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Empirical Research and Public Policy for National Development in Nigeria.

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Abstract

Experts all over the world have highlighted the pivotal role of research in designing and implementing effective public policies framed for achieving sustainable national development goals. The prime function of such research efforts is to discover answers to meaningful questions, which are aimed at remedying critical societal problems. Thus, this study investigated the place of empirical research in Nigeria's policy process, using the secondary source of data. The indicators employed for analysis revealed that most times, policy-makers and other stakeholders are unable to establish relevant and effective policies, because of the gap between the research sector and the policymakers in Nigeria. Public policy efforts are burdened with paucity of high-quality policy-relevant research, poor co-operation between the researchers and the policymakers, low political will and value for empirical research and inadequate research funding. In the light of these, some recommendations were made towards ameliorating the problem. These include: more commitment to the research/policy link by the relevant stakeholders, increased funding for quality research and the strengthening of research institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords; Empirical Research, Public Policy, National Development, Researchers, Policymakers

Introduction

The critical role of research-based knowledge in public policy making process has become more ramifying to many contemporary scholars in recent times. Indeed, it is virtually impossible for any country to remain on the frontier of development, unless it develops a more effective and reliable knowledge base, for national development purposes. For developing nations, such as Nigeria, the 21st century, shaped by the forces of innovation, information and technological advancement requires that political actors, administrators and researchers leapfrog their knowledge base, in order to catch up with the developed nations. Indeed, Bako (2015) argues that historically, it took the globally advanced countries some series of scientific and technological revolutions to metamorphose into their present status. This infers that empirical research was employed as a crucial tool for policy making and national advancement.

According to Head (2018), empirical research has become a critical and an urgent demand in contemporary governance, because, governments are being confronted with complex socioeconomic problems that require decisions based on reliable evidence, rather than assumptions, political rhetoric, or anecdotal experiences. Hence, empirical research is expected to provide the systematic and verifiable evidence, through the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, which would enable policymakers to understand the nature, causes, magnitude, and consequences of public problems, thereby enhancing effective solutions to those problems. Indeed, Ajayi and Osafo-Kwaako (2021) contend that the relevance of empirical research is particularly pronounced in developing countries such as Nigeria, where scarce resources, widespread poverty, unemployment, inequality, insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and deficits in education and healthcare require carefully targeted and evidence-informed interventions.

Similarly, Bako (2015) asserted that empirical research remains the most enduring and effective means of boosting sustainable economic development and re-enforcing competitiveness in the face of the rapid growth taking place between industries, countries and peoples in the world. In fact, the incorporation of systematic research results into policy, development programmes, evaluation and programme improvement is consistent with the New Public Management (NPM), which emphasises on efficiency and effectiveness in public governance (Young, (2020).

However, despite the critical place of empirical research in ensuring effective policy outcomes in the public sector, IFPRI (2019) observes a huge disconnection between empirical research and policymaking process, especially in the developing nations such as Nigeria. Consequently, policy outcomes in these countries continue to lag far behind those of the advanced nations, who continually invest significantly in contemporary scientific and academic knowledge. Indeed, Young (2020) attributes this challenge to the presence of many avoidable inefficiencies in governance, which discourage reliance on

evidence-based policymaking, with its negative consequences on sustainable development. Similarly, Cairney (2016) argues that policymaking in the developing nations often occurs within complex political and institutional environments, in which evidence constitutes only one of several factors influencing policy decisions. Hence, availability of empirical evidence in this context, does not necessarily guarantee utilisation in policy design or implementation. Most often, policy decisions are influenced by political interests, institutional priorities, ideology, bureaucratic structures, resource constraints, public opinion, and competing stakeholder interests.

In particular, Nigeria's policy environment also faces challenges that weakens the research/policy relationship, thereby undermining expected benefits (Bako, 2015). According to Ajayi and Osafo-Kwaako (2021), these issues include; inadequate funding for research, weakness in data generation and management, limited dissemination of research findings, insufficient interaction between researchers and policymakers, institutional fragmentation, and limited capacity to translate academic findings into practical policy recommendations. Similarly, Obadan (2016) noted that in some cases, research findings remain largely within academic institutions, without being effectively communicated to government officials or incorporated into policy decisions.

Furthermore, another issue is the attempt to implement foreign-sourced policies in Nigeria. Indeed, Sutcliffe and Court (2019) argue that the development arena in sub-Saharan Africa is distinct, thereby limiting programmes that are directly transferred from the developed nations. The economic, social and political environments in the developing nations such as Nigeria are diverse and often complicated with limited capacity and scare resources. Similarly, Amzat and Ogundiya (2020**)** lamented that some vital policies implemented in Nigeria are rarely evidence-based, as they are mostly handed down from International Institutions. The scholars contend that most often, attempts to implement such foreign-sourced policies have been confronted with many implementation problems, with dire consequences on national development goals. The reality on ground is that the massive diversity of culture, economic, and political contents in the developing nations make it difficult to draw valid generalisations around the globe (Sutcliffe & Court, 2019).

