

THE EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN GHANA AND POSTGRADUATE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, KUMASI.

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ABSTRACT

More than six (6) years after the publication of the University Rationalization Committee's recommendations on postgraduate studies in Ghanaian Universities, very little has been achieved at the University of Science and Technology (UST), Kumasi, in terms of student intake, infrastructural development and adequate funding. The proportion of postgraduate students to the total student population from the 1988/89 to the 1993/94 academic year were still low (3.14%-7.57%), and far from the URC's recommended 25% target. Prior to the publication of the recommendations, the proportions were between 0.29% and 4.65%.

These observations were attributable to problems like inadequate infrastructure for postgraduate students (including accommodation at Halls of Residence) inadequate/ obsolete equipment and financial constraints.

Based on these facts, suggestions were made for the improvement in the conditions to make postgraduate programmes more attractive.

KEYWORDS: University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Post-graduate Studies, Educational Reforms, University Rationalization Committee (URC).

INTRODUCTION

The importance of education in the development of a nation cannot be overemphasized. For sometime now, governments of Ghana have been trying to make education more relevant to the needs of the nation. Abban elaborated on the major objectives of Educational Policy of the country and the importance of the new Educational Structure [1].

Despite efforts since Independence to reform the system, the quality of education began to decline in the early 1970s. By 1983, the education system sunk to very low level and there was the need to salvage it. Under the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP I) in 1983, the Provisional National Defence Council

(PNDC) government took serious steps to arrest the decline of the system. This was achieved through the injection into the system of urgently needed materials e.g. books and stationery with assistance from World Bank under the Health and Education Rehabilitation Programme [2].

In 1986, the government under ERP II initiated discussions on reforms both in structure and content of education. Consequently, the government started a new educational programme in 1987. The structure of the school system was changed from the old 6:4:5:2 to 6:3:3 system. Under this programme, Basic Education consisting of 6 years of Primary Education and 3 years Junior Secondary School (J.S.S) education are compulsory. After successfully completing the JSS, students may enter the Senior Secondary School (S.S.S.) for three years after which they enter the University to offer programmes of their choice.

The reforms were not limited to the primary and secondary institutions only. The Universities had been requested to re-design syllabuses to meet the new challenges of the country. This was also in anticipation of SSS graduates who would be admitted into the Universities in the 1994/95 academic year.

Enrolment of SSS graduates to programmes in the Universities will gradually have some impact on postgraduate studies at the Universities. In 1986, a University Rationalization Committee (URC) was appointed to provide the basic information and recommendations to enable a medium term University sector development plan to be formulated for Ghana.

This paper attempts to highlight some of the URC recommendations made on postgraduate studies, examine their impact (if any) on postgraduate studies at the UST since the publication of the report in 1988, and to make suggestions as to the improvement of postgraduate studies at UST.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

The Board of Postgraduate Studies (BPS) at the University of Science and Technology (UST), Kumasi was founded in 1974 "to co-ordinate the various postgraduate programmes being run by a few departments". The UST offers programmes leading to the Master of Pharmacy (M.Pharm.), Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MSc), Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in various fields. Postgraduate Diplomas in Architecture, Art Education, Optometry and Economics and



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Industrial Management are also offered. New programmes have also been introduced as and when necessary.

Enrolment to Postgraduate Programmes

Enrolment to postgraduate programmes at the UST have been as small as one in many departments. The highest values sometimes up to about 36 were in the areas of Architecture, Art Education, Regional Planning and Development [3].

Reasons for the small numbers of postgraduate students in Ghanaian Universities have been identified by the URC as having been due to:- inadequate facilities, economic constraints, little recognition in placements in the Civil Service or Public Service to higher degrees, dwindling in amount of research staff themselves, non-appreciation of roles those with postgraduate qualifications could play in the private sector to mention a few [4].

