DYNAMICS AFFECTING STUDENTS' RESEARCH WORK: THE OBSERVATION OF GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

There ongoing discourse with emphasis on the quality of students' research work at the Department of Graphics Design, Takoradi Polytechnic has reached an alarming height and the conclusion reached by the debaters is the very fact that, the quality of research work among graphic design students is dwindling. The missing link which is eluded researchers is their inability to determine what quality is, and the extent to which together with other factors affect quality. In fact observations with respect to the factors that define quality research seem to be abstract, and in most cases not concrete enough. The purpose of the current study is to examine the dynamics affecting the quality of students research work, this time around from the perspective of the graphic design student. The exploratory research method was employed to explore deeper into the issue, and its associated factors. The major findings of the study were that graphic design students were not enthused about the delivery of the research lecturer and the course content. The facilities for quality research were nothing to write home about, but the system of supervision was very satisfactory. Finally, graphic design students professed they were a contributing factor, affecting the quality of research work done at the department of graphic design. The study therefore recommends that an enhancement of the factors of quality will inadvertently improve the dynamics of quality research work.
Keywords: Dynamics, Quality of Research, Student's Perception, Polytechnic, Project work

1.0 Introduction

Research recently has become a vital tool for development and progress, and in academia it is either a requirement for graduation for students or promotion for academic staff. In all these two areas what is sought after is the quality of the research and its ability to contribute to existing knowledge. Focusing on the aspect that is related to students, it must be emphasized that it is also a very vital requirement for graduating graphic design students. No matter how a graphic design student who is due for graduation excel in all his/her practical and theory work he or she is bound to be denied his/her certificate upon failure to pass in project work or long essay writing at the end of the three year stipulated period of learning. It is also in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Higher National Diploma (HND) certificate awarded by the National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABPTEX) of Ghana upon recommendation by the Academic Board and the External Examiners/Moderators, based on the performance of the student, and upon confirmation by the National Accreditation Board (NAB) of Ghana that the programme has been accredited by its board (Students Handbook, 2015)

This requirement highlights the need for every graphic design student to take project writing seriously, and this cannot be done in isolation. One must take a programme in research methods, and to a larger extent statistics to equip oneself with the necessary skills.

The purpose of undertaking research work by graphic design students is to; equip them to be able to conduct their own independent work; add to the body of existing knowledge; and secondly give them unique skills and knowledge in the field of research methodology. According to Benson et al. (2015) acquiring research writing skills and accumulating the needed knowledge does not wholly ensure quality in terms of research work done by graphic design students. It brings to the fore the issue of what is quality and in the context of research work? It is a term very ambiguous and very difficult to define in this context. It must be reiterated that it is very subjective (Reva, 2005) hence, the present study. The ability of the current study to define the concept and sources of quality research work will go a long way to determine what the study means by writing quality research works.

Recently, serious concerns, arguments, counter arguments and series of academic discourse on the quality of students' research works at the Department of Graphics Design of Takoradi Polytechnic, Takoradi, Ghana has been ongoing. The most recent, and the last straw that broke the camel's back was a workshop held by the department on Wednesday 9th March 2016 dubbed "*Effective Supervision and Assessment of Students' Project and Practical Work*.'' Speakers who took their turn in delivering lamented on the issue, and how it is contributing to the declining standards in the research work of graphic design students. Some discovered that graphic design students have poor writing skills, which seems from the discussion/debate that, they are not taught research methods at all, lack understanding of the basic concepts of research, and their research reports are poorly organized among others. At the end of the workshop it was pathetic that none, particularly the resource persons, were unable to define what constitutes quality in research and the prevailing dynamics that affect the phenomenon.

The failure of the debates to point out what the phenomenon really is and how best it can be minimized informed the current study the Dynamics Affecting Students' Research Works: The Observation of the Graphic Design Student.

2.0. Background Literature

The relationship between research methods and the quality of students' research work in academia has come under strong scrutiny recently, and a great concern for academicians, particularly in tertiary institutions, but interestingly, little search has been done to that effect. It is hoped that the present research will provide deeper insights into the problem and possibly provides solution to the challenge(s) faced by the graphic design students.

Quality in its broadest sense is a degree of excellence: the extent to which something is fit for its purpose. Better still product or service quality is defined in conformance with requirements, free from defects or contamination or simply the degree to which customers are satisfied with the product or service. Academic Quality Assurance Unit (AQAU Report 2015) In the perspective of Mahmood (2011) quality comprise the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. In operationalizing the definition whiles keeping in mind the concept of quality, Mahmood (2011) defined quality research work as "work which is time bound and meets the set time, having a well and tested or proven approach which is internally and externally valid, with reliable data as its foundation, free from intellectual theft, employs appropriate analytical methods very practical in nature, supported by statistical evidence and above all informs practice".

