

**Perceptions and Attitudes of Undergraduate Students of Sociology  
towards Research Methods as a Course in Kogi State University,  
Anyigba, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*This study was conducted to find out the views and attitudes of undergraduate students of Sociology towards research methods as a course in Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria. The sample comprises those 2017/2018 third year undergraduate students of sociology at the institution, who registered and sat for the examination of the course (Soc 301). Data were collected through in-depth interviews; and the data were content analysed (manually). Findings of the study reveal that respondents perceived the course as though complex, technical and stressful but interesting, educative and beneficial. These views were however discovered to be due to the positive attitude respondents have towards the course. While this attitude appears commendable, the university management still needs to pay particular attention to the sustenance of the attitude through further provision of conducive and attractive learning environment as well as appropriate instructional materials, as these will help to impact profoundly on the students learning the course and other courses. Further, research methods teachers need to always make the teaching of the course interesting and practical to stimulate learning. Finally, students at all time need to be diligent and serious with the course so as to become better researchers and good sociologists in future.*

**Keywords:** Perceptions, Attitudes, Undergraduate students, Research methods, Nigeria

**1. Introduction**

One of the compulsory courses any undergraduate student in Nigerian universities must register for and pass is research methods. Conceptually, research methods are the strategies, processes or techniques utilized in the collection of data for analysis in order to uncover new information necessary for better understanding of an issue (Smith, 1991). Research methods as a course cover a wide range of topics from philosophical, theoretical, statistical to practical dimensions (Schutt, Blalock & Wagenaar, 1984; Akuezuiilo, 2002). Specifically, the course is meant to enlightening students on the techniques used in identifying social problems, formulating hypothesis, conducting and using data gathering instruments, designing research studies, employing statistical

procedures to analyse data, and interpreting and presenting research reports (Schutt, *et al*, 1984; Akuezulo, 2002).

Despite the importance of the course, research by Leming (1979); Wagenaar (1982); Denham (1997); Ball & Pelco (2006); and Ekmekci, *et al* (2012) have shown that many students hate the course (due to its technical complexity) and the hatred is further increased when they see the statistical component of the research methods. However, the ease of understanding any course depends on students' perception and attitude towards the course. Students' perception here means students opinion towards research method as a course. Individual opinion is a function of factors such as individual personal characteristics such as attitudes, motives, interest, experience, expectation, etc; factors which are within the things to be perceived (novelty, motion, proximity, sound, size, and background; and characteristics of the situation (time, work setting and social setting) (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Gilbert, 1995; and Gross, 2010). Students' attitudes, on the other hand, refer to students' feeling/behaviour towards the course. Students' attitude towards learning has been found by Helder, 1946; Evans, 1965; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; and Ying & Ching, 1991; to be a function of motivation students got from teacher/parent, readiness to learn, organization of memory of what was learned, learning environment (comprising of sufficient learning resources or lack of it and access to the resources), and students day to day activities while in school. Students' attitude towards learning may be positive or negative. Whatever nature of attitudes formed by the students may determine their confidence in learning.

Although, investigation into the students' perceptions and attitudes towards research methods as a course have been conducted in developed countries (Schutt, *et al*, 1984; Ball & Pelco, 2006; Sizemore & Lewandowski, 2009, Ekmekci, Hancock & Swayzia, 2012; and Anthea, 2017), but the urgency of attaining technological advancement through research in developing countries including Nigeria call for more studies as research methods as a course may help students to acquire knowledge on ways of investigating any technological issue, collecting data, analyzing and presenting results and drawing conclusion. This study is thus conceived to make a contribution on this important subject, and it will however be done with particular reference to undergraduate students of Sociology in Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria, with the specific objectives of investigating the perception and attitudes of Sociology undergraduate students towards research methods as a course.

This study is significant theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it will contribute to existing literature on views and attitudes of undergraduate students towards research methods as a course. Practically, it will help university administrators, research method teachers and students to have a better idea of improving teaching and learning of research methods in higher institutions.

## 2. Methodology

The study was carried out at Kogi State University, Anyigba between November-December, 2018. The institution was established in 1999 by the Kogi State Government. As regards academic matters, the institution commenced academic activities with six faculties namely Agriculture, Arts and Humanities, Law, Management Sciences, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences; but currently, two faculties have been added including Faculties of Education and Health Sciences. This is in addition to the establishment of the Postgraduate school and the centre for Pre-Degree and Diploma Studies. The university offers courses such as Law, Sociology, Biochemistry, History and International Studies, Food Sciences Technology, Accounting, etc (Kogi State University Students' Information Handbook, 2016). Kogi State University is chosen for this study because it is one of the universities in Nigeria where undergraduate students are being taught research methods as a course.

