

**SOME ASPECTS OF THE STANDARD OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH-
BASED ESSAY/PROJECT REPORTS KAMPALA INTERNATIONAL
UNIVERSITY**

**BY
KIPKULEI K. MOSES**

BSE/14378/71/DF

**A RESEARCH-BASED PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
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THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE WITH
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Declaration

I KIPKULEI K. MOSES declare that this report is my original work and has not been submitted to any other university or institution of higher learning for any academic award.

Signed  Date 31/7/2010

KIPKULEI K. MOSES

BSE/14378/71/DF

Approval

I certify that the research-based essay project report submitted by the student was done under my supervision as the student's university supervisor.

Signed  Date 10/08/2010

MR. GEORGE KULABA

Dedication

To my father Kipkulei Kandagor and my mother Targok Kipkulei for their tender care during my early childhood.

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the tireless efforts and kindness of my supervisor Mr. George Kulaba who guided me through the whole process of writing this project report.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my brothers and sisters, David, Jacob, Kosgei, Linah, Grace, Jane and Elimu for their financial and moral support during the tedious academic process without forgetting my late sister Monica who bought for me the application form for Kampala International University.

Special regards to my friends, Musila, Joshat and Rosemary.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to establish the quality and the authenticity of undergraduate research based essay reports of Kampala International University. The research-based essay reports in the faculty of education were studied for both regular and in-service students. The quality of the project reports studied was found to be poor, 52% of the analyzed booklet had mistakes in both or some of the aspects examined. 35% of the studied project reports did not have clear objectives and 69% had unmanageable number of objectives. The fluency of the studied reports seemed to be impeded by the editorial (53%) and grammatical (40%) errors. The reference in the text (38%) and list of cited reference (81%) did not fully tally with any of the reference formats, although American Psychological Association (APA) seemed to have been used in most of the project reports. No duplication of work was found from the booklets studied, the common topics were; poor performance (27%) and academic performance (20%) and therefore the authenticity of the project reports were questionable.

The quality of the research-based essay reports was poor and the high likelihood of plagiarism and fraud made the authenticity of the project reports questionable.

There was need for improvement of writing skills among the students and dangers plus consequences of plagiarism and fraud made clear to them.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Background of the study

Undergraduate degree in most universities, including Kampala international university, requires the undergraduate to undertake project work and produce a research-based project report which has to be submitted to the relevant faculty or department as partial fulfillment of the award of the degree. The objectives of this course are:

- To inculcate scientific thinking and promotes the development of logical thinking habits and organization.
- To provide knowledge for example knowledge on how to do things better or in amore efficient manner.
- To enable one to attain higher position in the social structure for example many departments in universities require students to do research and write a report as one of the requirements for the completion of their studies.
- To help learners in solving various problems in a society.

Despite these vital importance of research-based essay project there seems to a problem in the way this unit is handled in Kampala International University and that is why the researcher has carried out the analysis of research-based project reports to establish what the true situation and how it can be improved.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Research –based essay or project is of great importance to the students and the community at large. But there are a number of doubts. Are they of the expected standard? Are they authentic? Do students take this task seriously or they just carry it out as a means of completing their studies of a given level like degree but not as a way of generating new knowledge?

Some lack the basic elements of a dissertation like the research design, leaving the whole project report below the minimum acceptable standard of a dissertation (Sseremba and Kiggundu 2010)

1.2 The general objectives

The general objective of this study was to establish the authenticity and quality of the research-based essay reports and then propose ways of discouraging plagiarism and improve the quality of the research –base essay.

1.3 Specific objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives;

- Assess the quality of the research-based essay reports
- Establish the authenticity of the research-based essay reports

1.4 Justification of the study

The findings of the study will be of importance as;

- It will help in the process of molding students to acquire skills of carrying out independent research.
- It enables individuals to be able to carry out research and provide solutions to social and economic problems in the society.
- Also it can enhance political changes by carrying out research on current political ideologies and coming up with new political ideologies that can change the political structures.

1.5 Hypothesis

Most research-based essay reports of Kampala International University are of poor quality and they are not authentic.

1.6 Scope of the study

The study was carried out in Kampala International University in July 2010. Research-based essay reports in the faculty of education for both in-service and regular students were analysed. The study was focused on the quality of the project reports where the objectives, errors in the text and referencing was looked at plus the originality of the project reports which was assessed by analyzing the areas of study and the common phrases used in the titles.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Literature Review

Literature survey was made, the general sources were; books, journals, and journals from the internet.

2.1 Quality research project report

Carnegie (2010) argued that theses must be a document of the best professional standards. It is a good practice for the student to prepare a document that meets the criteria for publication in the relevant professional journals. The standard must conform to standards of long achieve life and clear reproducibility.

