

Orientation Programme at the University of Education, Winneba Campus (Ghana): Perspectives of Second Year Undergraduate Students At The Faculty of Educational Studies

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Abstract

This study explored the perspectives of second year undergraduate students at the Faculty of Educational Studies, University of Education, Winneba, (Ghana) on the orientation programme organised at first year (2015/2016 Academic year). Using a sequential explanatory mixed-method design, a structured questionnaire was administered to 290 second year undergraduate students selected through stratified sampling technique for the quantitative phase of the study. Also, 12 of the students, who were class representatives, were purposively selected and interviewed for the qualitative phase of the study. The quantitative data collected was analysed using means and standard deviations as well as simple frequencies and percentages. The interview data was used to clarify the key quantitative results, when necessary. The study revealed that the orientation programme organised for the students was indoor nature. The students were of the view that there is the need for improvement in the orientation programme to facilitate the adjustment of first year students to the University environment. The study concluded that the duration of the orientation programme was too short. Therefore, it was recommended that those who organise the programme at the University should ensure that sufficient time is allocated to the programme so that the students could ask questions and seek clarifications on issues bordering their minds.

Keywords: university, orientation programme, undergraduate students, adjustment, transition

1. Introduction

Throughout the world, university education is considered to be the most important development indicator of human resource for all levels of the economy. University education enables individuals to develop analytical minds and skills that will help them take responsibility for their lives. The opportunity to study at the university is exciting to both students and families. However, literature suggests that first year students often appear to be stressful after gaining admission to the university. They often experience financial challenges, academic anxiety, difficulty of departing from family and friends, adapting good study habit, and the challenge of adjusting properly in the new environment (Rentz & Associates, 1996). They argue further that students enter the university and find it difficult to integrate into the new environment due to these challenges. This implies that universities should pay attention to these challenges of first-year students and assist them make a smooth transition to the university environment after gaining admission.

The effort on the part of a university to help newly-admitted students make a smooth transition from their previous environment to the university environment is known as orientation. Orientation programmes are usually provided in the students' early days, although it varies from institution to institution. It is usually a period of time at the beginning of the academic year in the university or other tertiary institutions during which a variety of events are held to orientate and welcome new students.

Organising orientation programme for newly-admitted students is a policy in all Ghanaian universities, including the University of Education, Winneba (UEW). The broad goals of these orientation programme are typically to acquaint students with the administrative regulations and expected behaviours of the institution, introduce them to student organizations, acquaint them with available students' services and provide opportunity for students to formally meet the institution's faculties in non-classroom setting (Bedu-Addo, 2014). Clearly, the general purpose underlying orientation programmes is to facilitate the students' successful integration into the new and unfamiliar academic and social environment.

The UEW organises orientation programmes at the beginning of every academic year to help the First Year students adjust well into the university environment. However, it appears that the adjustment needs of first year students at the Winneba Campus of UEW are not adequately met during the orientation programmes. After the

programmes, it seems students still struggle to register their courses online, manage their finances, locate key facilities and resources on campus, and choose safe and secure accommodation, among others. This situation could affect the academic performance of the students negatively, leading to their dismissal from the institution. Personal interaction of the researchers with the students revealed that some of the students struggle to integrate into the University environment, as they under-perform academically, especially in the first year. This situation raises questions about the nature of the orientation programme organised for them. However, little is known empirically about the nature and perspectives of the students on the programmes organised for them. This present study attends to this issue. Specifically, the study examined the nature of orientation programmes organised for undergraduate students at the Faculty of Education of the UEW in the 2015/2016 academic year and the perspectives of the students on such programme. The students had moved to second year when the study was conducted.

The study is significant in diverse ways. Firstly, the study would deepen the understanding of the authorities of the University about the students' perspectives on the nature of the orientation programmes for them. This would enable the authorities put necessary measures in place to improve upon the programmes, when necessary. Secondly, the findings could be incorporated into the design of the programmes so that they could be tailored to the adjustment needs of the students. Finally, study would contribute to literature on students transitional issues, especially those in Ghana.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman's (1995) transition theory. The theory is an adult development theory (Evans, Forney, & Guido-Dibrito, 1998), which is focused on the transitions that adults experience throughout life and the means by which they cope and adjust (Schlossberg et al., 1995). These authors define transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (p. 27)". When a transition occurs, a process takes place as an individual integrates and changes his or her daily life. There are four aspects of a transition that affect how well individuals deal with change. These aspects (referred to as the 4 S System) are *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies* (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Situation examines the features of a transition and how they may influence its significance to the individual. The *self* variable is composed of a person's outlook on life, as influenced by personal characteristics (including demographics, such as socioeconomic status) and psychological resources. *Support* refers to the resources available to people to assist them adjust, while *strategies* refer to the actions that individuals take in response to transitions.