Therefore, while there is no real scholarly consensus on how to successfully improve the linkage between empirical research and national policy process in the nations, it is very clear that understanding the specific context in which policy decisions are made remain crucial in enhancing national development goals (IFPRI 2019). For instance, Head (2018) asserts that the United States of America invests large shares in the world Research & Development (R&D) capital, thereby controlling large numbers of world class universities and securing a visible place in the world's knowledge economy. Conversely, Ajayi and Osafo-Kwaako (2021) argues that Nigeria lacks such systematic understanding of how research feeds into development policies. In fact, Maduka (2023) attributes the problem to the fallen standards in Nigeria's educational system in the late 1980s to the

1990s, which led to systematic decline and near-collapse of rigorous research activities in Nigeria. Indeed, the many years of military rule during this period did not promote much research/policy link in Nigeria, due to the constant hostilities between the academics and the military government. The general results were lack of incentives/motivation, obsolete research facilities, inadequate funding and lack of adequate research/policy mix for national development in the country.

Indeed, Bello (2025) argues that Nigeria currently has more institutions that generate empirical knowledge on major national issues than the military era. However, there are persistent concerns about the extent to which such knowledge is translated into policy decisions and practical interventions. Research findings remain largely within academic and professional circles without being adequately communicated to, accessed by, or incorporated into public policy processes. Where policy decisions are insufficiently informed by evidence, complex development challenges abound.

Hence, the essence of this study was to critically examine how empirical research shapes public policy for national development goals in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to; assess the level of availability of high-quality policy-relevant research; examine the level of co-operation between researchers and policymakers; determine the rate of political will and political value for research; examine the level of research funding in Nigeria; identify the challenges inhibiting research utilisation in public policy process and proffers solutions to the problem.

The study adopts the qualitative research design. This is preferred because, it enabled the researcher to compare evidence across different types of relevant documents to answer the research question and meet the objective of the study. Content analysis was utilised for the data analysis. This was most appropriate because, it helped the researcher to systematically identify, organise, interpret, and synthesise recurring meanings, patterns, concepts, and themes within the textual materials to arrive at valid conclusions. In addition, the secondary source of data was employed which includes, relevant books, federal government of Nigeria's policy documents, institutional reports, academic peer-reviewed journal publications, and publications of relevant national and international organisations.

The study contributes to existing literature on public policy studies in Nigeria. Most studies have generally focused on the relationship between empirical research and public policy process, but this study bridges a significant gap in the literature by showing how empirical research, public policy and national development interact**.** Indeed, the study contributes to knowledge by showing that the mere availability of research evidence does not automatically result in evidence-informed policymaking. Between the production of research and its application in policy are important aspects which includes; policy relevance, institutional capacity, communication, accessibility, researcher–policymaker

interaction, and the broader political and administrative environment. By examining these dimensions, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of the research–policy gap in Nigeria and proffers solutions to remedy the problem.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Concept of Public Policy

The concept of public policy is defined variedly by different scholars. Just like other concepts in the social sciences, it does not have a single definition. The concept of public policy can be viewed simply as a governmental programme found in a nation's laws or in the public statements of a government functionary (Ikelegbe,1994). Furthermore, Lasswell (1956) stated that public policy refers to the important activities of government. However, recent studies have shown that public policy refers to all governmental activities/outputs as they affect members of the society, and cannot be limited only to important activities of government.

The most popular definition is that given by Thomas Dye, who defined public policy as; 'whatever governments choose to do or not to do' (Dye, 1975:120). Public policy in this definition refer to government's action or inaction, intended to achieve certain public goals. This is too simple for many analytical purposes. Hence, Anyebe (2018), opines that Dye's definition makes public policy look like a mere decision. He contends that mere declaration of intentions, wishes, principles, or expression of desires cannot be called public policy. The scholar argues that public policy should in reality refer to the actual resource allocation, presented by project and programmes, designed to respond to perceived public problems and challenges requiring government action for their solution.

On their part, Barrett and Fudge (1981) view Public Policy as a policy emanating from the public sector, including both the institutions of central and local government and state created agencies, such as water or health authorities, commissions and corporations; it may be implemented through and directed at a wide variety of individuals and organizations, which may or may not be part of the state apparatus and which may be to a greater or lesser degree, be independent of state influence or control. This definition specified and enlarged the scope of public policy process to include actors in the private sector, but it does not lay emphasis on the need for quality in the decision taken. Until better choices are made from among alternative courses of action, public policy results and outcomes may be abysmal.

Furthermore, Chandler and Piano (1988) view public policy as the strategic use of resources to alleviate national problems or governmental concerns. This definition sees public policy from a managerial point of view. First of all, there is an awareness on the part of the policy makers that human wants (problems) are insatiable. Secondly, the available resources are limited. Consequently, there's a call for prudent management of

the meagre resources to meet the pressing demands of the citizens. By this, the scholars appreciate the fact that planning and strategy form the bedrock of public policy effectiveness. Thus, effective planning and strategy in the policy process can be better achieved through evidence-based data, rather than mere assumptions.

