Refocusing Research Writing, Methodology and Processes in the Academia

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Abstract

Research writing is the foundation of research reportage and documentation. It is the physical representation of all that the student or researcher must have done and gone through in the process involved in the research proper. It is discovered that students and researchers, especially those in the academia, mix up the processes and sometimes fail to do the right things in the writings. Therefore, a whole lot of junks called research writings in the name of thesis, dissertation, and project come out of the academia. Using the observation method, the paper has deployed pure research (to reappraise and to add to the existing knowledge of students in humanities for better understanding of research), which is under application research type classified by Kumar (2011) as cited in Alabi (2017, p.5). The paper posits that research dissertations, projects, theses in the academia can still follow the laid down rules and regulations. This rests on understanding and implementing all that are entailed in research writing and documentation by those concerned. It is only through thorough and efficient writing, editing, review and documentation processes that written reports can become references for other researchers to access, build upon and use for (human) development and research purposes.

I. Introduction

1.1 Research and Research Writing

Research writing is the foundation of research reportage and documentation. It is the physical representation of all that the student or researcher must have done and gone through in the process involved in the research proper. And how do they go about this? According to Fakuade (2011, p.1), "research is a systematic investigation of phenomena through the use of a set of procedures embodied in the scientific method." This avers that before any physical representation of the research report of a student or researcher, there has to be a process, a set of procedures or "a systemic investigation" as mentioned by Fakuade. And when one puts down what has been researched, it becomes research writing. In a bid to navigate through the problem statement of this paper and how it will contribute to humanity, this paper, which is pedagogical in orientation, tries to re-examine and re-teach the necessary steps needed in the writing of a research project, dissertation or thesis.

1.2 Pedagogical

As part of the keywords, there is the adjective "pedagogical" from the word "pedagogy", which according to Ugorji (2020, p.12) refers to "the art and science of teaching. It includes the teaching profession, the teacher. Teaching materials, methods of

teaching or instruction and principles and theories of education." It is important to note from here that pedagogy has to do with teaching and this paper is premised on this role for the learners, students, and researchers, etc.

1.3 Thesis, Dissertation and Project

The above has been arranged using the top-bottom approach, in the sense that, the word, Thesis, according to Collins Dictionary (2009, p. 1622) is "a long piece of writing based on your idea and research that you do as part of a university degree, especially a higher degree such as PhD." This means that, thesis is written at the PhD (doctor of philosophy) level. Dissertation according to the same Collins Dictionary (2009, p.446) is a long formal piece of writing on a particular subject, especially for a university degree." An example of such is at the Master's degree level, that is, at the postgraduate level. And lastly, project has to do with a detailed study of a subject by a pupil or student (Collins 2009, p.1240). This particular one is done mainly by the undergraduates at the university level. The three concepts actually mean the same thing, while the difference lies at the level or domain each refers to or is used.

1.4 Purpose of the Paper

This paper, which is pedagogical in orientation, tries to re-examine and re-teach the necessary steps needed in the writing of a research project, dissertation or thesis. To achieve this aim, the following objectives would serve as guide.
1. To examine the necessary steps needed for good research.
2. To reposition the value of research in the academia for robust academic research.
3. To re-establish and widen the horizon and the understanding of young, middle and old researchers in the academia.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Concept and Process of Research

In layman's terms, research simply means something that has been searched for, something that one is searching for, and something that might (can) be found. Research according to Kerlinga (1986) as cited in Alabi (2017, p. 2) is "a systematic and empirical and critical investigation of propositions or assumptions to discover new facts about certain phenomena". In other words, the research concept is systematic as it gives new insights into information surrounding a particular entity. This entity in question might be new or something already searched for. However, it resonates with discoveries that can benefit humanity in the long run. When one researches a phenomenon, it means one is revisiting it at one's own pace and with one's focus, by trying to expand, reduce, eliminate or add to it. As the saying goes, "There is nothing new under the sun". In research, it should be noted that somebody, somehow, somewhere, sometime had done something relating to what one is presently trying to do. So, to say one is doing or making research implies that one is looking into a thing again, that is, a thing that had been previously worked upon and that one wants to fill a particular gap or lacuna or solve a problem or answer a question.

