Appraising Exploratory Research Method as a Research Tool in a Comparison of Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution in Ghana and Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper appraises the exploratory research method as a research tool in a comparison of traditional methods of conflict resolution in Ghana and Nigeria. Every traditional African society has over time established cultural methods indigenous to them for the settlement or resolution of their conflicts; these methods are sometimes similar because of the cultural similarities among the African societies due to migrations and immigrations. Yet, the procedures, practices, instrument and other mechanisms of these conflict resolutions differ from society to society and therefore, a study of such requires an in-depth exploration which is hanging on observation, surveys, interview, focus group discussion all which are footings of exploratory research methods. The objective of which is to appraise the validity and reliability of an exploratory research method in a comparison study of traditional methods of conflict resolution in Nigeria and Ghana. The paper adopted case study research method, appraising the exploratory methods of interview, focus group discussion, questionnaire and observations methods as a tool in a comparison of traditional methods of conflict resolution in Ghana and Nigeria. The paper found that exploratory research method is of low cost, creates an in-depth understanding of the research subject, and establishes a foundation for further research. The paper recommended exploratory research as suitable for a research problem that has not been adequately or previously dealt with as it will give a clear and in-depth understanding of the problem been studied

Keywords: Exploratory Research, Validity, Research Tool, Peace and Conflict Resolution

INTRODUCTION

Exploratory research is a methodological approach primarily utilized to investigate a problem or phenomenon that has not been clearly defined. It is the preliminary research to clarify the exact nature of the problem to be solved. According to Questionpro.com on December 9, 2021, exploratory research is a study done to investigate a subject that isn't well defined.

In its definition, formpl.us of 13 November 2019 defined exploratory research as a process of investigating a problem that has not been studied or thoroughly investigated in the past. In his own wider opinion, According to Swedberg (2020), exploratory research is an effort

to learn something novel and fascinating by delving into a research issue; the scholar concluded that "it is the soul of good research."

The hallmarks of exploratory inquiry are its flexibility and open-ended approach. According to Creswell (2014), exploratory research is used to explore a phenomenon when the researcher does not have a clear expectation or the topic is new and understudied. It is especially helpful in obtaining preliminary data that can be used to describe issues and provide research hypotheses.

Exploratory research will therefore be described as a research methodology employed to look into an unclear problem or which has a very little-known fact or information. It is a discovery of ideas and insights; a method of research designed to make an in-depth understudy of a problem, or a subject matter for a better understanding of it, but which may not provide conclusive results as the results are subject to future or further research most especially in the cultural study of methods of conflict resolution within two multicultural societies of Nigeria and Ghana.

Several methods are employed in exploratory research, including review of literature, interviews, focus groups, and case studies. Stebbins (2001) notes that qualitative methods are often favoured because they allow for an in-depth understanding of complex phenomena. However, quantitative methods can also be used to gather preliminary data that may indicate patterns or trends.

Exploratory research is applied across various fields, including social sciences, business, and health sciences. For instance, in business, it can be used to explore new market opportunities or to understand consumer behaviour. In healthcare, it might involve investigating new treatment methods or understanding patient experiences with a particular illness (Babbie, 2020).

Objective of the Study

The objective of this seminar paper is to appraise the reliability of an exploratory research method in a comparison of traditional methods of conflict resolution in Nigeria and Ghana

Research Method

The research method adopted for this appraisal is the case study of the research conducted in Ghana and Nigeria on 'a Comparison of Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution in the two countries. Yin (2018) suggests that case studies are useful in exploratory research for providing rich, contextual insights into a specific instance or event, which can then inform broader understandings and hypotheses.

Methodologies of Exploratory Research

Among several methods which a researcher can use to figure out a research design, data-gathering techniques, and subject selection. These techniques can be broadly divided into two categories: primary and secondary techniques. Information obtained directly from the subject matter under investigation is called primary research. Surveys, polls, interviews, focus groups, and observations of a collection of people or an individual can all be used. Researchers

can perform these methods themselves or can assign the task to someone else known as a "research assistant." Information from published and unpublished primary research, such as book research, case study research, and internet research, is gathered using the secondary technique. Figure 1 depicts this, and it is defined conceptually below.

