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# An Empirical Assessment of Quality of Undergraduate Dissertation in the Polytechnics in Ghana: Evidence from the Business School of Takoradi Polytechnic

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Descriptive statistics were used for the survey and review. The findings revealed that the HND dissertation is ineffective because it lacks the quality standard of an undergraduate dissertation.

*Keywords : undergraduate dissertation, learning experience, dissertation models, dissertation quality, dissertation effectiveness.*

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# An Empirical Assessment of Quality of Undergraduate Dissertation in the Polytechnics in Ghana: Evidence from the Business School of Takoradi Polytechnic

Solomon Abekah Keelson [α], Isaac Theophilus Ampah [σ] & Jacob Oddae Addo [ρ]

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## I. Introduction

One part of the student's academic work that prepares him or her to a critical thinking approach to life is student's dissertation writing. This is so because unlike other areas of the academic work, student's dissertation is conducted in such a way that the student is involved in applying the knowledge that has been acquired in the respective areas of study to identify a real life problem, source for information to the problem, and try to solve the problem (Sonya et al., 2011). According to Kolb (1984), the dissertation process exposes the student to experiential learning, and provides the student with real life experience as the student fully engages in the research process. This requires that, though a student is given a supervisor, the students should participate actively in doing the work, as the supervisor only serves as a guide. In this connection, the student can develop the necessary skills for identifying problems in life and be able to find alternative ways to solve those problems (Sonya et al., 2011).

Though HND dissertation is an undergraduate research, which means much is not expected by way of contribution to knowledge as it would for Masters or PhD theses, its originality should not be compromised (Reynolds and Thompson, 2011). This requires that the student do as much search as possible commensurate with their level to demonstrate a better understanding of the subject area so as to avoid copy work or doing what others have done already. To achieve this goal, HND dissertation should not cover a wide area as a Master's or PhD Thesis will cover; but it should involve extensive reading of the subject area. The work should normally be carried out under the guidance of a supervisor, whose duty it is to guide and motivate the student toward effective sourcing and analysis of data.

Research has shown that student improve their learning and analytical capability by writing a dissertation as part of the requirement to attain the HND certificate, aside of the normal course work they undertake. Nevertheless, this could be done if students have the opportunity to go through a reasonable amount of HND research training and experience (Reynolds and Thompson, 2011). Studies have also shown that the research training and experiences help students to develop critical-thinking skills and research methods (Lopatto, 2003; Seymour et al., 2004; Hunter et al., 2007). An undergraduate research may involve people with little or no research experience. On many occasions, Business Courses, unlike science programs are thought with no practical works, where students usually accumulate facts and sometimes engage in memorized learning, devoid of analytical and critical thinking (Songer and Linn, 1991; Linn and Hsi, 2000).

This common feature of undertaken business programs by memorizing facts to address examination questions and doing class assignments, can hardly prepare a student for a graduate's life. Thus, to prepare students more fully for the graduate's life ahead, undergraduate dissertation is critical to fill the vacuum created by memorized learning and writing of examinations. As students do research and write

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dissertation independently, with a supervisor's guidance he or she is able to appreciate not only how to do critical thinking, but also how to interpret and solve life's problems. This is because dissertation writing involves a process, including problem identification, setting of objectives and asking questions, synthesizes literature, select appropriate methods, evaluate data, and interpret results (Reynolds and Thompson, 2011). If students take the dissertation writing seriously and systematically go through the process, despite the fact that they may have little experience in research, HND dissertation could be original, and could contribute to knowledge. Such encouraging experiences should motivate and serve as a basis for future advanced dissertation at the Master and PhD levels.

Considerable attention has been paid to student experience and lecturer practices in relation to the master's dissertation and the doctoral thesis (Wright and Cochrane, 2000; Jackson and Tinkler, 2001; and Woolhouse, 2002; Anderson et al., 2006). However, despite the significance role of dissertation at the HND programs and its perceived educational value, little attention has been given to this subject matter within the published research literature (Todd et al., 2004). In the undergraduate dissertation literature the few focus have primarily been on staff marking practices (Webster et al., 2000) rather than on the student experience of this learning activity. An aspect that has received some level of research attention is student perceptions of the role of the supervisor (Stefani et al., 1997). The lack of sufficient attention to the quality of dissertation process at the undergraduate level of HND creates a gap in the academic literature. Thus, this article aimed at capturing the valuable knowledge and experience of both students and supervisors, and to make an empirical assessment of the quality of dissertation at the HND Business Programs to measure its effectiveness.

