

# Research that improves/informs educational practice: A Case of Kwame Nkrumah University in Zambia

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**Abstract:** Killion (2007) submits that research is helpful to teacher leaders and coaches for them to fully understand what they experience in their work, to make decisions, and to improve practice. Hemsley-Brown and Sharp (2004) add that there is need to create a culture in public sector which supports and values research. This study focuses on determining the extent to which research has improved/informed professional practice at Kwame Nkrumah University, in Zambia. Kwame Nkrumah University was opened in 1967 as a teacher training College until 2013 when it started transforming into a fully fledged university. The study conducted at this University was qualitative which involved 20 lecturers out of a population of 80 lecturers at the time of the study. Data collection instruments used was face-to-face interviews. The study revealed that Kwame Nkrumah University has capacity to promote research among lecturers. It further revealed that there is capacity to improve professional practice. It was also revealed that 10 to 20 lectures (25%) were actively involved in research. The study further indicated that research has a lot of awards to lecturers and the institution alike. However, there were a number of challenges such as inadequate time for research due to teaching workloads, and lack of literature for local research. The study recommends increased funding to research activities and reduced teaching workloads to enable more lecturers get involved in research.

**Keywords:** Research, Professional Practice, Capacity, Challenges and Opportunities

## I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching is a process of impacting knowledge and skills into learners. Teaching and learning is a core business in education. There are a lot of challenges that are encountered by educators in the teaching fraternity which require solutions. Research is one of the solutions to various challenges which professionals are being faced with. In this vein, research is understood as a process of gathering information with a view of finding solutions to various challenges. The main focus of this study was on how the use of research could improve professional practice at Kwame Nkrumah University.

To address this study, the following objectives were considered:

1. To determine if Kwame Nkrumah University has the capacity to promote research among lecturers.
2. To ascertain whether Kwame Nkrumah has the capacity to promote research that improves professional practice or not.
3. To determine the number of lecturers actively involved in research.

4. To identify the awards of research to both lecturers and the institute

In order to address the set objects for this study, the following research questions guided the study:

1. Does Kwame Nkrumah University have the capacity to promote research among lecturers?
2. Does Kwame Nkrumah have the capacity to promote research that improves professional practice or not?
3. How many lecturers are actively involved in research?
4. What are the awards of research to both lecturers and the institute?

In 2013 Kwame Nkrumah university started transforming into a fully fledged university. Since then, there has been no documentation to show if the university has the capacity to promote research that improves professional practice and awarding to both the lecturers and institute. The reason this study was instituted. Therefore, this study determined the capacity of the university in promoting research that improves professional practice and awarding to both the lecturers and institute at Kwame Nkrumah University.

This study aimed at identifying if Kwame Nkrumah University had the capacity to promote research and improve professional practice. This study was important because it brought to light that Kwame Nkrumah had the capacity to promote research which improved professional practice. Furthermore, the findings of this study is added to the body of knowledge on how the use of research promotes research and improve professional practice.

In as far as the limitation of the study was concerned, the study revealed the use of research for improvement of professional practice from lecturers' point of view. Thus the study was limited to lecturers' views and the interpretation was based on lecturers' comments during the study and not from institution administrators' point of view.

In the quest to situate the study in the right context, a number of literature were consulted. For instance, Killion (2007) wrote about research that can improve practice among teachers. She defines research as an 'inquiry or in-depth study using established and rigorous processes to make discoveries through experimentation or investigation, add to the knowledge base, identify or confirm theories, laws, or conclusions, or confirm, clarify, or identify facts.' Killion

argues that research helps teachers to make decisions and to improve practice as it enables them learn how to read, analyze, and apply it to their work. She further argues that research keeps teacher as leaders stay abreast of research trends and share those trends with their colleagues. In a nutshell, Killion posits that research helps teachers to make better decisions, improve their practices, and make schoolwide improvements.

Hemsley-Brown and Sharp, (2004) did a systematic review of the literature on the use of research to improve professional practice. They set out to explore how teachers use research; which features of research encourage teachers to use research findings in their own practice and whether medical practitioners make greater use of research findings than teachers; and approaches to dissemination. Two key ideas emerged from their review. First, there appear to be common barriers to research use in both medicine and in education. Findings suggest that there is a need to create a culture in the public sector which supports and values research. Then secondly, review further revealed that key differences in the way that research knowledge is constructed in the social sciences has led to researchers being challenged about their findings, particularly in relation to the context, generalisability and validity of the research.