Figure 1: Diagram analysing Exploratory Research methods

Source: www.questionpro.com

The primary research methods of exploratory research include:

Polls and surveys are types of primary research techniques that are used to collect data from a pre-selected sample of participants. questionnaires and polls are a method of conducting research that involves sending questionnaires to respondents. The data gathered from these surveys is then statistically examined to produce significant research conclusions, according to Questionpro.com. One of the most significant quantitative techniques is the survey or poll. Thanks to technological advancements, surveys may now be accessed and sent online. For instance, a survey is distributed to a specific audience on this Department's WhatsApp group to understand the individual group members' opinions about "Farmer-Herder Crisis, ungoverned forests and Amotekun Security Network in Nigeria's South West Zone". With the help of this data, the researcher can delve more into the issue to gain a deeper understanding of the topic of the study.

Interviews: As defined by the Collins English Dictionary, an interview is a formal gathering where questions are posed to elicit information from the subject. It is a session in which a researcher asks an interviewee fact-specific questions on a given topic. Meaningful insights are frequently obtained via interviews with subject matter experts that are not possible from more generic public sources. Open-ended questions are used in both in-person and telephone interviews to elicit insightful information about the subject or issue. For example, Interviews with key players in traditional conflict resolution in Ghana and Nigeria gave more insights to find out the nature of conflict, the practice, procedure, techniques or methods used to resolve conflicts and the end result of such resolution

Another popular technique in exploratory research is the focus group, which involves selecting a group of people and allowing them to share their opinions on the subject under study. Ensuring that the participants in a focus group share a shared background and comparable experiences related to the topic matter is crucial, particularly within the areas of traditional ways of resolving conflicts in their various communities which an exploratory method is to investigate. Interview and Focus Group Discussions are techniques that involve direct interaction with participants and are effective for gathering detailed, qualitative data about people's experiences, attitudes, and opinions (Kvale, 2007)

Observations: Observation is a methodical strategy to gathering data in which a researcher examines subjects in natural environments or scenarios using all of his senses. There are two types of observation research: qualitative and quantitative. Such studies are conducted to watch an individual or group of individuals and determine a conclusion based on how they respond to particular conditions. Such research does not involve direct communication with the subject. For instance; in the study of traditional methods of conflict resolution in Ghana and Nigeria, it is important to live in the various communities to observe their conflicts, how it occurs, where they take their conflicts to, how and what methods they apply in resolving them; and how they react after settlement. Data will be collected which is then used to draw inferences from the collective information.

While the secondary research method is the collection of information from previously published and unpublished primary research such as case studies, journals, magazines, thesis, newspapers, books, and so on. This Secondary Research Methods include:

Online Research: online research is the collection of data or information previously published on the internet in an electronic format for use. The advance of technology in the recent time makes online research to become one of the fastest ways to collect information on any topic. A lot of data is readily available on the internet which a researcher can access and make use for his or her research by type out a query on a search engine to get multiple links with related information and statistics. However, the researcher must be conscious of the genuineness and authenticity of the source websites which the researcher is collecting his or her information from.

Literature research is the consultation of print materials for information that relate to the research work; it is regarded as one of the most inexpensive methods used for discovering a hypothesis. There is tremendous amount of information available in libraries, online sources, or even commercial databases. Sources of literature research include newspapers, magazines, books from library, documents from government agencies, specific topic related articles, literature, Annual reports, published statistics from research organizations and so on. For example; in comparative research of traditional methods of conflict resolution in Ghana and Nigeria. Information were easily explored from available books, journals and non-governmental organizations' reports relating to the topic being studied, and then research data were also accessed through government's documents. Conducting a comprehensive review of existing literature helps identify gaps in current knowledge and provides a foundation for new research (Randolph, 2009)

Case study research: Case study research can help a researcher with finding more information through carefully analyzing existing cases which have gone through a similar problem. Such analysis is very important and critical especially in today's business world. The researcher just needs to make sure he analyses the case carefully in regards to all the variables present in the previous case against his own case. It is very commonly used social sciences research, even in all academic research.

Characteristics of an Exploratory Research

Exploratory research is usually not structured studies, low cost, interactive and open ended. It enables a researcher answer question such as 'what is the problem?' What is the purpose of the study? And what topics could be studied? It is time-consuming research and it

needs patience and has risks associated with it. There are no set of rules to carry out the research per se, as they are flexible, broad and scattered. It explores areas where there is no prior research done or where the existing ones do not answer the problem precisely enough.