## II. Literature

Researchers have used different dimensions to measure quality. Some of these different dimensions include Crosby (1979) defines quality as 'conformance to requirement; Gronoos (1884) measures quality as technical, functional, and reputational; Parasuraman et al. (1985) measured quality by nine key determinants including, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security and understanding. In the business literature efforts to define and measure quality has usually been limited to the study of products and services as most studies make reference to the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1985). However quality studies can also be extended to project management Juran (1988). Thus, this study applies the service quality model used in the service marketing to study project management, which is undergraduate dissertation writing.

In the sense of project management, Ireland (1991) defines quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. This requires that HND dissertation has the necessary features expected in undergraduate dissertation report. In order for HND dissertation to satisfy the implied needs the use of Parasuraman et al. (1985) nine quality dimension was justified.

The undergraduate dissertation is supposed to provide an opportunity to student to research and produce some sort of original work. This measures the credibility aspect of the project quality. Credibility and communication mean the research is designed to draw together all of the knowledge that the student has acquired on the three-year HND program and are to enable students to develop and demonstrate analytical, judgmental and communication skills. Understanding and access (Parasuraman et al., 1985) will require that on successfully completing the dissertation the student should be able to demonstrate skills in researching primary literature, and critically evaluating published information and develop argumentative skill to produce a structured critical assessment of a chosen topic (Hughes, 2002). In this connection, dissertation writing should enable students construct a synthesis of theory, published studies, methodological understanding and the selection and application of appropriate research methods, analysis and discussion (Hemmings, 2001).

Reliability and responsiveness (Parasuraman et al., 1985) will demand that student's dissertation should be reliable, in the sense of contributing something meaningful to knowledge; also findings of dissertation should help response to the needs of society. This suggests that effective undergraduate dissertation must have relevance to societal development; how much little that might be. Finally, Webster et al. (2000) argued that student's dissertation is a substantial and most independently worked upon piece of work student undertakes while in school. This means student's dissertation has the security dimension of Parasuraman et al. (1985) nine quality dimensions if the dissertation is as independent as possible and free from copying or plagiarism. Thus, it is suggested that dissertation is considered a quality piece of work to both students and supervisors if it has the security feature of independence (Kolb, 1984; Hughes, 2002; Silén, 2003).

From the students' point of view, dissertation is an independent learning project, and it constitutes a significant component of their final HND Certificate. To be original, credible and reliable, a student is expected to select an appropriate topic for the dissertation and to research the topic on an individual basis, seeking advice from the faculty supervisor where necessary. Through the collection and analysis of primary and secondary data the student is expected to research and produce a

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substantial piece of original work. The learning outcomes of the dissertation process, which is based on the student's understanding of the subject area create and develop a valuable learning experience for a student through his active participation and production of quality piece of work (Hughes, 2002; Silén, 2003; Sonya et al., 2011).

Reynolds and Thompson (2011) have identified a common model for how to work with undergraduate dissertation students to enhance quality. One model is for research supervisors to work one-on-one with students. It is assumed that this approach enhances the quality of the dissertation as supervisors will be in a better position to guide students on credibility, reliability, understanding, access and security (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The advantage of this approach is the personalized attention that students receive. A disadvantage of this approach is the possibility that overzealous supervisor might take over with extensive editing, in some cases rewriting students' work. Although the final draft may be better, the student might not make the writing choices and therefore the independence dimension of the quality of the dissertation might be affected. The other model of how to work with undergraduate dissertation is to offer a course to support student writings. The advantages of writing courses are that instructors explicitly teach the conventions of scientific writing, and the structured nature of a course helps students stay on track. Unfortunately, some Business programs might have to bring teachers from other faculties to teach such a course given that business lecturers are not often well versed in these courses. The danger is that teachers from other faculties may not apply their teaching to the subject area of the business students.

In this article, we present the one-on-one model with the personalized attention of working one-on-one with students. Instead of a traditional course in which the instructor provides most of the feedback on students' writing, in this model students get the majority of their feedback from personal reading and few from their supervisors (Reynolds and Thompson, 2011). To determine the quality of this approach, we assess the quality of dissertation written by students' in Business Programs who simply worked one-on-one with supervisors. The article assesses dissertation for the quality of the process, including, the students' research knowledge; effort put into writing dissertation, perception of dissertation writing, perception of supervisors knowledge and guidance, and quality of content (Scott, 2008). The article presents details of the findings and results from the study, and describes how the study benefits both students and faculty.

