

Analysis of Graduate Satisfaction and Experience with Higher Education Services in a Ghanaian University

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Abstract

The paper examines the satisfaction and experiences of graduates of the University for Development Studies (UDS) with a range of academic and co-curricular services provided to them at the time they were being trained. The data for the study were collected using a self-designed structured questionnaire administered to 1000 graduands who graduated during the 18th Congregation of the University. With the retrieval of a usable 601 questionnaires, representing about 60% response rate, the data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 for windows. The results of the study indicate that the graduates were very satisfied with the general conduct of operations in the University and most of them were willing to further their education in the University. They were however, quite dissatisfied with the existing health services and facilities, sporting facilities and the general security situation on the various Campuses of the University. Recommendations and implications for Management of the University have been discussed. The paper contributes to knowledge in the area of quality assurance of higher education services.

Keywords: Education, quality, students, satisfaction, services.

Introduction

The movement towards mass participation in Higher Education (HE) has become a global phenomenon. This is due to the assertion that HE has the tendency to reduce social inequalities to the barest minimum (European

Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013) and increase the growth of the economy (Ali, Zhou, Hussain, Nair & Ragavan, 2016). Access to education has become a global human right following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which assert that elementary education shall be free and compulsory, and that the higher levels of education will be equally available to all, on the basis of merit (Ghana Statistical Service & Macro International Inc., 1999). Therefore, access to HE reaffirms an individual's right to education. Although HE is supposed to be accessible to all, quality in HE service provision should not be compromised to compensate for its accessibility. Quality should be central in the operations of higher education institutions (HEIs). Higher education institutions should be known for quality and excellence, equity, responsiveness, effective and efficient provision of services, and alongside with good governance and excellent management of resources in the conduct of its business as institutions for knowledge acquisition (Chacha, 2002).

Many governments, including that of Ghana are concerned about the quality of services provided by their HEIs. In Ghana, the government has established the National Accreditation Board (NAB), following the passage of the Provisional National Defense Council Law 317, 1993 (PNDC Law 317, 1993), to ensure that quality assurance is entrenched in the tertiary education sector. This law was later amended by an Act of Parliament culminating in the current NAB Act 744, 2007 which retained the earlier provisions and offered additional responsibility to the Board to lead in all quality assurance matters in the tertiary landscape of Ghana. Besides NAB, the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) also considers the relevance of academic programmes to national development (www.ncte.edu.gh/nctesite/index.php, retrieved 28th August, 2018). This is because the government, as a major stakeholder in education, is concerned with churning out graduates that meet the needs of industry and are capable of turning the fortunes of the country.

In this regard, meeting the needs and expectations of the customers (students) has compelled government to view quality in HE as an obligation to all stakeholders. The demand for provision of quality educational service does not only come from satisfied learners but also from their parents and benefactors who have to bear the expenditures of their education (Rajab et al., 2011). The parents and benefactors are more concerned with the processes learners go through before graduating, and the indicator of success to them, depends on the satisfaction of services offered by HEIs (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991, cited in Rajab et al., 2011). Dean and Gibbs (2015), are of the opinion that the advent of tuition fees will compel universities to act as “service providers” and hence, be responsive to students in line with the requirements of consumers as they expect “value for money” akin to the market setting.

From the foregoing, feedback from graduating students on their satisfaction and experience with the quality of educational services from HEIs is legitimate and strategic for institutional improvement. It is in line with this thinking that this study was conducted. The overarching objective of the study is to evaluate the satisfaction and experiences of graduates of the UDS who graduated during the 2016/2017 academic year, with a range of academic and co-curricular services provided to them when they were being trained. It is envisaged that the outcome of such survey could lead to the enrichment of quality of academic programmes and practices in order to meet the current and future needs of the various stakeholders of the University. The survey therefore assessed graduates' satisfaction and experiences in relation to both curricular (reading materials and recommended textbooks, course outlines, access to internet, etc.) and other support services (facilities of health, sports, accommodation and so on).