Sseremba and Kiggundu (2010), however reveals that some lecturers of Kampala International University require students to pay a bribe in order to approve their research without any scrutiny and consequently submission of substandard report projects.

According to Kerlinger (1973) one of the most confusing things to the students of science is the special way the scientists uses ordinary words. To make matters worse, he invents new words. He goes a head to say there is good reason for this specialized language and therefore students must understand and learn the language of psychological and educational scientists.

The researcher is perceived as someone peculiar who works with facts, does numerous experiments and piles up facts for ultimate purpose of improving the lot mankind. Notion like this impedes students understanding of research, the activities and thinking of scientist and scientific research in general.

Ortrun (2002) stated that one of the problems which undergraduates face is the requirement that the research-based essay report must be completed in a very restricted period of time, normally one year for full time students and two years for part time students. This problem is frequently compounded by the fact that an undergraduate has had no informal experience of independent research or any formal tuition in techniques and method of research.

Reddit-A-r (1998) stated that one may wonder why students face difficult while writing their research-based essay report and a simplest answer could be that this happens because the research-based essay report is meant to be difficult in order to be one medium through which students' abilities and progress can be assessed.

Gay (1989) found in his research that approximately 75% of students and researchers state that they postpone to some extent when they write larger assignments. To postpone is normal behavior, but it may become problematic if it continues for years without the assignment being finished.

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) the salient components of research report include; title, abstract, table of contents, list of tables, list of figures list of abbreviations, literature review, methodology, results and discussions, summary, conclusions, and recommendations plus the references.

Custom writing (2007) methodology section includes surveys, interviews, observations, experiments, and analysis. If the topic of investigation is new, the methodology will be exploratory. A detailed explanation about how the data was discovered and analyzed in the paper is also required.

According to Abdul (2008), while writing dissertations and theses the objectives should be stated in terms of the precise information necessary and designed to solve the research problem. Well formulated objectives serve as a road map in developing the research project. They also serve as a standard which enables external examiners to evaluate the quality and the value of work. Were the objectives met and do the recommendations flow logically for the objectives and the research findings? Were the objectives achieved?

Ortipot (2008) pointed out that examiners not only expect reports to be full of information, but also a report that has been edited and is written and formatted in a defining manner with important points being highlighted. Moreover, they expect the paper to be free from errors and the arguments to be flowing, so thorough revision of the report becomes important.

Wright (2009) added that proof reading consists of correcting spelling, grammar, punctuations and word choice to Standard English usage. The goal of editing is to ensure that a document is grammatically, linguistically and technically correct.

Many students believe that the first draft is the only and final draft. Good writing requires attention to detail; it means that writing as if every word and sentence should be taken seriously. Writers who wait until the last few hours or days to write a paper will not produce a good paper. It usually involves the revision of what is unclear, the deletion of what is extraneous and addition of what had been omitted (Royce A. et al 1993).

Abdul (2008) presented the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (IEEE) style, which uses a notational method of referencing, when referring to a source of information within the text of a document. In its simplest form, a citation is given consisting of a number enclosed by square brackets. The full details of the sources are given in a numerical reference at the end of the end document. A number enclosed in brackets e.g. [1] and [26] placed in the text of essay indicates the relevant reference.

Reference list at the end of the document according to (IEEE) format appears like this;

Author / Editors, title; subtitle (in italics) edition (if not the first) volume, (if it's multi-volume), place of publication; Publisher, year, page number. (Abdul 2008)

Jones, H. C et al (1999), stated that many disciplines require that you use the author-date format to cite reference in both the body of your dissertation or thesis and its reference section. In citing reference in the body, you might write 'as Jones (2004) points Out' or 'recent study (Jones 2004) shows...' Every source cited in the text is only listed in the reference section.

This is in agreement with the work of (Mugenda and Mugenda 2003), who pointed out that there are various ways of writing reference and bibliography. The format depends with university or the journal publishing the research work. The commonly used format,

American psychological association (APA) manual format, the author's last name and year of publication of the document are put in brackets when it comes after the paraphrased statement and only the year is put in brackets when the author's name and year comes at the beginning of the paraphrased statement. Example: Berry and Williams (1987) found ... or ... positively related to quality of life (Benny and Williams, 1987).

The example below shows how to list reference using (APA) manual; Harris, H.I (1970) why family estate planning? San Francisco, CA Bancroft- Whitney Co.

2.3 Authenticity of research project reports

According to Monalopan (2010), 94% of dissertation and theses services steal sources and plagiarize text from published research papers and other documents. (Carnegie 2010), added that a key component of academic integrity is avoiding plagiarism which is defined as the act of misrepresenting as one's own original work the ideas, interpretations and creative works of others. All cited sources should be listed in alphabetical order and within the text of the paper parentheses should show the reader where the writer found each piece of cited information.

