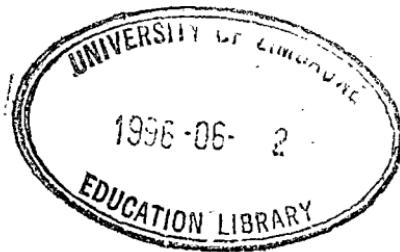


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# **PROBLEMS OF CONDUCTING EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN ZAMBIA<sup>1</sup>**

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## ***ABSTRACT***

*This study was an attempt to identify factors hindering the carrying out of educational research in Zambia. Further, it sought to provide solutions to the identified problems.*

*Seven of the 18 respondents returned completed questionnaires. The respondents identified the following as factors hindering research activities in Zambia; lack of research funds, lack of adequate number of publishing houses, ignorance of the uses of research results by the majority of individuals in the country, unwilling or unhelpful respondents, lack of transport and lack of research skills by the majority of professionals with first degrees.*

*The following were suggested as possible solutions to the identified problems; allocation of more funds for research purposes, setting up of more publishing houses, authorities should be more supportive of research activities, publicizing the importance and value of research findings and creating school based transport pools for research purposes.*

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1 Special thanks go to Dr S.M. Kasanda for comments on the earlier draft and encouragement.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In most developing countries it is extremely difficult to carry out educational research activities, even if one has the zeal and the ability to do so. Further, educational research projects in these countries, Zambia in particular, are a one shot type rather than a sustained and long term continuous activity.

In Zambia, research institutions such as the Educational Research Bureau (ERB), Institute for African Studies (IAS) and others were deliberately created to carry out relevant research activities. Nonetheless, few if any educational research projects have been carried out by these institutions. Most of their research projects appear to be concentrated on social, economical and policy matters rather than on educational aspects per se.<sup>2</sup>

## **PROBLEM**

This study sought to identify factors that hinder the carrying out of research and dissemination of research findings in Zambia. In addition, it was an attempt to identify solutions to those hinderances.

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- 2 A survey of the published works of the ERB and IAS show that most of the research carried out by these two institutions in recent years has been contracted by outside bodies and is in the main social, economic and political in thrust rather than educational.

## METHOD

### Sample

The sample comprised of seven respondents (six males and one female). These were all in one way or another associated with education in the country either as subject inspectors in the Ministry of General Education, Youth and Sport, Ministry of Higher education and as lecturers at the University of Zambia. The University of Zambia lecturers were involved in teacher training.

### Instrument

The instrument used to gather data from the respondents was an open-ended 25 item questionnaire. This was prepared by the author and revised after comments on the suitability of the items from colleagues in the School of Education. The questionnaire was divided into four Sections. Section A requested respondents to provide personal background information . Section B addressed specifically the conduct of research in Zambia, while Sections C and D dealt with publication of research work, the researchers' work place and authorities' role in encouraging research activity in the work , respectively.

The questionnaires were delivered to 18 potential respondents to complete and return to the researcher. Six of these were secondary school teachers, the other eight were lecturers at the University of Zambia, School of Education and the remaining four were inspectors of schools in the two Ministries of Education in the country. It should be pointed out that due to financial limitations it was not possible to reach a large number of educational researchers in the country.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

An indicated earlier only seven respondents (four lecturers and three school inspectors) returned completed questionnaires. This represented a low return rate of 38.9% of the questionnaires.This low return response

rate appears to underscore some of the factors hindering research activities in Zambia identified in this paper, i.e., respondents' unwillingness to complete and return questionnaires sent to them.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION ON RESPONDENTS**

### **Age and sex of the respondents**

The ages of the six males ranged from 40 to 48 years. The age of the only female respondent was 41 years. The average of the respondents was 43.2 years.

### **Academic qualifications and occupations**

Four of the respondents had doctorates while the other three had masters degrees. The earliest doctoral qualification was obtained in 1979 and the latest in 1987. On the other hand the earliest masters degree was obtained in 1983 and the latest in 1985. Four of the respondents were university lecturers and the other three were inspectors of schools in the two Ministries of Education.

## **RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

### **a) Exposure to research techniques**

The respondents were requested to indicate whether they had been exposed to research techniques before and at what level of their education they were exposed to these techniques. All seven (100%) indicated that they had been exposed to these techniques. One had been exposed to research techniques at the under graduate level, five at the masters level and one at the doctoral level.

**b) Last time involved in educational research activity**

This item received a variety of responses from the seven subjects. Of interest is the fact that two of the respondents, one with a masters degree obtained in 1984 and the other with a doctoral degree obtained in 1987 had as of 1990 not carried out any educational research. The other five had last carried out any educational research in Zambia in 1987 (2 studies), 1989(2 studies) and 1982 (1 study).