Concept of Empirical Research

The concept of empirical research is defined by various scholars. According to Bryman (2016), it refers to a systematic and organised process of investigating social, economic, political, administrative, or natural phenomena, through the collection and analysis of observable and verifiable evidence. The scholar notes that the term *empirical* is derived from the Greek word *empeiria*, which means experience. Thus, empirical research emphasises knowledge generated from observation, measurement, experimentation, interviews, surveys, documents, and other systematic sources of evidence, rather than relying exclusively on assumptions, speculation, intuition, or abstract reasoning.

On his part, Creswell (2018) explain that research involves systematic processes of collecting, analysing, and interpreting data to increase understanding of a phenomenon. The emphasis is on the importance of systematic inquiry in producing credible knowledge. Thus, the fundamental characteristic of empirical research is its reliance on evidence that can be observed, documented, analysed, and, where appropriate, independently verified. According to Saunders et al. (2019) evidence may be quantitative, such as numerical data obtained through questionnaires, administrative records, experiments, or statistical databases, or qualitative, such as interview accounts, observations, documents, and case studies. Consequently, empirical research is not synonymous with quantitative research. Qualitative research can equally be viewed as empirical, when the data are systematically collected from real-world settings and subjected to rigorous analysis (Bryman, 2016).

Neuman (2019) distinguished empirical research from purely theoretical or conceptual research by its direct engagement with evidence from the field or other observable sources. Theoretical research may develop concepts, models, or propositions through logical reasoning and engagement with existing scholarship, but, empirical research tests, examines, or develops such propositions using evidence. However, Bryman (2016) argues that this distinction should not be regarded as absolute, because empirical and theoretical research are complementary. The theoretical perspectives provide explanations and propositions that empirical investigation can examine, while empirical findings can modify, refine, or challenge existing theories.

Furthermore, Creswell, 2018) asserted that the empirical research process generally involves several interconnected stages, which includes; identification of a research problem, formulation of research questions or hypotheses, review of relevant literature,

selection of an appropriate research design, determination of the population and sample, development or selection of data-collection instruments, collection of data, analysis and interpretation of evidence, and formulation of conclusions. Hence, a well-designed empirical study seeks to establish a logical connection between the research problem, objectives, methods of investigation, evidence generated, and conclusions reached.

In addition, Bryman (2016) holds that although complete objectivity may be difficult to achieve, particularly in social research, researchers are expected to minimise personal bias through appropriate research designs, clearly defined variables, valid and reliable instruments, transparent analytical procedures, and systematic interpretation of findings. In quantitative research, objectivity may be enhanced through statistical procedures, while qualitative researchers may employ techniques such as triangulation, reflexivity, member checking, and audit trails to strengthen credibility.

Indeed, Saunders et al. (2019) stated that the concept also incorporates validity, reliability, and credibility**.** Validity concerns whether a research instrument or procedure adequately measures or investigates what it is intended to measure, while reliability concerns the consistency of measurement. On the other hand, credibility in qualitative research concerns the extent to which findings accurately represent the phenomenon investigated. These considerations are particularly important in policy-oriented research because inaccurate or weak evidence can lead to inappropriate conclusions and ineffective policy interventions

According to Neuman (2019), a critical consideration, however, is that empirical evidence is not automatically synonymous with reliable or truthful knowledge. The quality of empirical findings depends on the quality of the research design, sampling procedure, measurement instruments, data, analytical techniques, and interpretation. Poor sampling can produce biased findings; poorly designed instruments can generate invalid measurements; inadequate statistical analysis can result in misleading conclusions; and selective interpretation can distort evidence. Therefore, the empirical nature of a study alone does not guarantee scientific validity. Hence, Bryman (2016) concludes that rigorous methodological procedures are necessary to transform collected information into credible evidence. Evidence-based policymaking consequently seeks to reduce reliance on political assumptions, ideological preferences, or anecdotal claims by incorporating systematically generated evidence into policy formulation and implementation.

The Nexus Between Empirical Research and Public Policy

The relationship between empirical research and public policy has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the years. For instance, NESF (2012), contends that although the concept of evidence-based policymaking suggests that research findings should constitute a major foundation of public decisions, the relationship between research and policy is

considerably more complex than a simple linear process in which researchers generate evidence and policymakers apply it. The scholar suggests that the nexus is shaped by political interests, institutional capacities, competing values, contextual conditions, resource constraints, and the accessibility and relevance of research evidence.

Furthermore, at the conceptual level, Ayuk and Marouani (2017) states that empirical research can be understood as systematic investigation based on observable evidence, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Its principal contribution to public policy is the production of knowledge that can assist policymakers in understanding the nature and magnitude of public problems. However, public policy is not merely a technical exercise of selecting the most effective solution to a problem. It is also a political and institutional process involving competing interests and values. Hence, Head (2018) argues that this distinction is important because it challenges the assumption that better evidence will automatically produce better policy. On his part, Cairney (2016) insists that policymaking takes place within complex systems, characterised by bounded rationality, competing interests, institutional constraints, and limited information. Consequently, empirical evidence represents an important component of policymaking, but does not operate independently of political and institutional considerations.

