Supervision of Undergraduate Final Year's Project Requirement in Nigerian Universities – The Way out of the Wood

Chika Josephine Ifedili[1] & Stella Omiunu[1]

[1] Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria

Correspondence: Chika Josephine Ifedili, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, P.O. Box 10073, Ugbowo, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. E-mail: theifedilis@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study investigated the supervision of undergraduates' degree projects in Nigerian universities following the general allegation that the present day projects do not contribute to any knowledge because students copy past work and project supervisors do not have time for supervision. The population of the study was 27 federal Nigerian universities. A random sample of 9 federal Nigerian universities (33.3%) was used for the study. The instrument used in gathering the data was the questionnaire designed by the researcher titled Students' Project Management Inventory (SPMI). The validity of the instrument was done by both experts in educational administration and planning. Test-retest method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. A Z-Test and common percent were the statistics used to analyze the data. The major finding was that the increased population of degree students with decreased number of supervisors have made it difficult to have good supervision of projects. Based on this finding, it is recommended that degree project requirement should be optional or elective and not compulsory.

Keywords: supervision, projects, undergraduates, Nigeria, universities

1. Introduction

A project is one of the requirements for any undergraduate student to graduate from any Nigerian university. It is usually carried out during the student's final year in the university. At the penultimate year in the university, student takes a required course called Research Method. This paves the way for the student's project at the final year. Project is seen as a student's Master Piece. It gives the student the opportunity of looking into various problems in his or her area of specialization and following scientific method to systematically proffer solution to the problem. The student carries out research for further learning and development. According to Stanford University update on the net (2011), students carry out research although it might be difficult to satisfy themselves immensely. It offers students the opportunity to participate in creating a brand new idea and do a significant piece of work with lasting impact.

In the past, students carried out researches with interest, concentration, enthusiasm, and joy. The success of a student producing an original work used to be a well acclaimed success to the supervisor, the department, the faculty, the university and the public at large. The management of the students' projects was not as difficult as it is today. This is because in those days, students were more matured, more inquisitive, student population was low, students had so much interest to learn, students were comfortable both in provision of accommodation and proper feeding. Lecturers were very serious minded, highly respected, conscious of the students' progress, presented themselves as good role models and would never engage in any unethical practices like examination malpractice, blocking and inflation of marks.

According to Egborge (2002), the technological development of any nation can only be achieved through research and not through importation and transfer of foreign technology. He lamented that Nigerian government's confidence in foreigners who must be paid in hard currency to carry out researches for her in the midst of qualified Nigerian lecturers has been a big devourer to Nigerian foreign exchange. He mentioned among other things that lack of up to date equipment, inadequate basic infrastructure, inadequate fund etc. as some of the things disheartening and frustrating in carrying out researches in Nigerian universities.

In carrying out a project, students have the responsibilities to satisfy. These are to maintain regular contact with their supervisor, to be religious with their time management, to formulate the problem before asking for supervisor's contribution, to monitor their project progress and to be self-motivated and be able to work independently. The supervisors who are also the project assessors also have the responsibilities of making themselves available to the students for consultation, provide advice and guidance to the students and evaluate the students' projects in terms of quality and quantity.

The management and assessment of final year project degree requirement seem not to be properly organized. Some staff handling projects do not seem to be knowledgeable of what they are expected to do. The new lecturers to the departments seem not to be properly oriented in the supervision of students' projects before students are allocated to them to supervise. Jawitz, Shay and Moore (2002) advised that the level of support given to the students determines to a greater extent the quality of the output.

Today, the story of students' quest for further knowledge and development seem to be different. The students are poorly accommodated – a room housed only a student in the past, today the same room houses 6-9 students. Many students eat only once a day which they call 0-0-1. This means no breakfast, no lunch but eats only supper. Libraries are inadequate. With the new information communication technology (ICT), researches should be easier but it is not so in Nigerian universities because of the epileptic power supply. According to Ifedili (2002), 45% of students go to university only for certification and not for knowledge. This is because of the situations in the universities. University lecturers have been embarking on one strike after another for the federal government to improve on the infrastructures in the existing universities rather than embarking on new ones. The strike actions achieved little or no change. Lecturers carry heavy work-load. They have to carry out researches which are the major criteria for promotion. Many lecturers are saddled with administrative work in addition to their primary assignment. The students' population continues to increase yearly with so many final year students assigned to a lecturer for their projects. In fact, in addition to Masters and Doctor of Philosophy students, a lecturer has, about 40-50 final year undergraduate project students to supervise in many faculties eg social sciences, education, arts etc.. This makes it impossible for the lecturers to supervise the degree projects as they should. The students seem to see project requirement as a step that must be taken in order to graduate. Many students do not seem to be interested in carrying out the research. Many go to other universities and copy an old project which his supervisor may not be able to dictate because of work-load. Some students just photocopy an old project and put their names at the covers. Some pay some mercenaries to write for them etc. In fact the present situation with project writing in many faculties is very upsetting for anyone who has education at heart.

