

Remembering Nigeria's Top Health, Science Researchers

Research is one area the Nigerian Government has paid little attention on despite the benefits it brings to a nation. It has not also taken seriously findings from credible researchers in the country. **Martins Ifijeh** writes on Nigeria's top 28 health and science researchers who have moved against the tide to have their work on global map

When the famous American author of *Rise and Fall of America's Growth*, Robert Gordon, in 2016 relayed a definitive account of events that changed the fortunes of his country from 1870 to 1940, he mentioned research and innovation as the bedrock in which all the good things that happened to the United States rode on.

He said between the last two centuries, the United States made advances in public sanitation, pharmacology, communication and electricity because they had armies of people who were ready to churn out solutions through researches.

His book suggests the successes so far attained by U.S. and other developed countries have not only made standard of living better for them, it has reduced in several folds the number of avoidable deaths and disease outbreaks. An enviable result many developing countries, like Nigeria fantasise having someday.

But, while these successes have been attributed to the high regard placed on researches, most admirers, like Nigeria have refused to do what it did; that is, give priority to research. They have either discouraged research directly through lack of funding or through factors that make research a herculean task in the country. But it wants to be like the U.S. or Germany in medicine, pharmacology, technology, economy and infrastructure. It magically hopes one day it will reap where it had not sown.

Apart from funding, lack of recognition of researches by credible Nigerians, lack of enabling environment, and lack of dialogues with these scholars for the purpose of policy framework and societal good have made many researchers and would-be-researchers slowed down in churning out innovative approaches for government and stakeholders to run with.

But despite these odds, a recent study done by a Nigerian, Mohammed Dahiru Aminu, which THISDAY came across recently, highlighted Nigeria's top 28 health and science researchers/scholars, who have made several research works that could compete with those of the world's best scholars, and as well make the country better off if the solutions proffered in them were picked up, and possibly implemented, especially by the Nigerian Government, who obviously should have a bigger clout to support their works. Aminu who did the study said he was surprised that in a country where almost everything works against researching, a pool of resilient scholars could still be found even though weighed down by extreme improbability of researching and publishing successes. Yet their works were published in notable academic journals around the world.

Aminu arrived at these top 28 researchers by collecting a list of the most published scholars in Nigeria since 1910 to 2017, including their total publications; total citations from their publications and number of documents that cite their works; the period within which the publications were made; and their h-indexes. He used Scopus -the world's largest abstract and citation database for peer reviewed literature.

The documents surveyed cut across almost all subject areas: as medicine; biological sciences; biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology; social sciences; environmental science; pharmacology, toxicology and pharmaceuticals; immunology and microbiology; earth and planetary sciences; veterinary medicine, psychology, neuroscience, health professions, decision science, dentistry, among others. The study showed that the most published scholars, include Oyewusi Gureje, Department of Psychiatry, University of Ibadan. Using Scopus, he stands as the most published scholar in Nigeria. He has published in the best journals in the field of medicine. He currently has 338 publications and 18038 total citations by 14619 documents. His publication range is 1986 to present, and his h-index is 59.

Bolajoko Olubukunola Olusanya, Centre for Healthy Start Initiative, Lagos, has 164 publications



Olusanya, Adewole and Okonofua are among Nigeria's top 28 researchers

and 5907 total citations by 4753 documents. Her publication range is 2000 to present, and her h-index is 32. Using Scopus, Olusanya ranks the 8th researcher in Nigeria, but using Research Gates puts her at number two, just before Gureje. Adesola O. Ogunniyi, of the Department of Medicine, University College Hospital, Ibadan, has 198 publications and 5015 total citations by 3874 documents. His publication range is 1987 to present, and his h-index is 23; Akintunde Sowunmi, Malaria Research Laboratories, University of Ibadan, has 194 publications and 3252 total citations by 2089 documents. His publication range is 1988 to present

Friday Ebhodaghe Okonofua, University of Medical Sciences, Ondo State, has 190 publications and 3019 total citations by 2684 documents. His publication range is 1985 to present, and his h-index is 28. Using Scopus, he ranks number five in Nigeria.

The present Minister of Health, Professor Isaac Adewole, who was of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Ibadan, has 140 publications and 9339 total citations by 8173 documents. His publication range is 1992 to present, and his h-index is 22. Using Scopus, Adewole is the 14th top researcher in Nigeria. Ebenezer Olatunde Farombi, Department of Biochemistry, University of Ibadan, has 179 publications and 3126 total citations by 2343 documents. His publication range is 1997 to present, and his h-index is 31. Using Scopus, he ranks number six.

Emmanuel Adoyi Ameh, Department of Surgery, National Hospital, Abuja, has 176 publications and 3058 total citations by 2657 documents. His publication range is 1996 to present, and his h-index is 20 and he ranks 7th using Scopus.

