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Revisiting the Basics

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This chapter presents the overview of a variety of features needed for a well-crafted doctoral dissertation. These fundamental elements include (a) research approaches, (b) an ideal dissertation structure, (c) preparing a systematic literature review, (d) building a theoretical framework, and (e) a general overview of the types of research methodologies. For the sake of cohesion, these will be discussed separately. Before addressubg these features, however, let us first address the question of why we conduct research in the first place.

We do research for two major reasons. The first reason is to gain *knowledge*: i.e. facts, information, and secondly to acquire skills through experience or education. Figure 2.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the two ways knowledge can be gained:

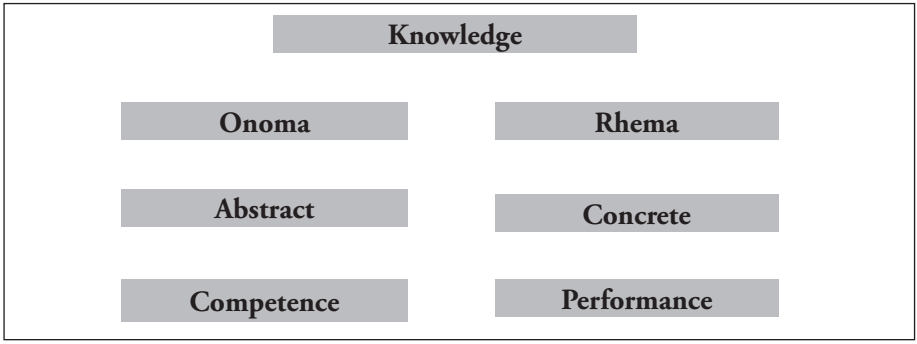

Figure 2.1: A Conceptual Framework of Knowledge
Source: Self-generated by author

Figure 1 suggests that knowledge can be acquired through *Onoma* (meaning naming in Greek) and *Rhema* (meaning doing/action in Greek). The former yields knowledge that is *abstract* (existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence) gained through *competence*: i.e. the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. The latter yields knowledge that is *concrete* (existing in a material or physical form; real or solid) gained through *performance*: i.e. the action or process of carrying out or accomplishing an action, task, or function. *Onoma* and *Rhema* combined yields *Logos* (i.e. logic: reasoning conducted or assessed according to strict principles of validity).

The second reason we conduct research is to ascribe *meanings* (intensions to convey, indicate, or refer to particular things or notions) to phenomena. There are two types of meanings. The first type is *denotative*, which refers to shared meanings: for example, those found in a dictionary. The second type is *connotative*, which is specialized meaning: for example, jargon used in an academic discipline.

As I also recount elsewhere, there are the following linguistic meanings: (a) *syntactic* meaning referring to sign-sign relations, (b) *semantic* meaning referring to sign-world relations, and (c) *pragmatics* meaning referrign to sign-behavior relations. Semantics traditionally deals with meaning as a dyadic relation while pragmatics deals with meaning as a triadic relation. Pragmatics assumes that the image of meaning is a polyadic (involving four or more elements) relation among conventionality-speaker-situation-hearer. Semantics assumes a triadic (involving three elements) relation among conventionality, language, and to what it refers. If language were natural, meaning would be dyadic; since language is conventional, it is therefore triadic; thus, pragmatics is polyadic (see, for example, Bangura 2002, 2013 & 2015). Now let us begin with the research approaches.

Research Approaches

A research approach refers to the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions. There are at least two major types of research approaches. One is the scientific/systematic/ideal approach and the other is the advocacy/participatory/emancipatory approach. These approaches are explicated in the following paragraphs.

