Implications of Students Exit Survey on Management and Administration of Higher Education in Ghana

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to assess the learning gains, educational experience, facilities and resources availability to support graduate students using the University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa. Ghana (UMaT) as a case and examined its implications for administration of higher education in Ghana. Descriptive statistics were used to present the perception of participants. Relative Importance Index (RII) was used to analyze the relative importance of each variable of assessment of facilities according to each responses weight. The graduate students indicated that they have acquired fundamental knowledge in their field of study. Again, the graduate students appreciated the quality of their learning experience. However, two variables (Library resources and Health and Counselling) were not positively perceived by graduate students. The study recommends for educational administrators to appreciate feedback from graduate students and use same for improvement of their institutions.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Educational Administration, Quality Education, Students Satisfaction, Feedback, Graduate Education

Introduction

Educational administration and management in recent times is focusing on using feedback from major stakeholders to improve the quality and expectations of students. Graduate Exit Survey are questionnaire that are often administered to students who are graduating from a programme or course of study to obtain feedback from them in respect of their learning experiences especially from graduate programme. This is

because graduate students have certain higher expectations which must be met. According to Polson (2003) many institutions have strategies to recruit new graduate students, but at the same time, such institutions devote limited attention towards assisting same students as they transition through the demands of graduate study. Graduate schools must, in addition to assisting students academically in their education and training also put in place measures to support their social needs. According to Lehker and Furlong (2006) the goal of graduate and professional training is not only to impart academic material to students, but also to aid them take on a new role in society after completion of their studies. Weidman and Stein (2003) also observed that the goal of graduate education, especially at the doctoral level, is to assist in the socialization of certain social roles in relations to what they studied in school and their career aspirations. They observed that on completion of their programme, graduate and professional students are assumed to have acquired the necessary competences appropriate to their desired career outcomes. This assertion therefore, calls for examination of the role of graduate supervisors and university administrators to ensure that they perform their roles effectively.

Winston and Polkosnik (1988) have outlined five essential roles and functions of graduate supervisors/advisors. These are: being a reliable information source to students, assisting as departmental socializer, advocating for students' needs, serving as a role model, and assisting as career advisor. When graduate advisors are able to

perform these roles effectively, it helps their students to have the best of learning experience and acquire the necessary educational experience. Nerad and Miller (1996) cautioned that the challenges of meeting the needs of the current heterogeneous graduate students needs and aspirations require sensitive, flexible, and creative approaches. They further observed that graduate students' demographics in recent times are changing and as diverse as their lifestyles, values, and attitudes. Therefore, higher education administrators and managers must respond effectively to these students by directing attention to graduate students' needs by providing a critical link not only for students to persist and graduate but also for them to have satisfaction and self-esteem after their graduate education as well. Oklahoma State University (2000) observed that the perception of students on their educational experiences can yield important information for educational administration. In view of this, Caricati, Chiesa, Guglielmi, and Mariani, (2016) postulate that universities around the world are expected to train students for the labour market.

It is unknown how such studies have influence management practices of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Ghana. The purpose of this Graduate Exist Survey is to conduct an assessment on: learning gains, educational experience, and facilities and resources availability to support teaching and learning using the University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa, Ghana as a case and examine how the outcome of the study may impact higher education administration and management.

Research Questions

1. What are the learning gains that graduate students have obtained?
2. What are the educational experiences that graduate students have obtained?
3. How satisfied are graduate students in respect of availability of resources and facilities for learning?

Method

A descriptive survey approach was used in this study which adapted a set of questionnaire developed by Azah, Suja and Ismail (2012). The validity and reliability of the questionnaire was already tested, but because it was being used in a different geographical context, two experienced senior faculty members at KNUST were asked to review it to ensure content validity and fitness for purpose. The questionnaire consisted of the following parts: Respondents' Profile; Assessment of Learning Gains; Assessment of Educational Experience, and Assessment of Facilities and Resources. The acquired data for this study was primary data obtained by administering questionnaire to 21 graduate (18 Masters and 3 PhD) students in the University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa, Ghana.

A purposeful sampling method was used in the selection of the respondents.

All the data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 16.0. Descriptive statistics were used to present the perception of participants. Relative Importance Index (RII) was used to analyze the relative importance of each variable of facilities assessed. The RII is given by

$$RII = \frac{\sum W}{A * N}$$

Where; W is the weight given to each factor by the respondents and ranges from 1 to 5 (where Excellent – 5; Very Good – 4; Good – 3; Average – 2; Weak – 1) A is the highest weight (5 in this case) and N is the total number of respondents.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic qualities of respondents of the surveyed respondents of the graduate students were gender, educational financing, and employment status.

The result shows that majority of the respondents were Males constituting 85.7% whilst 14.3% constituted Female respondents. The result also shows that 76.2% were employed, 4.8% were unemployed and 19.0% had a job offer that was gathered on the study.

