

**18.**  
**PRACTICE-LED AND PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCHES**

**ADIWU Talatu Onkala / Professor MBAHI A. A.**

Department of Fine Arts  
Faculty of Environmental Studies  
University of Maiduguri  
Maiduguri

[adiwutalatuonkala@gmail.com](mailto:adiwutalatuonkala@gmail.com) / [adamumbahi78@gmail.com](mailto:adamumbahi78@gmail.com)

---

**Introduction**

There are more than one way of defining research, and there are several traditions as to how research should be carried out. Research comprises “creative and systematic work undertaken to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new application” (Manual, 2015). Research is used to establish or confirm facts, reaffirm the results of previous work, solve new or develop new theories. A research project may be an expansion on past work in the field. Research project can be used to develop further knowledge on a topic. To test the validity of instruments, procedures, or experiments, research may replicate elements of prior projects or the project as a whole.

Archer (1995) said “research is a systematic enquiry whose goal is to communicate knowledge”. It is pursued according to some plan. Scientific approach is based on ground rules. Science is concerned with explanation. What can be observed? What events can be recorded? How does this, that or the other event proceed? What is the cause of this or that? The scientific ideal is to produce explanations that have enduring validity and remain valid when tested in wider and wider fields of application and which therefore offer some powers of prediction. Science is not defined by its subject matter. Science is defined by its intellectual approach.. The whole process of scientific research is characterized as being empirical (that is, based upon evidence obtained in the real world), objective (that is, free from the influences of value judgment on the part of the observer) and inductive (that is, moving from the observation of specific instances to the formulation of general rule). Empiricism, objectivity and inductive reasoning are basic components of a scientific approach.

According to Archer, in Humanities research consists in finding new things to know, or in identifying new ways of knowing them or refuting previous commentary on existing material. The difference between Science research and Humanities research are Science still seeks ultimately to explain and Humanities still seek ultimately to evaluate. Generally, research in the Humanities tradition advances by the conduct of logical argument. Propositions are validated or refuted by exemplification and citation.

Some artists and designers claim that what they ordinarily do is research. They argue that their art works or design products or other creative practitioner output constitute new knowledge. They believe that the act of publicly exhibiting, installing, manufacturing or distributing their works, constitutes publication. They say creative practitioner activity is synonymous with research activity. To what extent can such a claim be justified? Certainly, there is such a thing as tacit knowledge, that is, a kind of knowing that is not separated from perception, judgment or skill which the knowledge informs. There will be some of that in all creative practitioner activity.

In academics a practitioner activity can be recognised as a research activity, but one has to ask: Was the practitioner activity directed towards the acquisition of knowledge? Was it systematically conducted? Were the data explicit? Was the record of the conduct of the activity transparent, in the sense that a later investigator could uncover the same information, replicate the procedures adopted, rehearse the argument conducted, and come to the same (or sufficiently similar) conclusions? Were the data and the outcome validated in appropriate ways? Were the findings knowledge, rather than information? Was the knowledge transmissible to others? Only when the answers to all these questions are in the affirmative can a practitioner activity be classed as research or can be equated with it (Archer, 1995).

There are circumstances where the best or only way to shed light on a proposition, a principle a material, a process or a function is attempt to conduct something, or to enact something, calculate to explore, embody or test it. Such circumstances occur frequently in explorations in agriculture, education, engineering, medicine and business. Such explorations are called Action Research. All the rules governing research practice apply to Action Research. Research about practice can be of many kinds. Art or design history, for example and the analysis and criticism of the output of art or design activity are Humanities subjects. Studies about art or design in relation to people and society fall within the Social Sciences. Studies about the materials and the processes fall within appropriate science disciplines. Studies of the methodologies of art or design fall within the crosscutting discipline of design research. All studies about practice if they are to be recognized as research studies, must employ the methods and accord with the principles.

There are several forms of research like scientific, humanities, artistic, economic, social, business, marketing, practitioner's research, life, technological, etc. Generally, research is understood to follow a certain structural process. Though step order may vary depending on the subject matter and researcher, the following steps are usually part of most formal research:

1. Observation and formation of the topic,
2. Hypothesis,  
A testable prediction which designates the relationship between two or more variables.
3. Conceptual definitions,  
Description of a concept by relating it to other concepts.
4. Operational definition,  
Defining the variables and how they will be measured or assessed in the study.
5. Gathering of data,  
Identifying a population, selecting samples, gathering information from these samples by using scientific research instruments. The instruments used for data collection must be valid and reliable.
6. Analysis of data.  
Break down the individual pieces of data collected to draw conclusion about it.
7. Data interpretation,  
This can be represented through tables, figures, and pictures and then described in words.
8. Test,  
Revising of hypothesis.
9. Conclusion.  
Reiteration is necessary (Wikipedia).

