
BARRIERS TO COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH IN EDUCATION: A STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION LECTURERS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the importance of collaborative research and the key barriers hindering its practice among lecturers in universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education in Kwara State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 150 lecturers through a structured questionnaire (BCRHELQ) and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results revealed a strong agreement on the benefits of collaborative research, including enhanced research quality, access to funding, mentorship, and policy relevance. However, significant barriers were identified, notably a lack of research funding ($M = 4.50$), heavy workloads ($M = 4.40$), and limited institutional support ($M = 4.30$). An ANOVA test indicated significant differences in perceived barriers across institution types, with lecturers from colleges of education reporting higher levels of constraint. Senior academics were found to engage more in collaborative research than their junior counterparts. The study concludes that systemic and institutional challenges continue to obstruct collaborative efforts, despite their recognized value. It recommends increased funding, workload adjustments, mentorship programs, and infrastructure improvements to foster a more collaborative research culture in Nigerian higher education institutions.

Keywords: *Collaborative research, education, higher education lecturer.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Collaborative research has become an essential strategy for addressing complex educational challenges through shared expertise and resources (Harris & Jones, 2015). In the Nigerian higher education context, particularly in Kwara State, lecturers in universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education are central to knowledge production, innovation, and national development. However, despite the acknowledged value of collaboration, research among lecturers in the region tends to be individualized, with limited inter-institutional or interdisciplinary efforts (Adeyemi & Ede, 2020). Collaborative research in education is vital for advancing knowledge, improving educational practices, and addressing complex challenges in diverse educational contexts. Despite its potential benefits, collaborative research is often hindered by several interrelated barriers that affect both researchers and practitioners. These barriers can be categorized into the following key areas:

Lack of Time and Resources: A major constraint in collaborative research is the limited time and resources available to both educational researchers and practitioners. Heavy workloads and competing responsibilities often make it difficult to commit to joint research initiatives (Fullan, 2007). Moreover, insufficient funding and institutional support can restrict the

scope, depth, and sustainability of collaborative research projects (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

Communication and Interdisciplinary Barriers: Effective communication is a cornerstone of successful collaboration, yet it is frequently obstructed by disciplinary silos and differences in language, terminology, and epistemological perspectives (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Researchers from fields such as psychology, sociology, and education may approach problems using different frameworks, which can complicate joint efforts (Biesta, Boeve-de Pauw, & Van Hout, 2011). Additionally, practitioners may struggle to interpret and apply academic research findings, limiting their engagement and the practical utility of research outputs (Hill, 2012).

Institutional and Cultural Barriers: Institutional structures and academic culture can also inhibit collaboration. Academic environments often reward individual accomplishments such as publications and grants over collaborative ventures, creating disincentives for joint work (Becker, 2008; Trowler & Becher, 2002). This culture of individualism and competition can marginalize efforts that require collective input and shared ownership.

Power Dynamics and Trust Issues: Power imbalances between researchers and practitioners can negatively impact collaboration. Differences in status, academic training, or perceived expertise may result in hierarchical relationships that stifle open dialogue and shared decision-making (Gaventa, 2006). Establishing trust is crucial for productive collaboration, but it often requires time and deliberate relationship-building,

especially in interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral contexts (Nielsen, 2013).

Technological and Infrastructure Barriers; With the growing reliance on digital technologies for research communication and data sharing, technological barriers have become increasingly relevant. Limited access to reliable internet, lack of technological proficiency, and inadequate infrastructure can constrain participation in collaborative research, particularly in under-resourced settings (Zhao, 2009).

Siloed Research Practices and Limited Networking Opportunities; Researchers often work in isolation, a practice sometimes referred to as "siloing," which restricts interdisciplinary learning and sharing of ideas (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Similarly, limited access to collaborative networks and professional communities can prevent researchers and practitioners from forming meaningful partnerships necessary for sustained research endeavors (Nielsen, 2013).