Advantages of an exploratory research is that it has a lot of flexibilities and can adapt to changes as the research progresses; it is usually low cost. It helps lay the foundation of a research, which can lead to further research. It enables the researcher understand at an early stage, if the topic is worth investing the time and resources and if it is worth pursuing. It can assist other researchers to find out possible causes for the problem, which can be further studied in detail to find out, which of them is the most likely cause for the problem.

On the other hand, even though exploratory research points a researcher in the right direction towards what the answer is, it is usually inconclusive. Because most of the times, it involves a smaller sample, hence the results cannot be accurately interpreted for a generalized population. The main disadvantage of is that it provides qualitative data. Interpretation of such information can be judgmental and biased. Also, if the data is being collected through secondary research, then there is a chance of that data being old and not updated.

Exploratory research and the Comparison of Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution in Ghana and Nigeria as a Case Study

There are three main steps to conduct exploratory research which including identification of a problem, creation of hypothesis and further research. These methods were adopted in the study comparing the traditional methods of conflict in Ghana and Nigeria

The background of the study was that every traditional African society has over time established cultural methods indigenous to them for the settlement or resolution of their conflicts; these methods are sometimes similar because of the cultural similarities among the African societies due to migrations and immigrations yet, the procedures, practices, instrument and other mechanisms of conflict resolutions differ from society to society. In some societies like the Kpelle ethnic group of Liberia where the traditions of *Poro and Sande* are used to maintain peace and stability among the people; however, this tradition is reserved, revered and kept secret within themselves (Francis, 2019). A study of such traditions requires an in-depth exploration which is hanging on observation, surveys, interview, focus group discussion all which are exploratory research methods. The objective of which is to generate findings on what are the methods, participants, mechanisms and general outcome of conflict resolution in Ghana and Nigeria and make a comparison between the methods in the two countries to find out which method better resolves conflict; and to make appropriate recommendations from the findings.

Conflict resolution is as essential as the existence of human in his societies; man has consistently been in search of 'how or what methods' of resolving conflicts with another or others since the inevitability of conflict is a known fact of human existence in its social relations; because human social relations are naturally conflict-generating. Even at the less complex level of inter-personal to cross-cultural relations, between two individuals, or individual groups there are conflicts and many at-times violent expressions of displeasure. This thus made Ezirim (2009) posited that conflict is bound to arise as a consequence of pursuits of opposing interests.

Because man can neither live in isolation nor in the absence of conflict, has therefore at various levels consistently find a way to resolve conflict and also focus on peacebuilding

process to have peace with each other and make his society safe to live. Research has shown that every society across the world has institutional settings and mechanisms of conflict resolutions among themselves and with other groups. These institutions could be traditional settings that are practiced outside the domain of state justice system or the western system of conflict resolution (Awash, 2015). There are therefore two broad methods for resolving conflict in cultures around the world and these are the western and traditional or indigenous methods.

The western method has generally been adjudged by researchers to be alien and too technical; the cumbersomeness of western method of conflict resolution thus makes researchers to conclude that the western method is totally alien to African tradition and also been discovered not to totally resolve conflict, but create an endpoint hatred or bad feeling and therefore not perceived as effective in conflict resolution within the African societies. This finding thus gave room for the need to embrace the study of the various traditional methods within different cultures that are indigenous to traditional African societies having been accepted by the people and passed down from several generations.

The Statement of the Problem in that research was that Nigeria and Ghana are two countries of the same region with similar characteristics of multicultural societies, politics, religions, legal systems and were also colonized by the same British colonialists; yet one is relatively peaceful while the other suffers incessant conflicts. Therefore the need to make comparison of both nations to ascertain what is been done in one that is lacking in the other and what amendment or improvement to be made in their conflict resolution mechanisms; the research therefore requires an in-depth exploration of their natures of conflict, mechanisms and methods of conflict resolution within the study areas.

An exploratory research method is therefore designed for this comparison; the reason for choosing an explorative method is that the objectives, research questions and nature of the problem under investigation need an in-depth exploration of traditional experiences of conflict resolution in its natural setting. In line with this, Kothari (2004) argue that to investigate practical knowledge from people who have had practical experience with problem to be studied, exploratory research is useful to obtain insight into the relationship between variables and new ideas relating to the research problem. According to Kruger and Newman (2006) exploratory is aimed at exploring all sources of information, based on ranges of evidences and by discovering new ideas and using qualitative data.