In addition, Nutley et al. (2017) reveals that the assumption that research can identify a universally optimal policy option is problematic. According to Head (2018) policies are implemented within particular social, economic, cultural, and institutional environments. An intervention that demonstrates effectiveness in one setting may not produce similar outcomes in another. Therefore, the policy relevance of empirical research depends not only on methodological quality, but also on contextual validity and applicability. Indeed, Young (2020) insists that empirical research can identify implementation failures, institutional weaknesses, inadequate funding, poor coordination, communication deficiencies, and other barriers to policy effectiveness. Implementation research is therefore important because it shifts attention from what a policy intends to achieve to what actually happens when the policy is translated into programmes and administrative actions (Nutley et al., 2017). This distinction is particularly relevant in developing countries, where policy outcomes may be constrained by institutional and administrative incapacity.

Furthermore, Head (2018) states that empirical methods provide the basis for establishing indicators, measuring outcomes, comparing results, and assessing programme effectiveness. However, the critical issue as observed by Nutley et al. (2017) is that evaluation findings are not always incorporated into subsequent policy decisions, especially in developing nations, such as Nigeria, where political interests can favour the continuation of a programme. In such instance, unfavourable empirical findings may be ignored or selectively interpreted. Consequently, the effectiveness of evaluation as a

policy instrument would depend partly on the institutional independence of evaluators and the willingness of policymakers to respond to evidence.

According to Court and Young (2016, another issue emerging from the literature is the distinction between evidence-informed policymaking and evidence-based policymaking. The latter expression can imply that research evidence should determine policy decisions, whereas evidence-informed policymaking recognises that research is one of several inputs into the policy process. Hence, policymakers may have to balance empirical evidence against ethical considerations, public preferences, political feasibility, legal requirements, available resources, and competing policy objectives. From this perspective, Head (2018) opines that the value of empirical research is seen from its attempt to improve the information upon which judgement is exercised and not to eliminate political judgement. This is a more realistic understanding of the research/policy relationship because it acknowledges the inherently political nature of public policy.

In addition, Jones (2021) contends that researchers and policymakers frequently operate according to different institutional incentives and timelines. For instance, researchers may prioritise methodological rigour, theoretical contribution, peer-reviewed publication, and long-term knowledge accumulation, whereas policymakers often require timely, concise, accessible, and actionable information. Similarly, Nutley et al. (2017) note that research utilisation is often influenced by the accessibility, relevance, credibility, and applicability of research. Consequently, high-quality research may have limited policy influence, especially when the findings are communicated in highly technical language or are not presented in a form that policymakers can readily utilise. Bridging this gap requires sustained interaction among researchers, policymakers, civil society organisations, and other relevant stakeholders in the society.

Furthermore, Court et al (2020) argues that the quality and credibility of empirical evidence serve as another dimension of the research/policy nexus. For instance, not all research evidence has equal methodological strength. Hence, weak research designs, inadequate samples, unreliable instruments, inappropriate statistical techniques, or poorly interpreted findings may generate misleading conclusions. If such evidence is incorporated into public policy, it can result in ineffective or even harmful interventions (Jones, 2021). The implication is that evidence-based policymaking requires not simply more research, but better-quality research. Policymakers therefore need institutional capacity to assess the methodological quality, relevance, limitations, and applicability of research findings before incorporating them into policy decisions.

Although evidence supports transparency, by making government performance more measurable and subject to public scrutiny. However, the accountability potential of research depends upon access to information and the willingness of public institutions to disclose and act upon research findings (Jones, 2021). Where research reports are not

publicly accessible or where findings are suppressed for political reasons, the contribution of empirical research to accountability is significantly weakened.

In addition, according to Maduka (2024), the nexus between empirical research and public policy assumes particular importance in developing countries such as Nigeria. The country faces persistent challenges involving poverty, unemployment, youth unemployment, insecurity, healthcare delivery, educational inequality, infrastructure deficits, and ineffective social protection mechanisms etc. These challenges require policies that are sensitive to local conditions and supported by credible evidence. Similarly, Ayuk and Marouani (2017) argues that the Nigerian situation also demonstrates the importance of context-specific empirical research. Policies imported from other countries or developed without adequate consideration of local realities often produce unintended outcomes. Empirical studies conducted within Nigerian communities can enhance policy responsiveness by ensuring that interventions are designed around actual rather than assumed needs. Bryant (2020) asserts that strengthening this nexus is particularly important because, policies informed by credible and contextually relevant evidence have greater potential to address public problems effectively, improve resource allocation, enhance accountability, and produce sustainable development outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

The Decision-Making theory, propounded by Simon (1957) offers a relevant theoretical framework for this study. The model establishes a logical connection between problem identification, policy formulation, evaluation of alternatives, policy choices, implementation and assessment of outcomes. Similarly, empirical research strengthens each of these stages by improving the quality, relevance, efficiency, and accountability of public decisions. Hence, evidence assists policymakers in designing policies that are more responsive to actual conditions. The process of Rational Decision Making as given by Simon involves different but related stages, which are; problem identification, determining policy objectives; identifying policy alternatives; evaluating policy alternatives; policy selection and implementation. This study applies four (4) closely related concepts of the Decision-Making Theory, which are given below:

a. **Problem identification**: In the Nigerian context, research is expected to provide evidence on societal problems such as unemployment, poverty, education, inequality, healthcare deficiencies, agricultural productivity, or other developmental challenges. Such evidence is expected to help policymakers understand the characteristics of the problem before deciding on whether and how government intervention would be framed.

