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The Place of E-Research in Biblical Scholarship in Africa

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Introduction- It has long been the custom to make use of new technological developments in reducing and easing the rigour of complex or routine tasks. This is as true for research as it is for any other aspect of human activity. Thus one finds, for example, that over the years typewriters, word processors and computers generally have come to be adopted as part of the essential hardware of research. So the *e* in e-Research stands for a high-speed, digital network that is readily available anytime/anywhere.

E-Research is the application of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in research engagement. The definite term implies all the devices that are used in transmitting information in a bid to communicate. ICT has been a major tool for learning and research. It has recorded significant impact as there are various gadgets that can enhance quality research. The world has become a global village, whereby access to different worlds is made possible through internet. "The Net changes everything" a popular quote from Oracle Corporation, critically speaking, there is a sort of exaggerations and implications in that. E-research is not only the use of internet but software applications. Provision is made for the names, activities and links to pertinent internet websites as an appendix to this paper.

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I. Introduction

It has long been the custom to make use of new technological developments in reducing and easing the rigour of complex or routine tasks. This is as true for research as it is for any other aspect of human activity. Thus one finds, for example, that over the years typewriters, word processors and computers generally have come to be adopted as part of the essential hardware of research. So the *e* in e-Research stands for a high-speed, digital network that is readily available anytime/anywhere.

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II. The Benefits of E-research in Biblical Studies

In the past Biblical studies researches were carried out using the traditional methods. Close to the end of the 20th Century, the world was blessed with new innovations and technologies and that formed the foundation for what is obtainable today. Computers provide the crucial ability to insert new data as one uncovers it and to merge together information from a variety of topics without requiring the countless hours of retyping labour that would otherwise have been required.

E-research is so dynamic that "the quantity of information produced, coupled with the speed in which it can be accessed, filtered, sorted, and combined creates endless opportunity."[1] With all these opportunities and advantages we are faced with the challenge of surplus resources that require decisive, judicious and purposeful search. However, this affluent and assorted data forces e-researchers to be more selective and critical of the veracity of the data they gather. One way to be careful on the web is to look for institutional association or proof of academic authority. When using a website, investigate whether it is associated with a college or university, a research society, study centre or institute, a library, publishing company, scholarly journal, and so forth. One might also see if the site manager or author is an academic engaged in on-going research in the field.[2]

The Net breaks barriers including distance. E-research provides platform for researchers to become members of other Net communities. Examples of this are: Academia, Google scholar, whatsApp, Facebook and others. It helps the e-researcher to interact with colleagues, scholars and friends as they bring and share their experiences and insights together. Amateurs can have a voice too, and this helps to break through the coalitions, 'established views,' and 'political correctness' that sometimes stifles scholarship even as it sets itself up as the best scholarship.

E-research is a counterpart of e-commerce and e-learning as alternative avenues to act, understand and create knowledge in a networked community. So many new innovations and inventions are coming up which require new skills and competency. There are a good number of computer programs with sophisticated search features which outdo paper concordances. Some of the most recognized programs are such as Bibleworks, Logos, and Gramcord for Windows PCs. Particularly, Bibleworks helps with excellent Hebrew and Greek fonts which cannot be found ordinarily in any computer. These programmes are able to search for particular grammatical and syntactical constructions.[3]We have access a good number of lexicons and Bible dictionaries. These are indispensable tools for biblical and theological exegesis.

The Net also provides us with the platform to make more money. Very few African Biblical scholars are into this. Many books are published locally and are kept away from the global community. Amazon especially has been doing well in this area by helping authors make their materials available online. The natural challenge many authors encounter is the fear of losing control over their books (or piracy). One of the ways Amazon does this is kindle. Kindle is a customised electronic device to gain access to Amazon books

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which can neither be copied nor transferred to another electronic device. IVP (Intervarsity Press) is also doing excellently well with ebook and paperback. Some books are available only in paperback while some are in both forms, that is, softcopy and hardcopy. African Biblical scholars should explore this avenue to communicate, represent and demonstrate our identity globally.