According to Schlossberg et al., (1995), *situation* variable offers the researcher the opportunity to better ascertain the circumstances and challenges that first year students undergo in the process of transitioning after gaining admission to the University. They indicate that if students feel good about the transition and believe it is happening at an appropriate time, it will be easier for them to make the transition. However, if students feel transitions come with some difficult challenges and they are unhappy about having to attend school, their transition will be more difficult. Armed with this knowledge, the circumstances surrounding first year students which may likely include financial challenges, the fear of making appropriate adjustment and academic anxiety can better be matched with the *situation* variable in the theory. To Schlossberg et al., (1995) *self* variable can easily be incorporated into the challenges that first year students go through because it is composed of "personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources of students in the transition process" (Evans, Forney, & Guido-Dibrito, 1998, p. 113), which are in line with the mind set or psychological state as well as the personal and family background of first year students who have gained admission to university. This can be as a result of loneliness as they depart from the family and the vulnerability of their demographic characteristics.

All these likely challenges discussed under the *situation* and *self* variables of Schlossberg's theory can be channeled through orientation programme with the main aim of providing support and strategies for first year students to better manage and cope with challenges in the process of adjusting to the new environment.

3. Conceptual Framework

First year students at the Winneba Campus of UEW have various situations and challenges prior to entering the University. These may include academic anxiety, fear of how to adjust properly in the new environment, loneliness as a result of departing from the family, and financial problems owing to expenditure on feeding, renting, and reading materials. For these students to be successful in their academic pursuit and general social life on campus, they need to be supported through orientation programmes to enable them integrate effectively into their new environment.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of Second year undergraduate students on the nature of orientation programme organised for them at the Winneba Campus of UEW, when they were in the First year. To achieve this purpose, mixed method approach, underpinned by pragmatism was employed. Specifically, the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed for the study. This design occurs in two distinct interactive phases within one study: the quantitative phase followed by the qualitative phase (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). The first phase (quantitative phase of the study involved the collection and analysis of quantitative data. And in the second phase qualitative data was collected to explain or clarify the emerging issues in the quantitative results.

4.2. Population and Sampling Procedures

The study population consisted of all the Second Year students at the UEW, Winneba Campus admitted in 2014/2015 academic year. The accessible population was the Second Year undergraduate students at the Faculty of Educational Studies of UEW, Winneba campus. The Faculty of Educational Studies was chosen because it was the largest Faculty at the main campus of the University of Education, Winneba. Therefore, conducting the study in this Faculty, the researchers assumes that more second year undergraduate students would be involved. The student population at the Faculty was 944 (UEW, 2011). From this population, two hundred and ninety (278) students were selected to respond to the questionnaires in the quantitative phase of the study.

A stratified sampling technique was used to group the population into strata (according to Departments within the Faculty). Thus, Department of Early Childhood Education, Department of Psychology and Education, Department of Special Education, and the Department of Basic Education. To ensure proportional representation of the respondents, and equal chance to each individual in the stratum for selection, a simple random sampling strategy was then used to select 80 respondents from the Department of Early Childhood Education, 25 respondents from the Department of Psychology and Education, 105 from the Department of Special Education, and 84 respondents from the Department of Basic Education based on the student enrolment in each of the departments. Stratification was used in selecting the sample for this study because the respondents share common characteristics. Stratified sampling ensures that resulting sample will be distributed in the same way as the population in terms of the stratifying criterion (Ofori & Dampson, 2011).

Also, twelve (12) of the students, who were programme representatives (1 programme representative and 2 assistants from each of the departments) and had already responded to the questionnaire, were purposively selected for the qualitative phase of the study. The sample for the qualitative phase of the study consisted of seven (7) males and five (5) females.

4.3. Data Collection Methods

A structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were the instruments used for data collection in this study. The questionnaire was used to gather data for the quantitative phase, while the interview schedule was employed to gather data in the qualitative phase. The design of the questionnaire schedule was based on the issues that were discussed in the literature review and were related sources of orientation programme for first year students, nature/forms of orientation programme and perspectives of students on the orientation programme. The questionnaire was a five-point Likert-scale item type, consisting Strongly agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The key issues that came out from the questionnaire data formed the basis of the semi-structured interview schedule.

