Chapter 13
Action Research in Virtual Communities: How Can this Complement Successful Social Networking?

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ABSTRACT
Contextually, all tertiary institutions have four major responsibilities – teaching, research, publication, and community service. The adage “publish or perish” has become a thorn in the flesh of many university academic staff who rest on their laurels and do nothing about research, publication, and community engagement. Practising university academic staff are required by the nature of their profession to engage in regular research be it in their daily lecturing and supervision of students’ research thesis or writing for publication. Currently, research has become the buzz-word in all tertiary institutions but not all of them take the pains to school academic staff in the practice of research in terms of the virtual communities where the institution is located. In the context of this paper, the author looks at action research through the eyes of teachers of all categories in virtual communities and how their involvement can complement successful social networking. The approaches used in this discussion are purely from empirical and exploratory perspectives and provide detailed discussion with emphasis on the application of action research for effective and efficient social networking considering the social, cultural, organizational and human cognitive perspectives.

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INTRODUCTION

Boaduo (2011, p. 30) contends that “...nations cannot develop beyond the quality of their education systems.” Lawal (2006) concurs with Boaduo’s assertion that no nation develops beyond the quality of its education system, which is highly dependent on the quality of its research practitioners. To Lawal all researchers should be given the most appropriate tools during their training, including content knowledge and skills as well as applicable methodologies to be able to do their research work professionally. As already alluded to by Boaduo (2011) and supported by Lawal (2006) the quality of an education system depends on the quality of its teacher-researchers. Much of what teacher-researchers need to know to be successful is invisible to lay observers leading to the view that involvement in research requires little formal study. On the contrary, researchers of all categories seek answers to unanswered questions to enable them help their communities to learn and overcome their inherent community problems. All researchers learn about national development through literature and appropriate technology, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, evaluation and measurement and how these could be applied in various virtual communities for their benefit. What the community of researchers offer to their virtual communities remain a secret and their key to success is a mystery (Shaeffer, 1990). This paper argues that the 21st century teacher-researchers in every level of their educational institutional set up require new initiatives in their preparation and further professional development to adequately meet the new challenges of the millennium virtual communities needs in terms of social networking for effective and efficient social cohesion.

NEED FOR CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN ACTION RESEARCH FOR VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES PRACTITIONERS (TEACHER-RESEARCHERS)

Action research must be a major priority foundation for research in teacher education and preparation in the 21st century (Boaduo, 2010). Professional teacher-researchers naturally seek answers to questions and solutions to problems that enable them to help their communities and students to learn. They are decision makers. They make thousands of choices on hourly basis regarding the choice of texts, literature, appropriate and relevant technology integration, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and measurement. They are highly reflective and sensitive to the needs of their communities and students. In the process of articulation of their duties they encounter failures and successes. However, much of what teacher-researchers have to offer their communities and students remains a secret. Their key to success is a mystery. Teacher-researchers seek multiple means of looking at their world of teaching and learning and that of their communities and students by unlocking the secrets within their work environments. How they do all these remain a mystery which, they are the only people to understand. Action research has, however, become one of the major potential keys to help teacher-researchers unlock these secrets and help their communities and students towards effective and efficient social networking.

This section of the paper will provide detailed empirical evidence together with scholarly argument to address the issue of the need for teacher education and training institutions to provide teacher-researchers with in-depth action research content, practical knowledge and skills to enable them to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century virtual communities and students needs with confidence. The following perspectives will also be given elaborate attention:
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