## III. Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to assess the effectiveness of undergraduate dissertation at the HND level. In order to measure the overall effectiveness of students' dissertation, the following specific research objectives were addressed:

1. To appreciate the level of research knowledge of Business students who write dissertation.
2. To determine the effort students put into writing dissertation.
3. To assess the perception of students' toward dissertation writing.
4. To determine students' perception of supervisor's quality.
5. To measure the quality of students' dissertation.

## IV. Research Design

The purpose of this research was to evaluate and reflect upon the quality of the HND dissertation process in the Business Program at the Takoradi Polytechnic. To do this it was important to capture the experiences of the students involved in the HND dissertation module for the academic year 2011–2012.

Quantitative research was used in this article to collect primary data from the students involved in the HND dissertation module for the academic year 2011–2012 of the Business School of the Takoradi Polytechnic in Ghana. The population of the research comprised 1500 students. In order to ensure that all students of the Business Faculty were represented, they were grouped into four according to departments. The four departments included: Accountancy, Marketing and Purchasing/Supply and Management/Secretary ship.

Using quota sampling technique, respondents were selected from each of the departments on the basis of the numerical strengths of the departments. Drawing from the sampling method as prescribed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) 500 students were selected for the study, representing 33% of the population. The sample size was appropriate because it was above the sample requirement suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) in their sampling statistics table (p. 607). 150 students were selected each from Accountancy, Marketing and Purchasing/supply, while 50 were drawn from Management/secretary ship department.

Considering the aims for which the data was collected in relation with the strengths and weaknesses of the data collection modes, and the fact that the research undertaken was small in scale and exploratory as well as descriptive in nature, the study involved two main points of data collection. The first was Self-completion direct questionnaire to students. In order to address objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4, a self-completion questionnaire was designed and administered to 500 third year students, from the four departments of the Business School taken the dissertation module. The questionnaire consisted of multiple choice questions, and 5 Likert scales questions (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree) covering a



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range of topics related to the dissertation. The second approach was practically reviewing selected dissertations of completed works; in order to address objectives 5. Hundred dissertations that had been completed under the supervision and approval of assigned lecturers were physically reviewed against the quality research requirement (theoretical framework, originality of research, and contribution to knowledge). In this practical review, different components of the dissertations (including - problem statement, research objectives/questions, findings and analysis, and the linkage between the research problems, research objectives/questions and research findings, as well as presentation of reports) were weighed in line with dissertation process.

The data from the survey questionnaire, as well as those from the practical review were evaluated and analyzed, using descriptive statistics, particularly, frequency distribution method. The aim of the analysis was to identify perceptions and experiences of students on dissertation writing and compare them to the final reports of dissertation. This was to assess whether HND dissertation reflected the quality of undergraduate dissertation.

## V. Results

### a) Findings of the Quantitative Survey

For the quantitative survey, 432 questionnaires were completed and returned in useable form out of the five hundred, constituting 86.4% response rate. The profile of respondents included student's program of study, gender of student, and gender of research supervisor. Respondents were made up of: Accountancy 28.5%; Marketing 33.8%; Purchasing/Supply 27.5%; and Management/Secretary ship 10.2%. Also 51.6% and 48.4% of males and female respectively participated in the survey, which gives a good gender balance. However, there were 81.5% male supervisors, against 18.5% female supervisors. This was justifiable as the ratio of male to female lecturers at the business school is very huge.

#### i. Efforts Students Put in Research Writing

Tables 1 to 4 show that students put a lot of effort into the writing of the dissertation. The efforts include spending months and hours to source for their own information, as well as meeting their supervisors. Others include the amount of money they spend to get the dissertation started and completed.

*Table 1 :* Month Used by Student on Dissertation

Table 1 represents the amount of time in months that students spend on writing one dissertation.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Under 2 months | 49 | 11.3 | 11.3 | 11.3 |
| | 2 - 4 months | 245 | 56.7 | 56.7 | 68.1 |
| | over 4 months | 138 | 31.9 | 31.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The table 1 shows that an average of three months is spent on one dissertation (56.7%). This means that almost the whole of the second semester of a student's final year is devoted for dissertation work.