In doing research, some purposes guide one actions as to what to do and what not to do. This will reduce the ambiguity that can be attached to the scope of one's main aim of the research. The followings are some of the purposes of engaging in research work:

a. **Developmental Purpose:** The question that comes first into one's mind is, "What would be the purpose of the research one is trying to do?" This is the problem one is about to resolve with the research or the gap or the lacuna one is about to fill which will be one's contribution to knowledge and humanity. The contribution here has to add to the development of humanity and all that surrounds it.

b. **Academic Purpose:** As a way of understanding the situation one has built up as a researcher, there is the need to bring up a theory related to one's field of study or the area one is studying. One will be testing the situation with the theory. The contribution here is to the academic world and all that it entails.

c. **Research Purpose:** Another thing that comes to one's mind is the act of modification. That is, would one be taking out from an existing body of knowledge, or perhaps, one would want to build on existing work or one would want to establish a new line of thinking? This, however, tends to pose a lot of problems in the course of research. This contributes to specialised areas of knowledge in and out of the academia as it goes into science, technology, arts, culture, academic, gender studies, literature, language, cosmetics, medicine, education, etc – it is the breaking of new research grounds and the opening up of new ideas, ideologies, thought lines, etc

The above gives some tips to look into when conducting research. However, one would ask, "What are the things one needs to put in place or examine for research to be a success or before even choosing a research topic?" These can include:

1. Researcher's interest.
2. Time frame allotted or the duration for the completion of the research.
3. Availability of review materials for existing literature as far as one's topic is concerned.
4. Data availability and accessibility.
5. Clear expression of research problem(s) leading to aim and objectives.
6. Financial capacity and capability of the researcher. The researcher must have a financial base that will sustain him or her throughout the research period.
7. Availability of Supervisor(s). Is there a specialist in one's field of study? This will help one have thorough guidance and grounding as far as the research (process) is concerned.

After the submission of one's topic, considerations by the Supervisor(s) and the Department will look into topic structuring and whether it is researchable, focus, scope, language, timeframe, and geographical spread, etc. Some of the germane questions will be, "Will one be able to finish the work in six months or a year?" "Can the scope be handled at one's academic level?" For example, if one has a Literature related topic with the scope as Africa, using just four literary texts might not suffice. These might not represent the scope of difference in the geography and sociology of Africa. One might be asked to add more literary texts. This is an example of scope. On geographical spread, if one's topic is on Nigeria, then the work must cover Nigeria. One cannot work with a single text that covers only a particular region, say the South.

The concept of research had always been there to benefit the existence of humanity. However, one might ask what the benefits of research is to the researcher, the Institutions, and humanity. The followings are some of the benefits:

a) To gather enough helpful information for other researchers to work with
b) To add credibility to one's idea, situation, and work.
c) To develop a workable scope of a study by the researcher.
d) To establish a credible knowledge base for others to work with.
e) To build a consortium and base of ideas, which can serve as basis and blueprint others can follow and utilise.

f) To help humanity fight some of her problems while providing solutions to them at the social, religious, economic, political, environmental, academic, military, food provision and cultural, etc. levels.

g) To examine, open up and apply new vistas of once hidden knowledge to the development of mankind and all that surrounds it.

2.2 Research Design

Research Design according to Alabi (2007, p.88) "encompasses identifying the subjects or objects of study and describing the methods of data gathering and analysis." In other words, research designs are tools, plans, and strategies used in carrying out a work of research. This is just like how one first needs to gather building materials for a new house one has in mind. In the same vein, one's research design comes together through all one's strategies, plans, tools, methodologies, and techniques.

a. Functions of Research Design

These are some different functions of Research Design.

1. They help in balancing one's assessment between the dependent variables and the independent variables.
2. They assist in either confirming or denying one's hypothesis.
3. They may broaden or limit one's scope.

b. Types of Research Design

There are various types of Research designs depending on the one that suits one's research topic. Some of them include Survey, Experimental, Correlational, Semi-experimental, Review, Descriptive, Case Study, Diagnostic, Explanatory, etc.