Kumar (2009) on his part linked quality of a research work to the characteristics of research, thus any research work that is "controlled, has rigorous methodology, very structured in nature, valid and verifiable conclusions, empirical and critical". It is clear that what the two definitions seek to make known is the fact that, quality is evident in students research work only when the methodology is deemed to be sound, the work has practical relevance to society and lastly, the results of the work can be verified by peers or the scientific community. A critical look at what the two are positing, one can deduce that; the research content, the process and its management are critical indicators for quality. This in Benson et al. (2015) view is very subjective, and is only the formed opinions of few. It's relegated the key stakeholders; student researcher, supervisor and the typist to the background denying the scientific community their perceptions and shared experiences in the ongoing discourse, and frantic efforts to arrest the perceived phenomenon of declining. If all these are not factored into the process of correction, the debate will go on unabated with nothing concrete achieved.

The gap created above informed Andresen (2000) to assert that as academicians we will be pursuing a wrong course by relying on our own observation which yields nothing concrete but taking the pains to go to the stakeholders (students) to find out their perception and evaluating the evidence collected will be fruitful. Tackling the issue from this angle has practical meaning and makes clear the opinion of the stakeholders in the quality chain, and removes all forms of abstract reasons we always assign to the fallen standards in project work.

Adopting this all inclusive approach to a larger extent information from the Department of Graphic Designs will inform the best policy practices to be employed and implemented and if not arrest entirely, minimize the purported declining standards. In exploring the dynamics that affect quality of students the researchers reviewed other studies giving another dimension of the phenomenon. According to Isani and Virk (2005) the quality of research cannot be attributed only to the student a key stakeholder but it must be mentioned that it has direct or indirect relationship with quality of research tutor or teacher who imparts the knowledge onto the student. Mahmood (2011) added the course, nature of supervision done and the facilities available as

other notable factors with equal strong impact. The present study will adopt all these dynamics, but this time around will include the student a major stakeholder in ensuring quality of research work and project. The study will expatiate more on the already discovered factors in literature. With respect to the research teacher or tutor, Barnett (1992) sought to convince readers that, the two concepts effective teaching and research are analogous and very essential. He argued further that for teaching to be very effective it requires effective and consistent research experience of the teacher. In relation to the present study it can be deduced from Barnett's argument that a teacher who is consistently involved in research work thus the process enhances his/her quality of teaching and helps to acquire new learning experience. Aside that it creates the platform for the teacher to effectively and efficiently develop the curriculum and in-depth course outlines and do good supervision.

Mahmood (2011) in a related study, indicated students registered their dissatisfaction with experience, methodology and statistical knowledge of the teacher, confirming the teacher's inexperience in his own field. Secondly, regarding new methods, qualitative design and synopsis proves that students could not prepare synopsis and handle effectively basic problems in the research process. In terms of facilities the study found out that it was up to the mark, an indication that, conducive atmosphere has been created to enhance learning of the course. In terms of supervision, the finding was not in favour of the supervisor which shows the teachers once again are not equipped with and well trained for the task, there by affecting quality in the work of students. In the nutshell, it is worthwhile improving the quality of teaching, but one must confess it will be fruitless when there are no complimentary efforts in the provision of quality and sustainable research facilities such as twenty-four (24) hour internet service, computers, softwares, design journals and reports and well- furnished and stocked library among others in an effective manner.

3.0 Methodology

Research Design

The present study used both the qualitative and quantitative research. The survey and exploratory research design were used to execute the study. The exploratory method was employed by the researchers to explore deeper into the problem and related areas as we had little knowledge and as such little had also been done in relation to the topic to that effect, whiles the survey design was used to solicit the opinion of participants on the phenomenon (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Research Population

The study population comprised the third year research students of the Department of Graphic Design, Takoradi Polytechnic who had taken a research methodology course in the second year, practically involved in the research process, and currently writing their project works and long essays as a requirement for graduation. The whole student population of three hundred and seventy-eight was taken as the sample of the study. Two hundred (200) students responded to the survey, with One hundred and forty-four (144) being male students and fifty-six (56) female students

Sampling

In the present study, the targeted sample was students who are pursuing graphic design at department of Graphics Design, Takoradi Polytechnic. However, the sample population was further confined to third year students of the department who are currently doing their research work and as a matter of fact directly involved in the research process. The basic reason for considering these students was due to the fact all of them had already read or completed CAG 271 research methodology course. A total number of one hundred and forty- four 144 students took part in the study.