Literature Review

Universities all over the world produce two categories of products: “educational programmes in the market of educational services and graduates for the labour market” (Belash et al., 2015, p.345). The nature of the operations of universities and their linkage to their products are intertwined such that students are direct customers of the educational services and after completing their studies, become the products in the labour market. Therefore, the quality of HE received by students would be a reflection of the quality of graduates in the labour market (Belash et al., 2015).

The concept of students' satisfaction with the range of services offered by HEIs has gained momentum in recent years in the quest for quality of higher education (Garcia-Aracil, 2014; Temizer & Turkyilmaz, 2012). Harvey (2001, p.4) opined that “institution-wide student feedback about the quality of their total educational experience is an area of growing activity in higher education institutions around the world”. Similar authors (Ivana & Dragan, 2014; Uysal, 2015) have argued that measuring students' and/or graduates' satisfaction with services offered by HEIs would assist those institutions build on their strengths and identify areas that might need improvement. Cardona and Bravo (2012), argued that it is a legitimate question to find out how students feel with the quality of academic and administrative services provided to them by HEIs. Hanapi and Nordin (2014), also posit that education, characterized by good quality, is needed in the achievement of customers' satisfaction and students who are primary customers of educational services are entitled to quality of higher education. One of the many approaches of examining the satisfaction and the experiences of graduates of HEIs is the Graduate Exit Survey (GES).

Graduate Exit Survey is an integral part of assessing the quality of HEIs through feedback from graduating students in many universities in the developed and transition countries. For instance, GES has been extensively used to collect information from graduating students in many HEIs such as the University of Western Sydney, Central Queensland University, George Mason University, San Francisco State University, and University of Wisconsin Madison as well as Asian universities including Universiti Putra Malaysia, University Kebangsaan Malaysia and Tehran University of Medical Sciences (Konting, Kamaruddin & Man, 2009; Othman et al., 2011).

Graduate Exit Survey is a method of collecting information on the quality of graduate education from the perspective of graduating students, upon completion of their degree programmes (Azah, Fatimah, & Abdul-Halim, 2012). In other words, GES is a method by which an educational institution deliberately solicits feedback from its graduating students, at the end of their training, on their overall experiences and satisfaction of the institution's services provided to them while they were undergoing their training. GES is therefore a summative evaluation in nature; as opposed to other assessment approaches such as students' assessment of courses and lecturers, which is conducted while the students are still undergoing training.

Materials and Methods

Research design, population and sampling

The researchers used the survey technique for the study. The survey technique is favoured over other techniques especially in a research context where the study population is large and when uniformity, anonymity and objectivity in responses are of essence; and particularly when the data gathered is to be analyzed quantitatively using descriptive and/or inferential statistics. In addition, data collected using a survey strategy can be used to suggest possible reasons for particular relationships between variables and produce models of these relationships (Ibrahim, Mavis, & Kassim, 2018). The researchers, therefore, deemed it fit to use the survey technique because of the large number of graduands (the study population), the need for uniformity, anonymity and objectivity of the responses.

The target population consisted of 5,565 graduating students from the various Faculties/Schools of the University for the 2016/217 Academic Session. A convenient sample size of 1000 graduands were selected from the total population of 5,565 graduands. Data were gathered using a self-designed questionnaire administered to 1000 graduands at the Wa and the Tamale Campuses of the University on the 11th and 18th November, 2017 respectively.

Data Collection Instrument

The questionnaire was divided into five sections. Section 'A' had four items and focused on respondents' demographic characteristics and section 'B' (8 items) solicited responses on graduands' academic information such as level of entry, diplomas and degrees obtained as well as classes of bachelor's degrees obtained. Section 'C', with 27 items, focused on measuring graduands' level of satisfaction on academic gains, teaching and learning, health services, security, sports and accommodation. Out of the 27 items in this section, 2 were closed ended and 5 were open ended. The remaining items (20) used a five point Likert scale where respondents were required to state their level of agreement with the satisfaction level for each item using "1 = poor; 2 = fair; 3 = average; 4 = Good; 5 = excellent". Section 'D' consisted of six (6) items and focused on students' results administration, administrative support and graduands willingness to pursue further studies in the University and recommend it to relatives and friends after graduation. Section 'E' (3 items) solicited information on graduands' employability status.