III. The Dangers of E-research in Biblical Studies

Because of the dangers involved and inherent in e-research many critics have been canvassing against its use.

1. Laziness

When we depend heavily on e-library, it reduces our commitment. Some people do not want to work when everything is made easy and so they are eager to see the surprises that the Net would bring to them with the massive materials. We are vulnerable to always depend on the Net before anything is done. If caution is not taken we can become passionless and redundant in carrying out quality research.

2. Poor Research

As a result of laziness, one is prone to easily come up with shoddy research. Instead of making use of e-research to enrich and supplement one's research work rather it may turn out to be a poor research. Before one can produce quality research the ideas must have been internalized and processed. One principal characteristic of a quality research is proper documentation and interaction with the works of well-known experts in that field. When a careless e-researcher cites "junks" that is both irrelevant and insignificant materials the outcome may be disastrous.

3. Plagiarism

Among other dangers in e-Research is the challenge of "plagiarism." Plagiarism is easily possible with the help of the Net. There is the "copy and paste" syndrome as some Net users try to copy some materials make it theirs. Scholars and students can easily access information without acknowledging its right ownership mistakenly or deliberately. Students can easily download another person's work and make it theirs without any notice. By reading such materials one cannot see any linkage or connectivity between the arguments. It is the responsibility of the instructors to be up to date and know what is in vogue and develop skills in detecting plagiarism. Academic honesty is greatly required and must be emphasized. Students are often caught in the habit of copying and pasting another person's work from the Net or software.

a) Qualities of an e-Researcher

1. Selectivity: It is the sole responsibility of the e-researcher to decide the type of material he would like to read and use. One should not be mad or crazy at using the Net. Just as a mad man may pick any paper or information on the street. What is at stake is here is the quality of selectivity. As an e-researcher, one must know the difference between academic and non-academic software. For example, some Bible students use PC 5 Bible software for their academic papers which is quite not academic because there is no page number on any of the materials used. PC5 is good for pastors, evangelists and whoever may be interested, for personal reflection and not for academic purpose.
2. Carefulness: So many things are changing in our world. The trend of events is changing at a very fast rate. Instead of being very hateful and intolerable at the new innovations brought by technology one should cultivate the habit of updating and upgrading oneself. Some materials are meant just to have a taste while some are meant to be chewed and digested. Attitude towards toward e-research should be friendly with carefulness. One way to be careful on the web and software is to look for institutional association or proof of academic authority. When using a website or software investigate whether it is associated with a college or university, a research society, study centre or institute, a library, publishing company, scholarly journal, and so forth.
3. Evaluation: The number of materials that is available on the Net is massive. As Jeff Lenburg rightly observed that:

   Because of today's heavy reliance on the Internet, never before has evaluating your sources been more critical. News organizations, government agencies, reference and encyclopedia publishers, and electronic publishers are generally considered more accurate and reliable since most have developed a high standard of accuracy over the years that researchers can count on. However … not all source material is credible or accurate. Specifically, the Internet has raised serious concerns regarding the accuracy and authenticity of material. The rapid rate of growth of this medium has resulted in a huge proliferation of errors, inconsistencies, innuendoes, rumors, and misinformation reported by sites operated by individuals who are concerned less with accuracy and more with promoting a personal agenda.[4]

Biblical Studies is not a free discipline where anyone can write or say just "anything". Our writings most times project our personality and religious belief. In view of this, an e-researcher must sieve, weigh and scrutinize any material before usage. The wheat and the chaff must be properly and carefully separated.

4. Credibility: An e-researcher must always acknowledge the source of his/her information by

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citing the website or the name of the software. The quality of the information one gathers is more important than the quantity. Plagiarism is a very big challenge in modern scholarship. This issue has become much more serious with the inception of the Net and software. Some scholars think it is perfectly acceptable to "cut and paste" materials, ideas, or words from workpublished online into their own.

5. Complementarity: An e-researcher must admit that the Net or software cannot replace library. In other words, softcopy cannot replace hardcopy. The web is a more fluid source of information than libraries. Websites change at any time. It is required of an e-researcher to cite websites in papers not only by the site address but also by the date accessed. If a webpage is no longer available at the given address, one can search for it on Google or some other search engine, or find an alternative.

