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# Implementation Research in Developed and Developing Countries: an Analysis of the Trends and Directions

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## Abstract

The article examines implementation research across developed countries (North America, Europe), developing countries (Asia, Pacific) and Africa. It examines some key trends and directions of implementation research across regions. It revisits policy debate among scholars on approaches to implementation-top-down, bottom-up and mixed which characterised the developed world. Also, it adds some perspectives on the developing world including Africa. The paper has three contributions: it highlights trends in implementation research in developed and developing countries. It gives some directions on implementation research in Africa. It recommends that the policy design process should not be neglected, such neglect is inimical to implementation.

**Keywords** Policy · Implementation research · Developed countries · Developing countries

## Introduction

The article examines some trends and directions of implementation research, how it started and evolved in developed countries, especially in North America and Europe where implementation research was dominated by so-called generations of implementation research namely the first ('classical'), the second ('empirical') and the third ('analytic'). Secondly, the article adds new issues such as key *trends* of policy implementation in developing countries particularly in Asia and the Pacific. Also, it adds some key *directions* of implementation research in Africa.

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## Trends and Directions of Implementation Research in Developed Countries (North America, Europe)

Policy implementation research has grown considerably in volume since the early 1970s after Pressman and Wildavsky's publication of seminal work: "Implementation" published in 1973. Two generations of implementation research supposedly emerged. Since the early 1990s, the process of implementing a third-generation research design emerged (Goggin et al., 1990; Hill & Hupe, 2009). The three generations of implementation research do indeed, as claimed, differ markedly in their focus on dealing with conceptual, theoretical, methodological and contextual issues (Sætren, 2014).

### The First-Generation Research

The first-generation implementation research or works give 'detailed accounts of how a single authoritative decision was carried out' with more emphasis on the challenges to effective policy implementation (Linder & Peters, 1987). These are some of the first-generation implementation studies (Derthick, 1970, 1972; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Murphy, 1973). However, a few exceptions in the 1970s studies on the pessimistic views (Sapolsky, 1972; Bardach, 1977).

A classic work of the first generation, Pressman & Wildavsky (1973) opine that most policies or programs that have many 'clearances' and multiplicity of 'joint actions' are doomed to fail during implementation. This may be a relevant lesson for policy actors in both developed and developing world contexts to learn from when designing their policies or programs. On the contrary other scholars disagree with Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973) pessimistic conclusion. In this, Bowen (1982) argues that such a pessimistic conclusion is based on an erroneous calculation of the chances of policy success and failure at each of the several linked decision points. One key contribution of first-generation scholars is the description and conceptualization of policy implementation as a complex and dynamic process that involve multiple participants, multiple or wide range of perspectives, interpretations and operationalization of authoritative decision. *Second Generation Research*.

The second-generation implementation research is noted for the development of analytical frameworks to guide policy implementation research on a complex phenomenon. The second-generation scholars were deeply involved in the various approaches to implementation. Some aligned to the top-down approach. The top-downers works look more theoretical and with some command-control orientations. These are some of the notable or classic works of top-downers (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979, 1980; Edwards, 1980; Nakamura & Smallwood 1980; Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983; Linder & Peters 1987).

On the contrary, other second-generation scholars opposed the views of the top-downers. They criticized the top-downers as favouring national officials at the expense of those at the local level (the political-administrative units of government). The top-downers undermine local level actors' plans, initiatives, frameworks and other informal networks. These scholars are among those who contributed to the bottom-up perspective (Elmore, 1979; Berman, 1978; Lipsky, 1980, 2010; Hjern

& Porter, 1981; Hjern & Hull, 1982; Hjern & Hull, 1982; Linder & Peters, 1987). Hence, the bottom-uppers perspective/approach to policy implementation is based on the assumption that successful policy must be compatible with the desires, interests and behavioural dispositions of lower-level actors (the political-administrative bodies) and policy target groups (including the policy beneficiaries or members of the society whose problem the policy seeks to address or solve).

Other groups of second-generation implementation research disagree with some of the views of the bottom-uppers. One scholar is Matland. He argues that the overly inductive nature of the bottom-up approach or perspective led to a few theoretical generalizations and conclusions (Matland, 1995). Another notable policy implementation scholar expressed worry about the continuous debate. He argues the debate between the top-down and the bottom-up approaches to implementation though useful at the outset, unfortunately, developed into such a protracted and entrenched debate/divide where 'ideological-normative, methodological and epistemological-theoretical issues were intertwined' (Sætren, 2005). This group of scholars seeking to end the debate are seen as the synthesizers. There are several studies by implementation scholars in this regard (Berman, 1980; Elmore, 1979, 1985; Sabatier, 1986; Lester et al., 1987; Matland, 1995; Najam, 1995; Sætren, 2005; Winter 2012). Second-generation research is important in the sense that it rectified the failure bias of first-generation research by comparing the program successes and failures within the same policy area.