Regarding the sampling method, purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed in the selection process from the target population. The convenience sampling was used to select participants on the basis of availability. Purposive sampling is a technique where respondents are chosen based on their linkage with the phenomenon understudy, hence the selection of graphic design students (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Instrument Development and Procedure

A self-administered questionnaire was developed with the variables in mind (teachers, supervisors, research course, facilities) with the students as a key stakeholder in the research quality process added to it. Each variable was further broken down into measurable statements on a three point Likert scale. The prepared questionnaire was personally administered. In response 200 questionnaires were received. The questionnaires were processed using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) and data analysed keeping in mind the objectives of the study. Tables, frequencies, percentages and means for each of the items were prepared to enhance understanding.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Demographic Features

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	144	72
Female	56	28
Total	200	100
Age		
18-24	142	71
25-30	48	24
31-36	10	5
36 and above	0	0
Total	200	100
Status		
Full-time student	176	88
Part-time Student	24	12
Total	200	100

Source: Field data, January 2016

Table 1 shows a total of 72% of the respondents who participated in the survey were male students with only 28% forming the female population. The present study has more males than females for the only reason that graphic design course over the years has been and still the preserve of males and hardly do you get many female students enroll in it, but it must be put on record that the few that enroll really justify themselves.

In terms of age 71% of the respondents were within the age range of 18-24. Currently, that's the age cohort of polytechnic students who are admitted in the institution, aside that it is good to have a young generation of graphic design students get actively involved in the research process as it will go a long way to help them in their graphic design career.

With respect to status a heavy majority of 88% of the respondents were full time students whiles a minority of 12% were part-time (evening) students that is to say work during the day and school in the evening. Normally complaints are lodged by students that by virtue of they working and schooling at the same time it affects them in dedicating ample time for their research work hence, the need for this demographic feature.

Table 2: The Research Tutor/Lecturer

Statements	Rating						Mean
	Agree		Neither agree or disagree		Disagree		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Quality of research works among graphic design students is low due to the inexperience of the research tutor	87	43.5	34	17.0	79	39.5	1.96
Research quality is dipping among graphic design students due to the poor guidance of the research lecturer	80	40	49	24.5	71	35.5	1.95
Inability of the research tutor to link the research course to the programme of study makes it difficult for graphic design students to understand what is taught in class	108	54	28	14	64	32	1.78
Limited knowledge of the research tutor affects the output of the graphic design students research work	90	45	32	16	78	39	1.94
Lack of periodical training of the research tutor affects the research methods course taught in the graphic designs	76	38	44	22	80	40	2.02
The use of big research jargons by the tutor makes the research lecture boring among graphic design students	73	36.5	43	21.5	84	42	2.05
The inability of the research lecturer to practicalise what is taught in class makes it difficult for graphic design students to do quality research works	96	48	31	15.5	73	36.5	1.89

Source: Field Data January 2016

Regarding the research tutor, and the role he/she plays in ensuring quality in the research work and project of graphic design students, the present study shows that graphic design students perceive the research lecturer as a critical factor affecting the quality of research work in the department. They were not satisfied with his/her depth of experience in teaching the course, inability to guide students through the research process, inability to link the course to the programme of study, limited knowledge in the course, and finally the skill to practicalise what is taught in class. On the other hand a critical evaluation of the figures disagreeing to the issues was too close to call. This gives cause for the researcher to attempt to believe that either the respondents failed to understand the questions or felt playing it safe to avoid future trouble in terms of victimization. When research results show such a trend, it becomes difficult to know the exact perception of the respondents, and be able to come up with right policies and programs to mitigate the phenomenon.