*Table 2 :* Hours Used Per Week

Table 2 below presents the number of hours that students spent per week on their dissertation.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Under 2 hours | 106 | 24.5 | 24.5 | 24.5 |
| | 3 - 6 hours | 228 | 52.8 | 52.8 | 77.3 |
| | Over 6 hours | 98 | 22.7 | 22.7 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 2 reveals that about 75.5% of students spent over three hour every week to work on an aspect of their dissertation.

*Table 3 :* Hours Used to Meet with Supervisor

Table 3 shows the number of hours students used to meet their supervisors on their dissertations.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Under 2 hours | 140 | 32.4 | 32.4 | 32.4 |
| | 2 - 3 hours | 204 | 47.2 | 47.2 | 79.6 |
| | Over 3 hours | 88 | 20.4 | 20.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |



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As revealed by the table 3, an average of two hours is spent by students to interact with their supervisors on their research each week. The results show that 32.4% spent less than 2 hour; 47.2% spend between 2 to 3 hours; while 20.4% spent over 3 hours with their supervisor each week.

*Table 4 :* Amount Spend Per Dissertation

The amount of money spent on completing each dissertation is presented by table 4 below.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Under GH¢300 | 234 | 54.2 | 54.2 | 54.2 |
| | GH¢300 - 600 | 173 | 40.0 | 40.0 | 94.2 |
| | Over GH¢600 | 25 | 5.8 | 5.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

From the table four, it can be seen that an average of GH¢300 is spent on each project. While 54.2% spent under GH¢300, 40% and 5.8% spent between GH¢300 to GH¢ and above GH¢600 respectively.

From the tables 1 to 4 it can be suggested that students put in optimum efforts into writing their dissertation. This means that all things being equal, they should be able to produce quality research papers.

ii. *Students Level of Research Knowledge*

Students knowledge level in dissertation writing is measured by their previous research training, personal appreciation of research, ability to do independent work without copying, sufficient understanding of the research process and knowledge on how to source for research materials. Tables 5 to 8 present the findings on these variables.

*Table 5 :* Previous Research Training

Table 5 below presents the findings on the student's training prior to writing the dissertation

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 84 | 19.4 | 19.4 | 19.4 |
| | Disagree | 160 | 37.0 | 37.0 | 56.5 |
| | Neutral | 61 | 14.1 | 14.1 | 70.6 |
| | Agree | 97 | 22.5 | 22.5 | 93.1 |
| | Strongly Agree | 30 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

From the table 5 above, 56.5% of the students believe that they do not have sufficient previous training to enable them write good dissertation. On the other hand 43.5% of the students are either not sure or do see themselves as having sufficient training that could help them write good dissertation. The result suggests that students lack the requisite previous training needed to write good dissertation.

*Table 6 :* Understanding of Research

The level of students' appreciation of research is presented by table 6 below.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 120 | 27.8 | 27.8 | 27.8 |
| | Disagree | 214 | 49.5 | 49.5 | 77.3 |
| | Neutral | 49 | 11.3 | 11.3 | 88.7 |
| | Agree | 40 | 9.3 | 9.3 | 97.9 |
| | Strongly Agree | 9 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The table six indicates that students think they have insufficient knowledge in research. This is reflected in the views of 77.3% of the respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the assertion that they have sufficient research knowledge to enable them conduct good research. This means that students' appreciation of the research process is very low.



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*Table 7 :* Writing Good Research Independently

Presented on table 7 is the students' reaction to independent work done.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 122 | 28.2 | 28.2 | 28.2 |
| | Disagree | 172 | 39.8 | 39.8 | 68.1 |
| | Neutral | 45 | 10.4 | 10.4 | 78.5 |
| | Agree | 58 | 13.4 | 13.4 | 91.9 |
| | Strongly Agree | 35 | 8.1 | 8.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The table 7 reveals that as many as 68.1% confessed their inability to do independent work, while 31.9% were either not sure or could not guarantee that their work was not independent. This shows that by students own estimation they hardly do independent work.