In terms of financing their education, 61.9% of the respondents were financing their education themselves, 19.0% had their educational financing by their employers, and 4.8% of the respondents had their financing from their parents/guardians and through scholarship and 9.5% from student loan.

Assessment of Learning Gains

In the assessment of learning gains, six statements related to Programme Outlines (POs) were provided and for each response, a Likert scale of 1 to 5 was given with "1"

indicating "Weak" and "5" indicating "excellent". The responses from the 18 master's students were used for the POs.

The POs were as follows:

PO 1: Ability to acquire and apply fundamental and advanced knowledge in the field of study

PO 2: Ability to integrate knowledge and manage advanced problems related to the field of study

PO 3: Ability to execute research plan, analyze and deliver research results through written and oral presentation

PO 4: Have the understanding of the elements related to project planning and management

PO 5: Ability to evaluate and make decision

PO 6: Ability to demonstrate lifelong learning skill and acquire additional knowledge

Table 1: Respondents perception on programme outcomes

		Responses				
PO		Weak	Average	Good	Very Good	Excellent
PO 1	**No.**	1	3	2	5	7
	%	5.6	16.7	11.1	27.8	39.9
PO 2	**No.**	1	3	4	4	6
	%	5.6	16.7	22.2	22.2	33.3
PO 3	**No.**	1	1	2	8	6
	%	5.6	5.6	11.1	44.4	33.3

PO 4	No.	2	1	3	9	3
	%	11.1	5.6	16.7	50.0	16.7
PO 5	No.	1	1	2	8	6
	%	5.6	5.6	11.1	44.4	33.3
PO 6	No.	0	2	2	8	6
	%	0	11.1	11.1	44.4	33.3

For PO 1, 39.9% of the respondents concurred that they positively gained knowledge ("excellent") to apply theory to practice. The other 27.8% responded "very good" while 16.7% expressed "average". The remaining 11.1% voted "good" whilst 5.6% provided a "weak" indication. For PO 2, 33.3% of the respondents answered "excellent", which is the ability to integrate knowledge to solve problems in their field, while 22.2% of them expressed "very good" and "good". Those who answered "average" had a score of 16.7%. The remaining 5.6% disclosed a "weak" response. For PO 3 (Ability to plan for research and present research findings), 44.4% indicated "very good" while 33.3% responded "excellent". The remaining 11.1% remarked "good" and 5.6% stated both "average" and "weak" responses. Turning to PO 4, (project planning and management skills), 50.0% of them revealed a "very good" understanding followed by 16.7% declaring both "excellent" and "good". Other than this, 11.1% of the respondents communicated "weak" comprehension and the remaining 5.6% responded "average". The analysis for PO 5, (ability to make ethical about environmental) recorded a

response in the following order: 44.4% of respondents expressed "very good"; 33.3% indicated "excellent"; 11.1% responded "good"; 5.6% disclosed both "average"; and "weak" to this attribute. Finally, PO 6 (commitment to lifelong learning skill), indicated that, 44.4% of graduates surveyed posted a "very good" response to this PO while 33.3% of them called it "excellent" while 11.1% reported both "good" and "average" response.

Assessment of Educational Experience

Apart from assessing learning gains, graduates' educational experience was also assessed.

The attributes assessed were:

E 1 The overall quality of the learning experience at the college/faculty/department

E 2 The overall quality of the technical content of the programme

E 3 Working in teams in order to solve problems

E 4 Accessibility to information (such as scholarly journals, books)

E 5 Applying knowledge on environmental and ethical issues in engineering

E 6 Exposure to common ICT tools needed in research

Table 2: Respondents' perception on educational experience

		Weak	Average	Good	Very Good	Excellent
				Responses		
E 1	**No.**	0	1	6	7	7
	%	0	4.8	28.6	33.3	33.3

E 2	No.	1	3	3	7	7
	%	4.8	14.3	14.3	33.3	33.3
E 3	No.	0	3	5	7	6
	%	0	14.3	23.8	33.3	28.6
E 4	No.	3	3	4	7	4
	%	14.3	14.3	19.0	33.3	19.0
E 5	No.	0	3	4	8	6
	%	0	14.3	19.0	38.1	28.6
E 6	No.	1	3	6	4	7
	%	4.8	14.3	28.6	19.0	33.3

For E1, 33.3% of graduates concurred that the quality of the learning experience gained was "excellent" and "very good". Besides this, 28.6% indicated a "good" learning experience quality. The rest of the respondents, 4.8% rated it "average".

Graduates assessing the overall quality of the content of knowledge (E2) returned a 33.3% score for both "excellent" and "very good" whereas 14.3% reported that the content was both "good" and "average". Lastly, 4.8% of the respondents responded to "weak". For E3, the majority of respondents (33.3%) preferred to work in teams thereby giving a "very good" response. Again, 28.6% stated "excellent" in working in Teams

while 23.8% gave it a "good" rating. Graduates with a score of 14.3% expressed "average" response.