### Third Generation Research

The third generation of research started somewhere in the 1990s with the call for the application of more scientifically rigorous research design in implementation research. These are some of the key characteristics of the third-generation research as expounded by Goggin et al., (1990) (1) the key variables used must be clearly defined; (2) the hypotheses derived from theoretical constructs should guide empirical investigation; (3) the use of more statistical analysis based on quantitative data to supplement qualitative data analysis; (4) use more comparative studies across policy sectors and units of analysis between and within countries; and (5) the focus should be on research with longer time frames-longitudinal studies (Sætren, 2014, p. 86; Hupe & Sætren 2015, p. 99). Some scholars criticized the third-generation research direction as quite 'ambitious and demanding' (O'Toole, 2000; Winter, 2012). Also, it is criticized as an 'ideal type' analytical construct for implementation scholars to work towards rather than it being something expected to be fully implemented in one single research work or project (Sætren, 2014, p. 3). The main progress is more in a methodological sense than theoretical (O'Toole, 2000; Sætren, 2014). Some of the key issues from first, second and third generation research are in Table 1.

**Table 1** The key policy implementation debates in developed countries

Generations of Research	Main Characteristics or Features
<b>First Generation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ A-theoretical framework- lack of theories</li> <li>☐ Methodological Approach – the studies are mostly single qualitative case studies</li> <li>☐ Mostly in North America</li> <li>• Premature Pessimistic Conclusions</li> </ul>
<b>Second Generation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Development of Analytical Frameworks</li> <li>☐ Policy design-implementation linkages</li> <li>☐ Top-down, Bottom-up Debate</li> <li>☐ More quantitative, comparative studies</li> <li>• Conceptual issues-where implementation ends as a process, output(s) or outcome(s)</li> <li>• Absence of theoretical cumulative</li> </ul>
<b>Third Generation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Clearly defined variables</li> <li>☐ Hypotheses derived from theoretical constructs</li> <li>☐ More quantitative and few qualitative</li> <li>☐ More comparative studies across sectors</li> <li>☐ More emphasis on longitudinal studies</li> <li>• Too ambitious and more of an ‘ideal type’</li> </ul>

## Trends in Policy Implementation Research in Developing Countries (Asia, Pacific, Latin America)

Policy implementation researchers seem to have paid less attention to developing countries (Asia/Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Oceania) than their regions of origin (North America and Europe). While the developed regions account for 82% of publications (articles, books and chapters), developing countries account for 18% of publications (Saetren, 2005, p. 571). The bias is even stronger concerning PhD dissertations, whereas there is 89% of the developed world and about 11% from developing countries. Though this very biased research focus has been somewhat mitigated since the mid-1980 it is still quite pronounced. This study intends to strengthen research focusing on developing countries to address some public policy implementation gaps, challenges and issues in the developing world contexts. Some scholars like Saetren admit that the developing world contexts of policy implementation are probably the most challenging (Saetren, 2005). Thus, the motivation or the need to critically analyse some trends in policy implementation research within the developing world context.

Similarly, Grindle (1980) argues that public policies/programs are more difficult to manage, predict and implement in developing countries than elsewhere. She links to content and context variables prevailing in developing countries, and how and why content and contextual variables intervene in the policy implementation process. Grindle's concern is on the impact of public policy content on implementation and how the ‘political context of administrative action also affects policy implementation’ (Grindle, 1980). Thus, Grindle's works emphasize the importance of politics in the policy process in most developing countries/third world and highlight how both content and the context of public policy affect its implementation (Grindle, 1980, 2017).

Also, Grindle & Thomas (1991) recognized the role or the importance of policy elites in the policy process. They indicate that the response or the reaction to policy reforms can come from the public arena or from the bureaucratic arena in the policy process which may be in favour or opposition to the policy reform. They see policy implementation as an 'ongoing process', a 'nonlinear process' that must be managed properly by the policy actors or the environment (Grindle & Thomas, 1991).