*Table 8 :* Knowledge of Sourcing for Materials

Table 8 presents the extent of students' knowledge in sourcing for research materials.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 130 | 30.1 | 30.1 | 30.1 |
| | Disagree | 191 | 44.2 | 44.2 | 74.3 |
| | Neutral | 47 | 10.9 | 10.9 | 85.2 |
| | Agree | 53 | 12.3 | 12.3 | 97.5 |
| | Strongly Agree | 11 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

As presented by table 8 above, 74.3% disagree that they have what it takes to source for research materials. Only 35.7% either believed that they have the ability to source for research materials or were not too sure of themselves. Thus, we can say that in students' estimation sourcing for research materials is a setback to writing quality dissertation.

iii. *Students Perception Toward Research Writing*

Hoe students perceive HND dissertation writing is presented by tables 9 to 12. These tables try to measure students' perception in terms of whether dissertation at this level is a necessity, formality, should be replaced with course work, or should done in groups.

*Table 9 :* Necessity of Dissertation

Table 9 presents findings on whether students perceive research at HND level to be necessary or not.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 170 | 39.4 | 39.4 | 39.4 |
| | Disagree | 166 | 38.4 | 38.4 | 77.8 |
| | Neutral | 37 | 8.6 | 8.6 | 86.3 |
| | Agree | 37 | 8.6 | 8.6 | 94.9 |
| | Strongly Agree | 22 | 5.1 | 5.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The table 9 above shows that about 77.8% do not share the idea that HND dissertation is unnecessary. Only 22.2% think it is either not necessary or are in different. This implies that students see HND dissertation as very necessary.

*Table 10 :* Dissertation Just a Formality

The perception of students regarding whether dissertation is just a formality is presented by table 10 below.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 96 | 22.2 | 22.2 | 22.2 |
| | Disagree | 164 | 38.0 | 38.0 | 60.2 |
| | Neutral | 54 | 12.5 | 12.5 | 72.7 |
| | Agree | 94 | 21.8 | 21.8 | 94.4 |
| | Strongly Agree | 24 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |



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From the table 10, it is learned that only 27.4% consider dissertation as a formality. 60.2% think HND dissertation should not be taken as just a formality. This means that student believe that HND dissertation is of value and must continue.

*Table 11 :* Replace Dissertation with Course Work

The study sought to find out how students feel about replacing dissertation with a course work. This result is presented by table 11.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 89 | 20.6 | 20.6 | 20.6 |
| | Disagree | 139 | 32.2 | 32.2 | 52.8 |
| | Neutral | 51 | 11.8 | 11.8 | 64.6 |
| | Agree | 109 | 25.2 | 25.2 | 89.8 |
| | Strongly Agree | 44 | 10.2 | 10.2 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

From table 11 above students prefer dissertation to course work as 52.8% would not want dissertation to be replaced by course work. On the other hand 35.4% prefer course work to dissertation, and 11.8% cannot choose between the two. This means that students would still want dissertation to continue in the syllabus.

*Table 12 :* Do Dissertation in Groups

Table 12 presents the views of students on the form that dissertation should be writing, either by groups or by individual.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 52 | 12.0 | 12.0 | 12.0 |
| | Disagree | 77 | 17.8 | 17.8 | 29.9 |
| | Neutral | 19 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 34.3 |
| | Agree | 124 | 28.7 | 28.7 | 63.0 |
| | Strongly Agree | 160 | 37.0 | 37.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The findings as presented by table 12 suggest that students when given the option students would choose group work over individual work. While 29.9% will opt for individual work, 65.7% prefer group work; while 4.4% could not decide.

iv. *Students Perception of Supervisor's Quality*

How students perceive the quality of their supervisors and supervision in general is described by tables 13 to 16. These tables measure students' perception of the supervisor quality construct with supervisor's perceived knowledge of research, supervision style, supervisor's technical guidance and supervisor's perceived training needs.

*Table 13 :* Supervisor's Knowledge in Research

Table 13 below presents the findings on students' perception of their supervisors' knowledge in research.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 15 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3.5 |
| | Disagree | 14 | 3.2 | 3.2 | 6.7 |
| | Neutral | 9 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 8.8 |
| | Agree | 126 | 29.2 | 29.2 | 38.0 |
| | Strongly Agree | 268 | 62.0 | 62.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

From the table 13 above, the findings suggest that by students' own estimation, supervisors have adequate research knowledge to guide students in dissertation writing. While 91.2% of the respondents agreed that the supervisors are knowledgeable enough, only 6.7% suspects the level of knowledge of supervisors, with 2.1% unsure of supervisors' research knowledge level. This means that supervisor's research knowledge does not in any way affect the quality of dissertation.