b. **Policy objectives:** The policy objectives stage is where decision makers define specific goals, targets and outcomes to address the identified problem. Nigerian decision makers are expected to translate identified problems to actionable targets or courses of action. However, this stage is often politicised with factors such as regional interests and political patronage, etc., rather than objective national empirical needs.

c. **Evaluating policy alternatives**: This stage involves evaluating the courses of action. Empirical research is expected to assist policymakers in comparing policy options by highlighting the likely benefits, limitations, costs, feasibility, and possible consequences. This aspect is particularly relevant to the study because evidence-informed policymaking in Nigeria is not simply about producing research findings, but it also concerns the relevance of the research findings, national development priorities, resource availability and other critical political considerations.

d. **Policy choice**: The theory ultimately involves selecting a course of action from among available alternatives. In the Nigerian context, the policy choice may be reflected in executive decisions, legislative approval, programmes, institutional reforms, budgetary decisions, etc. However, the quality of the choices in Nigeria remain contested, since most of the decisions are poorly linked to empirical evidence. For instance, in the absence of a reliable national

The theory provides a useful analytical lens for examining the link between evidence and policy decisions in Nigeria's development efforts. For instance, just like the Decision Making Theory, Nigeria's policymaking process generally involves several stages: identification of problems, determination of priorities, selection of policy alternatives, implementation of programmes, and assessment of policy outcomes. Empirical research is expected to shape and support the Nigerian policy process for more effective and sustainable national development outcomes. Despite this advantage, Bryant (2020) contends that the Decision Making Theory's major weakness is the assumption that policymakers have adequate information, unlimited analytical capacity, sufficient time, and the ability to objectively compare all available alternatives. Simon (1957) also states that decision-makers are bounded in their rationality and often seek satisfactory rather than optimal solutions.

Nevertheless, the theory offers a better theoretical framework for this study because, the central concern is the relationship between knowledge production and policy choice. Where research evidence is inaccessible, poorly communicated, ignored, or displaced by other considerations, the connection between research, public policy and national development becomes weak. Hence, the Decision-Making Theory provides a framework for examining the research–policy-development interface as a process, in which empirical

evidence constitutes one of the important sources of information available to policymakers. The study does not assume that policymakers operate under conditions of perfect information or complete rationality in Nigeria. Rather, the theory is used to examine the empirical evidence available to policymakers in decision making for development goals.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND POLICY LINK: THE NIGERIAN REALITY

The scarcity of resources among ends and the need to leapfrog national development through effective public policy processes have continued to raise issues bothering on equity, effectiveness and efficiency in Nigeria's public sector administration. For instance, Amzat & Ogundiya, 2020**)** suggests that this dilemma concerns how the limited resources can be effectively allocated and how intervention outcomes can be maximised for greater benefits, etc. The scholars contend that employing the tool of research for policymaking would tackle some of the critical issues, bothering on effective and equitable resource allocation in Nigeria. This assumption is premised on the realities of the 21st century, which is characterised by the forces of innovation, information and technological advancement. Empiricism in this era offers great hope for sound development policies, shaped by the research/ policy mix. Hence, building research communities and re-enforcing their capacities should be a top national priority in Nigeria.

As important as research-based policies are to national development goals, Aberman et al (2020) argue that Nigeria lacks strong ties between the research sector and policy makers in the public space. Indeed, Maduka (2024) contends that research could influence policy outcomes in Nigeria, if there are sufficient linkages between the research sector and the policy process. He suggests, further, that such research should be very relevant to policy; have sufficient quality and credibility; with policymakers demonstrating strong political will and value for research and; having adequate funding for relevant research activities. In this section, these factors serve as indicators for examining the research/policy gap in Nigeria. They are given as follows:

i. Availability of high-quality policy-relevant research

ii. Co-operation between researchers and policymakers

iii. Political will and political value for research

iv. Level of research funding

- **Availability of High-Quality Research**

The paucity of high-quality and policy-relevant research for policymaking is an incontestable reality in Nigeria. For instance, Aberman et al (2020) argued that although Nigeria is home to a relatively large number of policy research institutions and think tanks, when compared to other African countries, these are often described as generally weak and unreliable. Indeed, Amzat and Ogundiya (2018**)** asserted that the virtues and values of quality research setting are not usually put in place in the country. Most times, data collection is not painstakingly done, due to socio-cultural and economic factors. In addition, amplification and manipulation of data also reflect in armchair empiricism. Hence, the legitimacy of empirical pursuit is contestable and accounts for little promise of originality for modifying policies. Indeed, Okojie (2024) attributes this challenge to the many years of military rule, bad governance, and high level of corruption, especially in the late 1980s, when many Nigerian research establishments suffered a flight of highly qualified academics to Western institutions. Often known as "brain-drain" syndrome, this issue has remained a critical challenge facing local research institutes in Nigeria. According to CAPPS (2017), about 36.1 % of migrants, who left Nigeria in the year 2015 were tertiary educated and highly skilled citizens. Many others found more prestigious jobs outside the research sector, working in the private sector or as practitioners for international development organizations, which offered better salaries and working conditions. All these aspects have contributed to low production and poor quality of research output and public policies in Nigeria.