Brinkerhoff and other scholars followed up by focusing on policy implementation challenges in developing countries. They view the policy implementation process as political, technical, complex and highly interactive involving a wide variety of actors and organizations. These scholars emphasize the need for building organizational networks from governmental, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), with privatization including public-private partnerships (PPP) in policy implementation. Such cross-cutting organizational mechanisms are critical to implementation success (Brinkerhoff, 1996, 1999; Crosby, 1996) went further to emphasize the role of governance instead of the government in the policy process. In this work on governance, the focus is on the role of the citizens (networks) in developing countries in the formulation and implementation of policies, which is a shift from the dominant roles of the state/government in policy processes through the power of what is termed 'state-civil society networks' (Brinkerhoff, 1999, p.24). This is what other scholars also termed the 'hollow state' (Milward & Provan, 1993). A shift from state to the recognition of non-governmental actors. Three factors are paramount in a state-civil society network or collaboration in policy processes namely 'participation of the various policy actors (with the target to meet beneficiaries' needs and demands in the policy objectives and build ownership, responsiveness, accountability, transparency and other governance features for policy). Also, 'decentralization' in the various forms in the policy processes and establishment of linkages between local and national units, civil-private sector actors (networks). The third factor is 'incentives' to foster networks. The assumption is that adequate incentives facilitate networks or partnerships for policy issues. The three factors are interrelated and are very crucial for policy implementation in developing countries (Brinkerhoff, 1999, pp. 127-8).

Context is crucial in implementation research; thus some scholars emphasize the importance of contextual factors including cultural, economic, social, legal, physical environment, institutional setting, policy actors/stakeholders in health systems of countries (governmental, non-governmental demographic and epidemiological conditions (Peters et al., 2013). Sanders and Haines also (2006) emphasize the need to achieve health goals through implementation research in poor countries. This, they stress the need to bridge the wide gap between rich and poor countries in terms of knowledge on disease as well as disease control. Also, the trend in implementation research is viewed from the 'social and political context' in which policies (especially in health) have evolved in developing countries (Sanders & Haines, 2006, p. 0719). They argue that implementation research is a neglected area in low-and middle-income countries where a negligible percentage (0.017%) of health expenditure is devoted to research (p. 0720). Though there is some growing funding for other areas like 'intervention research'.

Another trend in implementation research is to put findings into practice (Garner et al., 1998). They outline some grounds or preconditions why research in developing

countries including Papua New Guinea (PNG) needs to be put or translate policies into practice. The preconditions are that the research should be important to decision making and need sensible questions. Some implementation challenges are also highlighted such as inadequate funding, unregulated private sector in drug prescriptions and the quality of training, regulatory bodies on doctors to put research findings into practice, sometimes impede health interventions (Garner et al., 1998). This work stresses the need for policy experts to translate their research findings into practice. This is what Garner et al., (1998, p. 167) called ‘practice policies’ where the use of guidelines in health has become increasingly common in developing countries like the Pacific (PNG).

Another trend is the development of intervention policies including health in a sustainable way targeting urban or cities and rural people in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Saint Lucia, Argentina, Chile, Dominican Republic and Uruguay and other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. In comparative terms, there appears to be more implementation research quite extensive in Latin America which has more partnerships than in Africa and other developing countries in terms of developing more intervention policies including health which would benefit more people. Also, to foster policy development toward embedded implementation research policies or projects in a sustainable way. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and other alliances or partnerships are key players in embedded implementation research in Latin America and the Caribbean. The embedded implementation programs aim to identify some key factors that facilitate or inhibit the implementation of intervention programs. These types of implementation research are crucial as researchers look at policy design and implementation from the perspectives of policymakers, implementers and the people (policy beneficiaries) in different health systems setting on effective implementation strategies for policies or programs (Quintero et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2017; Langlois et al., 2019; Varallyay et al., 2020).

Makinde (2005) looks at the problems of policy implementation in developing countries. The problem is in terms of the widening gap between policy intentions (stated goals) and the results (realization of planned goals). This widening gap is due to a myriad of factors namely policy design, policymakers or the environment (non-involvement of target groups), corruption, inadequate resources and defective implementation which makes nonsense of the policy or program. Many public policies do not achieve their desired results in developing countries including Nigeria (Makinde, 2005; Effiong, 2013). Also, Saguin et al., (2018) look at policy and politics, and how political capabilities continue to serve as a constraint on the work of ‘policy professionals’ or actors in the developing world context of the Philippines. Others look at the perspectives on public policy implementation or approach in the context of developing countries (Isidiho & Sabran, 2016). Table 2 shows some key trends in implementation research in developing countries.