According to Deswell (2008), major steps in conducting research are:

- i. Identification of research problem,

- ii. Literature review,
- iii. Specifying the purpose of research,
- iv. Determining specific research questions,
- v. Specification of a conceptual frame work,
- vi. Choice of a methodology (for data collection),
- vii. Data collection,
- viii. Verifying data,
- ix. Analysing and interpreting the data,
- x. Reporting and evaluating research,
- xi. Communicating the research findings and possibly recommendations.

The steps generally represent the overall process, however, they should be viewed as an ever-changing iterative process rather than a fixed set of steps (Gauch, 2003). Most research begins with a general statement of the problem (Rocco; Hatcher & Creswell, 2011). The literature review identifies flaws and holes in previous research which provides justification for the study. A gap in the current literature, as identified by a researcher, then engenders a research question. The research question may be parallel to the hypothesis. The hypothesis is the supposition to be tested. The researcher then analyses and interprets the data via a variety of statistical methods, engaging in what is known as empirical research. The results of the data analysis in rejecting or failing to reject the null hypothesis are then reported and evaluated.

### **Practice Research**

Practice research is a form of academic research which incorporates an element of practice in the methodology or research output (Wikipedia). Rather than seeing the relationship between practice and theory as a dichotomy, as has sometimes traditionally been the case, there is growing body of practice research academics across a number of disciplines which use practice as part of their research. And there are variety of models of practice research such as practice-as-research, practice-based, practice -led, mixed mode research practice, practice through research and visual arts practice. The potential, nature, and scope of this research has been debated from the 1990s (Sullivan, 2010). Factors that shaped the debates were legislated change to affiliate art and design schools within higher education systems and the other was the provision of government funding, which directly tied to research outputs. These caused a reassessment of the position of the arts in the academy and how the university community was managed and supported. As a result, substantial questions were raised about the theories and practices of the visual arts and whether studio inquiry could feasibly be considered to be part of the university research community.

Artists who work in university also teach, but the question is: Do they do research? Can visual arts practice be accepted as a form of research? Frayling (1993) adopted Herbert Read's model of education through art to describe different ways of thinking about research, noting that research could be for practice where research aims are subservient to practice aims through practice, where the practice serves a research purpose, or into practice such as observing the working processes of others. The growing recognition of arts practice as research generated from the belief that there are circumstances where the best or only way to shed light on a proposition, a principle, a material, a process or a function is to attempt to construct something or to enact something, calculated to explore, embody or test (Archer, 1995). This led to the acceptance of practice research in disciplines to be reviewed alongside traditional research disciplines in the sphere of higher education (Wikipedia). The UK Art and Humanities Research Council supported practice-led research, which assisted in evolving the notion of practice as research in art, design and

architecture, media and creative writing. This in turn brought an increasing recognition in the ways creative departments contribute to research culture (Wikipedia).

The strategy before was to define a common purposes whereby studio practices could be seen to achieve goals expected of any research activity. The Prascati Manual (Sullivan, 2010) was seen to embrace the creative inquiries undertaken by visual arts and design practitioners. Practice-based researchers are attracted to the definition of research used in the Prascati Manual because it introduced creativity as an important feature of research. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2002) described research as:

Creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications (p.30).

Practice-based research activity contributes to the stock of knowledge, unfortunately practice-based researchers were stuck with the construct and conventions that frame research and development in the social sciences. This is useful in the areas of design and technology where research often involves problem-solving procedures whose task is to come up with inventive solutions, products and processes.

Practice-based researchers face an identity crisis and the challenge is to redefine the kind of research undertaken in studio contexts so as to more adequately represent what it is that artists do when carrying out research. Although all forms of research involve purposeful and systematic inquiry, there also needs to be agreement that different approaches and strategies can be used to pursue common ends. The early debates mostly involved coalition of theorists and practitioners from Europe, United Kingdom, and Australia, with participation from scholars in the United States (Sullivan, 2010).