- **Co-Operation between Researchers and Policymakers**

According to Obadan (2016), there exits communication gap between policymakers and researchers in Nigeria. Consequently, meaningful discussion of available research findings, their suitability to policy-related problems, and identification of alternative policy area requiring research attention is often inadequate. In some cases, policymakers do not have confidence in the research findings, probably due to doubtful methodology or the technical language used by the researchers. Similarly, Ajayi and Osafo-Kwaako (2021) pointed to the lack of interaction between researchers and policy-makers, which has become a major reason for poor knowledge uptake in the Nigerian trade policy making process.

Furthermore, Maduka (2024) asserted that research utilization is not solely about improving the quantity, but rather the quality of the research, particularly in cases which require the synthesis of various information sources. Strong links create opportunities for researchers to effectively disseminate their research results, while such connections may similarly improve the quality of the research itself. In fact, a study conducted to ascertain the cause of poor research output among Nigerian academics identified inadequate utilisation of research findings by policy practitioners as most critical, which had demoralised many researchers in the research sector (Okojie, 2024).

In addition, Aberman et al (2020) asserted that there have been many campaigns to have research results fed into policy processes in Nigeria, but these have not yielded the desired outcome. For example, Ajayi and Osafo-Kwaako (2021) found that the use of research in the policy process in Nigeria was limited, as political elites tend to rely on in-house data sources from the Central Bank of Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics, and the National Planning Commission rather than engaging with and using the information from the broader research community. The scholars felt dissatisfied with the fact that the Nigerian government officials are frequently citing public institutions such as; the Central Bank of Nigeria, Federal Office of Statistics, and the National Planning Commission as their primary sources of information. Indeed, Okojie (2024) argues that public information sources are less legitimate in cases that requires conceptual or macro-level utilisation of research. For more complex studies, government officials often outsourced the projects to external research consultants (Aberman et al, 2020).

Furthermore, Ajayi and Osafo-Kwaako (2021) noted that Nigeria's institutional policymaking framework has a central organ for economic analysis within the National Planning Commission, namely the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER). However, NISER's research influence has recently waned and the Institute no longer makes substantial contributions to Nigeria's policy process. Moreover, although most federal ministries also have in-house research departments, the weak capacity and poor resource-base of these departments suggest that they are making only nominal contributions to actual policy research in the country.

Another dimension of the problem as observed by Aberman et al (2020) is the suspicion held by researchers that policymakers often hoard information needed for policy research. On their part, policy makers also accuse researchers of abusing classified information divulged to them. Hence, the channel of linkage between research and policy has become mere dissemination of research findings through seminars and workshops. In fact, Maduka (2024) has observed that, most top policy makers scarcely attend these seminars and workshops, as, they prefer to send their representatives to contribute to the policy debates.

In addition, Ajayi and Osafo-Kwaako (2021) states that the discord between the researchers and policy makers in Nigeria stems from the fact that policymakers and researchers live in different worlds with different languages, values and professional rewards. For instance, while researchers cherish publications in referred journals that stress theory and technical advances, these products have little immediate value to the public policy makers. The later often shy away from technical materials that are laden with research jargons. Hence, Amzat and Ogundiya (2020**)** suggest that research results should be set at the door-step of the policy-makers to elicit their interest. This suggests that copies of such findings should be deliberately made available to policy makers, even

when published overseas, just to elicit the relationship needed for more effective policy outputs and national development.

- **Political Will and Political Value for Research**

Past experiences from Nigeria's governance history has been the existence of a great gulf between political intensions and the realities from implementation outcomes. For instance, Aberman et al (2020) stated that the Nigerian fourth republic revealed a stronger role for research in the policymaking process, as more academics became involved in policy designs. The scholars argued that the Obasanjo's regime's cabinet had technocrats with sound academic backgrounds and strong advocacy in the policymaking process. However, research was not directly used for policymaking, largely due to poor political will and limited political value for research in the policy process.

In addition, Bryant (2020) noted that decision-makers in the health sector lacked guidance with regards to the research /policy link. Hence, policies are typically disease-driven and without a broader, more integrated systems-level perspective. Indeed, the FMH (2019) concluded that there was no rational process in place to set health priorities through purely research findings. Similarly, Maduka (2024) insists that Nigeria's health sector demonstrates weak political commitment to evidence-based institutional development. For instance, research has consistently identified primary healthcare as essential for improving maternal and child health, reducing preventable mortality, and achieving universal health coverage. Nevertheless, implementation is constrained by inadequate financing, weak coordination, shortages of health personnel, and infrastructural deficiencies. These challenges in many vital policies in Nigeria demonstrate low political commitment, poor institutional capacity, low budgetary prioritisation and poor accountability (Bryant, 2020).