Using any of these can be dependent on the field one is working in. While it may be good to work with one, two or three of these designs that are related to one's field, it is not advisable to go out of one's scope by using three or four at a time. However, at the Undergraduate level, one can limit oneself to using one or at most, two. During one's postgraduate program, one can bring in two or three. Whatever type of these Designs one is using, there must be conformity to one's topic and the field in which one is working.

Attached to the research design is the method of data gathering, that is, the sampling technique. It is important to note that while choosing one's data, one is not meant to use the whole population. However, one is meant to choose out of the whole population, and as such, there are different ways of choosing one's data population. According to Alabi (2007, p. 91), "population can be finite and infinite". When we talk about finite, then we are referring to the fact that the population is limited while infinite deals with an immeasurable population, that is unlimited. The population has to do with the target which the researcher is looking at for analysis.

When a researcher decides to select out of the population, it is referred to as Sampling. Sampling in population comes with its techniques on how one chooses one's population. There are two main types as given by Alabi (2007) - Probability and Non-probability sampling techniques. Under the Probability sampling technique, there are simple random sampling, systematic random sampling, stratified random, single-stage, and clustering sampling techniques. Under the Non-probability sampling technique, there are accidental sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling techniques. All the aforementioned techniques are useable in choosing the right population for research by a researcher.

III. Research Methods

Using the observation method, the paper has deployed pure research (to reappraise and to add to the existing knowledge of students in humanities for better understanding of research), which is under application research type classified by Kumar (2011) as cited in Alabi (2017, p.5).

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Writing One's Thesis/Long Essay/Project/Dissertation

Thesis/Long Essay/Project/Dissertation mean the same thing. Their differences lie in British or American English usage and the academic level (1st degree, 2nd degree, or 3rd degree) one is working in. It is expedient to see research work as writing one's work or book. In most universities today, the majority of students are not keen on working on research as all they seek is an "easy" route by getting someone to help them write. They also plagiarize other people's contents from physical and online libraries in other universities and submit same to their supervisors. This is not the best when they can simply sit and learn how to go about it. It is usually the only book most will ever author in their lives.

4.2 Research Proposal

The moment there is an agreement between one, one's topic, and one's supervisor, the first thing one will be asked to write at any level will be the Proposal. One writes a proposal which is simply a template. Its essence is to show what one wants to do and how one intends to go about doing it. As such, a research proposal can be designed as a strategic outline or summary of one's research before one goes into the research proper. It can be likened to the Abstract which is written after justification has been done to the whole of the research. The research Proposal can almost be likened to the Prologue and the Abstract to the Epilogue (though its contextual position is early in the work) in Literary texts. The importance of the research Proposal is as follows:

1. It highlights the research problems the moment one starts writing it, and this allows one to begin to tackle those problems early enough.
2. It enables one to think deeply about all that one intends to do.
3. It allows for pre-planning with scope, finance, time, getting data, etc.

A research Proposal will show the topic or title. It is possible that in an academic environment someone will argue whether to call this a topic or a title. But never mind, at this level, let us just use the two interchangeably.

One's language use must reflect that one indeed is writing a proposal. The language tense must be futuristic. The proposal should have an overview of Chapters 1, 2, and 3. There should also be references, bibliography, or works cited at the end of one's work (whichever is relevant to one's work or field); all to show one's reading focus, and to document all one's readings during one's research reading or process.

4.3 Elements of a Research Proposal

Different elements make up a research proposal. These include:
1. Topic/ Title which will be on the title page.
2. Background to the study
3. Statement of the research problem
4. Aim and objectives of the study

5. Research questions
6. Scope of the study
7. Justification of the study
8. Methodology
9. Synoptic review or literature review (like a page or two)
10. Chapterization
11. Summary
12. Tentative references.

Writing a thesis/long essay/project/dissertation without a research proposal is like building a house without a plan; one's proposal is one's plan – one's template. Even when a proposal is not required of one, do sit and write it. It has its direct and indirect benefits. Assuming one's proposal has been accepted with permission to start writing, the first thing to do is to break one's work down into chapters. Some universities request five chapters depending on one's scope of work and or departmental requirement. At the higher levels, one can write six or seven chapters depending on the scope of one's work.