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*Table 14 :* Supervisor Adds to Confusion

Table 14 presents the result of how students assess the manner with which dissertation supervisors contribute to reduce students' anxiety in producing effective dissertation.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 120 | 27.8 | 27.8 | 27.8 |
| | Disagree | 160 | 37.0 | 37.0 | 64.8 |
| | Neutral | 50 | 11.6 | 11.6 | 76.4 |
| | Agree | 68 | 15.7 | 15.7 | 92.1 |
| | Strongly Agree | 34 | 7.9 | 7.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The finding of table 14 indicates that students perceive their supervisors as doing little to make things clearer for them. From the result, 64.8% of the respondents believe that supervisors do not do enough to minimize students' anxiety in research writing; but 23.6% think supervisors do their best to alleviate anxieties, while 11.6% remain indifferent. This suggests that research anxiety negatively influence the quality of students' dissertation.

*Table 15 :* Supervisor's Technical/Professional Guidance

The table 15 presents the results of how students assess the amount and quality of technical and professional guidance provided by supervisors.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 13 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 |
| | Disagree | 33 | 7.6 | 7.6 | 10.6 |
| | Neutral | 35 | 8.1 | 8.1 | 18.8 |
| | Agree | 162 | 37.5 | 37.5 | 56.3 |
| | Strongly Agree | 189 | 43.8 | 43.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The findings by table 15 show that 82.3% of the respondents admitted that the supervisors provide sufficient technical and professional guidance for the dissertation writing. 10.6% find the technical and professional advice provided by supervisors as inadequate; while 8.1% are indifferent about the issue. This means that supervisors provide the needed technical and professional guidance needed to produce quality dissertation.

*Table 16 :* Supervisor's Research Training Needs

Table 16 below presents the findings on students' expectation on supervisor's research training needs based on the overall assessment of supervisor's contribution toward the writing of dissertation.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 213 | 49.3 | 49.3 | 49.3 |
| | Disagree | 143 | 33.1 | 33.1 | 82.4 |
| | Neutral | 35 | 8.1 | 8.1 | 90.5 |
| | Agree | 28 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 97.0 |
| | Strongly Agree | 13 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 432 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

As indicated by table 16 above, 82.4% of respondents believe that supervisors are experience enough to need any research training. While 9.5% thought that supervisors may need some amount of research training, 8.1% were not too sure whether supervisors will need research training or not. This result suggests that supervisors' training is not a prerequisite for improving the quality of dissertation produced at HND level.

*b) Findings of the Physical Review of Dissertation*

Hundred completed and approved dissertations ere physically reviewed to assess the quality of HND dissertation on the basis of problem identification, setting of SMART objectives, having the right methodology, originality of work, some contribution to knowledge and whether the findings relate to the objectives set.

The findings revealed that only 38% of the works were able to identify a research problem, which



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indicates that problem identification and definition is a key set back affecting the quality of HND dissertation.

Similarly, 90% of the dissertations could not outlined appropriate research methodology to guide the work. In most cases, methods used were different from methods outlined in the methodology chapter. This lack of appropriate research methodology affects research quality. Again, only 14% of the dissertations were original, which means that about 86% were either copied work or does not have any ingenuity. Similarly, just 8% of the dissertations contributed in some ways to knowledge. This suggested that HND dissertation is not able to achieve an important objective of adding to knowledge since students do not do independent work but usually copy existing works.

An interesting finding was that as much as 64% of the students were able to set SMART objectives. However, objectives were found to have no relationship with findings of the studies. Thus, the findings revealed that 85% of dissertation set one objective, while the findings address something unrelated to the objectives. This suggests that HND dissertation does not solve problems.

It can be concluded that HND dissertation is not effective when we consider the actual dissertation presented and approved by respective supervisors. The quality of research work is very low and hardly meets undergraduate research standards.

## VI. Concluding Comments

In other to measure the effectiveness of undergraduate dissertation at HND level, the Business School of Takoradi Polytechnic was used. Two methods were used for the assessment, which include collection of data from 500 third year students writing dissertation in the Business School, and also review of 100 completed and approved dissertation. The review was to confirm the outcome of the survey conducted.

The findings of the survey agreed with that of physical review of the dissertation. For instance the findings of the survey indicated that students lacked sufficient training and knowledge of the research process. Students also could not do independent work when it comes to writing research, and found it difficult to source for research materials on their own. Again, students agreed that HND dissertation is necessary and must continue without replacing it with course work.