Other scholars who made the top 28 in Nigeria include late Benjamin O. Osuntokun, Department of Medicine, University College Hospital, Ibadan; Felix Ebhodaghe Okieimen, of the Geo-Environmental and Climate Change Adaptation Research Center, University of Benin, Obinna Onwujekwe, Health Policy and Research Group, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Adelola A. Adeloje, Department of Surgery, University College Hospital, Ibadan; Isiaka Ajani Ogunwande, Department of Chemistry, Lagos State University; Lateef A. Salako, Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of Ibadan; Peter Achunike Akah, of the Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Joseph Olusegun Ayo, Department of Veterinary Physiology, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Others are Charles Okechukwu Esimone, Department of Pharmaceutical Microbiology and Biopharmaceutics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Morenike Oluwatoyin Luwatoyin Fofayan, Department of Child Dental Health, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife; Anthony Amaechi Attama, Department of Pharmaceutics, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Wasiu Lanre Adeyemo,

Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, University of Lagos; Olumbe Bassir, (Sierra Leonean, who spent most of his professional career in Nigeria, and died, 2001, in Ibadan) of the Department of Chemical Pathology, University of Ibadan.

Others are Andrew Jonathan Nok, (died November 2017) of the Department of Biochemistry, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Yekini Shehu, Department of Mathematics, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Robert A. Asiedu, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan; Akpan Ndem Ikot, of the Department of Physics, University of Port Harcourt; Michael Umale Adikwu, of the University of Abuja; and Tolu O. Odugbemi, of the Department of Community Health and Primary Care, University of Lagos.

No doubt the top researchers moved against all odds to have their work published in globally recognised academic journals, but how many of their innovations and researches have been expanded by the government and major stakeholders who have the clout.

For instance, THISDAY sort audience with one of the researchers, Bolajoko Olubukunola Olusanya. She is the country's number two top researcher if Research Gates Score is used for evaluation. The first being Oyewusi Gureje.

Olusanya says it was unfortunate that Nigeria does not give priority to research despite the immense benefits attached to it. She says other countries have made significant progress in diseases prevention and morbidity reduction because of the importance they give to research.

She said now that the top 28 researchers in Nigeria have been spotlighted, first by the study done by Aminu, and now by THISDAY, the Nigerian Government, especially through the Ministry of Health, should take their findings seriously. "When the younger ones know that Nigeria takes research seriously, it will encourage them to also go into it. Many of us have done hundreds of researches individually, government should harness our findings for the purpose of policy formulations." Dr. Bolajoko Olusanya's husband, Jacob Olusanya, a former bank chief executive, who is also a leading researcher in Nigeria told THISDAY that the Ministry of Health should create a unit that monitors researches on health sciences in the country, adding that government should also have dialogue with the top researchers in the country, so that their findings in the different areas they have done researches will not go down the drain.

"If we have people who can publish as much as 100 researches and more in this environment despite the odds, they should be celebrated, encouraged and considered as mentors for the younger generations, so that Nigeria, which prized itself as the leader of Africa, will not just be doing that with the word of mouth, but in all areas, especially in research."

The Olusanya's who are not academicians despite having one of the highest research publications in the country, now jointly run

the Centre for Healthy Start Initiative in Lagos, where researches are done often to address issues affecting newborns.

In one of their studies, they realised that 14 per cent of children in normal schools within Mushin in Lagos have hearing problem. That research gave birth to Phoenix Hearing Centre to tackle the problem. "But we were not satisfied with just treating them. We then started newborn screening programme in 2005, which was launched by the then Minister of Health. The idea was to find out what causes hearing problem. This led us to do additional studies in Mercy Children Hospital and Island Maternity Hospital where we discovered that jaundice was the major problem.

"So we now started focusing on jaundice. We have placed specialised tents in the two hospitals with support from a U.S. organisations. Babies with jaundice are kept under these canopies for about five hours a day, and if done consecutively for three days, the jaundice disappears." The Olusanyas say this research could potentially help in reduction of several thousands of hearing-loss-cases and deaths in newborns in Nigeria.

"Hearing was a major problem among children in these hospitals. And indices now have shown that it has drastically reduced because every year we gather data from them.

"Usually, jaundice in babies mostly starts after they have been discharged from the hospital. And most mothers don't recognise how dangerous it can be. So what happens is that once they see that the baby's skin colour is changing, they start using all kinds of traditional medicines. By the time they come to the hospital, the damage may have been done. So we decided to design something for the mothers to help them at home to be checking if their babies have jaundice or not. It is a small card which when taken near the nose of the baby can tell whether the baby has jaundice or not." If these researches were done in developed countries, it would be most certain their governments will pick up from there and help their newborn citizens prevent hearing loss and death associated with jaundice. The intervention will not be in only two hospitals, but in thousands of hospitals across their country. Dr. Olusanya said in the 168 researches the centre has done, most of the challenges faced was funding, as many works were done through personal resources. "Research in Nigeria means you have to be swinging against the tide compared to your colleagues outside the country who have regular power supply, who do not have the kind of infrastructural challenges we have in this country."

"The cost of doing research in Nigeria is astronomical. Researchers don't need to be in the universities. Any body that has any skill and track record in publishing should be encouraged. TEDFUND should be open to any researcher, whether in the university or outside the university. As long as you are research credible," he added.