4.4 Structure of a Research

The structure of a research deals with how the book form of the research has been organizationally arranged for a well-outlined research/work. Depending on the university, department, scope of work, academic level, etc., the research book form can span between 5 and 7 chapters. The components of each chapter will be reviewed below.

a. Chapter One - Introduction

This chapter consists of one's introduction which is made up of various elements such as:

1. Background to the Study

The background to the study examines information related to one's research topic or title. That is what one's research is all about. It is the foundation (base) of one's work, where one establishes the topic by discussing it in detail.

2. Statement of the Research Problem

Soles (2010, p.29) refers to this aspect as thesis statement while defining it as "an expression of the central or controlling idea of your entire essay. It is the essence of your academic essay." This means that, without this part, as small as it is, one's academic essay is going nowhere. Note that immediately after one's foundation work, there is the need for one to state why one is conducting the research by problematizing the topic in a way that will fill the gap or lacuna that one had seen before starting the work. This is the problem one wants to solve and, therefore, it becomes one's contributory knowledge to the benefit of man. At this point, there is the need to cite a few scholars who have discussed something related to one's work. The following will reflect the statement of one's problem:

a. Write from the known to the unknown – from what everybody already knows to where you are going to.
b. Show what one's work will address.
c. Link the relevance of one's work to the concerned set of people, ideas, situations, etc.
d. Outline one's objectives.

3. Aim and Objectives

According to Bariki (2019, p.35), "the aim is the overall purpose or intention of the researcher while the objectives are subsumed in the aim." In other words, after the statement of the problem comes one's aim and objectives. One's aim is always one and that aim goes back to one's topic, that is, it reflects one's topic but it is always supported by the objectives that will guide the research. One's aim should be written in broad terms that should be linked to the topic. The objectives should be very specific and measurable, in ways that will show the steps one would want to use to achieve the aim. If for example, the work is on Pragmatics, one might be using a (literary) theory as the theoretical framework. With this, one is testing the research of the tenets or elements of pragmatics with a (literary) theory. This guides the objectives of one's research. The theoretical framework is the scientific foundation on which one's work is based. In nearly all research, theories are used. What theoretical framework does is to make one's work scientific, that is, one submits one's work to science, not minding the field of study.

4. Research Questions

According to Odekunle (2005, p.37) as cited in Bariki (2019, p. 36), "a research problem is broken down into specific objectives." That is, before getting what will go for the research questions, a problem must have been identified. This problem will be divided into the objectives and then questions would be generated accordingly. After the aim and objectives come the research questions. The research questions help one to define one's objectives well in a question-like manner. The research questions can be predictive, descriptive, comparative, explanatory, relationship-based, or interpretive in nature.

5. Scope of the Study

According to Oseni (2019), the scope of the study is an unequivocal delimitation of a research topic. It guides the reader to have the clear view of the bearing and coverage of the work embarked upon by the researcher. One can determine if s/he had maintained the demarcation of the topic or gone beyond the demarcation. It has to do with the limitations inherent in the study captured (sometimes) through the topic or title. It can be how wide or how limited one's research is. The right wording of this will give one's research a good focus and preciseness. Under this heading, the researcher will reveal to the reader the range of scope s/he will be deploying for the research. It affects one's data (to solve the problem one has at hand), geographical spread, and the topic (how wide or small). Does it cover the whole range of people, items, institutions, countries, etc.? The range of the intended environment? Will one get the right answer(s)? It will sometimes affect the dating, finance, and number of words in one's work. One must look at one's scope before embarking on a topic. While writing, one can still be delimited by one's scope, so one must be very careful. One's scope will surely reflect in one's work.