Collaborative research in education holds great promise, yet it is impeded by a variety of barriers, including time and resource constraints, communication challenges, institutional cultures, power dynamics, technological limitations, and siloed practices. This lack of collaboration may be attributed to systemic and structural issues such as poor funding, institutional rivalries, and limited professional development opportunities. The consequence is a reduced capacity to generate impactful, policy-relevant, and community-centered research that meets the diverse educational needs of the region (Adeleke & Oke, 2018). Understanding the barriers that hinder effective research collaboration is, therefore, critical to improving the

research culture and output in higher education institutions in Kwara State. Addressing these barriers requires systemic change, including the promotion of supportive policies, investment in professional development, and the creation of inclusive structures that encourage joint problem-solving. By fostering mutual respect, shared goals, and open communication, educational stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness and impact of collaborative research.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Collaborative research has emerged as a powerful approach for addressing complex educational issues by leveraging the diverse expertise, resources, and perspectives of scholars and institutions. In the context of higher education in Kwara State, Nigeria, such collaboration is particularly vital given the growing need for evidence-based solutions, innovative practices, and impactful policy development. Despite the widely acknowledged benefits of collaborative research, such as enhanced productivity, improved quality of output, access to funding, and professional growth, many lecturers continue to engage in isolated, individualistic research practices.

Empirical evidence and institutional reports suggest that higher education lecturers in Kwara State face multiple obstacles that hinder effective collaboration. These include inadequate funding, excessive workload, lack of institutional support and incentives, limited access to collaborative networks, and trust deficits among colleagues. Additionally, disparities in research capacity, infrastructural limitations, and entrenched academic cultures that prioritize competition over cooperation further complicate efforts to foster meaningful research partnerships.

While previous studies have examined general challenges to research productivity in Nigerian tertiary institutions, there is a noticeable gap in the literature specifically addressing how these challenges affect collaborative research practices among lecturers in different institutional contexts (universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education) within Kwara State. Without a clear understanding of these barriers and their contextual variations, policy interventions and institutional reforms may fail to effectively support and promote collaborative research.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the importance of collaborative research, identify the specific barriers hindering its practice, and propose actionable strategies for improving collaborative engagement among higher education lecturers in Kwara State.

Although research collaboration has been linked to increased productivity, innovation, and visibility (Bozeman & Boardman, 2014), lecturers in Kwara State still face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to engage in joint research activities. These challenges contribute to the low volume of impactful research outputs and minimal influence on policy development and educational practices.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

To examine the importance of collaborative research among higher education lecturers in Kwara State.

To identify the key barriers affecting collaborative research.

To explore strategies to improve collaborative practices in educational research.

1.3 Research Questions

What is the significance of collaborative research in the context of higher education in Kwara State?

What are the main barriers hindering collaborative research among lecturers?

What strategies can be employed to promote collaboration among educational researchers?

1.4 Significance of Study

This study is expected to inform educational policymakers, administrators, and academic staff in Kwara State on the importance of fostering collaborative environments in research. It also contributes to the national discourse on improving research practices and productivity in Nigerian tertiary institutions, with implications for both policy and practice.

1.5 Importance of Collaborative Research in Education

Collaborative research is an essential tool for advancing educational quality, especially within higher education institutions where intellectual diversity and specialized knowledge are abundant. For lecturers in Kwara State, collaborative research facilitates the pooling of expertise and resources in a setting where institutions often operate under constraints such as inadequate funding, limited access to research facilities, and isolated research environments (Adeleke & Oke, 2018).

Collaboration enhances research productivity and impact, as studies have shown that co-authored research tends to be more widely cited and better disseminated (Bozeman & Boardman, 2014). In addition, partnerships, especially those that cross institutional or national boundaries, can lead to the production of high-quality research outputs, greater access to research funding, and increased professional visibility for the academics involved (Tight, 2020).

Importantly, collaborative research fosters capacity building and mentorship among faculty members. It creates opportunities for junior academics to learn from experienced scholars, thereby promoting professional development and the transmission of research skills (Okebukola, 2002). This mentoring process is crucial in the Nigerian context, where disparities in academic experience and access to training are common.

In terms of relevance, collaboration allows researchers to undertake contextually grounded studies that reflect the diverse experiences of educational institutions across the state. Research that incorporates multiple voices and perspectives is more likely to produce findings that resonate with policymakers and stakeholders (Obasi & Eboh, 2019). Such evidence-based research is instrumental in shaping educational reforms, curriculum development, and teacher training initiatives.