Table 3: Research Course

Statements	Rating						Mean
	Agree		Neither agree or disagree		Disagree		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Research course and practical graphic works have wide gaps	100	50	31	15.5	69	34.5	1.84
The research course undertaken by graphic design students is such that, they are ill equipped to prepare their synopsis	97	48.5	46	23	57	28.5	1.80
The research course done by graphic design students is not equipped with modern research methods	94	47.5	37	18.5	69	34.5	2.03
The research course of graphic design students is non- scoring affecting their attitude towards it	83	41.5	41	20.5	76	38	1.96
Research course has little relevance to the graphic design course	60	30	37	18.5	103	51.5	2.21
The nature of research methods done by graphic design students is too advance	52	26	37	18.5	111	55.5	2.29
Graphic students believe on the field of work research methods will not be applied in any respect	67	33.5	50	25	83	41.5	2.08

Source: Field Data January 2016

The observation of graphic design students about the research methodology course revealed that there is a wide gap between the course and the practical works of students, it offers them little skills in preparing their synopsis or project proposals for research, quality research methods and designs are not adequately treated and the non-scoring nature of the course makes it extremely difficult for graphic design student to handle effectively and efficiently activities in the research process hence, affecting the quality of research work undertaken by them.

Table 4: Research Facilities

Statements	Rating						Mean
	Agree		Neither agree or disagree		Disagree		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Internet access is available 24hrs for graphic design students to do research studies	44	22	36	18	120	60	2.48
The graphic design library is well furnished with journals, and other research documents for students to learn and have a feel of what was taught in class	36	18	32	16	132	66	2.48
Graphic design students are introduced to research analysis soft wares to enhance their research work	45	22.5	31	15.5	124	62	2.39
Graphic design students subscribe to international journals on research education	44	22	36	18	120	60	2.38
The e-library is opened to graphic designs students to search for relevant and related documents for their project works.	63	31.5	47	23.5	90	45	2.13
Graphic design students have a research laboratory where the tutor gives them one on one tuition as to how apply what is taught in class	44	22	31	15.5	125	62.5	2.40
Graphic design students are sent to research related institutions to enjoy their facilities.	47	23.5	29	14.5	124	62	2.38

Source: Field Data January 2016

With respect to research facilities and their availability for graphic design students to embark on consistent, effective and search for current information, figures on table 4 supported by the mean ratings proves that the Department of Graphic Design lacks the basic, required facilities and resources to allow effective and quality research works to be conducted by students. The issues raised were not tolerated by the respondents.

Table 4 touching on the observation of graphic design students and the research supervisor's role in the quality of research work done at the Graphic Design Department, data gathered proved beyond all reasonable doubt, with favourable mean ratings that the supervisor is in no way a barrier or hindrance when it comes to quality of research works and project. Apart from the variables; supervisors not been given refresher training for supervision and their inability to make ample to meet and coach/guide students at every stage of the research process before students commence research work all others were in their favour. Summary of the views in figure and percentage wise exhibited on table 4.

Table 4: The Research Supervisor

Statements	Rating						Mean
	Agree		Neither agree or disagree		Disagree		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Most of the supervisors in the department of graphic design are not well vexed in the research area	69	34.5	43	21.5	88	44	2.09
Most of the supervisors do not have command over modern day research techniques	68	34	61	30.5	69	34.5	2.04
Supervisors fail to provide adequate guidance at each level of the research work to graphic design students	70	35	61	30.5	69	34.5	2.00
Most supervisors are not given refresher training for supervision at the department of graphic design	89	44.5	60	30	51	28.5	1.81
Supervisors do not make ample time to coach graphic design students very well at every stage of the research process before they commence research work	108	54	45	22.5	47	23.5	1.70
Some supervisors extort money from students and write their project work for them	62	31	58	29	80	40	2.09
Some supervisors take more students they can handle with the intention of getting money and end up not doing any good work	64	32	71	35.5	65	32.5	2.01

Source: Field Data January 2016

Table 6: The Research Student

Statements	Rating						Mean
	Agree		Neither agree or disagree		Disagree		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
Graphic design students believe research methods is non- scoring and fail to attend lectures	89	44.5	55	27.5	56	28	1.38
Graphic students do not intend doing any serious research in the future	97	48.5	35	17.5	68	34	1.32
Graphic students have a poor notion when it comes to research methods	82	41	42	21	76	38	1.45
Graphic design students perceive research methods a boring course	78	39	51	25.5	71	35.5	1.04
Graphic design students believe there is no relationship between design and research	54	27	48	24	98	44	2.22
Design students employ research in coming out with their designs	86	43	54	27	60	30	1.87
Students see research methods as worthless	52	26	66	33	82	41	2.15
Research method should be made a required part of the graphics design programme as it makes design students employable	106	58	39	19.5	55	27.5	1.75

Source: Field Data, January 2016

With respect to the student researcher and how they affect quality of research work amongst graphic design students the figures exhibited with their individual mean ratings it shows that students are becoming a barrier to the quality of research work done at the department of graphic design. They professed to all the factors which on their part affect quality of research work with the exception of disagreeing to the fact that there is no relations between graphic design and research, and research method been seen as worthless. Table 6 has the summary of the views.