To arrest the deteriorating situation, the URC made a number of recommendations on postgraduate studies in Ghana among which were the following:

- i. "That the Universities progressively increase the proportion of postgraduate students in the student body with the goal of being 25% of the student population within the next 7 years"
- ii. "postgraduate work should be made more relevant to the needs of the country and the Universities should be encouraged to promote innovative postgraduate programmes in areas relevant to national development"
- iii. "efforts should be increased to involve individual organisations and foundations in the sponsorship and execution of local postgraduate programmes"
- iv. "the Universities should continue to establish links with suitable overseas Universities and organisations for the further development of joint postgraduate programmes"
- v. "where postgraduate accommodation is always available in our Universities, it should be made conducive for postgraduate studies" [4].

The question is "Have these been achieved so far?"

DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

One would argue that much has not been achieved at the UST in relation to the recommendations of the URC cited above. There is therefore the need to put in a lot more effort for the attainment of the recommendations.

Table 1 shows that ratio $\frac{P}{SP} \times 100$

which is the proportion of postgraduate students (P) to the total student body (SP) is below 10% in all the academic years both before and after the publication of the URC Report.

Between 1974/75 and 1987/88 academic years, the proportion of postgraduate students to the total student population ranged between 0.29% - 4.65%. The figure ranged from 3.14% to 7.57% between the 1988/89 and 1993/94 academic years, a period after the publication of the URC report. This is far below the URC's recommended figure of 25% although generally there have been small increases. The over 7% enrolment of postgraduate students in some years was due to higher enrolment figures at the College of

Table 1: Ratio of Postgraduate Students to total student population at UST for 20 academic years.

Academic Year (19..)	Total Student Population (SP)	Postgraduate Students (P)	P x 100 / SP
74/75	2036	73	3.59
75/76	2354	100	4.25
76/77	2619	104	3.97
77/78	2740	8	0.29
78/79	2890	81	2.82
79/80	2997	115	3.84
80/81	2816	131	4.65
81/82	2836	112	3.95
82/83	2974	105	3.53
83/84	-	-	-
84/85	3069	102	3.32
85/86	3094	95	3.07
86/87	3434	130	3.79
87/88	3503	161	4.60
88/89	3562	112	3.14
89/90*	3657	147	4.02
90/91+	3980	185	4.65
91/92+	4754	332	6.98
92/93+	4374	330	7.54
93/94@	4451	337	7.57

SOURCE: * - UST Basic Statistics, July, 1992, pp 9.
 + - UST Basic Statistics, June, 1993, pp 7.
 @ - UST Basic Statistics, March, 1994, pp 6.
 Others - 25th Congregation Programme of the UST, May, 1991.

NOTE: 1. There were no admissions for 1983/84 academic year because all the Universities in Ghana were closed down.
 2. The greatest number of postgraduate students were in Architecture, Art Education, Regional Planning and Development, Planning and Management.

Art, Faculty of Environmental and Development Studies and the Faculty of Science (comprising Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Biochemistry).

The problems that need to be tackled seriously to attain the URC's recommended target include the following among others:-

(a) infrastructure (b) equipment (c) funding

(a) Infrastructure

The problem of infrastructural development has long been with the UST. This includes that of residential accommodation for postgraduate students. The University was built originally to accommodate about 2000 students in the Halls of Residence. Increasing intake of students to be accommodated at the Halls of Residence demand that even postgraduate students be paired.

At the moment apart from Shaba (which is an Annex of University Hall) and the accommodation at the SPRING HOSTEL built specifically for students on the SPRING (Spatial Planning for Regions in Growing Economics) programme, there is no other special accommodation for postgraduate students. This is rather an unfortunate situation which should be seriously addressed. With more and suitable accommodation for postgraduate students, many could be admitted into the University on various programmes. This way, the University can move towards the 25% URC target. The students will also feel comfortable and can therefore pursue their programmes and complete them on schedule. It is suggested that private entrepreneurs, etc. come to the aid of the University and build Halls of Residence, more laboratories and workshops for the students.