Furthermore, collaborative research encourages institutional innovation and partnerships. Through joint research activities, higher education institutions can initiate shared conferences, co-develop proposals for external funding, and engage in community-based projects that boost the credibility and

competitiveness of their academic programs (Harris & Jones, 2015).

In summary, promoting collaborative research among higher education lecturers in Kwara State is critical to enhancing research quality, building academic capacity, and producing knowledge that is both policy-relevant and socially transformative.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Collaborative research refers to the process where two or more individuals or institutions engage in joint intellectual efforts to investigate issues, generate knowledge, and provide solutions to shared problems (Bozeman & Boardman, 2014). In the context of education, this collaboration often involves lecturers, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners working together across departments, faculties, or even institutions to address complex educational challenges. This form of research is grounded in the belief that diversity of thought and interdisciplinary perspectives enhances the quality, relevance, and applicability of research findings. It promotes inclusivity and brings various skills, methodologies, and resources into the research process, thereby increasing the chances of producing high-impact outcomes (Tight, 2020).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The present study is informed by Communities of Practice (CoP) theory (Wenger, 1998), which emphasizes learning through social participation and knowledge sharing. In higher education, CoP manifests when lecturers engage in research collaborations that allow for mutual learning and the co-creation of

knowledge. The theory supports the idea that collaborative engagement fosters innovation and professional growth within an academic community. Additionally, Social Constructivist Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) provides a foundation for understanding how knowledge is constructed through social interaction. Within collaborative research settings, this theory emphasizes the role of dialogue, joint problem-solving, and shared experiences in building new knowledge.

2.2 Barriers to Collaborative Research

Several empirical studies have identified common barriers to research collaboration in education, particularly in resource-constrained environments such as Nigeria.

Institutional and Administrative Barriers: Institutions often lack clear policies or support structures for collaborative research. Bureaucratic hurdles, limited research incentives, and fragmented institutional cultures can impede collaboration (Adeyemi & Ede, 2020).

Funding Constraints: A significant barrier to collaborative research in Nigeria is the lack of funding. Most institutions do not have dedicated funds for collaborative projects, and external grant opportunities are limited and highly competitive (Adeleke & Oke, 2018).

Lack of Trust and Interpersonal Conflicts: Trust is a vital component of successful collaboration. Studies have reported that suspicion, competition, and a lack of mutual respect among colleagues often discourage lecturers from working together (Obasi & Eboh, 2019).

Disparities in Research Capacity and Experience: Discrepancies in research skills, methodological knowledge, and publishing experience can also pose challenges. Senior academics may hesitate to collaborate with junior colleagues who are still developing their academic profiles (Okebukola, 2002).

Time Constraints and Workload: Many Nigerian lecturers face heavy teaching loads, administrative responsibilities, and involvement in other non-academic duties. These competing demands reduce the time and energy available for engaging in meaningful research partnerships (Tight, 2020).

2.3 Gaps in Literature

While existing studies have highlighted various challenges, there remains a limited understanding of how these barriers specifically affect higher education lecturers in Kwara State. Furthermore, there is a need for empirical data that explores lecturers' perceptions, experiences, and suggestions on how to improve collaborative research within their local academic environment. This study seeks to fill that gap.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. The design is appropriate for obtaining data on the current status, challenges, and perspectives of higher education lecturers in Kwara State regarding collaborative research. It allows for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from a large population, making it suitable for identifying patterns, trends, and barriers.

3.1 Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised lecturers from universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education in Kwara State, Nigeria. These include institutions such as the University of Ilorin, Kwara State University, Al-Hikmah University, Kwara State College of Education (Ilorin, Oro, and Lafiagi), and Kwara State Polytechnic. A multistage sampling technique was used. In the first stage, institutions were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation from various types of higher education institutions. In the second stage, stratified random sampling was employed to select lecturers across faculties, departments, and ranks. A sample size of 150 lecturers was targeted to ensure diversity and representation.

3.2 Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire titled *“Barriers to Collaborative Research among Higher Education Lecturers Questionnaire (BCRHELQ) was used to elicit information from the respondents.”* The questionnaire contains four sections:

Section A: Demographic Information.