Carnegie (2010), blames the largely amount of information available on the internet that it has become easier to plagiarize dissertations and theses which is done intentionally or not and schools consider plagiarism a form of academic dishonest that can have major penalty.

According to Babbie (1990) most students are worried how to write undergraduate research-based essay report because they do not know how and where to cite sources to avoid plagiarism, they think they do not have enough time to complete and a time s they feel intimidated when they have no idea how to write it.

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) present another dishonest practice among researchers called fraud. It refers to situation where a researcher fakes data that has not actually been collected. It also refers to false presentation of research methodology and results.

According to Borg and Gall (1993) even if you use the person's papers as a template and make modifications, you have still committed plagiarism. Your words, ideas and format must be your own.

Many people are surprised to find out that they can plagiarize themselves. This occurs when one recycle previously used project report material for another award. Even if you have written the project report yourself, it is plagiarism.

Also, many courses may have requirement about the number of sources a student is expected to use. Students who have come up short on their sources may feel the urge to pad text bibliography or list of work cited by adding some that they did not actually use in the paper.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Sample population and sample plan

The research-based essay reports available in the various faculties formed the sample population from the year 2006 up to 2009.

The faculty of education was chosen to allow in depth analysis.

A random selection of twenty research-based essay reports was made from the years selected.

3.2 Procedure

3.2.1 Establishment of quality

To establish the quality of sampled research-based essay reports, the following tabulated aspects was checked and ticked if they appear in the research-based essay report.

Table 1. Assessment of the quality

Aspect	Frequency			Percentage (%)		
	Education (regular)	In- service	Overall	Regular	In-service	Overall
Objectives: Unclear Unmanageable						
Errors in first time pages: Editorial Grammatical						
Improper referencing (first five): Text List						

3.1.2 Establishment of the authenticity

The following aspects was checked to establish the authenticity; the frequency of a commonly studied area for example, how many are written about school drop outs. Then the frequency of common phrases in the topic like, relationship, causes, and effects was checked as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Establishment of the authenticity

Aspect	Frequency			Percentage (%)		
	Education (regular)	In-service	Overall	Regular	In-service	Overall
Commonly studied area						
(i)						
(ii)						
(iii)						
(iv)						
Common phrases used in the titles						
(i)						
(ii)						
(iii)						
(iv)						

3.2 Data analysis

The data collected from the reports examined were tabulated and the percentage of the frequencies was calculated recorded. Basing on the percentage of mistakes found in the aspects examined the quality of the project reports were rated; fair (30%-40% mistakes), poor (50%-60% mistakes), very poor (mistakes 60% and above). The authenticity of the project reports were established by examining the similarity of the titles and were rated as follows; (5%-10% similar) less likely plagiarized, (11%-20% similar) likely plagiarized, (21% and above) more likely plagiarized.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The result of assessment of the quality of projects and project reports are presented in table 3.

4.2 Assessment of quality of research undertaken

Table3 shows the aspects examined to establish the quality of the project reports and the findings.

Table 3. Aspects examined to assess the quality of research undertaken

Aspect	Frequency			Percentage (%)		
	Education (regular)	In-service	Overall	Regular	In-service	Overall
Objectives:						
Unclear	17(40)	11(40)	28(80)	42	27	35
Unmanageable	31(40)	24(40)	55(80)	77	60	69
Errors in first three pages:						
Editorial	29(40)	13(40)	42(80)	72	32	53
Grammatical	26(40)	10(40)	36(80)	65	25	40
Improper referencing (first five):						
Text	16(40)	14(40)	30(80)	40	35	38
List	33(40)	32(40)	65(80)	82	80	81

The important aspects examined were objectives; errors, and reference which are discussed in the following subsections;

4.2.1 Quality of Objectives

In table3, 35% of the studied project reports did not have clear objectives and it was fair. Some were written or formulated poorly leaving some information outside like the target group of study; some had editorial errors while others were stated using subjective words. The findings show that 69% of the sampled essay report had many objectives (some had up to six) and the target populations too large to be covered and therefore their achievement was doubted, given the short time frame for completion as stated by (Ortrun 2002) Compounded by the fact that undergraduates have no experience of independent research.

The poorly stated objectives and their unmanageable number made the quality of the project reports studied poor and particular attention was to be given to the choice of verbs used to state the objectives in order to clearly specify the particular issue to be examined and the number of objectives reduced to manageable number like two or three.

4.2.2 Errors in the first three pages (more than two)

The editorial errors 53%; mainly spelling and spacing of words and grammatical errors 40% (table3) further made the quality of the reports poor. The results of the study showed that students did not take their time to revise and edit their work properly as (Royce A et-al 1993) argues that writers who wait until the last few days or hours to write a paper will not produce a good paper which is in agreement with (Gay 1986) who found out that researchers postpone writing large assignments until dateline approaches and they begin to work under pressure and produce poor reports. Also (Wright 2009) added that the goal of editing is to ensure that a document is grammatically, linguistically and technically correct.