(b) Equipment

There is the need to adequately equip the laboratories and workshops. In some of the Departments, the equipment available are not suitable for postgraduate work because they are inadequate or obsolete. The results are that:-

- i. students are not admitted to postgraduate programmes in those departments at all for the particular project or
- ii. only very few students are admitted to the programme to make do with what is available or
- iii. the research student will have to move to other Universities or Research Institutions both inside and outside Kumasi to find and use equipment suitable for their work. Occasionally, specimens had to be sent abroad for identification or analysis or both.

(c) Funding

On account of inadequate financial support, many of the postgraduate students spend their time on part-time jobs to enable them earn some money to supplement whatever they receive from government. The result is that their studies suffer.

Admittedly, some postgraduate students also spend too long a time on their programmes due to lack of seriousness on their part. Funding of research at the postgraduate level had already been discussed [5].

In an attempt to find solutions to the problems pertaining to funding of research projects the Vice-Chancellor in his report to the 27th Congregation suggested thus:-

".... by adapting the research grant mode of funding in which a researcher is given a research grant to carry out research in a critical area having a direct bearing on our economic condition or technical advancement. The researcher could support several postgraduate students on his grant so that these students would actually be contributing to the solution of national problems while earning their degree" [6].

In addition to the above suggestion, the University could institute a scholarship scheme to be competed for by interested postgraduate students. Successful candidates would therefore feel comfortable and devote time to their studies.

Also, to make local postgraduate training attractive, the government could increase the scholarships and/or introduce other incentives to attract the students and to retain them on their programmes.

The UST has a few linkages with other postgraduate institutions. More of such linkages should be forged in a variety of special fields of study. The topics researched into by the postgraduate students are relevant to the national needs of the country. This is exemplified by comments made by both the External and Internal Examiners who are appointed to assess the theses projects and dissertations produced by the students [7]. Unfortunately however majority of these theses/dissertations accumulate dust on the shelves. If much more efforts would be made to actually make use of the research findings of the students a lot more would be achieved.

The above recommendations plus those made by the URC and cited in this paper should be seriously addressed to make postgraduate training at UST more attractive. The URC's recommended target of 25% cannot be easily achieved without considerable improvement in the problem areas identified.

After about six years following the publication of the URC Report, enrolment to postgraduate programmes is still low (see Table 1). This is a pointer to the fact that there is more to be done in terms of infrastructure, equipment, funding, and in general, more suitable conditions under which the postgraduate students study.

One observes that apart from a few organisations which sponsor their employees to pursue postgraduate programmes in certain fields, very little has been done by organisations and foundations in the sponsorship of postgraduate programmes. The result is that there is heavy financial burden on the central government. Since government alone cannot foot all educational bills in view of other commitments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), private entrepreneurs and other philanthropic organisations should come in to assist/promote and fund postgraduate training in UST and other Universities in Ghana.

As a result of the problems identified above, postgraduate students often ask for deferment of their programmes or request for extension of time of between 3 to 6 months to enable them complete their programmes. Between December 1993 and March 1994 for example, about 9 candidates asked for deferment and about 13 requested for extensions.

Some candidates asked for deferments because of their inability to secure sponsorship from their employers, ill-health, they were not released by their employers, they secured scholarships from somewhere else to offer the same or other programmes abroad or their reasons were personal. Some gave no reasons.

Reasons for the request for extensions included:- lack of equipment, equipment are faulty, lack or shortage of chemicals, the supervisor had travelled outside the country, data collection could not be completed on scheduled or need to use the library.

It is however gratifying to note that the government has earmarked an amount of ₵7bn to face-lift UST, to take care of infrastructure, computers, funding of research projects, vehicles, etc. [8]. The future is therefore bright for the UST.

SUMMARY

Enrolment to postgraduate programmes at the Universities will in future definitely increase to very high proportions more especially when SSS entrants start to graduate from the Universities. Many of them would want to enrol on postgraduate programmes because emphasis would be on local postgraduate training. It would therefore be in place if expansions in infrastructure are made so that the Universities could cope with the large numbers. There is also the need to improve upon the funding of postgraduate training, generally, to make it more meaningful and attractive.

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