In the study, data collection was done through observation using a structured template to scale how many times the disputants appeared, how many times they went disagreed, at what time they finally agree to settlement and their reactions at settlement. In the observation technique, the researcher visited palaces and chiefs' courts, traditionalists' shrines/meeting place, customary courts, and Arbitration courts. The researcher also consulted relevant books, journals and other related literatures for the secondary source of data. This was facilitated through the use of libraries, official documents, the Internet, etc.

Three hundred questionnaires (300) were administered in Ghana and Nigeria; one hundred and fifty (150) in each country, a distribution of fifty (50) per ethnic group was made and also a downward distribution of twenty-five (25) in each of the selected towns to be administered on the following personalities: traditional chiefs, disputants, Age-graders, customary court staff, and market women while, interview was conducted among some traditional rulers (Kings and chiefs), age-graders, traditionalists, and religious leaders. The proposed respondents were contacted using convenience sampling procedure.

A total of eighteen focus group discussions were held in Ghana and Nigeria, with three sessions held in each of the two countries' ethnic groups. Which involved three representatives

of the customary courts; the President, the Assessor, and the Court Registrar, as well as a public prosecutor, two women from the office of women's affairs, a police officer, and a cultural specialist from the department of culture and information were included in the first group. The session created a better understanding of "the extent to which the indigenous and the modern institution work together and the active change in the process of conflict resolution" improved as a result of this. Five male and five female fellows in the same age group made the second group. This made it easier for the researcher to comprehend and make deductions about women and youths' roles and attitudes in traditional conflict resolution settings. Two male and female disputants, two traditional leaders, and two traditionalists made up the third group. This group made it possible to better understand the workings of traditional conflicts resolution techniques as well as disputants' attitudes toward the procedure

Findings

Finding shows that exploratory research methods is used to examine diagnostically into a research problem using surveys, interview, observations, and focus group discussion to have an in-depth understanding of a subject matter understudy. It exposes a researcher to series of flexibilities and can adapt to changes as research progresses; it is usually low cost and helps lay foundation of a research, it is usually inconclusive which can lead to further research.

In the case study, the observation method revealed the practices and procedures of traditional methods of conflict resolution in both countries under study as the researcher witnessed the processions of the traditional rulers, the arrivals of the disputants, the starting points and how the entire processes were done in both countries which would have been difficult if the researcher was not there physically to observed.

Similarly, data collected through focus group discussions were the true and genuine occurrences and the minds of the participants because they were all discussions and parties freely open-mindedly discussed, the session created a better understanding of "the extent to which the indigenous and the modern institution work together and the active change in the process of conflict resolution, made it easier for the researcher to comprehend and make deductions about women and youths' roles and attitudes in traditional conflict resolution settings and made it possible to better understand the workings of traditional conflicts resolution techniques as well as disputants' attitudes toward the procedure.

And also, data collected through questionnaires and interview revealed are done privately taken ethical consideration of the protection of the identities of the participants, this therefore enabled the researcher to have in-depth exploration of the subject matters as the subjects were willing to information any restriction.

Above all, exploratory research method enables a researcher to understand at an early stage, if a research topic is worth investing the time and resources and if it is worth pursuing. It can assist other researchers to find out possible causes for the problem, which can be further studied in detail to find out, which of them is the most likely cause for the problem.

Findings also show that even though exploratory research points a researcher in the right direction towards what the answer is, it is usually inconclusive. Because most of the times, it involves a smaller sample, hence the results cannot be accurately interpreted for a generalized population (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The main disadvantage is that it provides qualitative

data. Interpretation of such information can be judgmental and biased. Also, if the data is being collected through secondary research, then there is a chance of that data being old and not updated.

Conclusion

It is concluded that exploratory research is a reliable research method to investigate a problem that have not been adequately or previously dealt with; particularly in a comparison of traditional methods of conflict resolution in Ghana and Nigeria because it is exploratory in nature. It will create an in-depth understanding of the various traditional practices in the different societies of Ghana and Nigeria; and will also lay out a foundation for further or future research since traditions are not static but prone to changes and modifications.

Recommendation

Findings from the nature and characteristics of exploratory research as been low cost, interactive and open ended; it gives an in-depth understanding of a research problem. An explorative research method is therefore recommended as suitable for a research problem that has not been adequately or previously dealt with as it will give a clear and in-depth understanding of the problem been studied; and also, will help lay out a foundation or create scope for future or further research on the same or similar problem.

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