

# Cultural Factors in Conducting Research in Developing Countries: Nigeria in Perspective

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**Abstract:** While conducting researches in developing countries, researchers are bedevilled with various cultural factors, which vary significantly from researches of developed climes and also contribute to the low quality and outcome of the researches in developing countries. Researchers in developing countries are bedevilled with various cultural factors, which affect the outcome of researches. The study utilized the qualitative desk research method, secondary method was utilized to source for data. The study identified and analysed language, belief, religion and value as some of the cultural factors in conducting research in Nigeria. The study recommended that researchers should have knowledge of the cultures of the population they intend to study to produce reliable and unbiased researches.

**Keywords:** Culture, Cultural Factors, Developing Countries, Research, values

## Introduction

Research is generally referred to as the process of searching for knowledge. It is also referred to as a scientific and methodical search for relevant facts on a specific topic. When we are confronted by the unknown, our curiosity lead us to more understanding of that unknown. This curiosity births knowledge and the method, which we utilise to obtain the knowledge of the unknown, can be termed as a research (Kothari and Garg, 2020).

Agara (2019) asserts that the term 'research' generally implies an investigation of a phenomenon for purpose of increasing its understanding, contributing to knowledge and its solution, and probably laying the ground for further future research into the phenomenon. Research involves identifying a problem, collecting new data, finding explanation to a problem through cautiously calculated measures and logical analysis.

Research, as the search for knowledge should be conducted in a way that is suitable for the unique population and the culture of the proposed research location. This statement might sound simple, but in actual fact researchers encounter all sort of challenges when conducting research in Africa and other developing countries where cultural factors and perspectives differs greatly from what obtains in climes.

Nowadays, one can easily see the dramatic inequalities among developing and developed countries. These inequalities are found in the level of advancement and development in the various sectors of the economy; health, education, aviation, transport, agriculture etc. These inequalities are attributed to the level of researches being carried out in both worlds, which have different cultural divides.

Before the 1990s, African scholars viewed culture as the main weakness in the conduct of research in developing countries. African scholars have not been able to adequately conceptualized, understood and used culture in examining the procedures of research and development in Africa (Modo, 1998). The bane of development programmes in the continent has been attributed to the inability to fully comprehend African's need, unawareness of the historical, ecological and socio-cultural practices. In support of the above, Andah and Bolarinwa (1994) asserts that the cultural setting of a people is the main influence in the developmental process of that community. The entirety of the cultural elements of a people shapes their socio-economic and political association in addition to inculcating an overall sense of development. Andah and Bolarinwa (1994), also asserts that culture is the sum values, beliefs, attitudes, customs and pattern of behaviours in a given people as an important support of social-economic change. Researchers, who undermine the prominence of cultural factors in conducting their researches are liable to yield indifference, disaffection and social discord .

While conducting researches in developing countries, researchers are bedevilled with various cultural factors, which affect the outcome of researches. The main objective of this study is to carryout a critical analysis of these cultural factors with emphasis on Nigeria. The study is also aimed at: exposing the reader to the cultural factors that affect the conduct of researches in Nigeria and

proffer solutions to the negative effects these cultural factors. The secondary data was utilized to source for information. The study utilized the qualitative desk research method of analysis based on which conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

## Conceptualisation

### Culture/Cultural Factors

Culture can be the entire multifaceted divine, material, knowledgeable and emotional characteristics features that make up society or social group. It includes the fundamental rights of humans, ways of life, value systems, belief and traditions. Different societies have different cultural expressions which makes profound responsive connections in the people, which occurs moderately due to the fact that the people draw upon a reliable tradition that define the collective picture of individuals and society that produces a unique collectively.

The millennium years introduced the changing phase in recognising the significance of culture in the development process in Africa. From the early 1970s the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has buttressed the importance of culture in the socio-economic and political development of modern societies. Etounga-Manguelle (1998), asserts that, in developing countries, the awareness of cultural factors for societal development focus on reiterating cultural identity, that invariably believed was really susceptible by the highlighting on purely economic development. From a thin viewpoint, culture can be referred to as “that multifaceted system which includes customs, morals, knowledge, law, belief, arts, and other capabilities and practices developed by humans as a members of community” (Scupin, 2006).