The *scientific/systematic/ideal* approach employs qualitative (emphasis on words), quantitative (emphasis on numbers/numerical values) and mixed/triangulative (emphasis both on words and numbers/numerical values) methods to gain knowledge. Thus, several aspects are involved when using this approach. Following Chava Frankfort-Nachmias, David Nachmias and Jack DeWaard (2014), the first aspect of the approach concerns the modes of knowledge acquisition. According to these scholars, in addition to the scientific mode of gaining knowledge, there also are (a) the authoritarian mode, which involves acquiring knowledge by consulting people who are politically or socially considered as knowledge producers, such as clergy, oracles, kings, scientists, etc.; (b) the mystical mode, which involves gaining knowledge from authorities such as diviners, mediums, and prophets who are perceived to have connections to supernatural powers; and (c) the rationalistic mode, which entails acquiring knowledge by strictly following the forms and rules of logic, based on the belief that 'the human mind can understand the world independent of its observable phenomena and…that forms of knowledge exist that are independent of our personal experiences' (Frankfort-Nachmias *et al.* 2014:3-4).

The second aspect deals with the basic assumptions of science. Frankfort-Nachmias et al. proffer the following six suppositions which, they confess, are unproven and unprovable, albeit neccessary for managing scientific discourse: (1) 'nature is orderly', (2) 'we can know nature', (3) 'all natural phenomena have natural causes', (4) 'nothing is self-evident', (5) 'knowledge is derived from the acquisition of experience', and (6) 'knowledge is superior to ignorance' (2014:5-7).

The third aspect has to do with the aims of social science. Frankfort-Nachmias and her colleagues delineate three aims. The first aim is to provide a scientific explanation–i.e. generating answers for the 'Why?' questions. The explanation can be either *deductive*, which involves '(a) a universal generalization, (b) a statement of the conditions under which the generalization holds true, (c) an event to be explained, and (d) the rules of formal logic,' or *probabilistic/inductive*, which involves an explanation of likelihood (Frankfort-Nachmias et al. 2014:8-9). The second aim is prediction, which involves stating or estimating that a specified thing

will happen in the future or will be a consequence of something. The third aim has to do with understanding, which involves inferring something from information received. Understanding is utilized in two radically different ways: (1) *verstehen,* German word for emphatic understanding; and (2) *predictive understanding* for objective understanding (Frankfort-Nachmias et al. 2014:11-12).

The fourth aspect pertains to the roles of methodology. Before discussing these roles, Frankfort-Nachmias and her co-authors first define a *scientific methodology* as follows: 'a system of explicit rules and procedures upon which research is based and against which claims of knowledge are evaluated' (2014:13). They then go on to state the following several roles of methodology. To begin with, 'methodology provides rules for communication'. Next, 'methodology provides rules for reasoning'. Additionally, 'methodology provides rules for *intersubjectivity*, which involves the sharing of observations and factual information among scientists' (Frankfort-Nachmias et al. 2014:14-15).

The final aspect deals with the research process. Frankfort-Nachmias et al. identify seven main stages of this process, with theory being at the center of them as each stage affects theory and theory in turn affects each stage (2014:20). The following are the eight stages with my brief definitions, since these authors do not provide them, at least not immediately:

1. *Theory* is a generalized logical statement that shows the relationship between two or more hypotheses.
2. *Problem* in science refers to any phenomenon that can be systematically investigated.
3. *Hypothesis* is a generalized logical statement that shows the relationship between two or more variables: i.e. elements, features, or factors that are liable to vary or change.
4. *Research Design* refers to a plan used by a researcher to collect, analyze and interpret observations.
5. *Operationalization of Variables* or *Measurement* [for quantitative studies] is about how the sizes, amounts, and degrees of the commonalities among concepts are ascertained. [For qualitative studies, definitions of major terms or concepts.]
6. *Data Collection* refers to how primary and secondary information is gathered.
7. *Data Analysis* deals with the detailed examination of the elements or structure of the data collected as a basis for discussion or interpretation.

8. *Conclusion* and/or *Generalization* refer to a judgment or decision reached by reasoning and a general statement or concept obtained by inference from specific cases.

Let us now turn our attention to the advocacy/participatory/emancipatory approach.

