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ATTITUDE OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS TOWARDS THESIS-WRITING IN NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA

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ABSTRACT

It is curious to know that not all postgraduate students have a positive attitude toward thesis writing and do not have enough knowledge and skills towards research. Thus, the current study investigated attitude of postgraduate students towards thesis writing. Survey research design was used for the study. 16-item questionnaire titled 'Postgraduate Students' Attitude towards Thesis Writing (PSATW) was used to collect data from 246 (178 masters and 68 PhD) students consisting of 104 males and 142 females who were drawn through accidental sampling technique. PSATW was validated by experts while the reliability was tested using Cronbach Alpha to obtain a coefficient value of 0.82. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. The findings of the study indicated that postgraduate students have a positive attitude towards thesis writing. The findings of the study further revealed that while masters students have a more positive attitude towards thesis writing than their doctoral counterparts, female students are more favourably disposed towards thesis writing than their male counterparts. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that College of Postgraduate Studies should consistently conduct seminars and workshops for postgraduate students on the need to improve their attitude towards thesis writing.

Keywords: Attitude of postgraduate students towards thesis-writing.

Introduction

Research forms the backbone of a university education. Research is the culture of education, in the sense that it is the business of everyone, not only teachers but also students. It is a process of proffering solutions to problems. It is a conscious effort towards pushing back the frontiers of ignorance while advancing the frontiers of knowledge (Bandele & Adebule, 2013). Research is the painstaking analysis of the problems or a detailed study of the specific issues or problems via the use of scientific method (Reddy, 2019). Educational process is expected to be the output of research and student-teacher interaction in the classroom is expected to result into further investigation or research (Abun, Magallanes, Encarnacion & Foronda, 2019). Thus, educational processes be research-

based because innovations are expected to be discovered in its course.

The idea behind conducting any kind of research as a university student is not only to enhance one's knowledge in a field of interest but to build one's sense of creativity, inquiry as well as critical thinking skills. The essence of research is to enable students to position themselves into the bigger picture of learning, and encourage pedagogic culture (Groessler, 2017). During the period of post-graduateship, students are provided with academic support mechanisms to enable them complete an independent research thesis. Such support mechanisms include: priority setting exercises, research supervision, protected time for research, obligatory requirement to publish, seminars for proposal development, peer review and data analysis (Shah et al., 2021). Thus, a postgraduate student can earn the title of Masters/doctorate of a chosen field of endeavour only after carrying out research work and compiling the write up of their research in the form of a thesis. Thus, writing a thesis is usually a vital step towards the achievement of the afore-mentioned.

Thesis writing is at the core of any postgraduate programme. Thus, every postgraduate student is expected to conduct a research and write a thesis as a requirement for postgraduate degree. The inclusion of thesis-writing in the academic curriculum of postgraduate programme is for the purpose of increasing research productivity (Shah et al., 2021). Thesis writing generally involves an empirical investigation of specific question(s) within the field of one's study (James & Slater, 2013). James and Slater added that the cardinal essence of thesis writing is to expand the students' understanding within the field of study and be equipped with the knowledge and skills in conducting research, teaching, textbook and paper writing. The processes involved in thesis writing include: Identification of problem, formulation of research questions and hypotheses, research design, presentation and analysis of data and report writing. In recognition of the relevance of thesis writing to postgraduateship, it becomes necessary to examine their attitude towards it.

Attitude refers to one's disposition towards something or somebody. Attitude is defined as a person's emotional response to something. Students' attitudes are defined as the student's way of thinking, either positive or negative, towards a given subject (i.e., their own learning, the course content, or the instructor) (Vedder, 2018). Attitude refers to internal beliefs that influence personal actions which is learned through one's experience (Adu, Galloway and Olaoye, 2014). The attitude of postgraduate students' towards thesis writing can either be positive or negative. Kumari, et.al (2018) found that postgraduate students have a negative attitude towards research which was caused by

their lack of knowledge about research while Siamian (2015) found that postgraduate students had a very positive attitude toward research, and it is useful in their life but such positive attitude did not correlate to their plan to conduct research in the future. Thus, that not all postgraduate students have a positive attitude toward thesis writing and do not have enough knowledge and skills toward research. Attitude of postgraduate students towards thesis writing could vary with their programme type and gender. Thus, the researcher sought to investigate the attitude of postgraduate students' towards thesis writing.

Features of a Good Thesis

Thesis is an aspect of postgraduate education which students must pass satisfactorily to merit the award of postgraduate degree (Asogwa, Wombo and Ugwoke, 2014). Asogwa et al. added that thesis is an academic treatise written by a postgraduate student based on original research for the award of masters or doctorate degree. Thesis ought to be written in correct, coherent language, in an appropriate style, correctly in strict adherence to the conventions of citation. Additionally, there must be clarity in text in thesis writing. There are five thesis main components of a thesis viz: Introductory chapter, review of related literature chapter, method chapter, presentation and analysis of result chapter, and discussion, conclusion and recommendation chapter.