As Serageldin (1998) rightly noted, that it is important that “cultural identity” be fixed at the middle of the development pattern that directs our activities. Societies have their own unique system of values making up important parts of their culture. The people of a society need to harness and exploit the resourcefulness of its culture in a manner that leads to harmonious develop (Salim, 1998). It is also relevant to note that the humans now live in a symbiotic environments within which people must endeavour to meet up with systematic and technological progress. When introducing new technology, the cultural implications of such technology, should be duly considered to protect the cultural values of a specific society.

Culture comprises the set of languages, beliefs, traditions, values, religion, and laws (or rules of behavior) commonly held a group of people. Culture includes religious observances; the spoken language of the people; customs (religions and beliefs); acceptable gender roles and livelihoods; types of food practices; intellectual, artistic and other aspects of behavior. Developing countries are made up of a widespread of cultural diversity, values, religious beliefs and customs, that characterizes the various origins of the people.

### Cultural Factors that Affect the Conduct of Researches in Nigeria

Nigeria is made up of several ethnic groups and cultures, the ethnic divided/prejudice of Nigerians as culture-loving people most times effect the perceptions and perspectives of majority of Nigerian researchers while undertaking research in the country (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Some of these are discussed:

1. **Language** According to Nations Online (2021), language is precisely the human ability for acquiring and utilizing multifaceted systems of sound as well as kinetic signals to express their thoughts, feelings and used for the exchange of information and experiences. According to Grimes (2000), there are about 515 spoken languages in Nigeria. The major languages (Hausa, Igbo Yoruba) have millions of speakers, while the non-major languages have a few thousands or hundreds of speakers (Ishekiri, Igala, Efik/Ibibio, Epira, Nupe, Edo, Ijaw, Idoma, Urhobo, Isoko, Ekweres, and many more) (Sasu, 2022). English language, which is the colonial language is the prevailing language used in press, administration, commerce, international relations, business and education. The major languages are predominantly used as a means of communication in the regions where they are localised, that is, Hausa-North, Igbo-East, and Yoruba- West region. Pidgin is commonly used as a means communication in the South-South zone in the Niger Delta Region.

The southern researcher who embarks on a research in the Northern part of the country will have the difficulty of being able to penetrate the northern areas of the country due to his/her inability to communicate fluently in the Hausa/Fulani/kanuri languages prevalent in the northern part of the country. This might influence the instruments for data collection and as well as the final outcome of the research. The researcher will have to source for a competent interpreter.

In a research carried out by Translators without border in 2021, all operational organisations interviewed reported high challenge in communicating with target population due to language barriers. Discretion and conflict-sensitivity are reduced when most participants cannot speak for themselves. Language barriers which was obstructing effective communication with the target population, was the researchers major concerns. The challenges of verbal communication are great in the sense that interviews with target population passed through many languages (English – hausa – kanuri- shuwa and back again), this increased the cost of conducting the research, time wastage, and unknown levels of information loss as meanings are lost in the cause of translation (Translators without border, 2021).

- 2. Belief.** Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2022), defined belief as a sense of convinced that someone or something exists or that something is true. Some communities in Nigeria have the irrational beliefs that children are not to be counted, certain concepts, issues and topics are taboo and obscene subjects that should not be publicly discussed. Although the Nigerian undergraduate might be too shy or uncomfortable to converse issues of sex, politics, aids and family with a stranger (researcher) thus making researches and their findings in such areas to be largely faulted (Jimoh, 1998). It is the belief in most communities in Nigeria, that bad/evil things should not be said about the dead. A researcher that would want to research on the activities of the dead while alive might not get all the right information because of the belief that negative comments should not be made about the dead. This will definitely impede the conduct of research in behaviours/attitude of a dead person before death. It is a common belief in some northern states of the country, that women are not expected to be seen outside their homes or participate in social or political activities, they are to be indoors all through, taking care of their husbands and children. This has greatly affected the conduct and outcome of researches relating to women and children in the country.