The researcher wonders why the degree students must write projects knowing very well that the situation at the university makes it impossible to have genuine projects done. Why not leave projects for just the Masters and Doctor of Philosophy students as it is done in some developed nations like the United States of America so that the lecturers can at least supervise the post graduate students well and there will be satisfying outcome. However, if the writing of projects must continue, there must be a surgical change in the organization and management of degree students' projects' writing. A handful of degree projects from the researcher's experience showed repetition of some topics. Even when the topic is banned, some students rephrased them to be accepted but end up with same write up and findings.

1.1 Statement of the Problems

The importance of writing degree projects in Nigerian universities as a requirement for graduation seems to be whirling out of control. The students are becoming uninterested because of load of problems facing them in the universities e.g poor feeding, poor accommodation, epileptic power supply, over stressed lecturers, inadequate library, inadequate infrastructural facilities etc. Many unethical things are done by students to fulfill this requirement. There is an allegation that some students copy old projects. Some just photocopy old projects and type the name page to reflect theirs and submit to their supervisors who may not be able to detect the problem due to heavy workload. Some employ mercenaries to produce the work for them. Some download from the internet a completed work and put their names as the authors. This is one of the reasons why the quality of education is falling. This situation in the universities does not augur well for the progress in education. There is need to investigate these allegations and if they are true, a way forward would be suggested so that education will continue to be proactive instead of retroactive.

1.2 Research Questions

From the statement of problem above, the following research questions are raised to guide the study: -

1. Is project a necessary requirement for degree graduation?

2. Do the students' projects really contribute to knowledge?

3. Are students enthusiastic in writing the projects?

4. Are the supervisors interested in supervising these projects?

5. Do the students carry out the projects by themselves?

6. Mention some students' unethical practices in project writing?

7. Mention some supervisors' unethical practices in project writing?

1.3 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated from the research questions; -

HO1 There will be no significant difference between male and female academic staff responses on the importance of project as a requirement for degree graduation.

HO2 There will be no significant difference in the responses of academic staff based on the years of experience as to the importance of project as a requirement for degree graduation.

HO3 There will be no significant different in the responses of academic staff based on sex as to students' attitude towards degree project.

1.4 Significant of the Study

This study is an important study which will benefit many especially Nigeria which is a developing nation. The government will benefit by knowing that the universities are not wasting their time on unproductive projects but seriously researching on areas which will help the country to meet the global standard. There will be better time utilization and goal setting with regards to projects in the universities. The university will plan better and will achieve positive results. The lecturers will be better organized and productive when they are aware of the need to be more dedicated and also have less students allocated to them for better project supervision. The students will be more focused and serious with their projects when there is public awareness of the importance of projects. The students will aim to put in their best and produce acclaimed work which may win them fame and awards.

2. Methodology

The research design used was ex post-facto. The design deals with the collection of two sets of data from a group of subjects with an attempt to determine the subsequent relationship between those sets of data. The population of the study was all the faculties in 27 federal Nigerian universities. A random sample of 9 federal Nigerian universities (33.3%) was used for the study. Five faculties were randomly selected to participate in the study. These were Social Science, Arts, Science, medicine and engineering. From each university, a stratified random sampling method was used to select 20 male and 20 female academic staff to participate in the study. A total 1800 (900 male and 900 female) academic staff participated in the study.

The instrument used in gathering the data was the questionnaire designed by the researcher titled Students' Project Management Inventory (SPMI). The questionnaire was made up of two parts: Part A was based on respondents' personal data while Part B contained fifteen questions bothering on public awareness of importance of final year projects, willingness of students to carry out projects, considered unique relationship between the supervisor and the project students, barrier to effective project supervision, unethical practices by the students and supervisors, management's efforts to alleviate the workload of the supervisors, whether the students' projects contribute to existing knowledge, etc. The questionnaire was augmented by oral interview. The validity of the instrument was done by both experts in educational administration and planning. The Test-retest method was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. A Z-Test and common percentage were the statistics used to analyze the data. The scores were rated in such a way that the score of 0-1.0 =very poor, 1.01- 2.0=poor, 2.01-3.0= fair, 3.01-3.35=good and 3.5-4.0=excellent.