Zueli (1994) carried out an empirical study which specifically concentrated on the way teachers use research findings. The study was done in Michigan in the United States with a convenient sample of thirteen Primary, Middle and Secondary school teachers aimed at finding out how teachers read and respond to educational research. In this study, Zueli argues that teachers only consider an article or find it credible when it matches their personal experience. The study further found that some teachers believed research should exclusively identify strategies and techniques that could have a direct impact on their teaching, and these teachers judged the study's merits on the basis of whether the findings can be translated into procedures that work in classrooms. The study also revealed that other teachers believed that research could have an indirect impact on their teaching and had the potential to expand their understanding of teaching. Zueli argues that most of the teachers responded more positively to credible concrete cases or examples, and that teachers needed more sustained opportunities to link their understanding of research to their knowledge of teaching.

Castle (1988) conducted a qualitative study with 26 elementary, junior, middle and senior high schools from one state in the United states, all of which were involved in a school reform initiative. The findings suggested that the volume of, lack of applicability and ambiguity of research material were barriers to the use of research by teachers.

As for Shkedi (1998)'s case study of 47 teachers in Israel, findings suggested that very few teachers turned to research literature to expand professional knowledge, solve problems or to meet the requirements of their job. Teachers in the study argued that they did not use research literature because they

percieved it to be irrelevant, unhelpful and too theoretical. They also said that research literature was not available in their immediate surroundings but, when they did read literature they gave preference to practical educational literature that could be applied directly to their teaching. Most of those using research literature were doing so in the context of academic study, rather than to support their teaching. Shkedi argues that teachers percieved educational research to be quantitative in nature and found that teachers were largely unaware of the potential and value of qualitative research.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was infromed by Role Acquisition Theory propounded by Yellin(1999) and Merton (1957). Merton pioneered the idea of role models, those who exemplify a certain role and its associated responsibilities and attributes while Yellin (1999) added that each new social position connects an individual to an array of subsequent related roles. He submits that individuals do not simply conform to their various roles but rather interact with and shape them. This study draws its strnegth from Merton's coined term 'self-fulfilling prophecy' whose argument is based on how individual is able to shape an experience with ideas, wether external or internal, about one's ability to perform a role. He further opines that one may let external ideas infiltrate his/her thinking and determine their experience relevant to a certain role. Research, therefore, is one exeprience that professionals continue to exeprience throughout their work life.

Merton's work is highly relevant to this study on reseach that improves professional practice in the sense that research experience offers many opportunities for professionals to learn stategie to help them to effectively improve their practice and navigate the dynamic process of teaching at university level. Practitioners and professors may wish to think about opportunities to challenge existing knowledge and decision-making relating to the implementation of research findings.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The study conducted at this University was qualitative which involved 20 lecturers out of a population of 80 lecturers. Data collection instruments used was face-to face interviews. Information from the respondents was analyzed manually.

## IV. FINDINGS

The following were the findings obtained through interviews which the researchers administered.

The study found the following which indicated that, Kwame Nkrumah University had the capacity to promote research among lecturers.

Table 1: Capacity to promote research among lecturers

S/N	Responses	Frequency of responses
1	Through allocation of funds for research	2
2	Through collaboration within the university concerning research and collaboration with other universities in areas of research	2

3	Allocation of funds for research	3
4	Through local presentations of research proposals and findings at the institute	1
5	Having visits and presentations of research findings with other universities	1
6	Allowing members of the staff to attend conferences from time to time	4
7	Publication of research findings in journals	
8	Sharing of ideas on how to write papers for publication	1
9	Through departmental presentations on the key components of the research	2
10	Through the conference held	4

It was reported by respondents that, research has the capacity to promote professional practice as reflected below;

Table 2: Capacity to improve professional practice

S/N	Responses	Frequency of responses
1	Improve the understanding of content even much better.	1
2	Improves ineffectiveness of teaching and learning	1
3	New knowledge and skills needed are generated	1
4	Copying up with the dynamism	1
5	Learning of different delivery methods	1
6	Gives us confidence during the delivery of our work.	1
7	Publish the knowledge being generated which helps the students in their academic work	1
8	It increases and improves the use of the skills of ICT more effectively	1
9	It help us share the discovered ideas and knowledge	1
10	It helps us notice what others who are not conducting research can not see concerning our area of speciality	3
11	It helps us understand its importance in relation to our field of work	5
12	Research skills are being sharpened and aquisition of advanced research skills	1