The perception of women in Nigeria society as a disadvantaged secondary one have a strong theme occurrence, a common notion is, “husbands or male guardians’ exercise the power of final decisions (Aradeon, 2016). A study by Adewemimo et al, (2014) found that 25% of Nigerian women sight husband’s consent as an enabler for the use of skilled birth attendants. Furthermore, Fagbamigbe and Idemudia, (2015) asserts that Nigerian women are perceived by their male counterpart as of “low-status”, these low statuses prevent women from being outspoken and having minds of their own, which makes women highly inaccessible for research purposes. Africa traditional society comprises of men who hold positions of power characterized by social stratification based on gender, that is, it is characterized by patriarchy (British Council Nigeria, 2012).

Africa social system promotes gender inequalities by relegating the female folks to domestic and reproductive roles and limiting their access to finance and other entitlements such as properties. Hence, the social construction of gender roles and patriarchy developing countries constrain female independence and access to resources, which also limit women’s capacity and participation in research activities.

- 3. Religion.** Nigeria major consists of three religions: The Christians, Muslims and Africa Traditional worshippers. The Christians make up about 40% of the population while Muslims make up about 55% of the population (Ayodele and Ahmad, 2012). The Muslims are predominantly found in the northern part of the country, where the concept of Dhu-Haram is practiced, which birthed the concept of “Kunya” meaning modesty. The female gender is expected to be withdrawn, not to be heard and modest specifically relating to inter-gender contacts (Shaguy, 2019). There are women in some northern part of the country who have been put under purdah – an Islamic religious belief where a woman is covered from her head to toe, which makes it difficult for an outsider/stranger to really know who is behind the coverings.

The southern and eastern parts of Nigeria are predominantly Christians who are a bit liberal in their associations. Some of these Christians believe that a woman should not put on trousers and artificial body parts like hair, fingernails etc. Thus, a researcher with such attributes might find it difficult to conduct his/her researches in these areas. Additionally, it is a belief in some Christian communities that topics like sex and family life should not be discussed with strangers. These impede researches on home environment, sexual abuses, depression etc.

- 4. Values.** Cultural Values focus on the custom and ways of life of a people, the dos and don’ts morals, etc. In developing countries and Nigeria in particular, the various regions and communities have various cultural values like sacred traditional rites, days of activities – market days, new yam festivals, ancestral worship days etc. There are certain places and days that visitors are not allowed entry; a widow is not allowed to remarry; it is a taboo for a woman to be seen outside her husband’s house after certain time of the day; a female victim of rape is also advised not to speak up due to stigmatization etc.

In the western part of Nigeria, western education has high value unlike the northern part of the country where western education has very low value, and in the eastern part of the country, skills acquisition and entrepreneurship is of utmost value. The researcher from the highly educated West who embarks on a research in the low educated North will have a bias by having the mind-set that the northerners are low-levels due to education which might generate a biased research result and findings. Presently in Nigeria with the high rate of kidnapping, crime and other vices, the collapse of moral values in the society and high level of distrust among citizens, researchers have to put in extra communication skills and caution to be able to carry-out researches in the country.

## Discussion

From the above analysis, the study discovered that the various cultural factors in conducting research in developing countries like Nigeria are language, norm, custom, values, belief, religion etc. These factors greatly affect and influence the outcome of researches in developing nations. They lead to high cost of carrying out research, misleading and loss of information to the researcher, time wastage in research process and biased and unreliable research findings.

## Conclusion

The study noted that a researcher is bedevilled with several cultural factors in conducting research in Nigeria due to its highly heterogeneous nature with diverse cultures – norms, customs, beliefs, languages, religion, values etc. The study concludes that these various cultural factors have greatly affected the outcome of researches in the country, leading to the slow pace of development and advancement in the developing countries. The study recommends that:

- i. Researchers should involve language translators who are fluent in the languages used by the research population.
- ii. Researchers should respect and tolerate cultural differences by gaining knowledge about other cultures, values, basic orientations, assumptions and behavioral policies shared among the study population.
- iii.

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