3. Results

Answers to Research Questions are on Table 1

Table 1. Answer to research questions

Questions	Yes	No	Total
1. Is project a necessary requirement for degree graduation?	62%	38%	100%
2. Do the students' projects really contribute to	55%	45%	100%

knowledge?			
3. Are students enthusiastic to write projects?	52%	48%	100%
4.Are the supervisors interested in supervising these projects	79%	21%	100%
5. Do students carry out the projects by themselves?	67%	33%	100%
6. Mention some students' unethical practices in project writing?	Plagiarizing, blocking, paying someone to carry out the project, bribery etc.		
7. Mention some supervisors' unethical practices in project writing?	Not often available, sexual harassment, taking bribe, delay in reading the projects etc.		

3.1 Testing of Hypotheses

HO1 The first null hypothesis which states that there will be no significant difference between male and female academic staff responses, on the importance of project as a requirement for degree graduation was tested with the data collected from the questionnaire. The result is on Table 2.

Table 2. Test of significant difference in the responses of male and female academic staff on the importance of project for degree requirement

Statistics	Males	Females	Calculated Z-Value	Table Value
Number	900	900		
Mean	2.76	2.79	1.50	1.96
SD	0.45	0.38		

From Table 2, the calculated Z-Value at 0.05-Confidence Level, is 1.50 while the Table Value is 1.96, the null hypothesis that there will be no significant difference between male and female academic staff responses, on the importance of project as a requirement for degree graduation is therefore accepted. Both male and female staff averagely agreed that the degree project was necessary. The male staff average rating was 2.76 as opposed to their female counterparts. This means that both had fair rating for the importance of project as a requirement for graduation. There is variation in their average responses but the variation was found to be insignificant. Out of 62% (1116) of respondents who agreed that project requirement was important, 51.08% (570) were males while 48.92% (546) were females. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents agreed that project as a requirement for first degree certification was not necessary.

HO2 The second null hypothesis that states that there will be no significant difference in the responses of academic staff based on years of experience as to the importance of project as a requirement for degree graduation was analyzed from the data collected from the questionnaire and the result on Table 3.

Table 3. Test of significant difference in the responses of academic staff based on years of experience as to the need for degree project requirement

Statistics	Less than 10 Years	10 Years and above	Calculated Z–Value	Table Value
Statistics	1191	609		
Number	2.84	2.67	7.39	1.96
SD	0.48	0.41		

From Table 3, the calculated Z-Value at 0.05 Confidence Level is 7.39 while the Table value is 1.96.The null hypothesis that states that there will be no significant difference in the responses of academic staff based on years of experience as to the importance of project as a requirement for degree graduation is therefore rejected. This means that years' experience affected the responses of the participants. The average response for less experienced staff was 2.84 while their counterparts who were experienced had 2.67. Although rating-wise, both

can be said to be fair in their ratings, however, there is a significant difference in their responses When randomly interviewed, 85% of the interviewed respondents emphasized the need for universities to higher candidates with post graduate certificates. According to them, the present culture of recruiting many first degree candidates leaves the problem of inadequate supervisors unsolved. This is because the first degree holders neither teach nor supervise projects. There is also poor orientation of staff as mentioned by inexperienced supervisors

HO3 The third null hypothesis that states that there will be no significant different in the responses of academic staff based on sex as to students' attitude towards degree project was tested and analyzed as it is on Table 4.

Table 4. Test of significant difference in the responses of male and female academic staff based on sex on the attitude of students towards degree project

Statistics	Males	Females	Calculated Z-Value	Table Value
Number	900	900		
Mean	1.85	1.81	2.11	1.96
SD	0.42	0.37		

From Table 4, the calculated Z-Value at 0.05-Confidennce Level is 2.11 while the Table Value is 1.96. The null hypothesis that states that there will be no significant different in the responses of academic staff based on sex as to students' attitude towards degree project is therefore rejected. The average score fore mqles was 1.85 while their female counterparts was 1.81. Both male and female academic staff agreed that students' attitude towards projects was poor. However, statistically, there is a significant difference in their responses. The general consensus was that students were not interested in writing projects.