Data Analysis

Out of the 1000 questionnaires administered, 850 questionnaires were retrieved. Prior to the analysis of the data, the questionnaire items were scrutinized for accuracy and usefulness. Eventually, a usable 601 questionnaires, representing about 60% response rate were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 for windows. Data were coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. Responses on the open ended items (qualitative data) were grouped into themes and coded to facilitate quantitative analysis. Theming qualitative responses for purposes of quantitative analysis are encouraged in a research context where the sample size is large and where the individual responses can be grouped into five (or less) themes.

As a result of the quantitative nature of the data, some items in the questionnaire were either missing or not answered. The researchers have duly reported all missing data in the paper. Missing data, as posit by Dong and Peng (2013) is a rule rather than an exception in the case of quantitative research. However, this did not affect the overall validity and reliability of the results of the paper.

Findings and Discussions

The analysis, presentation and discussion of results are in three parts. Analysis of demographic characteristics of respondents, graduands' evaluation of their academic programmes as well as evaluation of the University in terms of students' results administration, administrative support

services and graduands' continues affiliation with the University; even after graduation.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Among the 601 respondents, 73.4% of them were males and 23.3% were females. About eighty-seven percent of them (86.7%) were between the ages of 20 to 29 years old. Students from the Ashanti Region were the majority (14.8%) as compared to their counterparts from other regions of Ghana. Almost all the respondents (95%) were Ghanaians and 0.3% accounted for other nationals. More than half (52.9%) of the respondents stayed in private hostels while only 9.3% resided in the University's Hostels. The rest of the respondents (24.8%) lived in rented accommodation.

About half (50.9%) of the respondents were mainstreamed graduands. Whereas 31.8% of them were Final Year Non-Graduating (FNG) graduands, only 10.3% of them were ladderees or top-up graduands. Final Year Non-Graduating graduands are graduands who were supposed to have graduated a year or two earlier but for reasons such as trails in courses, repetitions and delays (because of other reasons) in completing the programme they could not graduate. Ladderees or top-up graduands are those who had some level of foundation in the programme pursued either because they had completed diploma or they had some level of working experiences and were therefore admitted into the University to pursue the programme at Level 200.

Eighty four percent (84%) of the graduands graduated with bachelor's degree. The rest graduated with either a diploma (6.7%) or a postgraduate degree (4.7%). In terms of class, majority (63.2%) of the graduates got second class honours (upper division) in their bachelor's degree (Appendix).

Academic Programme Evaluation

A reasonable percentage (39.4%) of the graduands responded 'good' in terms of meeting their expectations on the various study programmes they pursued. They also rated their programme of study as being good (41.8%) with respect to recent trends and development in their various fields of study. Some (35.1%) of the respondents maintained that the quality of course instruction in their various programmes was satisfactory. A good number of them (29.3%) were also satisfied with the availability of course outline for each course of their programmes. Availability of reading list or recommended text books recorded 26% "good" response. Many (26.1%) of the respondents provided an "average" response which suggest that they were quite dissatisfied with the University's existing laboratory facilities, health services and facilities, sporting activities and facilities as well as the general security situation in the University (Table 1).