The *advocacy/participatory/emancipatory approach* is used by researchers who seek to address the needs or situations of groups that are vulnerable or marginalized. The goal of these researchers is to engender concrete changes in the lives of their research subjects. These researchers tend to have a political agenda and, thus, strive to empower the groups they study. To ameliorate the marginalization of the groups they study and to instigate reforms, these researchers include these groups at all stages of the research process (Alzheimer Europe Office 2009). The Alzheimer Europe Office explains,

> The researchers may adopt a less neutral position than that which is usually required in scientific research. This might involve interacting informally or even living amongst the research participants (who are sometimes referred to as co-researchers in recognition that the study is not simply about them but also by them). The findings of the research might be reported in more personal terms, often using the precise words of the research participants. Whilst this type of research could by criticised for not being objective, it should be noted that for some groups of people or for certain situations, it is necessary as otherwise the thoughts, feelings or behaviour of the various members of the group could not be accessed or fully understood (2009:1).

Consequently, researchers who employ the advocacy/participatory/emancipatory approach tend to seek acceptance into the groups they study or demonstrate that they have something in common with the groups they study (Alzheimer Europe Office 2009).

The immediate question as this juncture is the following: What would an ideal dissertation structure comprise? This question is addressed in the next section.

An Ideal Dissertation Structure

That an ideal dissertation, like any other academic writing, should be well structured is hardly a matter of dispute. Learnhigher (2012), an educational organization that provides free teaching and learning resources for staff in United Kingdom higher education, has suggested that a dissertation or thesis structure should evenly connect similar points together.

Thus, an ideal dissertation structure would therefore begin with the front matter. This would be followed by (at least) three preliminary chapters that deal with the topic to be studied, the existing knowledge on the topic and how

the dissertation will add to it, and how the dissertation will be grounded. The subsequent chapters would analyze the results and discuss the findings, most preferably each of these chapters dealing with each of the major research questions and its attendant hypothesis. The chapter to follow would summarize the major findings, draw conclusions, and make recommendations. This chapter would then be followed by a complete bibliography and appendices, if any. What follows is an outline of the suggested structure.

Front Matter

a. Cover page with university's name, title of dissertation, author's name, date, etc.
b. Dissertation committee signature page
c. Acknowledgments page
d. Abstract
e. Table of Contents page
f. List of Tables page
g. List of Figures page
h. Preface (if any)

Introduction

a. Overview: What the Study is about
b. Brief Background of the Issue
c. Statement of the Problem
d. Purpose and Objectives of the Study
e. Major Research Question(s), Hypothesis/Hypotheses, and/or General Thesis Statement(s)
f. Definitions of Major Concepts/Terms
g. Significance of the Study
h. Limitations of the Study
i. Organization of the Study

Literature Review

a. Nature of the Literature
b. Review Approach Used: Synchronic/Thematic or Diachronic/Chronological (this can also be done either qualitatively or quantitatively)

c. Systematic Review
d. Summary and Conclusion: General Strengths and Limitations of the Literature, What/How the Dissertation Adds to the Literature

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

These aspects can be separated if there is enough material to do so. Most of the time, there is not enough material for separation and, thus, they can be presented together, albeit separately in a chapter for clarity. They also are logically related, since they are the aspects used to systematically ground a study. Please note that not all the features of these aspects are relevant for every study.

a. Theoretical Framework
b. Research Methodology/Methodologies
c. Research Design(s)
d. Operationalizations of the Variables
e. Research Participants
f. Instrument(s)
g. Data Collection Procedure(s)
h. Data Analysis Technique/Techniques
i. Validity and Reliability

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

a. The number of chapters will depend on the number major research questions and attendant hypotheses
b. Segment by types or levels of analysis or by themes

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

a. Summary
b. Conclusions
c. Recommendations: Policy and/or Future Research

Bibliography

a. Thorough, detailed and complete
b. Consistent with the citation style used
c. Organized in alphabetical order

Appendices

a. Clean and legible copies
b. Organized in the order discussed in the dissertation

Preparing a Systematic Literature Review

M. Ling Pan defines a literature review as "a *synthesis*: i.e. 'the combining of often varied and diverse ideas, forces, or factors into one coherent or consistent complex' (2004:1). Given this defintiion, it is imperative that a good literature review be done systematically. Such a review can be organized in one of two ways, or both when there is abundant literature on the topic. One way to do a systematic literature review is synchronically or thematically according to the competing schools of thoughts, theories, ideological or other positions, etc. The other way to do a systematic literature review is diachronically or chronologically in the order the works were published. This latter approach is appropriate when there are no competing themes, and it allows the reader to see how the ideas on the topic have progressed over time.