One respondent stated that research improves the understanding of content even much better. Another response was that research improves ineffectiveness of teaching and learning. Then another participant echoed that research has the capacity to improve our profession because new knowledge and skills needed are generated. Research helps us professionals to cope with the dynamism which come in education sector due to change of time such as the use of new technology as reported by one respondent. Then another respondent narrated that, it helps in the delivery of our of teaching content by helping us learn different delivery methods. The other response was that, research gives us confidence during the delivery of our work. It was also stated that, research help in the publication of the knowledge being generated which helps the students in their academic work. The other response was that, research increases and improves the use of the skills of Information and Communication Technology more effectively. Research gives us a platform of sharing our discoveries with other in the country, in Africa

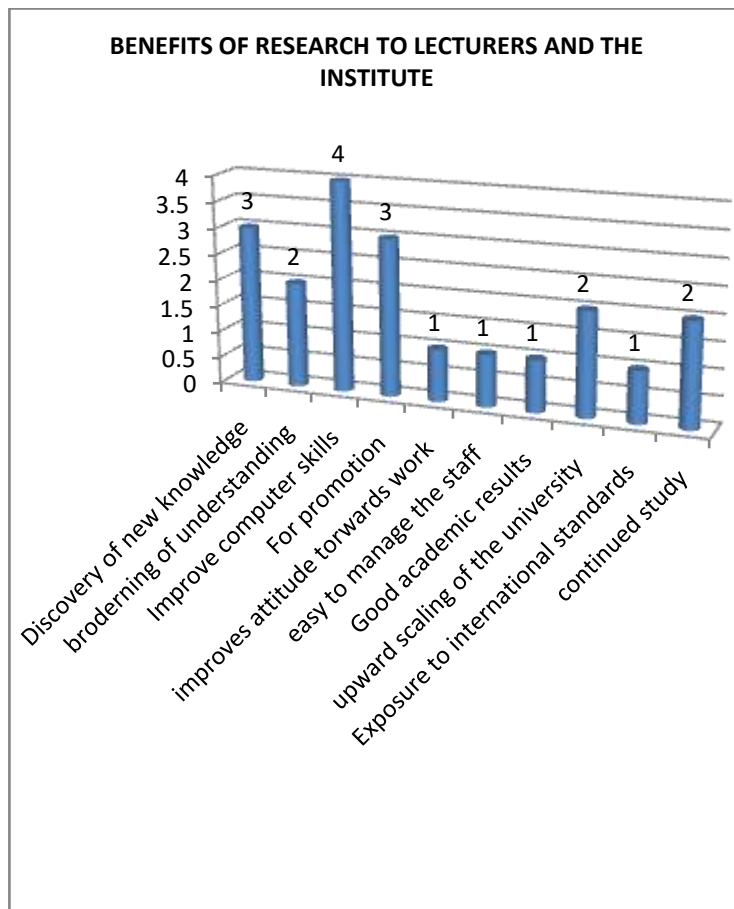
and at international level which improves our professional greatly as narrated by one of the respondent. The respondents revealed that, research helps us notice what others who are not conducting research can not see concerning our area of our speciality. The responses from five respondents was that, research is vital because it helps us understand its importance as we administer it in relation to our field of work. It also help acquire more advanced skills of research through research activities as disclosed by one respondent.

*Number of lecturers actively involved in research work activities*

When the researchers were finding out concerning the number of lecturers actively involved in research work activities the number which was reported was falling between 10 and 20 out of 80 lecturers.

