



Foreign Rating of Local Researches: Relevance in the Face of Development Conflicts

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Abstract

There has been a realisation by some scholars that African researches have to be rated and indexed using local standards. The exogenised approach has often undermined the scope and effort of the researches on local development. This desk analysis argues that there is need for an endogenisation of the impact measurement system so that locals also benefit. Local researches have to be measured according to the challenges on the ground, solutions required and the needs of the potential recipients among others.

Keywords: local researches, foreign rating, development conflicts, exogenous approach, endogenous rating

1. Introduction

Tertiary institutions inclusive of universities the world over are established to among others help develop local economies through researches. Researches are expected to unravel new spaces with a view to presenting new insights and potential solutions to challenges at hand. In most African economies, researches and their impacts are determined and measured by largely the financiers instead of the researchers and the intended consumers primarily in the local communities. The paper argues that researches' impacts from African universities are measured and valued by standards in the west thereby satisfying development needs of the western communities. Over the period that education and contemporary forms of researches have been introduced to Africa, most of Africa's view points and approaches have been pushed to the peripheries and rendered irrelevant.

2. Background

It is universally acknowledged that university researches play various roles towards the local development. The importance of the roles is measured amongst others through the income universities collect from the licensing of university-owned patents (Graff *et al.* 2002), through the entrepreneurial efforts of the graduates (Yusuf 2007) ^[17] and by the amount of its stimulation towards corporate research and development activity (Darby and Zucker, 2003) ^[5].

However, what has been worrying over the years is the fact that most of the educated and talented in various other fields have often been lured by the west in anticipation of better lives through what Audretsch and Stephan (1996) ^[1] refer to as 'drawing power'. The attraction of several talented Africans to universities in the west ostensibly to pursue education is a cover up for a deliberate illicit acquisition of skills for the development of local needs through royalties and reputation. At the end of the day, whenever researches are to be rated, they fair lowly.

Africa endowed with a vast pool of talented scholars has often found itself with researches that are either under-funded or ill-appreciated so much so that they have been unable to produce anything meaningful from an innovation perspective. Academic

conferences and other research oriented platforms are either convened in the west or are locally held but under the direction and funded by the west. This has naturally undermined the locals' efforts. To worsen the whole process, the yard stick for assessing researches and all initiatives academic is western defined and has to meet the needs of the west before it is applied to Africa and other developing areas.

3. Analysis

3.1 Research Relevance

There are various types of researchers and researches on social, political, economic and cultural issues and their respective depth also vary. These researches also differ in their level of influence and contribution to the innovation and development of local needs (Bitsch, 2005) ^[2]. Researches according to some scholars may not be equated even if they are focusing on the same subject matter. What sometimes makes them different are aspects like the surrounding environment, availability of funding, the propensity of the other supporting factors to change owing to climatic conditions and the credibility of the study approach itself among others (Bozeman & Sarewitz, 2011) ^[3]. These are some of the factors that differentiate researches in the west from those in Africa and other developing areas.

Good and successful research is usually attributed to a research team or an individual researcher, usually adequately resourced. It is believed that such success is determined by more than individual brilliance, hard work, and team skills. It also takes such factors as the nature and excellence of the research environment generally, the facilities and other resources available to the researcher, and contemporaneous effort by other researchers in related areas. For effective research, it is valuable to think about two key elements. In addition to human element, which may be called the active component, there is also an environmental element, made up of the institutional, social, and material factors that afford a setting for the research project and determine its accomplishment or failure (Bushman *et al.*, 2016) ^[4]. Because it is suitable for the needs of a particular area, that research naturally becomes appropriate and good.

The spread of research findings offers possibilities for improvements in the quality of innovation and infrastructural development. Effective research also provides the primary conditions for productivity increases in almost all production and social spheres. However, it has been noted to have its disadvantages of culminating to a tendency of political and economic domination by developed democracies and other research individuals and institutions (Sawyer, 2004) ^[15].