Within the thematic approach, as Pan also suggests, literature reviews can be arranged either qualitatively (i.e. narrative) or quantitatively. Arguing that the two approaches 'do not suggest a dichotomy', he states that they 'exist in a continuum from highly qualitative (with little mention of statistics or the research methods used to obtain them) to very highly quantitative (with the final synthesis based on the mathematical averaging of results across various studies reported by different researchers' (Pan 2004:v). No matter which of these two approaches researchers employ to arrange their literature reviews, Pan (2004:5) proffers the following features that undergird both:

a. introducing the topic and defining key terms,
b. establishing the importance of the topic
c. providing an overview of the amount of available literature and its types (e.g., theoretical, statistical, speculative),
d. describing how they searched for relevant literature,
e. discussing their selection of literature to include in their review (especially if there is much literature on the topic and not all of it could be covered,
f. revealing gaps in the literature (i.e. areas that are not covered by the literature),
g. describing and, if possible, reconciling discrepancies in the literature,
h. arriving at a synthesis, and

i. Discussing possible implications and directions for future research.

Additionally, Pan suggests the following five significant steps for preparing a literature review (2004:3):

1. Select a topic and modify it in light of the amount of available literature and your audience's needs.
2. Read the selected literature carefully in order to get a broad overview, with attention to the relationship of the literature to theory or theories and establish specific purposes for your literature review.
3. Evaluate and interpret the literature on the topic.
4. Create a synthesis by reconciling similarities and differences in the literature. Consider the implications of possible conclusions and identify fruitful areas for future research.
5. Write a first draft, get feedback on it from others, and revise or rewrite your review.

Furthermore, the University of Southern California Libraries system offers the following valuable suggestions that a researcher must take into consideration when writing a literature review (USC Libraries 2017):

Use Evidence: A literature review section is, in this sense, just like any other academic research paper. Your interpretation of the available sources must be backed up with evidence [citations] that demonstrates that what you are saying is valid.

Be Selective: Select only the most important points in each source to highlight in the review. The type of information you choose to mention should relate directly to the research problem, whether it is thematic, methodological, or chronological. Related items that provide additional information but that are not key to understanding the research problem can be included in a list of further readings.

Use Quotes Sparingly: Some short quotes are okay if you want to emphasize a point, or if what an author stated cannot be easily paraphrased. Sometimes you may need to quote certain terminology that was coined by the author, not common knowledge, or taken directly from the study. Do not use extensive quotes as a substitute for your own summary and interpretation of the literature.

Summarize and Synthesize: Remember to summarize and synthesize your sources within each thematic paragraph as well as throughout the review. Recapitulate important features of a research study, but then synthesize it by rephrasing the study's significance and relating it to your own work.

Keep Your Own Voice: While the literature review presents others' ideas, your voice [the writer's] should remain front and center. For example, weave references to other sources into what you are writing but maintain your own voice by starting and ending the paragraph with your own ideas and wording.

Use Caution When Paraphrasing: When paraphrasing a source that is not your own, be sure to represent the author's information or opinions accurately and in your own words. Even when paraphrasing an author's work, you still must provide a citation to that work.