It goes without saying that the art of thesis writing lends itself to complexity given the large number of linguistic errors made by students. This is evidently so given that most students are unable to use the foreign language forms and structures appropriately (Sahla, 2014). Sahla added that the majority of students are unable to reach this objective because they do not master the linguistic aspects like prepositions, punctuations, spelling, tenses, and so on. It can be logically deduced that the mastery of the art of thesis writing can be challenged by negative interference of the mother tongue, the Intra-lingual and inter-lingual errors.

Moderating Influence of programme type on Postgraduate Students' Attitude towards Thesis Writing

Postgraduate programmes include masters and doctorate. It is possible that a doctoral student will have a more positive attitude towards thesis-writing than their masters counterparts because they have been exposed to it at both undergraduate and masters level. Corroborating this, Kakupa and Zue (2019) and Seher (2018) compared Master students' and Doctoral students' attitude toward research and found that Doctoral students have more positive attitude

toward research compared to Master students. Seher (2018) added that students who had more exposure to scientific research had more positive attitude toward research than those who do not. Similarly, Oguan, Bernal, and Pinca (2014) found that those with a high academic qualification and academic grade display a high positive attitude towards thesis writing than those who do not. Rezaei and Miandashti (2013) observed that Master of Science students and Doctoral students who exude positive attitudes toward research had a good number of published research paper. In contrast, the masters student could have a more favorable disposition towards their doctoral counterparts given that they are doing a thesis writing for the first time at a postgraduate level. Thus, that sense of novelty and spirit of exploration could inspire a positive attitude in the masters' student.

Moderating Influence of Gender on Postgraduate Students' Attitude towards Thesis Writing

Gender is a factor that is capable of affecting postgraduate students' attitude towards thesis writing. It is possible that female students who seem to be naturally good with writing could have a more positive attitude towards thesis writing than their male counterparts. On the other hand, male students who appear to be naturally adept in matters of statistics could have a more positive attitude towards thesis writing than their female counterparts. Many studies have been done to measure the attitude of postgraduate students towards research across gender. For instance, some researchers (Belgrave & Jules, 2015; Shaukat, Siddiquah, Abiodullah & Akbar, 2014) found that male postgraduate students had significantly positive attitudes towards research than their female counterparts. Similarly, Oguan, Bernal, and Pinca (2014) found that the male students are more positive towards thesis writing compared to their female counterparts. However, Bibi, Iqbal and Majid (2012) argued otherwise that male and female students have almost the same level of attitude toward research. In view of the afore-mentioned contradictions, it became expedient to find out the moderating influences of programme type ad gender on postgraduate students; attitude towards research in in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Thus, the following research questions were raised:

1. What are the attitudes of postgraduate students towards thesis writing?
2. What are the attitudes of male and female postgraduate students towards thesis writing?
3. What are the attitudes of masters and doctoral

postgraduate students towards thesis writing?

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female postgraduate students towards thesis writing.
2. There is no significant difference between the masters and doctoral postgraduate students towards thesis writing.

Research Method

Research Design: Survey research design was adopted for the study. This design is considered appropriate for the present study given that it sought to determine scores of sample of a population on their attitude towards thesis writing in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Procedure: 16-item questionnaire titled 'Postgraduate Students' Attitude towards Thesis Writing (PSATW) was used to collect data from 246 (178 masters and 68 PhD) students consisting of 104 males and 142 females who were drawn through accidental sampling technique. PSATW which was adapted from attitude scale by Rafanello (2008) was validated by experts while the reliability was tested using Cronbach Alpha to obtain a coefficient value of 0.82. This was considered reliable based on the recommendation of Nworgu (2015).

Data Analysis: Data analysis was done with the use of mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 was used. For the hypotheses, p-value interpretation was used with the decision rule that if the p-value is low (<0.05), the null hypothesis was rejected but when the p-value is high (>0.05), the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Presentation Results