6. Justification of the Study

Oseni (2019) reveals that a researcher should describe the importance and uniqueness of the research topic and why it is worthy of the investigation or research. As such, this particular aspect reveals to the readers what others have done and this, in one way or the other, justifies one's choice of research topic. At this point, the research topic reveals the gap to be filled in the previous works done. A few of the extant works can be lightly examined here and later developed in the second chapter. Here, one is justifying the "why" and convincing others of the reason one has chosen the specific topic.

b. Chapter Two – Literature Review

Olademo (2019, p.92) opines that "literature review is the act of reading and understanding existing studies and resources available in the area of your research." This means that, in making a literature review successful, reading is very important. This is where different works of others who have (re)searched into what one is researching would be discussed. It is pertinent to note that under the structure of research, one's literature review is the second aspect that reveals everything about one's topic, as differentiated from the analysis. One does a kind of empirical review of related literature regarding one's topic. Different works, researches, researchers, and writers will be explicated based on what one has read about their works, their findings and their conclusions. One's views or positions come into play here on nearly all aspects of one's topic - whether one agrees with a particular proposition or not. One should take stands. As one's argument is established, the arguments of other scholars who have worked in that field of study will also be established. There will be the connection of ideas that will lead to one's own established point, and as such, the academic chain is established and elongated for another researcher who would need to review one's work too.

The literature review talks about the theoretical framework one is using. That is, the scientific theory one is using to test the research. The history, schools of thought, elements, and tenets of one's theory would be discussed so that one's readers can have a pre-understanding of it before they get to the analysis part (where one would be utilizing the theory). They need to get familiar with the tools and their meanings.

It is pertinent to note that when one quotes other researchers and writers here, one must reference them accordingly. And in using their ideas, one must not plagiarise. Use quotation marks to separate the ones that have been copied verbatim with a proper referencing style sheet - APA (American Psychological Association), MLA (Modern Language Association), Chicago, University of Ibadan, Turabian, Harvard, etc. – (anyone that applies to one's research). One can fully indent from around three or four lines depending on the type of style sheet instruction that one is following. It is good, that as a researcher, one reads widely at this stage for a better understanding of some of the issues one would be discussing. One should break down one's topic so that the review of literature chapter should come in sub-sections with sub-topics. One must be able to show, at the end of each of them, where one stands, one's arguments, where other researchers stand, and where one is taking it from and extending it to. Within one's review of the literature, the research lacuna will reflect. One does not need to plagiarize other people's content in the review of literature.

c. Chapter Three – Methodology

Methodology, according Babatunde (2019, p70), is "the procedure by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena." In other words, we cannot carry out research without going through some paths to gather the data and analysing the data involved. Earlier in this paper, it was mentioned that what students have learnt and are trying to research into should follow due process, scientific one, so that they can arrive at expected results, which will contribute to the body of knowledge. How the researcher has gone through the process, what has been added together and where s/he might have gone to in gathering the data, will all be visible in the methodology section. Kindly note that, depending on the department, faculty and research book content arrangement, this chapter can either be labelled as methodology, methods or other specific (literary or textual) topics. One would need to link the chapter topic to the overall title. Under this chapter, sources of data, types of data, methods of data collection,

and techniques of data analysis are examined. Researches can be statistical (quantitative) while others can be narrative (qualitative).

All activities, like the interview (structured, semi-structured or unstructured), the serving of questionnaires, use of the library, use of textual examples, visitations to the field, etc. that one had done, are to reflect in this chapter. In this chapter, one is presenting the research results and discussing them. As one writes, there must be a link to the aim and objectives, and research questions. It is taken that one has gone to the field and is now reporting in chapters 3 and 4. What one had seen in the field might not tally with one's questions and pre-assumptions. Research allows one to say exactly the results one got from the field. One does not need to tamper with results and records. This is what is called research. One does not need to agree with what other researchers have written or found.

d. Chapter Four - Data Analysis

It consists of the main analysis of the work. At this point, the tenets of the theoretical framework come into play and it works together with the selected data for the analysis. Research design becomes relevant here under the discussion. The quantitative or qualitative form of the research will reflect here. The chapter can also come under other (literary or textual) topics different from data analysis or discussion.

e. Chapter Five - Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendation

Some universities title this chapter as Conclusion and Recommendation. There is a total overview of all the preceding chapters through summary and or conclusion. Under this chapter, one is expected to show one's contribution(s) to knowledge. Contribution to knowledge does not always mean a new thing as one's research might just be validating, adding to, or opposing ideas that have been taken for granted. This does not mean that one has to present this in lengthy pages - it can be in just a few sentences or a paragraph. It needs not be extensive, but it must come from the summary and or conclusion (the overview) of all that one has done. It must be linked to the aim and objectives and should answer the research questions because it solves or fills the lacuna or the problem that one saw at the beginning of the work. All the research objectives must be met and if there are questions, they must be answered here.