Building a Theoretical Framework

The University of Southern California Libraries (2017) system defines and characterizes the theoretical framework as the configuration that can accomodate or under gird a theory. The system then goes on to suggest the following six strategies a researcher can utilize to develop an effective theoretical framework (USC Libraries, 2017; parenthetical notes are mine):

1. *Examine your thesis title [hypotheses] and research problem*. The research problem anchors your entire study and forms the basis from which you construct your theoretical framework.
2. *Brainstorm about what you consider to be the key variables in your research*. Answer the question, 'What factors contribute to the presumed effect[s]?'
3. *Review related literature* to find how scholars have addressed your research problem. Identify the assumptions from which the author(s) addressed the problem.
6. *List the constructs and variables* that might be relevant to your study. Group these variables into independent and dependent [also, antecedent, intervening, and mediating] categories.
7. *Review key social science [and other sciences] theories* that are introduced to you in [the literature] and choose the theory [theories] that can best explain the relationships between the key variables in your study.
6. *Discuss the assumptions or propositions* of this theory [these theories] and point out [its] their relevance to your research.

The system concludes by stating that a theoretical framework helps a researcher to restrict the extent of the pertinent data of his/her study by paying attention to the particular variables and defining the particular perspective [framework] s/he will employ to analyze and interpret the data to be collected. The system adds that the theoretical framework also assists the researcher to comprehend the concepts and variables vis-à-vis established definitions and to develop new knowledge by substantiating or questioning existing theoretical propositions (USC Libraries 2017).

To get a good grasp of the theoretical framework building process, the key concepts discussed by the University of California Libraries system need to be defined and discussed, albeit briefly. As defined earlier, a *theory* is generalized logical statement that shows the relationship between two or more hypotheses.

Next, there are two general types of theories. One is *deductive theory* which goes from the general to the specifics. The other is *inductive theory* which goes from the specifics to the general. The following is a diagrammatic representation of the building process of these two types of theories and definitions of their components:

A hypothesis, as defined earlier, is a generalized logical statement that shows the relationship between two or more variables. A variable, as also defined previously, is an element, feature, or factor that is liable to vary or change, and it also shows the commonality among concepts. A concept is a definition of words which can be an abstract idea or a general notion. A word is the smallest element of linguistic meaning.

There are four levels of theory. The first level comprises *ad hoc classificatory systems* in which 'arbitrary categories are constructed in order to organize and summarize empirical observations'. The second level is made up of *taxonomies* in which systems of categories are 'constructed to fit general observations in such a way that relationships among the categories can be described'. The third level is composed of *conceptual frameworks* in which 'descriptive categories are systematically placed in a broad structure of explicit *propositions*, statements of relationships between two or more empirical properties, to be accepted or rejected'. The final level comprises *theoretical systems* which 'combine taxonomies and conceptual frameworks by relating descriptions, explanations, and predictions in a systematic manner' (Frankfort-Nachmias et al. 2014:37-39).

Let us turn our attention now to an overview of the various types of research methodologies. The mainstream or Eurocentric methodologies will first be discussed and then the African-centered types.

A General Overview of Types of Research Methodologies

In this section, I discuss five types of research methodologies: (1) qualitative, (2) quantitative, (3) mixed/triangulative, (4) emergent, and (5) African-centered. The first four types are Eurocentric/Western methodologies frequently referred to as 'mainstream methodologies' and the fifth type comprises those that have been resuscitated and newly developed to serve as alternatives to the four due to their shortcomings in adequately examining and addressing African phenomena. They are discussed separately for lucidity.

Qualitative Methodologies

Qualitative methodologies refer to systems of methods used in particular areas of study or activities by employing data in the form of words to generate descriptions and explanations. In qualitative research, theory arises from the investigation. Theory and conceptual insights derive *from* data collection rather than prior to it. Such qualitative studies generate hypotheses, as opposed to testing them. Qualitative methodologies are more interpretative, historical, and ethnographic than the quantitative approaches. Thus, the critical issues for qualitative methodologies involve scrupulosity, meticulousness, commitment to scholarly rigor in the investigation of research questions, determination to find the truth, and intellectual honesty (Bangura 1994; Bangura and Hopwood 2014; Bangura, Thomas and Hopwood, in press; Bangura and McCandless 2007).