Table 1: *Mean Scores of Respondents on their Attitudes towards Thesis Writing.*

S/N	The following represent my attitude towards thesis writing:	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Thesis writing should be made optional.	2.52	0.71	Agree
2.	Thesis writing is important to me.	3.62	0.90	Agree
3.	Thesis writing is interesting.	3.24	0.60	Agree
4.	I do not enjoy thesis writing at all.	2.03	0.71	Disagree
5.	Thesis writing is a waste of time.	2.16	0.87	Disagree
6.	My brain seems to go blank when I start writing.	2.28	0.63	Disagree
7.	I don't think I write as well as my colleagues.	2.32	0.72	Disagree
8.	I think about how my work will sound to others.	3.07	0.58	Agree
9.	I should not start writing without having a written plan.	3.18	0.93	Agree
10.	I like seeing my thoughts on paper.	3.30	0.63	Agree
11.	I don't seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly.	2.43	0.73	Disagree
12.	My co-students seem to enjoy reading what I write.	3.09	0.90	Agree
13.	I believe that writing is a habit and the more I write, the better I write.	3.42	0.53	Agree
14.	I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing.	3.19	0.85	Agree
15.	Thesis writing is stressful to me.	2.38	0.80	Disagree
16.	I'm afraid of writing when I know it will be evaluated.	2.56	0.64	Agree

Table 1 shows that item 2 with a mean score of 3.90 has the highest mean score. This indicates that most of the respondents agreed that thesis writing is important to them. This is followed by item 3 with a mean score of 3.24 which shows that a good number of respondents are of the view that thesis writing is interesting. This is followed by items 14, 9, 12, and 8 with mean scores of 3.19, 3.18, 3.09 and 3.07. Item 4 with lowest mean score of 2.03 shows that the least number of the respondents are of the opinion that they do not enjoy thesis writing at all. The cluster mean of 2.80 shows that postgraduate students have a positive attitude towards thesis writing.

Table 2: *Mean Scores of Male and Female Respondents on their Attitudes towards Thesis Writing*

		Male		Female		
S/N	**The following represent my attitude towards thesis writing:**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Remark**
17.	Thesis writing should be made optional.	2.54	0.66	2.50	0.69	Agree
18.	Thesis writing is important to me.	3.27	0.77	3.84	0.72	Agree
19.	Thesis writing is interesting.	3.19	0.73	3.36	0.71	Agree
20.	I do not enjoy thesis writing at all.	2.08	0.78	1.97	0.70	Disagree
21.	Thesis writing is a waste of time.	2.18	0.53	2.20	0.68	Disagree
22.	My brain seems to go blank when I start writing.	2.21	0.81	2.19	0.86	Disagree
23.	I don't think I write as well as my colleagues.	2.20	0.54	2.43	0.66	Disagree
24.	I think about how my work will sound to others.	3.09	0.93	3.11	1.00	Agree
25.	I should not start writing without having a written plan.	3.05	0.82	3.27	0.74	Agree
26.	I like seeing my thoughts on paper.	3.36	0.64	3.22	0.68	Agree
27.	I don't seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly.	2.39	0.51	2.47	0.56	Disagree
28.	My co-students seem to enjoy reading what I write.	3.02	0.79	3.15	0.94	Agree
29.	I believe that writing is a habit and the more I write, the better I write.	3.54	0.77	3.40	0.74	Agree
30.	I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing.	3.39	0.83	2.92	0.79	Agree
31.	Thesis writing is stressful to me.	2.45	0.67	2.31	0.64	Disagree
32.	I'm afraid of writing when I know it will be evaluated.	2.50	0.59	2.66	0.61	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**2.78**	**0.71**	**2.81**	**0.73**	

Table 2 shows that item 29 for male students has the highest mean score of 3.54. This indicates that most of the respondents agreed that thesis writing is a habit and that the more they write, the better they write. In contrast, item 18 with a mean score of 3.84 has the highest mean score for the female respondents; indicating that majority of them agree that thesis writing is important to them. The cluster means of 2.78 and 2.81 respectively for the male and female respondents show that female students have a more positive attitude towards thesis writing than their male counterparts.

Table 3 *Mean Scores of Masters and Doctoral Respondents on their Attitudes towards Thesis Writing* Masters Doctorate

S/N	The following represent my attitude towards thesis writing:	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Remark
33.	Thesis writing should be made optional.	2.54	0.60	2.50	0.78	Agree
34.	Thesis writing is important to me.	3.82	0.70	3.42	0.58	Agree
35.	Thesis writing is interesting.	3.25	0.73	3.18	0.98	Agree
36.	I do not enjoy thesis writing at all.	2.11	0.82	1.94	0.66	Disagree
37.	Thesis writing is a waste of time.	2.20	0.54	2.18	0.62	Disagree
38.	My brain seems to go blank when I start writing.	2.24	0.93	2.16	0.90	Disagree
39.	I don't think I write as well as my colleagues.	2.20	0.68	2.33	0.70	Disagree
40.	I think about how my work will sound to others.	3.12	0.77	3.08	0.64	Agree
41.	I should not start writing without having a written plan.	3.12	0.88	3.20	0.92	Agree
42.	I like seeing my thoughts on paper.	3.31	0.68	3.27	0.76	Agree
43.	I don't seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly.	2.40	0.55	2.46	0.67	Disagree
44.	My co-students seem to enjoy reading what I write.	3.09	0.98	3.08	0.82	Agree
45.	I believe that writing is a habit and the more I write, the better I write.	3.58	0.55	3.36	0.68	Agree
46.	I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas in writing.	3.31	0.68	3.00	0.65	Agree
47.	Thesis writing is stressful to me.	2.41	0.76	2.35	0.69	Disagree
48.	I'm afraid of writing when I know it will be evaluated.	2.62	0.97	2.54	0.93	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**2.83**	**0.74**	**2.75**	**0.75**	