The role of artists in higher education and the changing face of professional identity continue to be the topic of discussion. The position of the artist remains less certain. Dilemmas about teaching and learning in the studio, changing relationships with the contemporary art world, and limited access to all levels of institutional participation, all play a part in these uncertainties. One task involved in promoting art practice as research is to consider what it is that artists do. What artists do, of course, is to make art, and as an object and subject of study, art has been picked over by aestheticians, historians, psychologists, sociologists, critics and cultural commentators. But what artists do in the practice of creating artworks, and the processes' products, proclivities, and contexts that support this activity, is less well studied from the perspective of the artists.

Artists who are readily able to take up position of theorists, philosophers, researchers, curators and art writers, make many of the arguments found in the growing literature on practice-based research and practice-led research. Advocacy arguments, historical synopses, research guides and case studies in anthologies, articles, position papers, conference proceedings, dedicated print and e-journals, online research centres, and theorized arguments in monographs and single-authored texts, now fill the ranks debating the significance of art practice as research (Sullivan, 2010).

Both practice-led and practice-based researches fall within the general area of action research. In these researches, researchers' aims are to advance knowledge about practice and within the practice. The researchers are easily distinguished one from the other by purposes. A research is termed "practice-based" if it is targeted at creating artifact which its basis is to contribute to

knowledge. A research is termed “practice-led” if its outcome points out new understanding about art practice. Practice –based research is undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcome of the claims of originality which the researcher puts forward as basis of the research. The claim to originality and the contributions to knowledge may be demonstrated through the creative outcomes (artifact) which may consist of images, music, design, models, digital media, performances and exhibitions (Candy, 2006).

A practice-based PhD is distinguishable from a conventional one because the creative outcomes from the research process are or may be included in the submission for examination of the claims of contribution to the field. It must include substantial contextualization of the creative works. In this sense, practice-based research deals with locating a problem in a practice, which can lead to research which can be presented textually. This results from constant exploration in the studio or laboratory which eventually produces new knowledge and understanding. Studio based research in art are theorized through practice. Theory is the basis for the generation of ideas. The pathway for interrogating ideas. The pathway for interrogating ideas is through practical production of art. There is no one fit-it-all methodology that researchers can readily adopt to carry out research. There are many methodologies applicable to art.

### **The Nature of Practice-based and Practice-led Educational Researches**

There are different names of these types of research. It is also referred to as art-based research field-based traditions, practice-based research, practice-led research, artistic research and visual research. The different names can be used interchangeably according to a researcher’s choice and subject matter. Artistic research is also seen as “practice-based research” and can take form when creative works are considered both the research and the object of research itself. Artistic research is to investigate and test with the purpose of gaining knowledge within and for our artistic disciplines. It is based on artistic practices, methods and fantasticality. Through presented documentation, the insights gained shall be placed in a context. Artistic research aims to enhance knowledge and understanding with presentation of the arts. Klein (2010) defines artistic research perhaps more so than other disciplines, intuition is utilized as a method to identify a wide range of new and unexpected productive modalities. Writers whether of fiction or non-fiction books, also have to do research to support their creative works. This may be factual, historical or background research (Hoffman, 2003).

Visual research is a qualitative research methodology that relies on the use of artistic mediums which include film, photography, drawings, paintings and sculptures. The artistic mediums provide a rich source of information that has the ability to capturing reality. They also reveal information about what the medium capture, the artist or the creator. Art-based research educational research has direct lineage to qualitative research traditions. The genre of visual record methods as build on field-based traditions and used to respond to the pervasive image-based world we encounter every day. Art practice as research explores and explains the capacity of visual arts research to create knowledge that can help us understand the world we live in and how we learn to make sense of it. The meanings that artists make from their imaginative investigations are not only collected from their encounters with things around them but they also created in response to their experiences. Artists create new understandings from what we don’t know which profoundly changes what we do know. It is believed that artistic forms of knowing contribute in our understanding of the increasing complex world we inhabit.

Art practice as research inquiry argues that the imaginative and intellectual work undertaken by artists is a form of research. The critical and creative investigations that occur in studios, galleries,

or the internet, in community spaces and other places where artists work, are forms of research based on studio art practice. Rather than adopting methods of inquiry from the social sciences, the research practices explored subscribe to the view that similar research goals can be achieved by following different yet complementary paths. What is common is the attention to systematic inquiry in a way that privileges the role imagination and intellect play in constructing knowledge that is not only new but has the capacity to transform human understanding. The study of visual arts builds on the links between art history, fine arts and humanities. Based on the agreement that the arts contribute to the goals and purpose of research, art educators are increasingly vocal in positioning the arts as distinctive forms of inquiry.