In essence, whereas qualitative studies are basically enumerative, quantitative studies are more causally oriented. Thus, although qualitative studies are as important as quantitative studies, quantitative studies are methodologically more complex than qualitative studies (Bangura 1994; Bangura and Hopwood 2014; Bangura, Thomas and Hopwood, in press; Bangura and McCandless 2007).

Quantitative Methodologies

Quantitative methodologies can be defined as systems of methods used for the systematic or scientific investigations of phenomena and their relationships. Quantitative research tends to be theory driven; uses fixed research designs – the most common being pre-experimental, quasi-experimental, and experimental;

and involves the collection of numerical data. From this perspective, quantitative research involves inquiry into human problems based on the testing or application of theory that is operationalized into variables and analyzed with appropriate statistical or social scientific analytic procedures. Quantitative research is generally approached using scientific methods and processes that include (a) the generation of models, theories, and hypotheses; (b) the development of instruments and methods for measurement; (c) the experimental control and manipulation of variables; (d) the collection of empirical data; (e) the modeling and analyzing of data; and (f) the evaluation of results.

The objective of quantitative research is therefore to develop and use mathematical or representational models designed to indicate systematic patterns of relations, time sequences or causal connections in data, and theories and testing of hypotheses pertaining to natural phenomena. The process of measurement is central to empirical observation and the mathematical expression of quantitative relationships.

In sum, whereas qualitative studies are basically enumerative, quantitative studies are more causally oriented. Thus, although qualitative studies are as important as quantitative studies, quantitative studies are methodologically more complex .

It may appear, however, that the difference between qualitative and quantitative methodologies is a somewhat artificial dichotomy, since each group combines both approaches in its underlying assumptions. This is because the quantitative approach calls for a great deal of qualitative description prior to counting (in order to empirically ground each category) as well as after counting (statistical tendencies have to be interpreted as to what they reveal about causal relations). And the qualitative approach has an implicit notion that 'more is better': that is to say, the more instances of a phenomenon to be found, the more a researcher can trust his/her interpretation of an underlying pattern.

Despite these underlying similarities, qualitative and quantitative methodologies are different in some ways. In addition to some of the more obvious procedural differences (for example, quantitative studies categorize and count occurrences), the two types of approaches differ in their overall orientation toward inquiry: the qualitative focuses more on particularities and the quantitative focuses more on generalities (Bangura 1994; Bangura and Hopwood 2014; Bangura, Thomas and Hopwood, in press; Bangura and McCandless 2007).

Mixed/Triangulative Methodologies

According to Todd Jick, mixed methodologies or triangulation can be broadly defined as 'the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon' (1978:291). He adds that 'in the social sciences the use of triangulation can be found in the work of social science researchers in the past quarter of the century who developed the idea of multiple operations' (Jick 1978:291). This researcher advanced the argument that more than one method should be employed in the validation process to ascertain that the variance in the operationalization of the data reflects that of the trait and not of the method. There must be an element of truth in the two methods used (Jick 1979:).

Ensuring the reliability and validity of the data to be collected is one of the challenging factors in conducting scientific research. The other challenges include the subjective views of the researcher, unsystematic methods employed in collecting data, and the reliability of the data. Thus, as Robert Bruce Burns states, 'an exclusive reliance on one method may bias or distort the researcher's mental and physical pictures of the particular schema of reality being explored' (2000:42).

Therefore, a triangulative-driven transformative mixed-methods researcher, according to John W. Creswell (2009), utilizes a theoretical perspective that combines both qualitative and quantitative information in a logical sequence. He adds that this triangulative analysis approach means that a convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods will be utilized. The qualitative and quantitative methods can be merged side by side to validate each other (Creswell 2009).

Also, Donna M. Mertens asserts that such a 'transformative paradigm provides an overarching framework for addressing issues of social justice and consequent methodological decisions' (2007:212). The transformative paradigm provides a framework for investigating the assumptions that inevitably deal with matters of power structures, social justice, cultural dynamics and peculiarities throughout a research process. The transformative mixed-methods then allow a researcher to use various quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the research focused on power issues (Mertens, 2007). This theoretical lens directs a researcher to what issues are important (e.g., marginalization, empowerment) and the demographics that need to be examined (e.g., disabled, transient population, minority groups) (Creswell 2009).