Another aspect of complementarity between the libraries and the e-library is in the respect of the availability of classic books that may out of print or not available in Africa but are made available on the Net. In this wise, an e-researcher is able to gain access both to old and new books.

6. Efficacy: This has been associated with aptitude and accomplishment. "Internet efficacy means the confidence and willingness to learn to use new tools and to become competent at applying these tools to authentic problems."[5] There is always tension to be able to navigate between old and new skills. Attempt must be made though it may be difficult and terrifying initially but within short period of time negotiation and compromise are bound to happen.
7. Currency: This is a quality that is lacking among many Biblical scholars in Africa. Some who have had their PhDs long ado do not care about the current and prevailing issues. Many do not care to search for new development, information, and resources. Events have overtaken some of the information they think they have. Scholarship requires constant and persistent up-dating. An e-researcher has the vantage of up-dating and up-grading himself/herself anytime/anywhere. As Karl Barth remarked "Take your Bible and your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible."

IV. The Task Ahead

a) African Initiated Bible software and Website

A good example of this is the collection of Byang Kato's works scanned and converted into pdf and made available for us. In my opinion there is need to exert more effort to produce an African initiated Bible software. Alternatively, there can be customised websites meant for users in Africa with *Internet Protocol* that may prevent users outside Africa from accessing it if need be. Users from Africa must pay certain fee in order to gain access to such site. Even books published by African scholars are not readily available to the Africans. For example, Prof. Samuel W. Kunhiyop's book titled *African Christian Theology* published by Hippo was not made available for the people in Nigeria.

b) Resource Centre for Biblical Studies

A key problem in doing critical biblical scholarship in Africa is lack of access to resources especially those from the Western world. When we finally get them they already old. Even with the aid of the Net, *Internet Protocol* is a challenge whereby they are not made available for the Africans. For example, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* by J.W. Wenham was published in 1965 and has ever been in use in most of the Seminaries and Universities till now. We got to hear about the third edition written by Jeremy Duff in 2011 whereas it was published since 2005. This is just to illustrate the gulf between the Western world and Africa (except South Africa). What practical step can we take to break this barrier?

No doubt, Prof. S. O. Abogunrin has contributed immensely to biblical studies in Africa both in writing and training, home and abroad. I remember sometime in 2007, I was going through Logos 2.1 and in the software was *Journal for the Evangelical Theological Society* and I came across an article titled "The Language and Nature of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ in the New Testament" behold it was written by our Prof. S. O. Abogunrin. In the light of this, there is urgent need to put in place a resource centre for Biblical studies in honour of Prof. Abogunrin as a way of immortalizing his personality. For now there is no stable centre or shop where one can go and purchase professional Bible software in Nigeria. ACTS sold IVP Reference software some time ago. There is serious need to expedite action by raising fund that can accomplish this noble vision.

V. Conclusion

An African adage states that "we don't throw away the bathing water with the baby". We should not downplay the use of internet because of the dangers involved. Just as some people use their brains for right course and others for the wrong. This is similar to the use of internet and software. The internet is a tool not an end. An instrument and not a god. E-Research is capable of increasing and widening the worst and best of an individual. There is need to put a lot of things in place in order to spread and expand Biblical studies in Africa. Theological institutions should be more innovative and committed in providing electronic tools that can aid quality research.

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Websites for Biblical Studies[6]

The list of websites below may be very helpful for Biblical and theological studies scholars:

Biblical Studies

http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/

The site offers scholarly articles, including ones organized canonically, study aids, andnews and events. A related site is TheologicalStudies.org.uk

Tyndale

www.TyndaleHouse.com

Tyndale House is an evangelical library and residence in Cambridge for evangelical scholars. It is particularly strong in Biblical Studies, and some readers will find its website very useful:

http://www.americanbible.org/brcpages/bibletranslation

The UBS offers suggestions on how to choose a translation of the Bible.

