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ESSENTIALS OF EDUCATION



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Why do students find it frustrating to carry out academic research?

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KAMPALA. "I got a brain jam. Everything looked complicated," says Sophie Kasumba speaking about the time she was working on her academic research in 2010. "There was a lot of material to read and doing the compilation was a strenuous process," says the now 30 year old manager.

At some point, she wanted to give up with the whole research process.

"If it was not for my helpful supervisor, I would not have completed the project. From time to time, he continuously encouraged me to push on with the work," she says.

With this kind of support, Kasumba managed to complete her research before eventually graduating with a Masters of Arts in public administration and management.

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HANDS-ON EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES FOR JOB CREATION

Why students find it frustrating to do academic research?

Many times, it is mandatory for students advancing their studies to do academic research. But it has been discovered that many of them find research frustrating. We find out why it is such a mind-numbing process for many scholars and how it can be made a lot easier.

FROM COVER

Academic research involves studying, interpretation of data and sourcing for information to establish facts on a particular issue at hand. Research is often carried out at different education phases including degree, masters and a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) level.

What other students say?

Kasumba is just one of many former and current students who have found academic research an overwhelming process while advancing their education.

Jimmy Odoki Acellam, a former student of Uganda Martyrs University, Rubaga graduated in 2015 after pursuing a Masters of Arts in Diplomacy and International Studies. His research topic was, *Back channel diplomacy in conflict resolution; the case of Juba peace talks between the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda.*

According to Acellam, the most strenuous process of his research revolved around collecting data which also involved interviewing people.

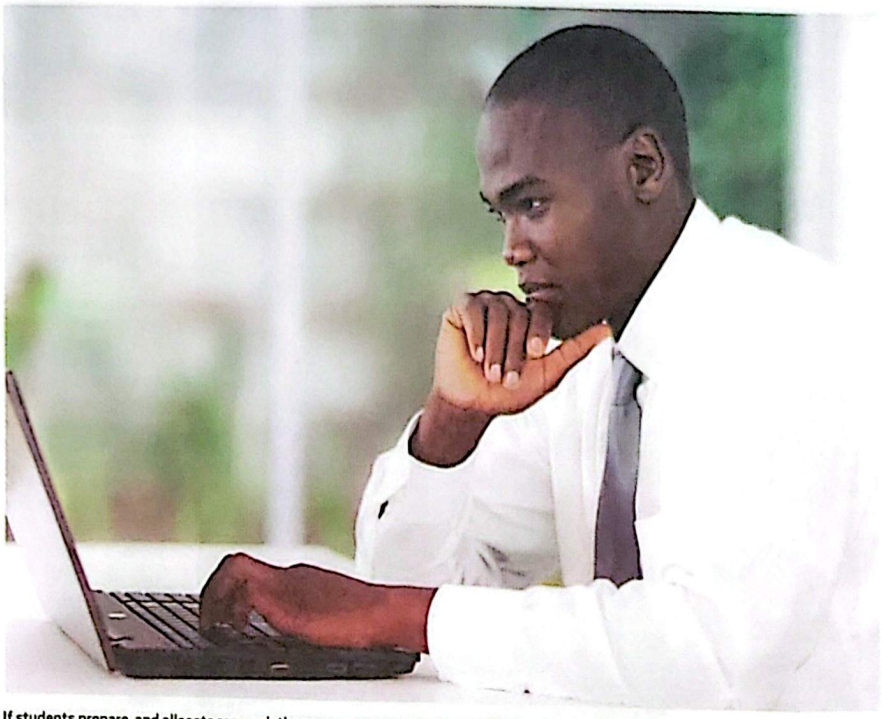
"Sometimes the people who had the information I needed were never readily available, so most of the time, I had to reschedule the interviews," he says.

In addition, Acellam says there were particular books required for him to use as reference points during research, however, these were not always available in the library.

Other than that, Acellam says his supervisor was very helpful and flexible during the time he was doing his research.

"He was always reachable by both email and phone," he says, adding, "He often gave me feedback on my work and would advise that I make the necessary corrections as soon as possible."

Acellam was able to complete his research within a timeline of eight months.



