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DIFFERENTIAL EFFECT OF SCHOOL TYPE ON RESEARCH COMMITMENT AMONG POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE SOUTH-EAST OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Research is an integral part of the post-graduate program in any given academic field in Nigeria's education ecosystem. However, there is growing concern about the declining commitment toward research works among students enrolled in the graduate program in the university system. Although, previous research has identified the constraints impeding the realization of positive research attitudes in the higher education ecosystem. The primary objective of the current paper is to test the differential effect of school type on research commitment among post-graduate students in southeast Nigeria. Ninety-six students enrolled in graduate programs in the private and public universities in the Enugu and Ebonyi States of Nigeria completed a self-report measure. The mean, standard deviation score, and t-test result indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups on research commitment. Thus, the result indicated that graduate students in the private university are more committed to research work than their counterparts in the public university.

KEYWORDS: *Post-graduate, students, research commitment, school type, university*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary education ecosystem is increasingly demanding evidence-based learning and an innovative paradigm. Integrating research-based knowledge in education is gradually attracting significant attention in the education setting (Amaratunga & Senaratne, 2009). Notably, research occupies a central position in the development of higher education (Kachalova et al., 2019). Many higher education institutions are undergoing an increasing swing to inquiry-based knowledge, inspiring more research models complementary to the age-long conventional teaching (Etzkowitz, 2003). Perhaps, robust systematic inquiry and logical research context are critical in national development (Ashrafi-Rizi et al., 2015). Hence, Bhagavathula et al. (2017) defined evidence-based knowledge as a universal feature of global education. Thus, research is an essential tool governing modern advancements in every part of the global sphere. Accordingly, many authors have highlighted the importance of imparting research knowledge to learners (Sabel'nikova-Begashvili & Khudoverdova, 2020; Krylova et al. (2019).

Research in higher education reflects gathering and evaluating relevant data to increase knowledge and understanding of a topic or an issue (Creswell, 2012). Thus, it denotes careful processes that provide credible knowledge. Numerous literature abounds that associates positive research behavior and the willingness to engage in research activities (e.g., McLaughlin et al., 2018; Mina et al., 2016; Partido & Colón, 2019). Similarly, Vossen et al. (2018) emphasized the significance of research and evidence-based inquiries on the growing Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics education (STEM). In general, the higher education system in the contemporary academic environment encompasses research and teaching. Hence, the famous saying 'publish or perish' (Uzochukwu et al., 2016). In particular, research in higher education is the pathway to institutional evaluation and comparisons.

Over the years, the quality of institutions of higher learning across the globe has been evaluated using the higher education ranking, which encompasses teaching and research appraisals (Boholano et al., 2014). Thus, the ranking of higher education is predominantly based on research productivity. This confirms the conception of research as a distinguishing feature of the higher institution (Marchant, 2009). Consequently, about seven HEIs in Nigeria are in the overall Times Higher Education World University Rankings, with the highest (University of Ibadan) ranked within the number 401–500 (Times Higher Education, 2021). Thus, signifying poor research productivity of HEIs in the country.

Accordingly, previous studies contend that effective research behavior in academia facelifts institutional integrity (Hajdarasic et al., 2015) and equips students with innovative information (Davis & Jones, 2017). It increases scholarly inspiration (Falconer & Holcomb, 2008) and impacts leading-edge knowledge and basic research procedures on the students (Brown et al., 2016). In particular, numerous studies have underscored the importance of exposing learners to inquiry-based learning (e.g., Abu-helalah et al., 2015; Beanland et al., 2020; Borakati et al., 2017; Kozlov et al., 2017; Noguez & Neri, 2019; Razeghi, 2019; Roach, 2017; Swan et al., 2018; Weiner & Watkinson, 2014). Thus, research in higher education is fundamental to achieving the required developmental objective of contemporary societies.

The Nigerian higher education system consists of universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. However, post-graduate studies are primarily incorporated into the universities. Thus, graduate studies in any discipline remain the exclusive responsibility of the university system. Nevertheless, the government and the private sectors are the primary proprietors of university education in Nigeria. While the public tertiary institutions are governed by the government (state/federal), individuals, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations oversee the operation of the private universities. Indeed, there has been age-long contention about the quality of research the private and public universities. Regarding research productivity, the public university system is mainly presumed to be more research-oriented, given funding availability. Conversely, the private university is privately funded and is typically concerned with functional or applied knowledge and practical learning. Thus, they are less competitive relative to research output. In particular, growing insinuation suggests that research activities are more salient in the university system than in private. Accordingly, Casani et al. (2014) reported that private universities conduct research less intensively than public institutions. Thus, post-graduate students describe graduates with bachelor's degrees or higher national diplomas who intend to further their education in a specialized field. Most importantly, the post-graduate programs are specifically research-based and require the supervision of qualified researchers. The intention is to equip the student with the necessary research skills to conduct a responsible inquiry in their specializations. The purpose of the present paper is to examine the impact of the research climate in public and private universities on the research commitments of post-graduate students.