Biblon 2000

This project of Tyndale House, Cambridge offers a Greek text with apparatus for the New Testament. The actual manuscripts for various readings can be viewed as well.

http://www.tyndalehouse.com/Biblon/biblon2000.html

International knowledge sharing platform

Research on Humanities and Social Sciences is a peer reviewed journal published by IISTE. The journal publishes original papers at the forefront of humanities and social Sciences issues. The journal is published in both printed and online versions. The online version is free access and download. We have many contributors from Nigeria.

http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/10668/10998

The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts

At this site, digital photographs of a number of NT manuscripts can be viewed. The Center operates under the auspices of the Center for the Research of Early Christian Documents, founded by Daniel Wallace.http://www.csntm.org

Institute for New Testament Textual Research

This site contains helpful information on textual criticism at the University of Münster's Institute for New Testament Textual Research. http://www.uni-muenster.de/INTF/

New Testament Gateway

This important site for NT studies on the web also includes listings for textual criticism.

http://www.ntgateway.com/resource/textcrit.htm

Biblical Institute of Fribourg University

This site contains the activities of the Biblical Institute, including the new edition of Biblica

Hebraica. It also gives information on Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis and Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus, and on the Swiss Society for Ancient Near Eastern Studies.

http://www.unifr.ch/dbs/

Center for Computer Analysis of Texts (CCAT)

CCAT offers a variety of texts and software at their site, such as a morphologically analyzed LXX, a parallel aligned Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Old Testament, Augustine's Confessions, Lightfoot's translation of the Apostolic Fathers (under Church Writers), and the Quran.http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/gopher/

Christian Classics Ethereal Library

This site has already been mentioned. In addition to historical resources and texts ofclassical literature, the Church Fathers, and later writers in English translation, it also offerssome older resources for Biblical studies (such as Greek grammars).http://www.ccel.org/

Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts

K. C. Hanson's and Douglas Oakman's website links that go with their book by this title:

http://www.kchanson.com/PTJ/ptj.html

Resource Pages for Biblical Studies

Dr. Torrey Seland, of the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger, Norway, offers numerous resources for Biblical Studies.http://torreys.org/bible/

Society of Biblical Literature

http://www.sbl-site.org/

iTanakh

A helpful site for the study of the OT and the ANE.

http://www.itanakh.org/

NT Gateway/ Old Testament Gateway

A gateway to NT Biblical studies managed by Dr. Mark Goodacre at Duke University.

http://www.ntgateway.com/

http://www.otgateway.com/index.htm

N. T. Wright Page

This is an unofficial website dedicated to a major New Testament scholar, Dr. N. T.Wright. Numerous articles and other information are available.

http://www.ntwrightpage.com/

The Paul Page

This website is dedicated to the study of the new perspective on Paul.

http://www.thepaulpage.com

ENDNOTES

1. Terry Anderson and Heather Kanuka, 2003.*e-Research: Methods, Strategies, and Issues,* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon,5.
2. Rollin G. Grams and Mark B. Poe, Internet Resources for Biblical and Early Church Studies. Charlotte: Robert C. Cooley Center for the Study of Early Christianity. 2010.

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3. Bibleworks 9: A Software for Biblical Exegesis and Research. [BibleWorks, LLC, P. O.Box 6158, Norfolk, VA 23508, USA; $359.00 www.bibleworks.com. Logos Bible Software. [Logos Bible Software, 1313 Commercial St., Bellingham WA Libronix Digital Library system (www.libronix.com) which contains a vast digital library in addition to bibles.] e-Sword. [www.e-sword.net; a free bible program for PC and the Pocket PC platform.] Online Bible. www.online-bible.com; for PC and Mac platforms; generally free but a CD-ROM with many bibles is relatively inexpensive.]
4. Jeff Lenburg, (2005). *The Facts on File Guide to Research.* New York: Facts on File, 28.
5. Terry Anderson and Heather Kanuka, (2003). e-Research: Methods, Strategies, and Issues, 10.
6. For more massive and detailed websites *see* Roland H. Worth, Jr. (2008). *Biblical Studies on the Internet: A Resource Guide.* London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

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