As can be seen from the research activities of the respondents, at the time this study was carried out these potential researchers were doing nothing in terms of productive and informative research in their areas of specialization.

**c) Research output**

The seven respondents were requested to indicate whether enough educational research was being carried out in the country. All seven (100%) said "no". This is a sad and unfortunate situation in that the practitioners in education such as teachers and educational policy makers are being deprived of an important source of information for use in the classroom and for decision making.

**d) Access to research products.**

The respondents were asked to indicate the most recent educational research work they were aware of carried out in Zambia. Five (71.4%) of the respondents indicated "none", while two (28.6%) gave examples of research projects they were aware of. The type of research given by the two subjects appear to have been part of their job descriptions. Nonetheless, the findings to this item were confirmed by the respondents' responses to another item on the questionnaire which requested them to list the different educational research projects they were aware of, and only a few (42.95%) could do so.

## FACTORS HINDERING EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN ZAMBIA

Several factors constraining the conduct of research were identified by the respondents. The following are the most important identified factor:

### Lack of research funds

Five (71.4%) of the respondents gave this as one of the factors hindering research activities in Zambia. Indeed, research activities require money. Without adequate funding little meaningful and sustained research activities can take place. The Director of the IAS lamented the lack of research funds from the University of Zambia:

...last year (1989) the centres were allocated only K10.660<sup>3</sup> for research in University budget. This amount was limited to be used for meaningful programmes. (Zambia Daily Mail, Friday, 19th October, 1990).

It is probably instructive to get a leaf from the curriculum changes of the late 60s and early 70s in mathematics. In both developed and developing countries, several millions of dollars were poured into educational research activities in order to ascertain the worthy of the new mathematics curriculum over the "old" or traditional one. Indeed the benefits of such liberal funding for educational research activities are being enjoyed even today.

It is interesting to note that in Zambia and Africa in general, Governments, parastatals and non-governmental organisations, including

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3 At the time of writing this paper the official exchange rate of the Zambian Kwacha to the Pound was: 1 = K 92.00. Accordingly, the figure of K 10.660 equals approximately 115.90

the private sector have recognised the importance of the applicability of research findings to real life situations (Bless and Achola, 1990). In Zambia several prominent individuals both academics and politicians have talked about the need for professionals in different fields to become involved in research activities, especially social research in order to find solutions to pressing social problems. Unfortunately, little material support has been forthcoming from these individuals.

One of the items on the questionnaire requested the respondents to indicate whether research and publications were considered in the promotion of staff at their places of work. Five (71.4%) of the respondents answered "yes". Indeed, at the University of Zambia promotions of academic staff is heavily weighed towards research and publications<sup>4</sup>.

This is not the case in the Ministries of Education where seniority appears to count more for such promotions. Nonetheless, although the University requires research and publications for promotion, little is done to facilitate the carrying out of such research activities. Approval of research proposals takes too long and when the funds are available, they have been either too little or have come too late. By the time the researcher gets the money the research time-table has elapsed and a new one must be worked out. Besides, the research problem will have been probably overtaken by

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4 At its (University of Zambia) recent promotion exercise held on 8th and 9th January 1991 much emphasis was placed upon research and publications, especially in international journals for the applying for promotion to Senior lectureship and above. Local journals were lowly considered and teaching was placed even lower.

events or the researcher will have lost the initial zeal to carry out the research.

The price of all commodities in Zambia rise or change often suddenly and without notice. Accordingly, a budget worked out six or so months earlier will be outdated when the money is obtained by the high rate of inflation.<sup>5</sup> As such research could not be carried out as originally conceived.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that all seven respondents agreed that research and publications should be part of the promotion criteria for professionals such as teachers, university lecturers, and planners. They argued that research brings about progress in the researcher's area of specialization and also reveals the researcher's competence.

### Absence or lack of adequate numbers of publishing houses

The factor was given by four (57.1%) of the respondents as one reason for reduced research activities in Zambia. It should be noted that dissemination of research findings, be it educational, social science, etc, is an important final stage in the research process. It is important because it helps in spreading the findings to other experts in the same field who may help in expanding the ideas further or helping in clarifying some identified issues. Furthermore disseminated research findings may be applied by other professionals in practice and by ordinary citizens in their day to day activities (Likert & Lippit, 1953). Accordingly, there is need to have adequate research clearing and publishing houses where research findings and completed research reports could be sent for such dissemination. Unfortunately, Zambia lacks these facilities. A few

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5 *The inflation rate during the year 1990 was as high as 112.20 % as reported in the Sunday Times of Zambia ,10th February 1991. The inflation rate for the year 1991 has not been calculated at the time of writing this paper, but was expected to be higher than in 1990.*

publishing houses exist but these are over stretched and their "obsolete" printing machines are under constant breakdown. As such little actual work is done.