3.2 Discussions

From the data analysis, 62% of the respondents agreed that project writing was necessary a first degree requirement However, 38% of the respondents were of the opinion that project writing as a requirement for first degree was not necessary. When people who felt that project was not necessary were further interviewed, 78% of them agreed that the number of students to a supervisor was an average of 45 students. They further emphasized that since projects were individually written, there was no way quality assurance could be maintained. These respondents according to questionnaire were academic staff in the faculties of education, social sciences and art. The remaining 22% emphasized on inadequate equipment and poor infrastructural facilities as the main issues militating against project writing as a degree requirement. Sex of the respondents did not show any significant differences but years of experience showed that there was significant difference. Respondents with ten years and above experience agreed that project writing was necessary more than the people with less years of experience.

The attitude of students towards project writing was rated by both male and female respondents to be poor. Fifty-two percent of respondents however agreed that students were interested in writing projects while 79% of respondents agreed that supervisors were interested in supervising projects. There is still hope to have good project writing but the organization and management seems to be the major problem for achieving the goal of project writing.

Many unethical practices were mentioned like plagiarism, paying someone to carry out the project, bribery, supervisors not often available, supervisor's delay in reading the projects for further corrections, sexual harassment by some supervisors etc. These unethical practices although they are unacceptable, if the project writing is properly organized would be minimized. Nigeria is a developing nature and the contribution to knowledge of projects is very vital. If only 55% of the respondents agreed that students' projects contribute to knowledge, then there is a problem somewhere that made 45% of respondents to have a contrary view. This also will tell some supervisors that they are not doing their work well in choosing researchable topics. There is hope, however, that the project will be structured and organized in future in a manner that students' projects will produce better results.

4. Conclusion

From the research findings, it is obvious that students were not interested in writing projects due to some conditions in the university that make project writing difficult. Although 79% of the supervisors were willing to supervise the project, the willingness is not backed by adequate time to be given to the students' project supervision due to workload. Poor orientation of inexperienced supervisor made some supervisors not to follow

guidelines. The individual project method seems not to be suitable to some faculties because of the population. Faculties of social sciences, arts and education – the humanities had high student/supervisor ratio than sciences. This makes the present project writing more stressful in humanities than in sciences although the sciences have the problems of inadequate research equipments and poor power supply.

5. Recommendations

- Conferences, seminars and workshops should be organized for both nthe academic staff and students to create awareness on the importance projects.
- Lecturers workload should be reduced to enable them supervise their students well.
- Employment of individuals with only first degree should be limited to minimum while more people with postgraduate certification should be employed. This is because the first degree holders neither teach nor supervise projects.
- Supervisors should have designated hours for students' projects placed on their office doors so that their students can have access to them.
- Better infrastructural facilities should be put in place. There is no way ICT can work properly with epileptic power supply.
- Equipments should be made available to students.
- Libraries should be updated to meet the global standard.
- Better accommodation should be provided for the students.
- Loans should be made available for poor students for better feeding. The loan can be repaired after graduation.
- In the faculties with high students/supervisor ratio, group projects are recommended. The group however cannot be more than two.
- Good time management should be religiously guarded by both the students and the supervisors.
- Supervisors should help the students in choosing their project topics. The present culture of students presenting their supervisors with three topics to choose one should be discouraged.
- New staff to the departments should be properly oriented into good project supervision.
- Assessment of project should not be done by the student's supervisor. It is hereby recommended that the supervisor and another staff in the department should independently assess the student. The average score would be the student's score. This will prevent students from being unfairly assessed.
- Project deadline should be observed. One week grace is recommended. Payment of levy is recommended for late project submission.
- In the faculties where there are many postgraduate students carrying out their projects and the final year degree students are many but few supervisors, it is recommended that projects should not be a requirement for final year degree students but can be made elective.

References

Egborge, A. B. (2000). *Servus nigerial* (p. 105). Effurum: Ben Miller.

Ifedili, C. J. (2002). Time utilization and goal setting by the students in University of Benin. *International Journal of Educational Planning and Administration, 1*(2), 149-162.

Jawitz, J., Shay, S., & Moore, R. (2002). Management and assessment of final year projects in engineering. *International Journal of Engineering, 18*(4), 472-478.

Net: Stanford University Update 6th Feb. 2011