In addition, Aberman et al (2020) stated that the research/policy debates have long highlighted the relationship between poverty, educational exclusion, child vulnerability, and the traditional Almajiri system in northern Nigeria. However, poor political will, unreliable population census, implementation challenges, institutional fragmentation, insecurity, poverty, and changes in political priorities affected the sustainability and effectiveness of vaious interventions. According to Maduka (2024), public policy decisions in Nigeria are often influenced by electoral calculations, patronage, elite interests, regional considerations, and political competition. In such cases, research evidence becomes only one of several competing considerations. Evidence that conflicts with political interests receive less attention than evidence that supports a preferred position in the country

- **Level of Research Funding**

Adequate and predictable funding for research is a critical determinant of the capacity of universities, research institutes, and individual researchers to generate credible evidence for public policy and national development (NUC, 2021). In Nigeria, however, inadequate and unstable funding has remained a persistent challenge (Ajayi & Osafo-Kwaako, 2021). Although successive governments have recognised research and innovation as instruments for economic transformation, the level of funding, its predictability and the management of research funds have often been challenging (Okojie, 2024). The consequences have been inadequate research infrastructure, dependence on foreign grants, limited postgraduate research capacity, weak university/industry linkages, and a disconnect between research production and policy utilisation. According to Maduka (2024), the problem is not simply that Nigeria spends too little on research. More fundamental is the fact that the funding is often fragmented, delayed, poorly coordinated, and insufficiently connected to national development priorities.

For instance, Aberman et al (2020) argues that Nigerian universities provide one of the clearest cases of underfunded research. Public universities depend substantially on government allocations, yet funding pressures have historically been concentrated on salaries, administration, and basic institutional operations, thereby, leaving relatively limited resources for research. Consequently, researchers frequently face inadequate laboratory facilities, obsolete equipment/tools, poorly stocked libraries, unreliable electricity and limited access to international journals and databases. The NUC (2021) has repeatedly emphasised the importance of adequate infrastructure and research capacity for improving the quality of Nigerian universities.

Similarly, Amzat and Ogundiya (2020**)** asserted that the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) was established partly to address infrastructure and academic development deficiencies in tertiary institutions. It supports academic research through institutional research grants and other interventions. Nevertheless, the existence of TETFund itself demonstrates the extent to which ordinary university financing has been insufficient to meet research and infrastructure needs. Moreover, the demand for research grants substantially exceeds available resources. The huge competition involved in disbursements indicate that only a fraction of proposed projects receives the needed funding (Okojie, 2024). This creates a situation where potentially valuable research projects remain unfunded despite their relevance to national development.

Maduka (2024) insists that the problem is both quantitative and structural, because, increased allocations may not often translate automatically into effective research outcomes when; funding is released late, bureaucratic procedures delay access to resources, or institutional priorities favour recurrent expenditure over research. The result is a research environment in which many academics must rely on personal resources or small external grants to undertake serious empirical studies.

In addition, Ajayi and Osafo-Kwaako (2021) asserted that Agricultural Research Institutions such as the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), the Nigerian Institute for Oil Palm Research (NIFOR), the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI), and universities have undertaken research addressing food production, crop improvement and agricultural productivity. However, agricultural research often requires long-term investment. Development of improved crop varieties, climate-resilient farming systems, soil management technologies and pest-control methods cannot normally be achieved through short-term funding cycles. Hence, since funding in Nigeria is often done intermittently, research programmes are interrupted before meaningful outcomes are achieved. The scholars insist that the implication is significant for Nigeria's food-security challenge in Nigeria. Government may respond to declining agricultural productivity through short-term interventions, while insufficient investment in research limits the development of locally appropriate technologies capable of addressing the structural causes of low productivity. Thus, poor research funding indirectly reinforce dependence on imported technologies and agricultural inputs.

Furthermore, Maduka (2024) contends that in the Nigerian health sector, many researchers depend heavily on international organisations and foreign development partners for funding. This dependence became particularly visible during public-health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Nigerian scientists and institutions participated in research relating to diagnostics, epidemiology, vaccines, treatment and public-health responses. However, the pandemic also exposed the weaknesses in domestic research infrastructure and financing. The critical issue is that external funding, although beneficial, may influence the direction of research towards the priorities of international donors rather than exclusively towards Nigeria's own long-term research agenda. Donor-funded research can therefore create a form of agenda dependency, whereby research capacity grows in areas attractive to the external funders, while other locally important but less internationally attractive problems remain neglected.

Generally, research generates benefits that are often long-term and difficult to attribute directly to a particular political administration. However, Nigerian politicians prefer highly visible projects that generate immediate political returns over investments in laboratories, data systems, basic research and scientific infrastructure, whose benefits may materialise in later years. Consequently, research funding has become vulnerable to changing political actors and political priorities in Nigeria (Amzat & Ogundiya, 2020**)**. Funding is very critical to the research/policy link in any nation that craves for sustainable development and Nigeria cannot be an exception.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research and public policy are fundamentally interconnected in the pursuit of national development. Empirical research provides policymakers with systematic evidence about

the nature, causes, magnitude, and possible solutions to social, economic, political, and developmental problems. Public policy, on the other hand, provides the institutional mechanism through which research findings can be translated into programmes, interventions, regulations, and development strategies. However, in the Nigerian context, the relationship between research and public policy has remained relatively weak, despite the country's considerable research capacity.