3.2 Research Impact

Research impact according to van der Meulen and Rip (2000) ^[16] and Bozeman and Sarewitz (2011) ^[3] is any relevant demonstrable contribution and benefits out of a research to a targeted constituency. It is the manner and depth in which a research influences and directs people. However, the question remains as to who defines and measures the impact. It is only some institutions based in the west and if any African endogenous institution tries it, the researches and its publications will not be recognised, even by the intended consumers in the locality. From the definition, there is no talk of the invention of any new technology; it simply has to be demonstrable contribution and benefits.

It is this paper's argument that the impact of a research must be measured based on the local needs and how much it would have impacted on the local consumers. This explains why Darby and Zucker (2003) ^[5] argue that universities with the greatest local impacts are those with the highest quality research benefitting the local consumers. If a university is located in a given area, first and foremost, its mandate should be focused on exploitation of locally available resources towards the development of some commercially beneficial activity. Secondly, its products: graduates and research outputs should benefit the local industries and people before any external players move in to measure the degree of benefit.

In simple explanation, some communities have built international reputations owing to specialised research and developments at the hands of local universities. Cases in point include electronics in Silicon Valley, California with ties to Stanford University and Route 128 in Boston with ties to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Hill and Seidman, 2006) ^[9]. There is also Siemens' medical imaging technology development related to University of Tennessee and the Boeing Company also associated with Georgia Institute of Technology (Aerospace Engineering), Purdue University (Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering), Brigham Young University (Mechanical Engineering), and University of Washington (Aeronautical and Astronautical Engineering) (Yusuf, 2007) ^[17].

Salter and Martin (2001); Nightingale and Scott (2007) ^[12] argue that some of the published researches in high indexed journals may only be good for academic purposes and not for social development. It is also argued that impact assessment should take into account the fact that there is not just one model of a successful research university that is valid for the whole world (van der Meulen and Rip, 2000; Rymer, 2011) ^[16, 13]. Instead, according to, Molas-Gallart *et al.* (2002) ^[11] and Goransson, Maharajh and Schmoch (2009) ^[7], impact measurement and determination should consider the cultural context, and the national needs and standards.

However, there are some specialised universities whose researches have failed to impact positively on the local needs.

Bradford University in Britain and University for Peace in Ethiopia whose mandates also focus on peace have for ages failed to transform local and surrounding conflicts. The failure to positively impact on the ground is attributable to brain drain and poor governance on the part of the administrators. Besides, they have been focusing on the demands of their financiers and the west instead of the problems at hand.

3.3 Challenges

The challenge that Africa has over the years faced relating to the 'aspect of research impact' being measured on the basis of having been published in 'indexed' journals that are unfortunately largely based in the west and funded by the west is non-progression. There is a natural tendency in humanity to ignore anything thought not to have been 'accredited or indexed' by some westernized measurement despite its non-relevance to local needs. Researchers also tend to forget that researches have various aspects as defined by Donovan (2008) including *sociometrics*, whose impact can only be felt and measured on the ground at local level.

Africa's researches are also expected to meet some western standards and satisfy some western socio-economic challenges ignoring the fact that any research out-put is determined by the corresponding inputs (HEFCE, 2011; Martin, 2011; Rymer, 2011) ^[8, 14, 13]. In this case, a research conducted in Zimbabwe under Zimbabwe's social, political, economic and environmental conditions may not adequately satisfy the measure-stick made and kept in the west. The concept may be generalisable but the results conflicting in all respects.

Especially with qualitative studies in the humanities and social sciences, scientifically measuring a study's impact level is not easy. Besides, the impact may take several ages to become apparent and be identified with a particular study. Therefore, having local researches' impact measured in foreign lands without looking at how the local people and their surroundings have been moved, influenced, directed and shaped is an invitation of conflicts in local development against the west. To some extent, it explains the stagnation of local development.

4. Conclusion

There have been calls by some African researchers on the need to endogenise research indexing systems as a way of making them relevant to the surrounding consumers. Like it has been observed, there is need for serious consideration of local standards and intended consumers' expectations. The present arrangement where most of the research publishers are either in the west or funded by the west has worked to the disadvantage of African researchers whose socio-economic and political challenges remain hanging. Often, they lag behind, lose confidence or have their ideas applied elsewhere without their participation. The present measurement of research impact has also seen most of the African indigenous systems lagging behind in development as the rating is done using western standards which are not compatible with indigenous systems.

5. References

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