E4 had a total of 33.3% of the graduates returning a "very good" response to acquiring needed information in their field (such as scholarly journals, books) while 19.0% of them posted both "excellent" and "good" to this item. The rest of the respondents indicated 14.3% for both "average" and "weak". Further, on the issues of applying knowledge gained ethically to solve environmental problem(s) (E5), 38.1% of respondents stated "very good" as a response with another 28.6% responding "excellent". Besides these, the other 19.0% indicated "good" and 14.3% also indicated "average". For E6, (ICT skills and tools to conduct research), 33.3% of respondents gave an "excellent" response while 28.6% indicated "good". A total of 19.0% indicated "very good" and 14.3% indicated "average" while 4.8% indicated "weak".

Assessment of Available Facilities and Resources

In education delivery, facilities are important in supporting teaching, learning and research process. The learning and teaching process would be enhanced greatly provided that there are sufficient facilities for students to thrive academically. Table 3 therefore, presents the responses of the surveyed respondents, the weight, RII values and by extension their relative ranks.

Table 3: Respondents' perception on Assessment of Available Facilities and Resources

Stakeholder Management issues	Responses						RII	
	1	2	3	4	5	Weight	RII	Rank
Administrative support	2	1	3	6	10	87	0.829	1
ICT and Internet Services	1	2	4	6	8	81	0.771	2
Security and Safety	1	4	2	5	9	80	0.762	3
Programme specific needs	2	2	5	5	7	76	0.724	4
Library resources	1	6	9	3	2	62	0.590	5
Health and Counselling	4	6	7	2	2	55	0.524	6

Rank: [Excellent – 5; Very Good – 4; Good – 3; Average – 2; Weak – 1]

The result of the Relative Importance Index (RII) indicates that the six most perceived variables of assessment of available facilities and resources include: (1) Administrative Support (RII = 0.829); (2) ICT and Internet Services (RII = 0.771); (3) Security and Safety (RII = 0.762); (4) Programme Specific needs (RII = 0.724); (5) Library resources (RII = 0.590) and (6) Health and Counselling (RII = 0.524).

The result of this study indicates that the first four (4) variables of end users' perception of assessment of available facilities and resources are the best perceptions of the stakeholders since their RII values are above the minimum importance threshold value of 0.700.However, the result of this study shows that the last two (2) variables of end users' perception of assessment of available facilities and resources are not good because their RII values fell below the minimum importance threshold value of 0.700.

Conclusions, implications and Recommendations for educational administration

From the study, it could be concluded that graduate students have different expectation from their studies which may be seen from their learning gains, educational experience and satisfaction from the use of resources and facilities made available for their studies.

The implication of this study for higher education and university administration and management is to assist to formulate policies and systems to assist students to meet their expectations of undertaking a graduate study. Assisting students in this regard could be obtained through collaborative work of the university community with administrators playing a major role. It is important for higher education management to appreciate different expectations by students and use such information in strategic planning and programme accreditation and re-accreditation. It is therefore, appropriate in planning a programme for students, to examine learning activities and students' expectations and use the results to develop appropriate support structures and resources for them.

Based on the above, educational administrators must as a matter of priority appreciate the uniqueness of graduate students and make every effort to provide the necessary support for their training. This is in line with Nerad and Miller (1996) assertion that the challenges of meeting the needs of today's heterogeneous graduate population require sensitive, flexible, and creative responses.

Administrators must develop deeper understanding of changing trends in higher education where most students are working and financing their own education. Therefore, students must be made to feel comfortable to engage in their own career development throughout their academic career. They must have "value for money" in view of the fact that they are financiers of their own education.

Graduate students provide useful information for an institution. HEIs and their administrators must therefore have mechanisms in place to capture such information and use same for improvement of their quality assurance systems to assist graduate students to acquire social skills. This aligns with Lehker and Furlong (2006) preposition that the goal of graduate and professional programme is not only to impart academic material to students, but also to help them take on a new social role.

Graduate supervision is a critical aspect of graduate education and therefore, educational administrators must design programmes that will constantly build the

capacity of supervisors. As indicated by Winston and Polkosnik (1988), essential roles and functions of graduate advisors must be exhibited by graduate supervisors. To achieve this, mentoring programmes could be instituted. Also, HEIs should have periodic review of their system such as appraisal of graduate supervisors by students.

Also, all resources and support systems must be made available for graduate students especially health and counselling as well as library support services. As indicated in the survey, most of the graduate students are working adults (76.2%) and therefore, combining work and studies causes psychological and health related challenges which educational administrators must identify and have strategies to support them.

Lastly, offices responsible for managing graduate students must appreciate the dynamics in quality assurance. Managers of higher education institutions must institute Graduate Exit Survey as part of the internal quality assurance mechanism. They must collaborate with the main university quality assurance office and develop strategies to ensure the quality of all programmes especially graduate programmes. This will ensure that they produce graduates who will meet international standards. Administrators and managers in these offices must receive contact training to appreciating the evolving trends in higher education. To this end, institutional budget must make provision for staff training.

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