If students prepare and allocate research the necessary sacrifice, it's possible to get done with it. PHOTOS BY RACHEL MABALA

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

Research is an original contribution to the existing stock of knowledge making for its advancement. It is the pursuit of truth with the help of study, observation, comparison and experiment. In short, research is the search for knowledge through objective and systematic methods of finding solutions to a problem. The aim is to find out the truth which is hidden and has not been discovered as yet. The possible motivations of doing research include the desire to get a research degree along with its consequential benefits, the intellectual joy of doing some creative work as well as to face the challenge in solving unsolved problems.

(Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques by C.R. Kothari)

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LOWEST AMOUNT IN THOUSANDS OF SHILLINGS STUDENTS USUALLY PAY RESEARCHERS TO HELP THEM CARRY OUT THEIR RESEARCH

Why students are finding challenges

Andrew Onapito, a student at Makerere University pursuing a Master's program in journalism and communication says research is definitely a demanding process.

"It takes so much displine and intellectual engagement on the student's part. Many get discouraged and give up in the process," he says.

Meanwhile, Dr. Brian Ssemujju, researcher and editor of the African Journal of Communication that aims to serve the different programmes of communication in the East African region affirms that many students indeed are always frustrated by the academic research process. He blames it on the poor reading culture of many students.

"During my tenure as a researcher, I have observed that many students hate reading and yet research requires a lot of evaluation," he says.

According to him, many students simply want to pass examinations without going through the hustle of doing research.

"I have even personally taught some brilliant students who have confessed that they find research being tedious. There are even those who have previously requested me to give them a desired passmark so that they can pass and leave the university," Ssemujju says.

It is for such reasons Ssemujju thinks that some students hire and pay other people including bureaus to do the research for them.

"These bureaus are a clear indicator of the issue at hand, that in fact many students are making other people conduct the research on their behalf," he says.

Many universities and other academic institutions often require students to complete and defend their research work as one of the requirements for graduation.

What can be done to make research easier for students?

Onapito believes that if students prepare, and allocate research the necessary sacrifice, it's possible to get done with it.

"There are two sides to the research coin. First, the universities need to prepare their students from the word go. This involves availing necessary academic resources, as well as available supervisors," Onapito says, adding, "Secondly, students need to play their part by working together with their supervisors to get the job done."

On the other hand, Ssemujju advises students to have a reading culture as this will always make researching a passionate and easier project. In addition, Ssemujju proposes that universities ban all bureaus operating within their premises especially those they suspect to be conducting research on behalf of students.

Principles of Good Research

All research is different but the following factors are common to all good pieces of research involving social care service users, their families and carers and staff working in this area.

- There is a clear statement of research aims, which defines the research question.
- There is an information sheet for participants, which sets out clearly what the research is about, what it will involve and consent is obtained in writing on a consent form prior to research beginning.
- The methodology is appropriate to the research question. So, if the research is into people's perceptions, a more qualitative, unstructured interview may be appropriate. If the research aims to identify the scale of a problem or need, a more quantitative, randomised, statistical sample survey may be more appropriate. Good research can often use a combination of methodologies, which complement one another.
- The research should be carried out in an unbiased fashion. As far as possible the researcher should not influence the results of the research in any way. If this is likely, it needs to be addressed explicitly and systematically.
- From the beginning, the research should have appropriate and sufficient resources in terms of people, time, transport, money etc. allocated to it.
- The people conducting the research should be trained in research and research methods and this training should provide:
  - Knowledge around appropriate information gathering techniques,
  - An understanding of research issues,
  - An understanding of the research area,
  - An understanding of the issues around dealing with vulnerable social care clients and housing clients, especially regarding risk, privacy and sensitivity and the possible need for support.
- Those involved in designing, conducting, analysing and supervising the research should have a full understanding of the subject area.
- In some instances, it helps if the researcher has experience of working in the area. However, this can also be a negative factor, as sometimes research benefits from the fresh eyes and ears of an outsider, which may lead to less bias.
- If applicable, the information generated from the research will inform the policy-making process.
- All research should be ethical and not harmful in any way to the participants.

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