taught of the course, hence they could not teach what they were not taught.

Rigorous and Robust

It was discovered from the analysis that scholars/researchers are afraid of qualitative methods due to its rigorous and robust nature of the research approach. FGs ‘E’ and ‘G’ maintained that rigorous and robust nature of qualitative methods begins from developing an acceptable research topic to arriving at valid findings. The method of

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carrying out the research using qualitative approach is rigorous in the sense that the experts apply subjectivity, instead of objectivity since the said research involve human being that cannot be predicted as in the case of quantitative methodologies. Probing further on the rigor and robust of the qualitative methods, FG ‘A’ reported that after an acceptable topic is framed, and it is followed by appropriate formulation of research questions which should be in line with the topic under investigation. Additionally, researcher(s) has to develop an acceptable theory which relates to research methodology (research design, paradigm, interview, coding, saturation and data analysis). In another vein, FG ‘A’ submitted that instead of going through this long and extensive process in qualitative methods, it is undeniably appropriate and convenience to employ quantitative methods in conducting research study. In a similar manner, FG ‘B’ stated that they cannot use qualitative methods to conduct any study, because it seeks to answers ‘why’ question. In addition, they said that it is easy to deploy numeracy in conducting the research, than to explore the research through lens of grammatical expression. FG ‘B’ said that process of establishing the ‘why’ question is difficult, because it involves telling of long stories using long and undiluted English language. Aside from application of good grammatical expression in qualitative research methods, qualitative researcher must report the participants’ experience or stories verbatim and he/she should socially construct the participants’ real world-life situation. From all indications, FG ‘B’ the reason why qualitative methods are extremely rigorous and robust is based on the application of social constructivism and intepretivism paradigm in the research. In fact, this requires the researcher(s) to look at the participants’ stories or experiences from their own lens. From the above narrative, it was established that qualitative methods covers a vast array of research typologies, using nonnumerical data such as words, pictures, observations to explore, discover, and describe the experiences, meanings, processes, and purposes of the phenomenon under consideration from the perspective of those who are experiencing it and value of the uniqueness, natural variation, diversity, and ambiguity in the findings.

Discussion

Finding from analysis indicated that when one look at the Nigerian universities' climate, it was discovered that if at all there are availability of qualitative researchers in some departments in the universities, there are extremely few when one compare to quantitative researchers. It was established that few qualitative methods experts found around in our Nigerian universities were actually trained in some foreign universities across the world. In summary, it can be argued that Nigerian universities have handful qualitative methods lecturers to teach Research Methods, because the majority of lecturers in Nigerian universities were taught by first generation lecturers who lack basic knowledge in the field. Most lecturers in our universities are comfortable and found expression in quantitative methods. The finding is supported by Akpan (2024) who argued that Nigerian universities are currently experience the underrepresentation of qualitative methods experts in most departments. The author was of the view that the majority of scholars and researchers in almost all the schools and departments adopted quantitative methods, hence the overrepresentation of the methods.

In a related circumstance, it was discovered from the findings that there was a complete lack of qualitative methods experts in Nigerian universities. In fact, moving from one department to the other one, it was asserted that no qualitative methods lecturer was found, all the ones found specialised in quantitative methods. It may be argued that the basis of non-availability or absence of qualitative methods lecturers was based on the fact they were only taught quantitative methods while they were in the university by lecturers who only understand and knew how to teach the course, hence they cannot give what they do not have. The finding aligned with position canvassed by Umeokafor and Windapo (2018), Abidi, van Koeveringe, Smolka, van Lierop, Bosma, Alleva and Nagelhout (2024) who argued that many Nigerian universities lecturers has refused to move with current qualitative paradigm shift which are happening in universities across the world, rather, they prefer to stick with the old fashion of employment of quantitative methods in all their research study.

The reason given by the interviewees on why they do not adopt qualitative methods in carrying out research study was that it is completely new approach introduced by the western and eastern scholars, therefore, scholars/researchers in Sub-Saharan Africa refused to embrace this new innovation. From all indications, it may be argued that scholars, researchers and most doctoral students in Sub-Saharan African universities are resistible to innovation in this direction. This finding is in agreement with position advanced by Fayomi, Okokpujie and Kilanko (2018); Bain Tchuisseu-Kwangoua, Adeagbo, Nkfusai, Amu, Saah and Kombe (2022) who said that there is no authoritative and empirical scholarship on qualitative methods by Sub-Saharan African university lecturers, rather, majority of the papers published in national and international journals applied quantitative methodologies.

It was discovered through the findings that scholars and researchers in Sub-Saharan African universities rejected qualitative for quantitative methods due to their inherent believe that the course is rigorous and robust in nature. In related development, qualitative methods are rigorous and robust because, it involves an in-depth reasoning which is a deliberate one. Here, researchers or scholars engage on various processes of data analysis, then logically, systematically and consciously draw out inferences grammatically and display it in form of research findings. It would be argued that qualitative methods is rigorous, robust and unique because of process involves in conducting the research in the field such as researchable questions, workable theory, acceptable paradigm, reasonable sample size, quality instrument (interviews, observations), translation, transcription, coding, reaching saturation point in the analysis of the data. Besides the above notion, the emergence of themes and subjection the data to acceptable analytical tools such as narrative, thematic, contents, discourse analysis, among others equally makes it rigorous and robust, which does not prevents scholarship. Buckley (2016) supported the above findings when the author revealed that qualitative methods is difficult due to certain dynamics involve which is complex and abstract than quantitative methods.

Conclusion

A glance at Nigerian universities witnesses a drought in qualitative methods scholars and researchers, rather, there is overrepresentation of quantitative methods. This was occasioned by the undiluted assertion by the contemporary Sub-Saharan African scholars and researchers that they were not introduced to the field at all by their lecturers who taught research methods at the infantile stage in the university. Additionally, in spite of the fact that one cannot give out what he or she does not have, however, the dearth of qualitative methods scholars and researchers in Sub-Saharan African universities is fundamentally on cause by qualitative methods' rigorousness and robustness.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings reached in this paper, the researcher primarily recommended that;

- a. The students should be introduced to qualitative methods at the early stage of first-degree level just like we engage them in quantitative methods, by so doing qualitative methods will gain prominence like its quantitative methods' counterpart in Nigerian universities.
- b. Lecturers teaching Research Methods at the university level and in other tertiary institutions should be sent on refresher courses or workshops in foreign countries so that they can be taught on how and at what level qualitative methods can be applied in research study.
- c. Seminars and workshops on qualitative methods should be introduced to both lecturers and students on the relevance of qualitative methods in research.

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