As regards research design, study population, sample size and sampling technique, the study used both case study and descriptive research designs with qualitative approach. The case study design is apt because the study focused solely on research methods as a course being offered by undergraduate students; while the descriptive design helped in making a description of students' views and attitudes towards learning of research methods. The study population comprises of all the 2017/2018 third year undergraduate students of sociology (the choice of only the third year undergraduate students of sociology was because research methods is a 300 level course in the Sociology department at Kogi State University) totaling two hundred and eighty three (283). However, to qualify as sample the students had to have registered and sat for the examination of the course (Soc 301). Those meeting these criteria totaled two hundred and seventy eight (278) and were chosen as sample for the study using purposive sampling technique.

With regards to methods of data collection and analysis, data were collected using in-depth interviews (IDIs). The rationale for choosing this method is to be able to gather in-depth information about the issue under investigation. The interview guide designed was structural in nature and it contained themes relating to the objectives of the study. The instrument was pilot tested (in other departments different from the one chosen for the study). The pilot study helped locate ambiguities, flaws and inadequacies in the interview guide. Pilot data that were collected were content analysed and the results were used to modify the interview guide. During the actual interview, data collected were recorded on audio tape and attention was equally given to body language as well as non-verbal responses of the respondents. With regards to data analysis, raw data from the interviews were sorted, transcribed and categorized into the objectives of the study they match. Content analysis of the transcribed interview was thereafter done

manually; also verbatim quotations of the participants' response were done where necessary. As regard ethical consideration, the permission of the Head of Sociology Department was sought before talking to students. Before the actual interview, the consent of students was also sought and the information that was collected was treated confidentially.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The results presented are in two parts. Part A centers on the respondents social demographic characteristics while Part B focuses on the objectives of the study.

**Table 1:** Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N=278)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	101	36.3
Female	177	63.3
<b>Age (in years)</b>		
Less than 18 years	03	1.1
18-20	69	24.8
21-23	79	28.4
24-26	57	20.5
27-29	68	24.5
30 and above	02	0.7
<b>Religious Affiliation</b>		
Christian	101	36.3
Islam	98	35.3
Traditional African Religion	79	28.4
<b>Ethnic Group</b>		
Igala	126	45.3
Yoruba	89	32.0
Ebira	53	19.1
Others	10	3.6
<b>Residence</b>		
Hostel	119	42.8
Off-campus	159	57.2

**Source:** Field Survey, 2018

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. From the table, majority (63.7%) of the respondents were female while the remaining (36.3%) were

male. This finding shows that female than male prefers courses that are theoretical in nature than calculative courses. The respondents' age shows that most (28.4%) were between ages of 21-23 years, about 24.8 percent were between ages of 18-20 years, 24.5 percent were between ages of 27-29 years, while 20.5 percents were between ages of 24-26 years. This finding clearly shows that most of the students were young adults capable of learning. As regards religious affiliation of the respondents, most (36.3%) of them were Christian, 35.3 percent were Muslim while the remaining 28.4 percent belong to various traditional African religions. With regards to the ethnic grouping of the respondents, most (45.3%) of them were Igala, about 32.0 percent were Yoruba, 19.1 percent were Ebira while the remaining 3.6 percent were from other ethnic groups in Nigeria. As regards respondents' residence, majority (57.2%) resided off-campus while the remaining 42.8 percent resided at the University hostels. This finding shows that there is insufficient hall of residence in the institution.

All in all, the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents' shows that majority of them were male, aged between 21-23 years, practices Christianity, belonged to Igala ethnic group and resides off-campus.

In addition to the foregoing, enquiries were made from some of the respondents through interviews about their views towards research methods as a course. The results of the interviews show that there was a consensus among the respondents that the course though technical and systematic, is an interesting and educative one. For example, one of the respondents states that:

*I see research methods as an educative course that has helped me to understand the nitty-gritty of research. For instance, through the course, I have been able to learn different research concepts as well as know how to formulate research questions, objectives and hypotheses. The course also gave me the idea of the distinction between general and specific objectives as well as how to appraise my research objectives. In addition, the course has made me to understand the meaning of research design and its various types, as well as when and where to use each of the designs. Further, the course has enabled me to have the knowledge of how to collect, collate, analyse, present and report data on human behaviour. As it is now, with the knowledge I have acquired through the course I can carry out research without any fear or intimidation either for the advancement of knowledge or for profitable socio-economic gains.*  
Male Respondent /23 years/IDI/Sociology/Anyigba.