4.5 Documentation, Referencing, and Citation

According to Soles (2010, p.48), "if you do not acknowledge all of the sources from which you borrowed information – whether you quoted directly from these sources or paraphrased information – you are likely guilty of the serious academic offense of plagiarism." In other words, plagiarism in academics is unforgivable. Whatever one writes, do in-text, do end text, do footnote, everything must get to the back of the work as reference, bibliography or works cited. If other people's works are cited in one's work, one must mention their names. So many people have failed their defence because it was discovered that they did not reference author(s) whose works they utilized or copied. One's documentation brings together all works one had cited or those that one had worked with throughout the research. We have references, works cited, and bibliography. Within the three, one is doing nearly the same thing, there are just little differences. With reference, one shows all the sources that one had worked with. To do this, one can use any of the different Style Sheets which have been mentioned earlier like the MLA (Modern Language Association), APA (American Psychological Association), Harvard, Chicago and so on. It is advisable to use the recommended one utilized by the faculty, department or one's specific field of study. These cover the in-text, end text, foot notes and the

cumulative referencing at the back of the work. Do make sure that the rules guiding the specific style sheet you are using are followed.

4.6 The Abstract

According to Medubi (2019, p. 170), an abstract is "the statement grouped together to describe the various segments of a research in a brief form." It is meant to show a summary, an overview, of all that one had done. It is one of the first things that will show in the content arrangement of the work, but one of the last things that will be written because one must finish one's work before writing the abstract which brings together everything one had done. Some universities have specific numbers of words and paragraphs to be used here. There are elements (BPMRC) to follow in writing an abstract. They are:

1. Background to the study (present tense)
2. Purpose of the research (past tense)
3. Methodology (past tense)
4. Results or findings (past tense mainly)
5. Conclusion (present tense)

The tense in front of each element signifies the fact that each element comes with its language and should be used accordingly.

4.7 Editing

According to Soles (2010, p. 112), "editing is the process of correcting and improving the sentences and words within a written text." In other words, editing is an act done by (language) professionals to enhance the words in a written text. It makes the work to be problem free, that is, without grammatical errors, and with meaningful and well-constructed sentences. If one is not too good at these, one can employ the services of an editor or use apps such as Grammarly, Hemingway, Slickwrite, and so on. Soles (2010) gives some of the sections to deploy editing as grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and diction. All these are what make a writing or essay well-coordinated for easy assimilation.

4.8 Results

The aim of this study is to re-examine and re-teach the necessary steps needed in the writing of a research project, dissertation or thesis. And from the objectives, this study was able to reappraise research methodology again.

In the first objective, the study has been able to systematically examine the steps and methods needed for good research in the humanities and by that, researchers would find it easy to embark on research at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Also, since it was found out that researchers don't attach values to research the way it has been before, this study has been able to reposition the values of research in the academia, so that contributions to humanities through research will not stop.

Finally on the results, after finding out that most researchers, especially, at the undergraduate level, do not understand some important aspects of research methodology, this study, through the pedagogical mind, has been able to re-establish and widen the horizon alongside the understanding of young, middle and old researchers in the academia. And as such, this paper posits that, research dissertations, projects, theses, in the academia can still follow the laid down rules and regulations, and this rests on understanding and implementing all that are entailed in research writing and documentation by those concerned, that is, the researchers, especially, in the academia.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, for one's research to be a point of scholarly reference and be valid, it must follow all the instructions, structure and ethics that guide its writing. In terms of ethics, the researcher must not be guilty of plagiarism, the referencing style must be adhered to and every other thing needed must be followed accordingly.

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