Additionally, this lens signifies how a researcher positions himself/herself in a qualitative study (e.g., direct or indirect, unbiased or biased from personal, cultural or historical context) and how the final written accounts need to be documented (Creswell 2009). Creswell argues that the qualitative 'lens becomes

an advocacy perspective that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed, and provides a call for action or change' (2009:62). A researcher is likely to have the knowledge and interest to design and conduct a qualitative study, which allows him/her to utilize and work with a flexible and open research design process. Creswell also asserts that the quantitative approach is a deductive theoretical model applied to test and verify a theory or hypothesis, rather than develop it (Creswell 2009).

Emergent Methodologies

Emergent methodologies refer to nascent systems of methods to be utilized in particular areas of study or activities due to the inadequacies of existing methodologies. Realizing the need for state-of-the-art research methods that address the growing methods-theory gap within the behavioral and social sciences, sevearl research methodologists have embarked upon the task of developing new methodologies. I have elsewhere summarized the nature of these emergent methodologies as follows (Bangura 2011:11):

a. they combine theoretical and empirical approaches;
b. they focus on methodological issues within and between disciplines;
c. they offer very broad perspectives of the possible uses and issues surrounding research techniques and methods; and
d. they challenge researchers to build bridges that link new research questions with innovative methods that can address issues of power, authority, and representation in the research process.

After discussing 25 emergent methodologies, I concluded by stating that these systems of methods stress a strong theory-practice mix. Essentially, they comprise a refreshing attempt to forge behavioral theory and praxis to expand human capacities for problem-solving (Bangura 2011).

African-centered Methodologies

After almost three centuries of employing Eurocentric/Western methodologies, many African communities in the continent and the Diaspora remain marginal. It is obvious that these Western methodologies, which are not indigenous to Africans, have done relatively little good for Africans. Thus, I have proposed in many works that the salvation for Africans in both the continent and the Diaspora hinges upon resuscitating old, employing contemporary and developing new authentic African-centered methodologies for their use. In light of this proposition, at least

two major questions emerged: (1) Why have Western methodologies not yielded much benefit for Africans? (2) Did Western methodologies infiltrate African societies because Africans lacked their own? The following paragraphs attempt to answer these questions (Bangura 1994, 2011, 2015, in press).

In response to the first question, as Kofi Nyidevu Awoonor (1990) has suggested about African political systems and I (Bangura 2002) have done similarly about African educational systems, Western systems are incompatible with African systems because the former are based on a concept that fragments African life derived from a Eurocentric division of labor theory. This theory in turn separates education from politics, religion, economics, and the social institutions of family, or group, or people. This fragmentation theory emanates from Eurocentric epistemology and a fundamental approach to existence which has its genesis in Greco-Roman and subsequently Judeo-Christian thought (see also Bangura 2011, 2015, in press).

Thus, one of the major tenets that guide my suggestion for the use of authentic African-centered methodologies to investigate African phenomena is that before we attempt any description of the thought process of Africans, it will be necessary to locate its total personality within the boundaries of its own self-perception; this means delineating African philosophy and its view of the world, both visible and invisible, its fundamental habits of thought, and its attitude towards its physical and spiritual existence (Bangura 2011, 2015, in press; see also Awoonor 1990).

As Awoonor (1990) and I (Bangura 2002) have also stated, the African life concept is holistic–i.e. it is based on an integrative world view. All life to the African is comprehensive; all human activities are closely interrelated. This has as its underlying principle the sanctity of the person, her/his spirituality and essentiality. This essentialist view of the person confers value to her/his personhood. All else–her/his labor and achievements–flow from this value system. Even personal shortcomings cannot invalidate it (see also Bangura 2011, 2015, in press).