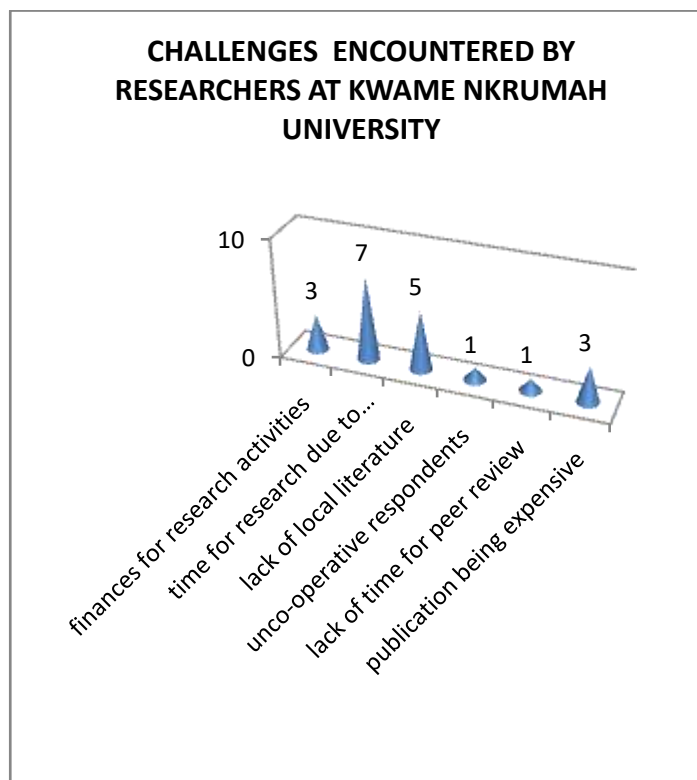
The following were the awards realised through research activities to both the lecturers and the institute from the respondents.

Chart 1: Research awards to lecturers and institute



These were the challenged encountered by the researchers during their research activities from respondents' point of view.

Chart 2: Challenges being encountered while conducting research



#### V. DISCUSSION

This study discovered that Kwame Nkrumah University had the capacity to promote research among lecturers because of the allocation of funds for research, collaborations going on and sharing of ideas and knowledge during presentations at the institute and with other institutions coupled with the publications of research work. The findings of this study are not similar to research discovery of Shkedi (1998)'s case study of 47 teachers in Israel, whose findings suggested that educational research was not promoted because teachers were largely unaware of the potential and value of educational research. However, there is great need to promote research among educators in all learning institutes.

From Merton's self-fulfilling prophecy perspective, the other finding of the study was that, Kwame Nkrumah University had the capacity to use research to improve professional practice. This was evident through the responses from respondents who stated that, it improved for instance the ineffectiveness in teaching and learning, there was generation of new knowledge and skills, publication of research work, lecturers being confident when teaching and having wider and deeper understanding of the content used when teaching. The finding of this study was in line with Killion (2007) who found that, research helps teachers to improve practice and make schoolwide improvements. Basing on this empirical finding the researchers' point of view was that, research should be promoted in universities because of its ability in improving professional practice among educators.

It was further revealed through this study that, research was awarded to both the lecturers and institute but it also posed challenges to researchers. This was because respondents narrated that, there was discovery of new knowledge, broader understanding of the education being offered, development and improvement of Information and Communication Technology skills, lecturers were easily promoted because of being researchers, production of quality academic results, positive attitude towards work, easy management of staff and exposure to international research standards. The challenges researchers were being faced with were lack of time for research due to workloads, lack of enough finances for some of the research activities such as the logistics needed when collecting data and publication of research work which proved to be expensive and lack of local literature. This study unveiled what had remained hidden in the research carried out by Zueli (1994) who carried out an empirical study done in Michigan in the United States with a convenient sample of thirteen Primary, Middle and Secondary school teachers and found out that research had an indirect negative impact on their teaching and had the potential to expand their understanding of teaching profession. Researchers views were that, research should be encouraged among lecturers and the universities because of its potential benefits. However, the challenges experienced need to be addressed in order to move forward and realise more benefits academically and professionally. However, Merton's theory argues that such challenges can help the educators think critically and more realistically from their research point of view, about their ability to succeed in their various roles by crafting research experience for reflection and engagement.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Basing on the research finding it was discovered that, Kwame Nkrumah University has capacity to promote research among lecturers. It further revealed that there is capacity to improve professional practice. It was also revealed that 10 to 20 lecturers (25%) were actively involved in research. The study further indicated that research has a lot of awards to lecturers and the institution alike. However, there were a number of challenges such as inadequate time for research due to teaching workloads, and lack of literature for local research. The study recommends increased funding to research activities and reduced teaching workloads to enable more lecturers get involved in research.

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