Research commitment reflects the tendency to engage in research activities (Safi & Kumar, 2019). It describes the readiness to investigate a phenomenon, comply with procedures and establish an assumed outcome. In particular, research commitment is integral to the post-graduate programs and represents a pathway to completing the program. Committing to research work allows the post-graduate student to develop new skills, approaches, and strategies (Impedovo & Malik, 2016; Landicho, 2020) and facilitate promotion in the system (Katz & Coleman, 2001), and determines success (Chin & Law, 2020). Therefore, research undertakings are considered vital and meaningful in the overall program.

The present study compares the research commitment of post-graduates in public and private tertiary institutions in South-East Nigeria. There is a growing concern about the declining scientific attitudes of post-graduates in the tertiary education level in Nigeria, as most students no longer demonstrate scientific behaviors concerning observation and measurements, which characterizes the post-graduate program. Indeed, there is a wide intimation that the trend is pervasive in the public

tertiary institutions. Several factors, including the shortage of qualified research instructors, unequipped laboratories, institutional neglect, and lack of scientific objectives, have been implicated in declining research attitudes in tertiary institutions. For instance, a lack of adequate policy concerning research authenticity aids plagiarism, whereas a competent research supervisor encourages procedure while a less skilled supervisor attends to anyhowness. Arguably, school type (public/private) represents a significant driver of academic research commitment. In particular, it could contribute to the variance in research commitment among the post-graduate students in South-East Nigeria.

Hypothesis: *There would be a significant difference between post-graduate students in public and private universities on research commitment.*

Method

The study population comprised students enrolled in different post-graduate programs in public and private universities in Enugu and Ebonyi state in southeast Nigeria. One hundred and twenty-one male and female graduate students from various academic disciplines were approached between February and April 2022. They were asked to participate in a study to understand their research commitment. The one hundred and eleven graduate students who consented to partake in the study were given the study instrument. In all, ninety-six (96) copies of the research instruments were filled correctly and utilized for the study, perhaps, the twelve (12) improperly filled copies and three (3) unreturned copies were discarded. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted in the study.

Measure

The participants completed a self-report measure designed to assess their research commitment and motivation. The 10-item Linkert type scale is scored in a 5-point response format, with high scores indicating a high research commitment. The reliability of the scale was recorded following a pilot study. Observation of the Cronbach's alpha coefficients revealed acceptable levels of internal consistency reliabilities of the instrument, which exceeded the cutoff rules-of-the-thumb of .86 as recommended for study purposes (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2001). The school type was indicated in the demographic section of the scale.

Result

The respondents' mean and standard deviation scores are presented in Table 1 below. It shows the mean and standard deviation of the score on the difference between the participants on research commitment. The result revealed a higher mean and standard deviation score (M = 2.46, SD = 0.71) for the private university graduate students than public university graduate students' mean and standard deviation score (M = 1.54, SD = 0.50). Thus, the result indicates that private university graduate students have higher research commitment than their public university counterparts in southeast Nigeria. Furthermore, a t-test was conducted to test the difference between the two groups on research commitment. There was a significant difference between private and public university post-graduate students on research commitment $t(94) = 1.121, p = 0.05$, as shown in Table 2. Thus, the expectation that there would be a significant difference between the two groups on research commitment was supported.

Table 1:

The table shows the Mean and Standard Deviation of participants' scores on research commitment.

Institution	N	Mean	SD
Private University	49	2.46	0.71
Public University	47	1.46	0.50

Table 2:

The table shows the t-test results comparing the two groups' differences in research commitment.

Institution	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig
Private university	49	2.46	0.71	1.147	94	.000
Public university	47	1.46	0.50			

Discussion

The present study aimed to compare research commitment in higher education institutions with an emphasis on post-graduate students. In particular, the study examines the difference between post-graduate students for public and private universities on research commitment. The study's findings revealed the private university students' mean and standard deviation score (M= 2.46, SD= 0.71) and public university students' mean and standard deviation score (M= 1.46, SD= 0.50). Thus, showing that the private university graduate students perform higher on research commitment than the public university students. Also, the t-test result, $t(94) = 1.121, p = 0.05$, indicated a significant difference between the two groups on research commitment. Thus, the hypothesis suggesting a difference between the two groups on research commitment was affirmed. The result presupposes that most post-graduate students in private universities are more devoted and prepared to engage in research-directed behaviors. The probable explanation for this outcome might be that private institutions are privately funded and constantly competing with public universities. Therefore, they are more committed to output. In other words, private schools are managed by standards, and supervisors are constrained to ethics.

Conversely, public universities are less dedicated to ethics and are more prone to limited supervision. Thus, they are less likely to maintain standards given that discipline is more intricate in the system than in the private sector.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the research commitment of post-graduate students enrolled in private and public universities. Ninety-six graduate students from diverse academic programs were recruited for the study. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference between the two groups on research commitment. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups on research commitment, thus, affirming the study's assumption. It was concluded that graduate students from the private university system have more positive research commitment than their counterparts in the public universities. The finding of this paper has implications for academia in that it provides insight into the role of school type on research commitment. However, the self-report measure of research commitment and the sample size constitute a considerable limitation to generalizing the result of the study. Future research should use multiple data collection methods and employ more sample size. Notably, a better understanding of the determinants of research commitment would be relevant in the higher education institutions in Nigeria to push the academic system towards research-based and improve the culture of scientific inquiries. It is implied that post-graduate students' research commitment in public universities would increase if efforts are made to establish an enforced standard and interdepartmental supervision system.

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