Table 1: Detailed Presentation of Findings on Academic Programme Evaluation

Academic Programme Evaluation								
S/N	Items	Responses						Total
		Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Excellent	Non-response	
1	Where your expectations met in the study programme	29 (4.8)	77 (12.8)	161 (26.8)	39.4 (237)	69 (11.5)	28 (4.7)	601 (100)
2	How will you rate your programme with respect to recent trends & development in your field of study	22 (3.7)	74 (12.3)	156 (26.0)	251 (41.8)	69 (11.4)	29 (4.8)	601 (100)
3	Overall, how will you rate the quality of course instruction in your programme	31 (5.2)	89 (14.8)	184 (30.6)	211 (35.1)	61 (10.1)	25 (4.2)	601 (100)
4	Availability of course outline for each course	60 (10.0)	128(21.3)	155 (25.8)	176 (29.3)	57 (9.5)	25 (4.2)	601 (100)
5	Availability of reading list or recommended text books	110 (18.3)	130 (21.6)	151 (25.1)	156 (26.0)	29 (4.8)	25 (4.2)	601 (100)
6	Effective use of Information Communication Technology	122 (20.3)	139 (23.1)	157 (26.1)	124 (20.6)	34 (5.7)	25(4.2)	601 (100)
7	Time table scheduling	106 (17.6)	140 (23.3)	172 (28.6)	119 (19.8)	38 (6.3)	26 (4.3)	601 (100)
8	Availability of tools and equipments for practical lessons	141 (23.5)	145 (24.1)	151 (25.1)	107(17.8)	30 (5.0)	27 (4.5)	601 (100)
9	Availability of online teaching and learning resources	129 (21.5)	133 (22.1)	159 (26.5)	115 (19.1)	34 (5.1)	31 (5.2)	601 (100)
10	Access to lecturers	79 (13.1)	110 (18.3)	197 (32.8)	146 (24.3)	41 (6.8)	28 (4.7)	601 (100)
11	Availability of counselling services	116 (19.3)	157 (26.1)	159 (26.5)	111 (18.5)	28 (4.7)	30 (5.0)	601 (100)
12	Adequate laboratory facilities	153 (25.5)	157 (26.1)	144 (24.0)	86 (14.3)	29 (4.8)	32 (5.3)	601 (100)
Health, Security and Sports Evaluation								
S/N	Items	Responses						Total
		Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Excellent	Non-response	
1	There was provision for my health needs on campus	130 (21.6)	180 (30.0)	139 (23.1)	88 (14.6)	32 (5.3)	32 (5.3)	601 (100)
2	Health facilities provided the services that promoted good academic work	135 (22.5)	170 (28.3)	143 (23.8)	75 (12.5)	29 (4.8)	49 (8.2)	601 (100)
3	How do you evaluate the security situation on campus	131 (21.8)	179 (29.8)	162 (27.0)	61 (10.1)	17 (2.8)	51 (8.5)	601 (100)
4	There were adequate sports facilities on campus	156 (26.0)	169 (28.1)	144 (24.0)	51 (8.5)	21 (3.5)	60 (10.0)	601 (100)
5	Engagement in sports enhanced my academic work	144 (24.0)	183 (30.4)	142 (23.6)	57 (9.5)	22 (3.7)	53 (8.8)	601 (100)
6	Academic calendar allowed easy engagement in sports	148 (24.6)	193 (32.1)	129 (21.5)	57 (9.5)	16 (2.7)	58 (9.7)	601 (100)

Source: Field Survey, November 2017

*Percentages are in brackets

University’s Evaluation

Supportive from Staff and Challenges during Registration of Courses

Majority (77.2%) of the respondents indicated that the University’s staff were friendly and supportive while the rest (18.8%) held the opposite view. Most (79.2%) of them indicated that they did not face challenges during the registration of courses of their respective programmes for each trimester (Figure 1).