For Africans, politics defines duties and responsibilities alongside obligations and rights. All these relate to the various activities that have to do with survival. The survival concept is continuing, dynamic and dialectical. The fundamental principle that is at the basis of this conception is a moral one. Moreover, the African moral order never defined rigid frontiers of good and evil. Good and evil exist in the same continuum. Whatever is good, by the very nature of its goodness, harbors a grain of evil. This is a guarantee against any exaggerated sense of moral superiority which goodness by itself may entail. The notion of perfection, therefore,

is alien to African thought. Perfection, in itself, constitutes a temptation to danger, an invitation to arrogance and self-glorification. The principle of balance defines the relationship between good and evil. As life operates in a dialectics of struggle, so also does good balance evil and *vice versa* (Awoonor 1990; Bangura 2002, 2011, 2015, in press).

In response to the second question, as Davidson Nicol (1965) stated that the University of Sankore in Timbuktu, which flourished in the 16th Century, is very important to Africans. To most people in Europe and America, the history of Africa begins with the slave trade; but increasingly, Africans feel that the latter was simply an incident in a long history of the continent and that one must look beyond that. Sankore was a Muslim institution, or a series of institutions, where law, philosophy, and theology were taught, and it bore similarities to the present Al Azar University in Cairo–another Muslim university – that medieval Oxford does to present day Oxford (cited also in Bangura 2002, 2011, 2015, in press).

Nicol (1965) further revealed that Al Azar University would in fact be a convenient point from which to start from a premise of African nationalism. It is one of the focal points which have been used to unite Muslims all over the continent. Scholarships are given to attend it, and students there are taught Arabic, Islamic theology, and law. Upon graduation, they go back to spread their knowledge and Islamic culture in the various African countries (cited also in Bangura 2002, 2011, 2015, in press).

But even before the advent of the universities in Timbuktu and Egypt, as Ado K. Tiberondwa (1978), among others, has argued, the absence of Western education in pre-colonial Africa does not presuppose that education was lacking on the continent. As long as humans have been on earth, each community has evolved its own forms of education based on the religious, social, political, economic and cultural values of that community. Traditional forms of education existed all over Africa, based on ethnic and clan units and covered both the theoretical and practical fields. Education was part of living, but not everyone had to go to a 'school building' to be educated. The whole process of living was a process of learning (cited also in Bangura 2002, 2011, 2015, in press).

We can begin by acknowledging that a *true* African-centered research paradigm must first and foremost be built on a sound spiritual basis that highlights those aspects of African spiritual life that have enabled African people all over the world to survive as a human community throughout the centuries. It should go beyond European classical humanism with its class, socio-economic and geographical limitations based on Greece and the Athenian city-state, which was based on a

system of slavery. African-centered research must lead to 'enlarged humanities' and recapture that original meaning of humanity which Western scholars, beginning with Plato, in their hollow and lopsided search for material progress, abandoned. By privileging 'reason' above everything else and abandoning the spiritual aspects of life, including the idea of the immortal soul, Western scholarship embarked on a path that is increasingly bringing humanity to the brink of destruction through violence and ecological destruction (Nabudere 2002; see also Bangura 2002, 2011, 2015, in press).

The task of African-centered research must be to critique the Eurocentric 'idea' and 'general philosophy' in their metaphysical belief that European humanism is superior to that of the African people. This falsehood, which Europe and America perpetuated and still do, in so many ways, is based on the idea that the rest of humanity must be forced to believe like Europe and America in order to be 'humanized' into a singular humanity (Nabudere 2002; see also Bangura 2002, 2011, 2015, in press).

Indeed, as the preceding discussion makes evident, a good dissertation must be based on the eight components of the scientific/systematic approach: i.e. (1) problems definition, (2) theory, (3) hypothesis, (4) research methodology, (5) definitions of major concepts or operationalization of variables, (6) data collection techniques, (7) data analysis, and (8) conclusion drawing and/or generalization. At the core of the process is theory, around which the other seven componets revolve. Also, throughout this process, literature is continuously reviewed.

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