The inadequacy of publishing houses in the country has frustrated authors of materials, especially those of a technical nature, with a limited audience who have to wait for anything up to several years before their work is finally published. Further, the author has to keep constant check on the publisher to ascertain whether the work is still on the agenda to be done.

The irregular appearance of journals could best be illustrated by concrete examples. The author of the present article is the editor of *Zango*, a journal of contemporary issues of the University of Zambia. The journal has not been published for the past nine years. Although articles have been typeset, publication has not been possible mainly because of high publication costs quoted by publishing houses. The other example is the *Zambia Educational Review* whose last publication was three years ago. Further, the foreign journals are hard to come by because of the foreign exchange component required for their acquisition.

In addition to inadequate publishing houses and irregular appearance of these journals and/or textbooks, their prices are too high. As such few individuals have access to recent research publications. As a result research findings end up never being noticed or read by those for whom they were written /or who may apply them.

Further, for any research to be useful, it must build upon prior world views or existing current research literature in the area of interest (Drew, 1980; Fox, 1969; Mauch & Birch, 1983). This is the only way it could extend the knowledge in that area. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Zambia. A lack of recent publications of both textbooks and journals results in emergent researchers finding it exceedingly difficult to contribute meaningfully to their field of specialization. The use of literature over twenty years old is the norm rather than the exception in Zambia. The use of such outdated and archaic literature contributes nothing or very little to the knowledge acquisition or extension in a particular field. It is,

therefore, not only retrogressive to argue one's case from such an archaic literature when the field has undergone tremendous changes.

### **Ignorance of the uses of educational research information**

The reason for lack of research activities in Zambia was given by five (71.4%) of the respondents. It should be noted that the average Zambian and politician alike do not seem to appreciate the role that educational research plays in improving teaching and learning in the classroom. Probably, this is to be expected bearing in mind that it is only recently that research activities are being encouraged (Bless and Achola, 1990). Nonetheless, although most Zambians manning both institutions of learning and business are supposed to realize and appreciate the value of research, they do little to encourage it through active sponsorship. In fact, they seem to forget the fact that for any country to advance technologically new ways of doing things need to be identified and tried. Research provides such an opportunity. The developed countries are where they are today because of a strong research base and educational research has its place in this respect. Improving the quality of education in a country is necessary for a country's development. This will later translate into improved quality of life for all citizens as the products of the improved educational system take up their positions in industry and other areas. The importance of research in Zambia will only be recognised when the majority of Zambians recognise the fact that all of us are consumers of research findings in one way or the other.

### **Unwilling or unhelpful respondents**

Four (57.1%) of the respondents were of the view that unwillingness on the part of individuals to take part in research contributed to poor research output. It is possible that most individuals in developing countries, Zambia included, are suspicious of research and researchers. This is especially true if the research instrument requires them to provide information regarding their work performance and their work place. They are often of the view that the research findings will be used to their disadvantage. For example, a number of the author's fourth year education students in an Introduction to Educational Research course could not obtain information from the majority of owners of privately run

secondary schools in Lusaka for fear of their schools being closed or identified as providing inadequate instruction compared to the high fees they charge. The fear of possible victimization by authorities on the basis of research findings has become so entrenched in peoples' minds that even to obtain mere statistical figures about anything from any office in the country requires permission from the highest authority in that organisation or ministry and this takes long to be given.

The hassle one has to go through to obtain mere figures or permission to carry out a simple research has detrimental effects on the research activities in the country. First, the individual researcher's zeal wanes, and secondly the interest is no longer there. As a result this reduces the research output of the individual or group of individuals.

### **Lack of transport for research activities**

Lack of transport for research purposes was given by four (57.1%) of the respondents as another reason for not carrying out research in the country. Transport problems exist in the country especially if one needs to reach far flung places or schools. The public transport is not as efficient as one would like it to be and is often inconveniencing since it does not depart at the scheduled time. Accordingly, this results in a waste of time as one waits for this mode of transportation. It may therefore be argued that an improved public transport system may result in more individuals going out for research activity. Although 75.1% of the respondents gave transport as a factor hindering the carrying out of research work in the country, it may not be that serious especially in the urban areas where the transport system of mini-buses, taxis and the government owned bus system appear to be adequate for the purposes of research activities. That is, the researcher in the urban area is likely to reach his or her research destination in good time.