**Table 2** Key Trends in Implementation Research in Developing Countries

- 
- Policy content vs. implementation (how policy content affects implementation)
  - Policy design vs. implementation (how design factors affect implementation)
  - Political context vs. policy implementation (how politics affect implementation)
  - Socio-economic context vs. implementation (social/economic factors influence)
  - Network/shift of governmental and non-governmental actors vs. implementation
  - Other contextual factors: cultural, legal vs. implementation
  - Intervention policies vs. embedded implementation research projects/strategies
- 

## The Directions of Policy Implementation Research in Africa

One direction is that most public policy studies in Africa show that the design process is largely the work of governmental actors (government officials and some top bureaucrats) leaving out other actors like non-governmental organizations and individuals. Another direction is that the policy design process is done in secrecy while the implementation process is open to the public. Thus, creating implementation problems, or in some circumstances result in implementers' resistance to some policy goals (Ridde, 2009; Ohemeng et al., 2012; Ohemeng & Ayee, 2012; Ayee, 2012; Béland & Ridde, 2016; Mohammed, 2020).

Implementation research seems to be growing in Africa not only in the social sciences but more in the health sciences and in different directions: connecting health policy or program designs to practice, connecting theoretical to evidence-based implementation research, with emphasis on contextual factors in an attempt to reduce or possibly eliminate pediatric HIV (mother-to-child transmission) in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bhardwaj et al., 2015) as well as those persons who are at high risk of HIV administered with the approved guideline for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in Sub-Saharan Africa (Cowan et al., 2016). Some health policy scholars examine mental health policies in four African countries namely South Africa, Zambia, Ghana and Uganda from policy design to implementation. Other health policy scholars look at policy implementation within a local level context of Burkina Faso. These scholars emphasize health policies agenda setting, the formulation stage as well as implementation gaps in a developing world context of Africa with specific reference to health equity in the utilization of healthcare services among the people, particularly the indigent persons (Flisher et al., 2007; Ridde, 2009; Kipo-Sunyezi, 2020a, b).

Another direction in implementation in Africa is on implementation gaps due to policy design. Bénit-Gbaffou (2018) focuses on the policy implementation gap in terms of street trading in Johannesburg South Africa and how to address the gaps in the execution of the public policy. The city authority in an attempt to keep the city clean and to get rid of some illegal or unlicensed activities or address some illegal trading activities in the inner city embarked on 'Operation Clean Sweep' in October 2013. The policy intent of the city authority is to make pavements 'trader free' and have few legal trading activities in the inner-city streets. This policy was met with



stiff resistance from the trader organizations with many implementation challenges. Thus, there exist some implementation ‘gaps’ between the policy mandate and its operational needs. In some settings, policy implementation is hindered by poor resources and planning, lack of support of a policy from key stakeholders, ambition or lack of clarity of goals-policy content and contextual factors, and weak monitoring and evaluation of policies in Africa. In this regard, policy design factors are crucial for implementation (Molete et al., 2020; Kipo-Sunyehzi, 2020a; Peters et al., 2018) emphasize the importance of policy design for effective implementation. They argue that the ‘central goal’ or purpose of ‘policy design is effectiveness’ (p. 1). The crust of policy design is to get what works and how to solve a public problem with the right tools or means to achieve the desired results (policy success)-outcome and or output. In Africa, several implementation research studies have looked at the linkage between policy design and translation of policy into practice (implementation), in terms of availability of resources, the interest of policy target groups or policy agents (key policy actors or stakeholders), policy learning, policy content (policy targets/goals) and context (ethnicity, culture, religion, politics, economics among other factors or conditions. Also, policy implementation goes through an evolutionary process with some trial and error. The suggestion is that African leaders and governments should see policy implementation as a continuous process, in pursuit of continuity rather than change (Asagba, 2005; Brynard, 2009; Lledó & Poplawski-Ribeiro, 2013; Kipo-Sunyehzi, 2020a).

The other direction is that policy implementation is a process, an evolutionary learning process. Implementation scholars from the African continent also elaborate further with more insights from their North American and European colleagues that implementation usually faces the problem of ‘under-achievement of stated objectives’ which is associated with complex and interrelated activities of ‘governmental institutions and interest groups’ that are involved in the execution of a ‘single governmental policy’ (Aye, 1994, p. 1). Also, the implementation of policies often involves the activities of government organizations and interest groups like civil society groups, NGOs private organisations and citizens, and different actors in the process of implementing policies (Bratton, 1990; Kipo, 2011; Kipo-Sunyehzi, 2019; Aye, 1994) argues that there is the failure of successive governments in Africa to see the policy implementation as an evolutionary learning process. As a result, most policies are often not implemented. This Aye explains that successive governments in Africa including Ghana have failed to utilize the ‘possibilities of learning’ to realize the objectives/goals of decentralized policies (Aye, 1994, p. 48).