Table 3 shows that item 34 for masters and doctoral students has the highest mean scores of 3.82 and 3.42 respectively. These indicate that most of the respondents agreed that thesis writing is important to them. The cluster means of 2.83 and 2.75 respectively for the male and female respondents show that masters students have a more positive attitude towards thesis writing than their doctoral counterparts.

Table 4: t-Test Analysis of the Significant Difference between the Attitudes of Male and Female Postgraduate Students towards Thesis Writing.

Gender	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	df	p-value	alpha level	Decision
Male	104	2.83	0.74				
				244	0.13	0.05	Not Significant
Female	142	2.75	0.75				

Result analysis in Table 4 shows no significant difference the attitudes of male and female postgraduate students towards thesis writing. The analysis revealed that since the p-value of 0.13 is greater than 0.05 alpha level at 244 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that there is no significant difference between the attitudes of male and female postgraduate students towards thesis writing.

Table 5: t-Test Analysis of the Significant Difference between the Attitudes of Masters and Doctoral Students towards Thesis Writing.

Programme	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	df	p-value	alpha level	Decision
Masters	178	2.78	0.71				
				244	0.01	0.05	Not Significant
Doctoral	68	2.81	0.73				

Result analysis in Table 4 shows a significant difference the attitudes of masters and doctoral students towards thesis writing. The analysis revealed that since the p-value of 0.01 is less than 0.05 alpha level at 244 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between the attitudes of masters and doctoral students towards thesis writing in favour of the masters students.

Discussion

Gender and Attitude of postgraduate students' towards thesis writing

The findings of the study revealed that female students have a more positive attitude towards thesis writing than their male counterparts. This goes to show that female students are self-efficacious in thesis writing than their male counterparts. Thus, a self-efficacious student will be less anxious in matters of thesis writing. In contrast to the findings of the current

study, Oguan, Bernal, and Pinca (2014) found that the male students are more positive towards thesis writing compared to their female counterparts. In further contrast to the current study, Bibi, Iqbal and Majid (2012) found that male and female students have almost the same level of attitude toward research. The afore-mentioned contradictions may not be unconnected to sample characteristics. The findings of the study further revealed that no significant difference existed between the attitudes of male and female postgraduate students towards thesis writing. This is rather surprising given that females, by nature appear to be more adept in writing than their male counterparts. The findings of the study is contradicted by the assertions of Shaukat, Siddiquah, Abiodullah and Akbar (2014) that male postgraduate students had significantly positive attitudes towards research than their female counterparts.

Programme type and attitude of postgraduate students' towards thesis writing

The findings of the study indicated masters students have a more positive and significant attitude towards thesis writing than their doctoral counterparts. This is quite curious given that doctoral students are more experienced in thesis writing than their masters counterpart. However, the attitude trend could be attributed to the fact that masters students are new in the postgraduate programme and are motivated on writing thesis at postgraduate level. Contradicting the findings of the current study, Kakupa and Zue (2019) and Seher, Remziye, Kizilcik, and İlker (2018) compared Master students' and Doctoral students' attitude toward research and found that Doctoral students have more positive attitude toward research compared to Master students. Seher (2018) added that students who had more exposure to scientific research had more positive attitude toward research than those who do not. Similarly, Oguan, Bernal, and Pinca (2014) found that those with a high academic qualification and academic grade display a high positive attitude towards thesis writing than those who do not.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that postgraduate students have a positive attitude towards thesis writing. It was further concluded that while masters students have a more positive attitude towards thesis writing than their doctoral counterparts, female students are more favourably disposed towards thesis writing than their male counterparts.

Recommendations

In line with the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Research supervisors should devise supervisory strategies that will improve postgraduate students' attitude towards thesis writing.
2. College of postgraduate studies should consistently conduct seminars and workshops for postgraduate students on the need to improve their attitude towards thesis writing.
3. Doctoral students should take the art of thesis writing seriously in order to bridge the attitude gap between and their masters counterparts.

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