The editorial and grammatical errors made the standard of the project reports poor. The students were to take their time to edit their work to produce good project reports that can be read with no difficult, reports free from errors and arguments flowing systematically.

4.2.3 Improper referencing

The reference both within the text and the list of cited reference did not fully tally with any of the reference formats. The findings of the study (table3) shows 38% of the project

reports analyzed had mistakes in the reference within the text and were fair. The study also revealed that 81% of the essay report projects had the list of cited reference not written properly (table3) and that was very poor. The common mistakes were; the title of the cited book written before the author's name and the year of publication, in some the year of publication was not put in brackets as it suppose, while in some the list of names of the others of a given book were cut short by using the word et-al, (which is only used in the text) and other punctuation errors were evident.

The notational method of reference, commonly used by Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (IEEE) was not found used in any of the examined project reports. The APA format of reference commonly used by social scientists was used in most of the booklets examined.

4.3 Establishment of the authenticity

Table 4 shows the findings of the aspects that were examined to establish the authenticity of the project reports.

Table 4. Common phrases used in the titles

Aspect	Frequency			Percentage (%)		
	Education (regular)	In-service	Overall	Regular	In-service	Overall
Common phrases used in the titles						
Poor performance	7	15	22	17	38	27
Drop out (girls)	3	1	4	8	3	6
Impact of poverty HIV/AIDS	2	0	2	5	0	5
Academic Performance	5	11	16	12	28	20
Female Circumcision	2	1	3	5	3	4
Challenges of (F.P.E, U.P.E)	2	2	4	5	5	5
Others	16	8	24	40	20	30
	Ef = 40	Ef = 40	Ef = 80	100	100	100

The important aspect was how the topics/titles are related as discussed in the following subsection.

4.3.1 Common phrases used in the titles

In table 4, the recurrent common phrases used in the titles were; poor performance 27% and academic performance 20% indicated high likelihood of plagiarism and fraud as (Borg and Gall 1993) argued that even if you use the person's paper as a template and make modification you will have committed plagiarism.

Although no duplication of work was found from the project reports examined the densely studied topics; poor performance and academic performance render the authenticity of the reports questionable.

The results can be shown in a bar graph as follows

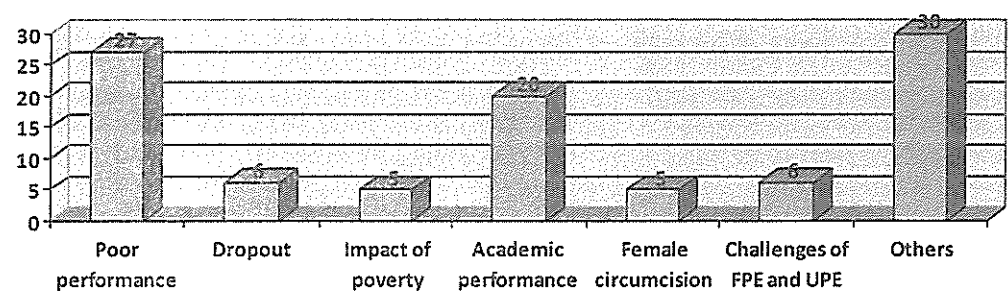


Figure 1

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The conclusions and recommendations of the study were made basing on the findings analyzed in the previous chapter.

5.1 Conclusion

5.1.1 Quality of the Research undertaken

The findings of the study showed that the quality of undergraduate research-based essay reports of Kampala International University were poor, in average 52% of the sampled reports had mistake in some or both of the areas examined. The objectives need to be stated clearly and reduced to manageable number like two or three. The errors, editorial, grammatical and those in references need to be addressed.

5.1.2 Authenticity of the research report

The findings showed that 47% of the studied research-based essay reports were suspect of plagiarism and fraud and therefore the authenticity of the reports is questionable and not original as declared there in.

5.2 Recommendations

Due to the poor quality and the questionable authenticity of the studied reports as shown by the results of the study I recommend the following measures;

English grammar should be taught along side communication skills to improve the standard of English and writing skills of the students.

The teaching of research methods should also be emphasized to equip the students with sound knowledge to carry research successfully minus opting to unlawful acts like plagiarism and fraud.

The students should be encouraged to begin working on their research based essays early enough in order to have humble time to gather all the necessary information while

undertaking their research work still have time to revise and correct mistakes in their work to produce a presentable research-based essay report.

The dangers and consequences of plagiarism and fraud should be made clear to the students before starting working on their research-based essay projects to discourage the vice.

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