One other direction is on politics of policy implementation. Implementation research or studies look at the influence of politics on policy implementation success. Several implementation studies or research on the African continent look at the issues of politicians’ interference with the work of public administrators. Other issues include the disposition of the implementers in carrying out policy mandates or goals. Others include politics and social protection and key actors including policy implementers, the beneficiaries, and donors. These multiple actors with diverse interests in both the design and the implementation of policies on the continent. In most cases, the strong and the privileged ones try to have their way in policies/programs. Thus, a contestation between and among actors. The continent experienced a policy

shift from the left (independent free healthcare, and education among others) to the right (full or partial withdrawal of state subsidies-market mechanisms) on ideological lines, particularly in the 1980 and 1990 s. Other issues in Africa include the politics of cash transfer policies/programs and the dynamics of the act as a ‘right’-constitutional entitlement or a ‘political’ issue-politics of patronage for electoral gains. Hence, there is politics in the design of policies as well as their implementation. These are some of the key factors or issues in policy implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa specifically South Africa, Ghana, Botswana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Uganda (Johnson, 2004; Aina, 2013; Lledó & Poplawski-Ribeiro, 2013; Imurana et al., 2014; Awortwi & Helmsing, 2014; Awortwi, 2017; Ayisi Yeboah-Assiamah & Bawole, 2018; Kpessa-Whyte 2018). There is the need to build elite consensus on both the design and implementation of policies in Africa.

An interesting direction of policy implementation in Africa is on policies assuming the position or the principles of *Ubuntu* (Nkondo, 2007)-an African concept of oneness to humanity as well as *Ujaama* and *Harambee*. An African ideal is rooted in: ‘I am because you are’ (Aina, 2013; Awortwi, 2017). Where the policymakers and implementers strive towards humanity or collective interest in both the design and the implementation of the policy-especially policies that promote the wellbeing of all in African society. Scholars hold the view that incorporation of the *Ubuntu* principles into national policies is challenging in both the design and execution process but worth considering. The *Ubuntu* principle of policy can be social where collectivity is prioritized over individualism and the political system is seen as a development state in both the design and the implementation of policies in Africa, it has prominence in Southern Africa. Also, *Ubuntu* as a public policy prioritized social norms/values/interests against private interests. The *Ubuntu* principles depart from the Western social sciences which often focus primarily on ‘rational individuals’ in society- be it their involvement in policy design and or implementation particularly African social and wellbeing policies-more Southern African people (Norren, 2014). *Ubuntu* implies that everyone, all individuals can transform themselves in society. The *Ubuntu* emphasises consensus building in the policy arena, it highlights ‘consensus politics’ and embedded elements of spirituality in many dealings with other humans (Norren, 2014, p. 256). *Ubuntu* also reflects the ‘African realities, perspectives and cultural practices’ which resonate with ‘humanism in its universal sense’ (Qobo & Nyathi, 2016). Similarly, *Ubuntu* exists across Africa including West Africa local proverbs like a ‘tree does not make a forest’. Thus, these reflect the African thinking, philosophy, and principles that guide policymaking and execution. The *Ubuntu* principle places ‘people’ at the centre of public policy or public service particularly in South Africa (Qobo & Nyathi, 2016, p. 426). It is important to note that the concept/principle of *Ubuntu* may still be a highly contestable issue in public policy, or policy thinking as well as policy implementation and in other areas or disciplines, especially beyond Sub-Saharan Africa.

While implementation research in the West was moving from the first to the second and or the third, policy studies in Africa particularly Southern Africa were caught up in the web of *Ubuntu* in public policy which strives to promote collective interests against private/personal interests. Thus, *Ubuntu* as a public policy is for ‘social cohe-

**Table 3** shows some key directions in implementation research in Africa

Key Directions in Implementation Research in Africa
⊖ Policy design process (more governmental/state actors, less of non-state actors)
⊖ Secrecy of the policy design process (few top elites, alienation of the masses)
⊖ Directions to address implementation gaps (policy content, contextual factors)
⊖ Implementation is a process, not a linear (a process of public problem solving)
⊖ Involvement of key policy actors/agents/stakeholders and embracing learning
⊖ Direction of continuity of policies than a change in policies (political changes)
⊖ The principles of <i>Ubuntu</i> in public policy in Africa and the perspectives beyond

sion and people-centred transformation, and development’ (Nkondo, 2007, p. 99). Some key directions of implementation research in Africa are presented in Table 3.