5.0 Findings/Conclusions

The following were the major findings and conclusions emanating from the study;

With respect to the research lecturer, graphic design students were not enthused and comfortable with his/her depth of experience in teaching the course, inability to guide students through the research process, inability to link the course to the programme of study, and limited knowledge in the course. This is a clear indication that, the research lecturer is a critical factor affecting the quality of research works. This finding was consistent with Mahmood (2011) who discovered that students were dissatisfied with the experience and statistical knowledge of the researcher teacher.

In relation to the research course, graphic design students were of the view that, they are not prepared adequately to acquire the needed skills to be able to write their synopsis or proposal, quality research methods and design as well the non-scoring nature of the course makes it difficult for them to tackle challenges relating to the research work. These discoveries points to the fact that the quality and depth of the research course is not up to the standard required. In their study Isani and Virk (2005), attributed the poor nature of the research course content to outdated and unrevised curricula. They pointed out these when they were discussing quality research activities in Pakistani Universities. Mahmood (2011) in a related submission said due to the unrevised nature in terms of the content of the research report, students are unable to prepare, defend their synopsis for research, and above all poorly positioned to tackle problems concerning research.

The perception of graphic design students on the research facilities proved that all the required facilities needed for quality research work to be done at the department of graphic design was non-existent. This indicates that the polytechnic is not doing much in providing the basic facilities to research students. Mahmood (2011) citing the Pakistani National Education Policy Report (1998-2010, p.73) indicated the quality of research work has dwindled because of the lack of libraries, training facilities and research literature facilities. On the contrary, he Mahmood (2011) found out that, research facilities were excellent, and in good condition for quality research work to be done. His discovery may be one out of thousand giving credit to the institution employed in the study, but earlier comments suggest that research facilities are not sufficient, libraries are poorly furnished with modern books and of low quality. This clearly shows it's a key factor affecting quality research work.

The view of graphic design students about the research supervisor with respect to all the issues were in the favour of the research supervisors. This only goes to show that research supervisors are not a factor affecting the quality of research work done by graphic design students. Discoveries in literature contradict the current finding. Isani and Virk (2005) pointed out research supervisors do not abide by time as we all know research is also time bound; they lack the needed experience, training and knowledge in the modern techniques of research. Considering Barnett (1992) submission linking the quality of teaching to research, thus a good teacher is equally a good researcher means when you are actively involved in the research process, it sharpens your skills and increases the depth of knowledge you impart onto your students. One can confidently say that in the current finding the supervisor who doubles as the teacher did his work well. But in the same study, the same respondents were of the view that the research teacher was not on top of his or her job making him or her a factor affecting quality research work. The sudden turn around could be that for now the research teacher has little to do with the marks of students, but the supervisor does hence, the painting a good picture about the supervisor to avoid being victimised. It could also be that the researcher student never thought of the researcher supervisor doubling as the research teacher hence differing in opinion on one person but in different designations

The graphic design students sharing their view on whether they are a factor affecting the quality of research work confessed they are a key barrier to quality of research work. They confessed to all the issues posed to them.

6.0 Recommendations

Keeping in mind the findings and conclusions emanating from the present study, the following recommendations were arrived at;

The findings exhibited that, the research lecturer was not up to the task with respect to his or her field-research methods. The current study will suggest that he or she be given periodical training, attend refresher courses and as well be attached to research institutions to enhance the quality of research at the graphic design department. Incentive packages like sponsorship to attend workshops, conferences, seminars and related programmes frequently can also improve his or her skills which in the long run will boost quality research work.

The study discovered that the content of the research methods course was not up to the required standard. The current study will suggest special training be given the tutor and as much as possible research experts from analogous institutions be drafted into the team for curriculum development to give inputs in consonance with current research practice keeping in mind quality.

A finding about the research facilities at the graphic design department shows they were non- existent. The researchers will entreat the design department to make provision for the state of the design facilities to aid in the research work of graphic design students.

A finding regarding the research supervisor shows that he or she is not a barrier to quality research work at the graphic design department. The study will encourage supervisors to keep up the good work and consistently develop themselves to keep up with current practice.

On the part of the research student, they openly profess they were a barrier to the quality of research work done. The study will advise students to be proactive and attach some amount of seriousness to the course in terms of approach. Secondly, the design department will help improve the studying of the course by making research methods scoring and sensitise students to see the relevance of research methods to their programme of study.

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