A critical review shows that Nigeria's development challenges cannot be attributed solely to a lack of research, because Nigerian universities, research institutes, government agencies, professional organisations, and independent researchers continuously generate knowledge on poverty, unemployment, education, health, agriculture, insecurity, youth empowerment and governance etc. However, the major challenge remains the limited translation of this knowledge into policy decisions and effective implementation for national development goals. Consequently, a significant gap persists between knowledge production, policy design and implementation**.** One major explanation for this gap is the paucity of high-quality policy-relevant research, followed by inadequate cooperation between researchers and policymakers in Nigeria. Hence, research is frequently produced within universities and research institutions without adequate mechanisms for communicating findings to Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government. Conversely, policymakers do not always clearly communicate their evidence needs to researchers. This two-way communication deficit has reduced policy-relevant research uptake in Nigeria.

Others explanations are weak political commitment to evidence-informed policymaking, whereby, political actors often prioritise ideological considerations, electoral interests, patronage, institutional interests or short-term political benefits over empirical evidence. Hence, research findings that contradict prevailing political preferences are often ignored, while evidence that supports predetermined policy positions receive greater attention.

Furthermore, the issue of inadequate research funding further compounds the situation. Limited and irregular financing constrained the ability of Nigerian researchers to conduct large-scale, longitudinal and policy-relevant studies. Inadequate research infrastructure, poor access to current databases, delays in grant disbursement and dependence on foreign funding has also affected the quality, continuity and independence of research in Nigeria. Consequently, policymakers in Nigeria often lack timely, reliable and locally generated evidence when making important policy decisions.

The experiences from programmes such as; the N-Power, agricultural interventions, social protection programmes and health initiatives, demonstrate why stronger research/policy linkages are necessary. Without a reliable national population census, Nigeria continues to make decisions based on political exigencies. Meanwhile, Simon (1957) Decision Making Theory stipulates that are policies be based on evidence to

deliver sustainable national development outcomes. Public programmes involving substantial financial resources require continuous evidence-based monitoring, impact evaluation and policy learning. Without systematic evaluation, the government can continue ineffective programmes, terminate potentially successful interventions prematurely, or redesign programmes without sufficient empirical justification.

In the Nigerian context, the contribution of research to national development depends not merely on producing more research, but on creating an institutional environment in which credible evidence is valued, accessible, communicated and incorporated into policy decisions**.** Indeed, Nigeria requires a transition from the situation where research is viewed primarily as an academic activity to one in which research constitutes an integral component of governance and development planning. Ultimately, sustainable national development requires a functional evidence-to-policy ecosystem in which researchers, policymakers, civil society, the private sector and citizens continuously interact.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered for a more productive research/policy mix in Nigeria:

i. Nigerian government should promote and prioritise evidence-informed policymaking. This will generally encourage the availability of high-quality policy-relevant research results. The government should adopt this as an explicit principle of public administration. This is being promoted in the developed nations, especially in this 21st century, shaped by forces of innovation, information and technological advancement. Nigeria policymakers can examine available empirical evidence, alternative policy options, implementation costs and likely consequences before major policies are designed and implemented. This would enhance more effective policy outcomes in the country. Evidence should not merely be used to justify decisions already taken; it should contribute meaningfully to the decision-making process. This would help to continually align public policies to national development goals.

ii. There is a need to establish a stronger research–policy linkages in Nigeria. Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) should establish formal mechanisms for engaging universities and research institutions in the policy process. The MDAs should identify major policy problems requiring empirical investigation and commission researchers to provide evidence before major programmes and policies are designed and implemented. In addition, major government policies and programmes should be subjected to baseline studies, continuous monitoring and independent impact evaluation. In addition, researchers should be encouraged to communicate their findings in accessible formats, including policy briefs, executive summaries, stakeholder workshops and public seminars. Universities and research institutes should establish policy

engagement units responsible for translating complex academic findings into practical information that policymakers can readily use.

iii. The Nigerian government should develop more political will to invest in reliable, accessible and regularly updated national databases. This can start with a strong will to conduct a credible National Census that can promote effective development policies. Government agencies should improve the collection, storage and sharing of administrative data while maintaining appropriate privacy and ethical safeguards. Reliable data would enable researchers and policymakers to monitor trends, evaluate interventions and make more accurate projections.

iv. The Nigerian government should increase Research and Development (R &D) funding and strengthen the role of research-funding institutions substantially, in order to increase public investment in the sector and ensure that approved research funds are released promptly. Funding should be predictable and sustained over the medium and long term, rather than being dependent on annual political priorities. In addition, research-funding institutions should expand competitive research grants, while improving transparency, accessibility and efficiency in grant administration. Funding should prioritise high-quality research with clear potential for addressing Nigeria's development challenges.

v. For research and innovation to translate to wealth creation and national development in Nigeria, it must critically reflect the specific socio-political, economic and cultural challenges and opportunities of the country. Past efforts of adapting research outputs from foreign nations to Nigeria must be discouraged to ensure effective context-specific outcomes.

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