## Discussion

The paper has carefully examined the level of progress in implementation research from the first to the second and the third generations of research, and the following observations are noted. There is more progress from the first generation to the second generation in terms of the development of implementation models or frameworks and a shift from the largely qualitative to quantitative in a methodological sense. However, there is less progress from the second-generation research to the third generation of implementation research. Even though implementation research has reached a mature stage of development in scientific terms, the scholars see the progress more in the methodological sense than in the theoretical sense of development (O’Toole, 2000; Sætren, 2014). The three ‘generations’ of implementation research—first, second and third— the scholars and the works are based largely in the West. On the contrary, the developing countries including Africa made fewer inroads. Between Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, there seems to be more implementation progress in the latter than in the former through partnerships and alliances on the increasing trend of embedded implementation projects/strategies (Langlois et al., 2019; Varallyay et al., 2020). Thus, this paper adds some key trends in developing countries and the directions of implementation research specifically in Africa where implementation research progress seems to be slow.

On trends in implementation research, the literature shows some key trends in implementation research in developing countries. Two areas emerged from the literature and that is policy content and context which influenced implementation positively or negatively depending on the prevailing conditions in the developing country. The design of the policy in terms of clarity, ambiguity, and the ambition of the goal is paramount and they have great influence at the implementation stage. Some policy design factors include the strong will of the government, the policy constituents, and the availability of resources. Implementation research in other developing countries

points to the role of bureaucrats and the issues of public sector corruption which turn to impede the implementation of policies (Garner et al., 1998; Makinde, 2005). Several implementation research in developing countries points to the importance or influence of contextual factors which serve as either facilitating or inhibiting the implementation of policies. Politics or political factors coupled with social, economic, legal and cultural factors or conditions prevailing in a country. Others include political ideology, policy elites, and the role of governmental and non-governmental actors and organizations that can facilitate or impede the implementation of policies in many countries especially developing countries (Grindle, 1980; Grindle & Thomas, 1991; Brinkerhoff, 1996, 1999; Crosby, 1996; Milward & Provan, 1993).

Some observations are made on the directions of implementation research in Africa. The literature suggests that the so-called ‘three generations’ of implementation research are less observed in Africa. Some key directions of implementation research in Africa are summarized in Table 3. Policy design is so crucial and it is a process but the design process seems to be shrouded by secrecy-limited policy actors. The implementation process is continuous and not linear and there is an emphasis on continuity of policies rather than a change of policies in times of change of government and involvement of key policy actors or stakeholders to address implementation gaps (Asagba, 2005; Ridde, 2009; Brynard, 2009; Ohemeng et al., 2012; Lledó & Poplawski-Ribeiro, 2013; Bénit-Gbaffou, 2018; Molete et al., 2020; Kipo-Sunyehzi, 2020a). In Southern Africa, there is the incorporation of the *Ubuntu* principles in public policies (Nkondo, 2007; Aina, 2013; Norren, 2014; Qobo & Nyathi, 2016; Awortwi, 2017).

## Conclusion and Implications of the Study Observations

The observations of the study imply that the three generations of implementation research occur largely in America and Europe and at different paces among implementation scholars. Other parts of the world may have experienced the so-called generations of implementation research in a different style or way but were prominent among scholars in the USA and Europe. The study reveals that the trends and directions of implementation research in developing countries including Africa appear slow and not as systematic as the three generations of implementation research. It is in this regard this study or paper attempts to bridge the literature gap between policy design and implementation. Thus, one contribution is to connect public policy design to its implementation through the adoption of the synthesizers’ perspective (Winter, 2012) or the approach that works better (Kipo-Sunyehzi, 2020a). This study maintains that neglect of the policy design stage is inimical to implementation. Also, the study adds to the policy discourse on factors that facilitate and or inhibit policy implementation. The rationale for contrasting trends of policy implementation research between developed and Africa is to draw the attention of African governments, policy actors and policymakers to the importance of policy implementation research as many of the leaders appear to pay less attention to the policy-making process than implementation. Also, to bridge the gap between Africa and the developed world.

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## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** the author declares no conflict of interest.

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