Another respondent submitted thus:

*Rresearch methods is a technical course which has positively influenced me in a number of ways. For instance, it has enlightened me on how to use two or more methods in the study of the same phenomenon (triangulation). It has also given me the idea of the purpose and various dimensions of triangulation. In addition, the course has helped me*

*to have the idea of units of analysis (those items/objects that are subject to graphic descriptive assessment, elaboration or expatiation) in research. Further, the course has given me the idea of how to explain the cause and effect of events that are occurring within our social milieu.*

*Female Respondent /26 years/IDI/Sociology/Anyigba.*

The response above is corroborated by another respondent who sees research methods as a complex course. In the words of the respondent:

*This course is a complex course and not so easy to understand unless one take one's time, but the most interesting part of it is that the course was handled by an intelligent lecturer who tried his best to bring out the best in us (students). He lectured us well, and now I find it very easy to understand research concepts such as population (which may be people, events, animal and objects), sample (a portion of population), and methods of sample selection (probability and non-probability techniques). The course has also enabled me to know some of the ethical principles and statistical issues associated with research work. In sum, the course will not only help me in carrying out my final year research project in scientific way but also help me in my entire future endeavour.*

*Male Respondent /27 years/IDI/Sociology/Anyigba.*

Another respondent also noted that:

*I see research methods course as a stressful one because of the many issues associated with it. For instance, during the lectured of the course I was told of the need to always systematically review related literature in any research work. I was also told to always discuss my research findings objectively and accurately in relation to my research objectives and literature reviewed. Although doing these are good but come with stress.*

*Male Respondent /24 years/IDI/Sociology/Anyigba.*

In sum, the views expressed above by the respondents indicate that research methods as a course though complex, technical and stressful but interesting, educative and beneficial as it has increased the knowledge base of the respondents on the basic steps and procedures to follow in research work.

On the factors that informed respondent's views, all of them mentioned experience; that the experience they had in the course of the lecture of the course informed the view they expressed about the course. These finding conform to that of Fiske & Taylor (1991); Gilbert (1995); and Gross (2010). These scholars in their various studies discovered individual experience as one of the factors influencing people opinion on issues/subjects.

With regards to respondents attitudes towards research methods as a course,

findings from the interview conducted revealed that majority of the respondents have positive attitude towards the course. In the words of one of the respondents:

*My attitude toward the course is positive. I took the course seriously and diligently because I believe it is a course that will help me become a better sociologist.  
Male Respondent /21 years/IDI/Sociology/Anyigba.*

Another respondent averred thus:

*Initially I had a negative attitude towards the course but when I started attending the lectures, the subject matter of the course became clearer to me and I then decided not to miss any of the lectures nor allowed to be distracted by any of my course mates  
Female Respondent /26 years/IDI/Sociology/Anyigba.*

The view expressed above is further corroborated by another respondent who stated that:

*My attitude at first was negative. I felt it was going to be impossible for me to understand and pass the course. But as time went by it became interesting to me and I later developed a positive mindset towards the course.  
Male Respondent /24 years/IDI/Sociology/Anyigba.*

A 24 year old female respondents also had this to say:

*My attitude toward the course was a positive one because I like the course and the way it was taught by the course lecturer. That was the reason I never for once missed the lecture.  
Female Respondents /24 years/IDI/Sociology/Anyigba.*

The various views expressed above show that respondents have positive attitudes towards research method as a course. The findings of this study however contradict that of Ball & Pelco (2006); and Ekmekci, *et al* (2012). These scholars in their various studies found that many students hate research methods as a course and these were due to the technical complexity and the statistical component of the course. The difference in findings of this current study and that of the previous scholars is however due to differences in research setting.

To further ascertain the positive attitude claimed by the respondents toward research methods as a course, their performance in the course first semester examination (2017/18 session) was examined. Out of the two hundred and seventy eight (278) respondents that registered and sat for the examination, about 268 respondents (representing 96.4%) passed while the remaining 10 respondents (representing 3.6%) failed. Among those that passed, 19 respondents (representing

6.8%) scored A, 81 respondents (representing 29.1%) scored B, 94 respondents (representing 33.8%) scored C, while the remaining 74 respondents (representing 26.6%) scored D. These performances, according to the enquiries made, was due to the respondents positive attitude towards the course, appropriate teaching methods adopted by the research lecturer, and presence of resources such as books, teaching aids, etc in the school. Further enquiries were made from the respondents that failed the course on reasons for their failing. The results of the inquiry revealed respondents lack of interest in research methods as a course, difficulty in understanding the concept used by the research lecturer and lack of confidence in the ability to learn and perform well in the course.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the perceptions and attitudes of undergraduate students of sociology towards research methods as a course in Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria. Findings of the study reveal that respondents perceived the course as though complex, technical and stressful but interesting, educative and beneficial. These views were however discovered to be due to the positive attitude respondents have towards the course. Respondents' performance in the 2017/2018 first semester examination of the course was also examined to confirm the forgoing findings and the results show that 96.4% of the respondents passed the course with grades ranging from A to D and the remaining 3.6% failed. While this attitude appears commendable, the university management still needs to pay particular attention to the sustenance of the attitude through the provision of conducive and attractive learning environment as well as appropriate instructional materials, as these will help to impact profoundly on the students learning the course and other courses. Further, research methods teachers need to always make the teaching of the course interesting and practical to stimulate learning. Finally, students at all time need to be diligent and serious with the course so as to become better researchers and good sociologists in future.

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