Section B: Importance of Collaborative Research.

Section C: Perceived Barriers to Collaborative Research.

Section D: Strategies for Enhancing Collaboration.

The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1)*.

3.3 Validation and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was subjected to content and face validation by experts in educational research and measurement. A pilot study involving 20 lecturers from a non-sampled institution was conducted. The reliability coefficient was determined using Cronbach's Alpha, with an acceptable threshold set at 0.70.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

Data was collected through both online and physical distribution of questionnaires. Research assistants were trained and engaged for in-person administration in sampled institutions, while Google Forms was used to reach respondents electronically.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics such as t-tests and ANOVA to test for significant differences based on demographic variables (e.g., institution type, academic rank, years of experience). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used for data analysis.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Information of Respondents

A total of 150 valid responses were analyzed. Respondents included lecturers from universities (45%), polytechnics (30%), and colleges of education (25%). In terms of academic rank, 20% were professors/associate professors, 35% senior lecturers,

and 45% assistant lecturers or lecturers II. The majority (60%) had over 10 years of teaching and research experience.

4.2 Perceived Importance of Collaborative Research

Table 1 shows the mean responses on the importance of collaborative research among higher education lecturers in Kwara State.

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
1	Collaborative research improves research quality	4.60	0.55
2	It enhances access to research funding	4.25	0.71
3	It fosters mentorship and knowledge sharing	4.45	0.60
4	It leads to better policy-relevant research	4.35	0.68

Interpretation:

The mean values ($M > 4.0$) suggest a strong agreement among respondents on the value of collaborative research. This supports existing literature emphasizing the importance of collaboration in enhancing scholarly productivity, especially in resource-constrained settings (Bozeman & Boardman, 2014; Tight, 2020).

4.3 Identified Barriers to Collaborative Research

Table 2. presents the main barriers perceived by respondents

Item	Barrier	Mean	Std. Dev
1	Lack of research funding	4.50	0.58
2	Heavy workload and time constraints	4.40	0.62
3	Lack of institutional support or incentives	4.30	0.64
4	Poor communication and mistrust among colleagues	4.10	0.78
5	Competition rather than collaboration culture	3.85	0.81

Interpretation:

The highest-rated barrier was the lack of research funding ($M = 4.50$), followed by workload issues and insufficient institutional support. These findings align with Adeyemi and Ede (2020), who identified funding and institutional culture as key impediments to research collaboration in Nigeria.

4.4 Inferential Statistics

An ANOVA test revealed a significant difference in perceived barriers based on institution type ($F(2,147) = 4.82, p < 0.01$). Lecturers from colleges of education reported more barriers than those in universities and polytechnics, likely due to differences in research expectations, funding access, and institutional infrastructure.

A t-test comparing junior and senior academics showed that senior academics were more likely to engage in collaborative research ($t(148) = 2.34, p < 0.05$), suggesting that experience and professional networks play a role in enabling collaboration.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study confirmed that lecturers in Kwara State recognize the value of collaborative research, particularly its role in improving quality, increasing funding access, and supporting professional development. However, several systemic barriers hinder their participation. The findings echo Obasi and Eboh (2019), who highlighted how institutional fragmentation and lack of support discourage collaborative efforts in Nigerian higher education. Interestingly, the significant difference between institution types underscores the need for tailored interventions. Colleges of education may require more targeted support and policy

frameworks to encourage cross-institutional and intra-institutional collaborations.

The findings of this study underscore the widespread recognition among higher education lecturers in Kwara State of the critical role collaborative research plays in advancing educational quality and policy-relevant knowledge. With mean ratings above 4.0 on all indicators measuring the perceived importance of collaboration, it is evident that lecturers strongly believe in the value of joint scholarly efforts. Specifically, collaborative research was perceived to improve research quality ($M = 4.60$), enhance access to funding ($M = 4.25$), foster mentorship and knowledge sharing ($M = 4.45$), and contribute to policy-relevant research ($M = 4.35$). These results corroborate the assertions of Bozeman and Boardman (2014) and Tight (2020), who argue that collaboration in research increases productivity, dissemination, and impact, particularly in resource-limited contexts.