### **Lack of research skills**

Two (28.6%) of the respondents gave lack of research techniques as contributing to the paucity of research activity in Zambia. This factor though given by only two subjects may to a large extent account for lack of research activity in the country. This is due to the fact that even some

professionals with first degrees have not been exposed to research techniques during their under graduate studies. For example, only a handful of education students at the University of Zambia take the Introduction to Educational Research course which provides them with the necessary research skills. The majority leave the University with scanty knowledge of the research process. As a result they are unable to carry out any research activity requiring the identification of the problem, review of the pertinent literature, collection of data and its analysis, discussion of results and making of appropriate recommendations.

For most of them this skill is only acquired when pursuing a Masters degree programme. In fact in this study only one of the seven respondents had his skill at the undergraduate level. Five (71.4%) acquired research skills at the masters level, and one (14.3%) was exposed to research techniques at the doctoral level. As such these people could only be expected to become actively involved in research in their specialised areas after their second or third degrees. Since these higher level degree qualifications are obtained after a long period of time after the undergraduate degree, a long period in which they could be involved in productive research is therefore lost. This is indeed a fault of the programmes offered to them and not of their own making. But , the final result is the same - little research output.

Further, the lack of research skills at the undergraduate level also largely contributes to the length of time taken by candidates following the Masters programmes at the University of Zambia, even though the candidates of such programmes have failed to recognise this as one of the major causes of the delay (*Sunday Time of Zambia*, 15th November, 1987).

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS**

Item 12 on the questionnaire requested the respondents to indicate what action should be taken to redress the paucity of research activities in the country. Several actions were offered, and only the important ones are presented in this paper:

**a) Allocate more funds for research purposes**

This solution to the problem was given by six (85.7%) of the respondents. The liberal provision of research funds may encourage several individuals to become active in research. Further, in order to facilitate the completion of funded research in time and to avoid loss of interest and zeal by the researchers, these funds must be given with as little delay as possible.

**b) Set up publishing and clearing houses**

Over fifty percent (57.1%) of the respondents suggested setting up of publishing and clearing houses, and formulating national policy regarding research in the country as ways of encouraging research activity among professionals. It is possible that with the increase in the number of publishing houses many more research articles will become available to the readership in the country. This may also reduce the high prices being quoted by the current publishing houses for publication of journals, because of the competition that will result.

The formulation of a national policy on research in Zambia may help in the identification of priority areas for research, the dissemination of research findings and the training of future researchers. These activities if well coordinated will result in an increased output of research useful to the development of the country. Indeed, the establishment of a Research Foundation may be what is needed to promote research in the country.

**c) Authorities should be supportive of research efforts**

Fifty seven percent of the respondents suggested that authorities should support research efforts of their employees. Some of the respondents suggested time off for research purposes and/or lighter work load to facilitate the carrying out of research. Others (28.6%) suggested some kind of recognition of the research effort.

Other ways of supporting research activities by the authorities may take the form of increased research funding and the holding of seminars or

workshops at which the research findings may be discussed with other colleagues in the field or profession.

#### **d) Publicize the value of research**

This action was offered by three (42.9%) of the respondents. It is possible that when individuals have come to realize the important uses of research findings in their work, their attitude towards research and researchers will change for the better. What needs to be done is to emphasize the fact that research findings will not be used to victimise them or their institutions, but to help them improve for the better. Education of the public on the value of research through seminars and workshops may prove more useful, and enlightened research consumers are an asset to the production of meaningful research data.

#### **e) Create school based transport pools for research activity**

Forty-two percent of the respondents gave this as a possible solution to address the lack of dependable and efficient transport for research activities. The creation of such transport pools especially at the University and the ministries of education may solve one of the vexing problems of an inefficient and less dependable public transport system. Indeed, the saved time in travelling may be used for doing other important things or getting back to the researcher's work place in time.

### **CONCLUSION**

In this paper factors inhibiting research activities in Zambia were identified and possible solutions to rectify these problems outlined. It is possible to redress the paucity of research activities in the country if some or all of the given solutions are implemented. It should be noted that the identified factors affecting research activities in this paper are not the only ones. It is possible that a larger sample than used in this study may provide a longer list of factors inhibiting research activities in the country. Further, the factors identified in this study may be hampering research activities in other developing countries too.

Nonetheless, the conduction of research is important in a professional's life. It gives him or her the opportunity to keep abreast of new developments and ideas within his/her field of specialization. This activity enables the professional to contribute to knowledge generation and extension in that area; and engages the individual in a learning situation. Further, the country benefits from such research in that better ways of doing things may be found which in turn may improve the way of life for the citizens as a whole. It is therefore imperative that professionals in Zambia are encouraged and supported financially in the conduct of research in their respective areas of specialisation.

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