Art –based research was first formally cited around the mid of 1990s (Sullivan, 2010). Art-based educational inquiry describes and interprets phenomena whereby seeing or sensing is the basis for compiling thematic patterns of evidence from which meaning is made vivid. Art-based researchers favour those features of qualitative research that encourage the use of a responsive approach in order to understand complex realities of the classroom. In surrounding research problems in order to solve them, data gathering involves creating rich literary word portraits and various forms of artistic documentation that reflect the insight of the insider and the critical focus of the dispassionate observer. While the mode of communication is predominantly language based, the means of representation involve many artistic forms that are used to capture, reflect, and critique the multiple textural realities being investigated.

Most basic art-based educational research is an example of practitioner-based inquiry whose aim is to bridge perceived disconnects between quantitative and qualitative traditions of research using the capacity of the arts to deal critically, socially and creatively with problems facing education. Problems and issues are investigated using strategies of inquiry that are grounded in the arts, yet take their methodological cue from the social sciences. Art-based research draws attention to the multiplicity of ways of encouraging and representing experience through the arts and the use of forms of expression and representation that effectively communicate research outcomes in new ways. With its emphasis is on constructivism, critical interpretation, and contextualism.

Art –based educational research attempts to draw on wide theoretical and cultural support to further build its status as a viable methodology. Within qualitative inquiry in the social sciences, art-based research offers an opportunity to look to the arts as culturally relevant forms and practice that deal with aspects of human knowing as no other field of inquiry does. “The arts simply provide qualitative researchers a broader palette of investigative and communication tools with which to garner and relay a range of social meanings” (Leuvy, 2009:11-12). McNiff (1998, 2008) holds that science and art are contemporary modes of knowing and forms of inquiry and we need to resist the tendency to “reduce one to the other and the assumption that one is more truthful” (p.34). “Just as science assists art-based research through its emphasis on systematic inquiry, art enhances the process of discovery in science by its responsiveness to the unexpected” (p. 39). Art-practice is a specific and special form of research. “In the arts the idea of a qualitative-quantitative divide becomes irrelevant because by its distinct nature arts research calls for a different set of categories where the arts do not search for stuff or facts, but they generate it (Baldacchino, 2009b:4).

The promise of new insights and the possibility of more compelling theories is why people do research, because this holds the prospect of improving the structures and actions we put in place to conduct our lives. In traditional area of research such as the human sciences, inquiry methods are mostly theory-driven and studies are designed to build on existing knowledge so that the results help fill in the gaps. Sometimes the outcomes can be surprising and create new theories that take a

field in new directions. A similar impulse to want to know compels people to make art. There has been much theorizing done that seeks to explain what then visual arts are, why artworks are made, how they are viewed, what the cultural impact is, why and how art might be taught, and so on. These are mostly philosophical issues that link theories of art to cultural practices and the learning lives of individuals.

Philosophical theories may include claims about concepts, content and relationship among visual arts forms and contexts. Constructing theories using problem-solving strategies is based on the premise that there is a gap between a perceived problem and how it might be explained. Problem-solving encourages a pluralistic aesthetic where there can be any number of correct solutions, although some may be more appropriate than others. The cycle of inquiry involves the identification of a research problem that includes criteria for its resolution. A review of related research about what has already been done, a plan of action, the production of an object or prototype, and an evaluative stage where the solution is tested against the original demand of the problem.

The artist is the key figure in the creation of new insights and awareness that has the potential to change the way we see and think. The studio experience is a form of intellectual and imaginative inquiry. And the studio is a site where research can be undertaken that is sufficiently robust to yield knowledge and understanding that is individually situated and socially and culturally relevant. Areas of interest may involve an investigation of how insight is created in the process of making art. Research practice in visual arts asks questions about the process and products of artistic knowing. To do this, the artist can be both the researcher and the object of study. The artist can be the subject of a case study and here the methods range from interpretive biography. As a producer of new knowledge and understanding, critics, historians and philosophers give insights into why and how art is made and interpreted and how it may function in society.

The main research interest is to study forms, methods, and meanings by making interpretations about art. The goal of the art writer is to produce work that is based on evidence that justifies the questions asked and support the claims made. A work can be considered to be a site where knowledge is created and meanings are made. Research about works of art communicates new insight into how objects carry meaning, whether by means of description, representation, expression, or through symbolic form. Researchers who study the way that art practice might function to help understand the contexts surrounding visual arts will be interested in the communicative and political role of art. The analysis of artworks, artifacts and other socially situated texts and the circumstances surrounding their production and presentation, mean that both the forms themselves and the viewing public are subject of study.