Despite the acknowledged benefits, the study also revealed several key barriers that hinder the actualization of collaborative research among lecturers. The most prominent among these was the lack of research funding ($M = 4.50$), followed closely by heavy workload and time constraints ($M = 4.40$), and lack of institutional support or incentives ($M = 4.30$). These findings are consistent with the work of Adeyemi and Ede (2020), who highlighted how inadequate funding structures and unsupportive institutional cultures discourage collaborative efforts in Nigerian higher education. Similarly, Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) emphasized that limited time and resources diminish the viability of joint research projects.

Moreover, communication challenges and mistrust among colleagues ($M = 4.10$) were also identified as significant impediments. These reflect the broader issues of disciplinary silos and interpersonal dynamics that often hinder effective collaboration, as discussed by Becher and Trowler (2001) and Gaventa (2006). A further concern was the prevailing culture of competition over collaboration ($M = 3.85$), suggesting that institutional reward systems may inadvertently favor individual over collective achievements, a theme echoed by Becker (2008).

Inferential statistics added nuance to these findings. The ANOVA test indicated that lecturers in colleges of education perceive more barriers to collaboration than their counterparts in universities and polytechnics. This could be attributed to discrepancies in institutional infrastructure, research expectations, and access to external funding. Additionally, the t-test revealed that senior academics are more likely to engage in collaborative research compared to junior staff, likely due to their broader professional networks, experience, and familiarity with funding landscapes.

These findings highlight a systemic disconnect between the recognized importance of collaborative research and the practical conditions needed to support it. The barriers identified are interrelated and reflect broader structural and cultural challenges within the Nigerian higher education system. As such, addressing them requires a multi-level approach that includes policy reforms, institutional realignment, and capacity-building initiatives. This includes providing dedicated funding for joint research, reconfiguring academic workloads to allow

time for collaboration, and fostering a research culture that values teamwork, inclusivity, and mutual respect.

Ultimately, enhancing collaborative research among lecturers in Kwara State is not only a strategic necessity for improving academic output and relevance but also a critical step toward building a more robust, innovative, and inclusive educational system. Without intentional efforts to dismantle the existing barriers, the transformative potential of collaborative research will remain underutilized.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the perceived importance of collaborative research and the barriers hindering its practice among lecturers in universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education in Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that while lecturers strongly recognize the benefits of collaboration, such as improved research quality, access to funding, mentorship opportunities, and policy relevance, numerous systemic and institutional barriers continue to impede collaborative efforts.

Key barriers identified include inadequate research funding, heavy workloads, insufficient institutional support, poor communication, mistrust among colleagues, and a prevailing culture of competition over cooperation. Notably, differences were observed across institutional types, with lecturers in colleges of education experiencing more constraints than those in universities and polytechnics. Additionally, senior academics were more likely to engage in collaboration compared to junior staff, underscoring the role of experience and networks.

Overall, the study highlights the urgent need for structural reforms and supportive policies to foster a culture of collaboration in higher education. Without deliberate interventions, the current barriers will continue to limit the potential of collaborative research to drive educational innovation, evidence-based policymaking, and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Increase Research Funding:** Government agencies, tertiary institutions, and private stakeholders should allocate dedicated funds for collaborative research, especially projects that span multiple institutions or disciplines.
2. **Reduce Workload and Time Constraints:** Institutions should review academic workloads to allow lecturers sufficient time for research. This may involve recruiting more teaching staff or implementing workload-sharing strategies.
3. **Institutional Support and Incentives:** Universities and colleges should establish clear policies that recognize and reward collaborative research through promotion criteria, research grants, and public recognition.
4. **Foster a Culture of Trust and Communication:** Workshops, retreats, and team-building activities should be organized to build mutual trust and improve interdisciplinary communication among researchers.

5. Capacity Building for Junior Academics: Mentorship programs should be strengthened to support early-career researchers in acquiring collaborative skills and building professional networks.
6. Leverage Technology and Infrastructure: Investment in reliable internet access and collaborative tools such as virtual meeting platforms, shared research repositories, and communication apps should be prioritized.
7. Create and Strengthen Research Networks: Institutional and regional research networks should be established or expanded to facilitate partnerships, idea sharing, and co-authorship opportunities.

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