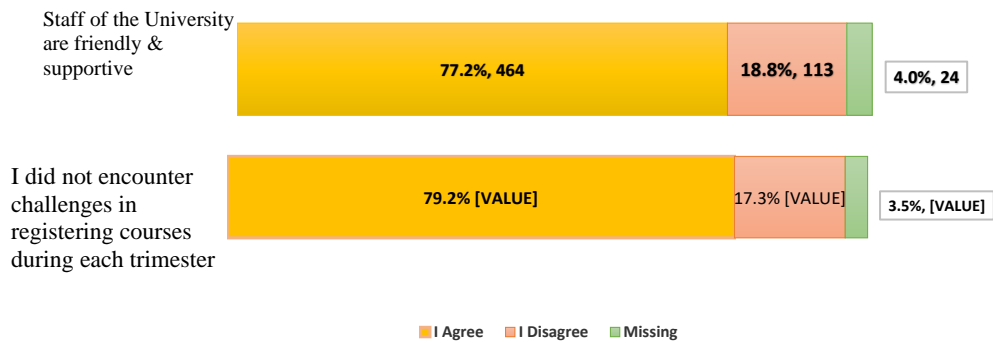


Figure 1: Staff being supportive & Challenges during registration of courses

Graduands’ willingness to further their education in UDS

Graduands were asked to choose their willingness to further their studies in UDS. Majority of them (72.9%) said they would prefer UDS if they qualified for further studies. About nineteen percent of them (19.3%), representing 116, said they will not further their education in the University. Out of this figure, 10% of them said they prefer to have experience in a different educational environment while 5.3% of them said that their programmes of choice for further studies are not run by the University. Almost three percent (2.8%) of them said they were quite dissatisfied with the services provided to them by the UDS when they were pursuing their individual programmes. Those who did not provide any reason for not wanting to further their education in the University was only 1.2% (Figure 2).

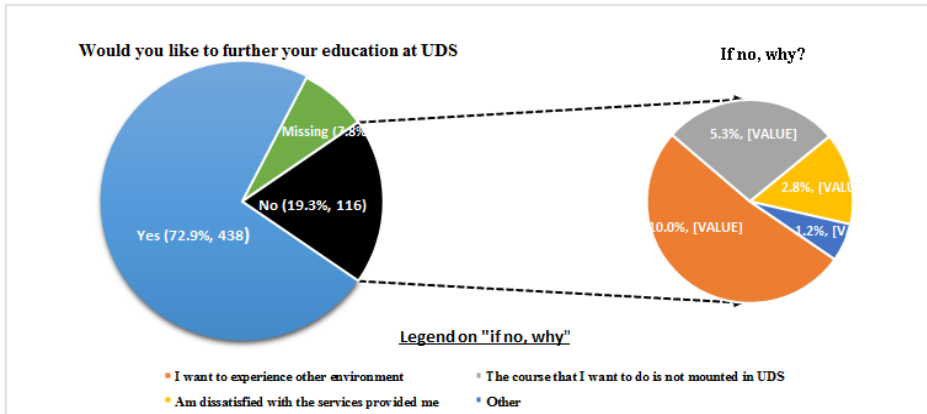


Figure 2: Graduands asked whether they will like to further their education in UDS

Graduands asked whether they will recommend UDS to a friend/relative to pursue a programme

Graduands were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statement “would you recommend the University to a friend/relative to pursue a programme?” To this statement, majority of them (69.1%) answered affirmative while 27% of them said no. When asked why they will not recommend the University to others, 7.8% of them said they were dissatisfied with the services provided by the University while 4.2% of them believe that pursuance of their programmes in the University were difficult the effect of which reflected in their performance during examinations. Others (4.7%) said the University’s teaching staff were not friendly. Majority of them (9.2%) attributed their decision not to recommend the University to others to poor administration of students’ academic results. Still, 0.6% of them have not given reason(s) why they will not recommend the University to others (Figure 3).

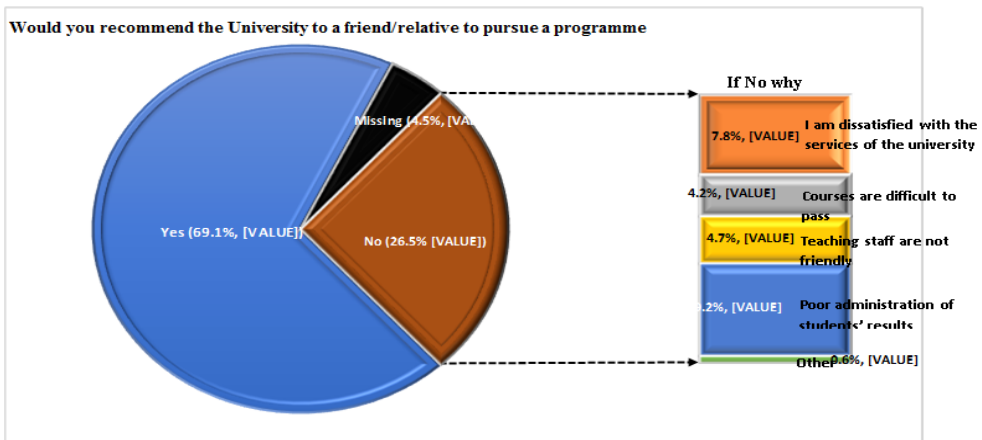


Figure 2: Graduands asked whether they will recommend UDS to a friend/relative

What would you like the University to do differently?