## **Conclusion**

What has not been well understood in the past is the place of artists and the things they do in the studio that is part of artistic traditions of inquiry. For some art educators, the school classroom studio is a unique place for problem finding and problem solving, media exploration, and giving form to ideas of personal and social relevance. Understanding the art making practices by doing studies of artists that reveal insights into the imaginative mind is a common approach used to investigate creativity and to model artistic learning processes.

Studio practice is a central site where visual arts research takes place. The studio is a place of inquiry. Studio art experiences include the full range of ideas and images that inform individual, social and cultural actions. These may include issues that take place within community or within

the institutional setting and these inquiries can move within and across different subject areas. What is most important about art is the artwork. Artists know this. Art writers know this. Art educators know this. And to enlighten others will not only take advocacy and political guide but also credible evidence, convincing argument, sound research, insightful practice, valid theory and powerful art. Consequently, the quest to claim visual arts as an important area of human knowing, requires strong arguments.

Although important research practices in visual arts are found in the studio, in galleries, in communities, on the streets, or on the internet, they have not yet find a rightful place within institutional settings. Art practice as research incorporates ways of presenting, encountering and analysing information that is sufficiently robust to produce new knowledge. It is possible to consider the visual, not only as a descriptive or representational form, but also as means of creating and constructing images that form an evidential base that reveal new knowledge.

## References

- Archer, B. (1995). The nature of research, *Co-design Interdisciplinary Journal of Design*, Pp.6-13  
<https://archive.org>
- Balkema, A.W. & Stager, H. (Ed.) (2004). *Artistic research*, Amsterdam: Dutch Society of Aesthetics, Vol.18
- Banks, M. (2001). *Visual methods in social research*, London: Sage
- Baron, T & Eisner, E.W. (1997). *Art-based educational research unit* R. M. Jaeger (Ed.). *Complementary methods for research in education* (2<sup>nd</sup> edit.), Washington D.C.: American Educational Research Association
- Barone, T. (2008). How art-based research can change minds in Colimann, J. & Siegesmind, R. (Eds.). *Art-based research in Education: Foundations for practice*, New York: Routledge
- Brown, N.C.M. (2003). *Art as a practice of research*, New York: The Centre for International Art Education Inc., Teachers' College, Columbia University
- Candy, L. (2006). *Creativity and cognition studies*, University of Technology, Sydney CCS Report: retrieved from <http://www.creativityandcognition> on 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2015
- Creswell, J.W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, constructing and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3<sup>rd</sup> edit.), Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall
- Eisner, E.W. & Peskin, A. (Eds.) (1990). *Qualitative inquiry in education. The Continuing Debate*, New York: Teachers' Press
- Flick, U. (2002). *An introduction to qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> edit.). London; Sage
- Frayling, C. (1993). *Research in art and design*, Royal College of Art Research Papers, 1(1); 1-5
- Gauch Jer H.G. (2003). *Scientific method in practice*, Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press
- Hoffman, A. (2003). *Research for writers*, London; A & O Black Publishers Limited
- Manual, F. (2015). *Measurement of scientific, technological and innovation activities*, on1; 10.1787/0780264239012-en
- Norman, E.; Heath, R.; Pedgley, O. (undated). *The training of a practice-based PhD in design*, <http://www.core77.com/research/thesisresearch.Wml>, retrieved on 31/5/2019
- Rust, C. (2005). *AHRC review of practice-led research*, *Architectural research quarterly*, Sheffield: Hallam University, UK
- Rocco, T.S.; Hatcher, T & Creswell, J.W. (2011). *The handbook of scholarly writing and publishing*, San Francisco, C.A.: John Wilayinsons
- Shields, P. & Rangarajon, N. (2013). *A play book for research methods: Integrating conceptual frameworks and projects management*, Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press
- Stuart, M. & Julian, M. (Eds.) (2015). *Practice-based research in art and design*, *International Journal of education through art*, Online [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)
- Sullivan, G. (2010). *Art practice as research inquiry in visual arts*, Columbia: Columbia University Teachers' College
- Sullivan, G. (2005). *Art practice as research: Inquiry into the visual arts*, Thousand Oaks, C.A.
- Wein, J. (2010). *What is artistic research?* Catalogue.