They however conceded that dissertation should discontinue to be written on individual basis but rather be done in groups. Though students perceived their supervisors to have adequate research knowledge and may not need further training to supervise dissertations, they are perceived to do little to alleviate students' research anxiety. Similarly, students believed that their supervisors do not give them the adequate technical and professional guidance they need to write dissertation.

These findings are supported by the review of 100 selected dissertations. In assessing the quality of dissertation, only SMART objective was found to be something that students could outlined. The findings show that students had serious problems with defining research problem, setting the appropriate methodology, doing original research, contributing anything to knowledge and more importantly addressing the research objectives by the research findings and analysis.

Therefore, it can be concluded from the findings of both the survey and the review that undergraduate dissertation at HND level is not effective.

Thus, the polytechnic authorities should either scrap the HND dissertation from the syllabus or find a better way to improve it. Considering how students believe that dissertation is necessary, it would be necessary that the latter suggestion is given more attention. Teaching of research method could taken more seriously, and be practical enough to give student requisite research knowledge. Research methodology must be treated as 'scoring' subject if not so already so that students will attach seriousness to the study of the subject. Though students prefer writing dissertation individually, a consideration of group work could help since sharing of ideas and cost shall alleviate some of the challenges associated with dissertation writing. Furthermore, supervisors must be encouraged to improve their research skills as well as their guidance skills to make dissertation writing encouraging to students. Finally, introduction of best research award to students could go a long way to enhance the effectiveness to HND dissertation.

This study has two main limitations. Firstly, the paper is only quantitative, which makes it was difficult to measure opinion and reasons for the quantitative responses. Secondly, the study used only Business School of Takoradi Polytechnic, the results of which may not reflect the position of Polytechnics in Ghana. Thus future studies may consider using both quantitative and qualitative research, while including other faculties and Polytechnics in the population and sample selections.

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## Appendix 1 : Quantitative Questionnaire Construction

Please **tick** one from the multiple answers below based on your frank opinion, for each question from 1 to 15.

From question 8 to 15, ***strongly disagree*** denotes total disagreement to the statement, while ***strongly agree*** denotes total agreement to the statement. ***Neutral*** means you are not sure of the statement.

*a) Respondent Profile*

1. Program offered:
   Accountancy [ ] Marketing [ ]
   Purchasing/Supply [ ] Mgt/Secretaryship [ ]
2. Gender: Male [ ] Female [ ]
3. Gender of Supervisor: Male [ ] Female [ ]

*b) Efforts Students' put into dissertation writing*

4. On the average how many months did you use to write your dissertation?
   Under 2 months **[ ]** 2 – 4 months **[ ]**
   Over 4 months **[ ]**
5. On the average how many hours per week did you spend on your project during the period of writing your dissertation?
   Under 3 hour per week **[ ]**
   3–6 hours per week **[ ]** Over 6 hours per week **[ ]**
6. On the average how many hours did you use to meet your supervisor per week during the period of writing your dissertation?
   Under 2 hour per week **[ ]** 2–3 hours per week **[ ]**
   Over 3 hours per week **[ ]**
7. On the average how much did you spend on your dissertation?
   Under GH¢300 **[ ]** GH¢300 – GH¢600 **[ ]**
   Over GH¢600 **[ ]**

*c) Students Level of Research Knowledge*

8. My previous training in research is sufficient to help me write HND dissertation easily
   Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ]
   Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]
9. My understanding of writing dissertation is good enough



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Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]

10. I can write good dissertation on my own without any copy work
    Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]
11. I have little knowledge if any, on how to source for research materials

*d) Students' Perception toward Undergraduate (HND) Dissertation Writing*

12. I do not think HND Dissertation is so necessary
    Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]
13. I see NHD dissertation as just a formality
    Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]
14. HND Dissertation could be better replaced by a Course Work
    Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]
15. For effective dissertation, I think it can be done in groups, rather than by individuals
    Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]

*e) Students Perception of Supervisor's Quality*

16. I would say my supervisor is knowledgeable in dissertation writing
    Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]
17. My supervisor sometimes does enough to alleviated my anxiety in writing dissertation
    Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]
18. My supervisor made the research work difficult through his technical and professional guidance
    Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]
19. From experience I think my supervisor needs some training in research to be able to better supervise HND dissertation.
    Strongly disagree [ ] Disagree [ ] Neutral [ ] Agree [ ] Strongly Agree [ ]



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