Figure 4 presents the opinion of respondents about what they would like the University to do differently from what they experienced when there were students. In this regard, most of them (44 %) said they would like the University to improve upon its Information Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure to allow for increase speed and accuracy in processing and retrieval of students' academic records.

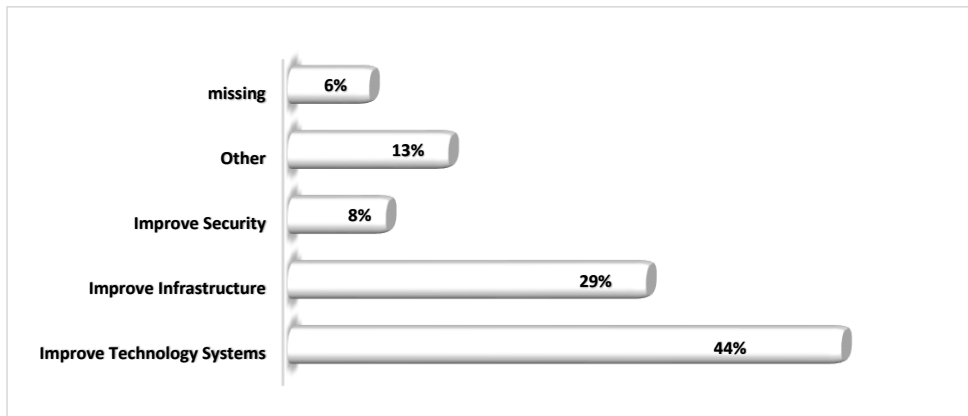


Figure 3: What would you like the University to do differently

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined the level of satisfaction and experiences of the graduates of the UDS with respect to academic and co-curricular services provided by the University. The outcome of the survey is intended to assist the Management of the University to review and enrich the services provided and to improve upon the quality of the educational programmes so as to meet the expectations of the clientele. It was found out that the graduands were generally satisfied with the programmes of study and other co-curricular services of the University. They were however, quite dissatisfied with the inadequate health facilities and poor services. The sporting activities and facilities also received poor rating by the respondents. The general security situation on the various Campuses of the University were considered to be unsatisfactory. It is therefore, recommended that the University should improve on the exiting health and sports facilities, ICT infrastructure, construct new lecture halls and renovate existing ones, beef up security services on the various campuses, and improve student access to University residential facilities since these facilities and services were poorly rated.

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Appendix

Demographic characteristics of respondents		
Gender		
	Frequency	Percent
Male	441	73.4
Female	140	23.3
Missing	20	3.3
Age		
20 – 29 Years	521	86.7
30 – 39 Years	44	7.3
40 – 49 Years	11	1.8
50 – 59 Years	2	0.3
60+ Years	1	0.2
Missing	22	3.7
Region		
Upper East	67	11.1
Upper West	72	12.0
Northern	86	14.3
Brong Ahafo	29	4.8
Ashanti Region	89	14.8
Western	44	7.3
Eastern	54	9.0
Central	30	5.0
Volta	58	9.7
Greater Accra	47	7.8
Missing	25	4.2
Nationality		
Ghanaian	577	95
Not Ghanaian	2	0.3
Missing	22	3.7
Residence		
Campus Hostel	56	9.3
Private Hostel	318	52.9
Rented Accommodation	149	24.8
Other	9	1.5
Miss	30	5.0
Year Enrolled		
2013/14 Academic Session	306	50.9
Before 2013/14 Academic Session	191	31.8
After 2013/14 Academic Session	62	10.3
Missing	42	7.0
Degree Obtained		
Diploma	40	6.7
Bachelor	505	84.0
Master	28	4.7
Missing	28	4.7
Class Obtained (Bachelors Only)		
1 st Class Division	16	2.7
2 nd Class Upper Division	380	63.2
2 nd Class Lower Division	133	22.1
3 rd Class Division	5	0.8
Pass	39	3.2
Missing	28	4.7

Source: Field Survey, November 2017