4.4. Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

An instrument is considered valid when it measures what it is supposed to measure. Two forms of validity were established in this study and these were face and content validity. The face validity of the instruments was established by giving them to some Master of Philosophy students at the Department of Educational Administration and Management for their comments. Indeed their comments were favourable and the instruments did not require any major changes. Furthermore, to establish the content validity of the instruments, they were given to some experts in educational administration and management at the UEW to scrutinise them before the final administration.

To establish the internal consistency of the questionnaire instrument, ten questionnaires were pre-tested with second year undergraduate students at various departments within the Faculty of Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. This students shared the same characteristics as those in the main study and had undergone a similar orientation programme in the first year at University of Cape Coast. The data obtained was subjected to

Cronbach's alpha analysis to determine the reliability of the instrument. The coefficient obtained was 0.8. According to Bryman and Cramer (1999), any calculated Cronbach's alpha at 0.8 is acceptable and as such reliable.

4.5. Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was administered to the students in September of 2016/2017 academic year, after they had closed from lectures. It was self-administered and collected after 40 minutes. The mean and standard deviation scores, and frequency were generated through the software. The questionnaire data was analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 19. The means and standard deviations were helpful in showing the various levels of the forms/natures of orientation programmes and which form/nature was mostly used by the authorities of UEW, Winneba Campus, to facilitate the adjustment of first year students.

Then using the key issues in the questionnaire data as the basis, the interview guide was designed and conducted. The interview data was transcribed and used, when necessary, to explain the quantitative results. To attribute comments to the interviewees, they were categorised by gender (male and female interviewees). The male interviewees were given the serial code MI (Male Interviewee) and the female interviewees were given the serial code FI (Female Interviewee). Thus since seven (7) males were interviewed, they were given the serial codes (MI-1 to MI-7) and the five (5) females (FI-1 to FI-5).

5. Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

All the 278 questionnaires distributed to the students were retrieved, representing 100% return-rate. This was so, probably because the duration and times for the administration of the instrument were convenient to the students and they also informed in advance about the data collection process. Also, as already indicated, 12 of the students were interviewed at the qualitative phase of the study. The data collected was categorised under two headings: nature/forms of the orientation programme, and the students' perspectives on the programme.

5.1. Nature/Forms of Orientation Programme

This section was meant to find out the nature of the orientation programme that was organised by the UEW for the students. With respect to the questionnaire, scores for each of the five-point Likert-scale represents the sum of the scores for the items included in it. Thus, the scores for each identified sub-scale on the nature of orientation could range from 5 to 25. Based on the responses of the respondents mean scores were calculated. The questionnaire contained the following constructs:

1. Indoor activities
2. Outdoor activities
3. Departmental activities
4. Individual/online versions

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of the various identified nature/forms of orientation programmes

| Construct | Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (SD) |
|----------------------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Indoor activities | 10.55 | 3.14 |
| Outdoor activities | 6.77 | 2.4 |
| Individual/online versions | 2.59 | 1.31 |
| Departmental activities | 4.07 | 1.76 |

Table 1 shows the means and the standard deviations of identified nature/forms of orientation programmes for first year students. The respondents rated the 'indoor' part of the programme as the most dominant ($M= 10.55$, $SD= 3.14$) form/nature of the orientation programme organised for the Faculty of Educational Studies students at the Winneba Campus of UEW. The interview data also confirmed that the programme was of indoor nature as the following comments suggest:

'For this orientation, we did everything indoors. I will say it was organised like a lecture because all the first year students were put in different lecture halls and someone from the administration came to talk to us'[MI-3]

In addition, MI-7 also shared his view:

Greater part of the orientation programme took place indoors. The facilitators took turns to explain social, academic and economic issues to us. Almost everything took place at the Assembly hall!

The comments suggest that, the indoor nature of orientation programme was mostly used to facilitate the adjustment of first year students to the institution. It therefore appeared that, to some extent, the needs or expectations of the students were not met as FI-1 commented:

'I did not meet my expectation during the orientation programme. I thought the orientation programme was going to be done completely like the way it was done in my former school where we were taken round the four corners of the school to see the facilities. There was nothing like field trip so it was not exciting at all'.

The comment suggests that the students expected the organizers of the programme to go beyond the indoor activities, implying their expectations were not met through the programme.

The next most dominant form/nature of the orientation programme was 'outdoor' nature which recorded a mean and standard deviation of ($M= 6.77, SD=2.4$). Commenting on the 'outdoor' nature of orientation programme during the interview session, one of the interviewees [FI-3] said '*the orientation was done indoors with the exception of library orientation where we were taken round the various sections of the library.*' It appeared that the outdoor programme was the preference of most of the students interviewed as the following comment by one of them suggests:

I was expecting that the University authorities will take us round to see and know the University's facilities but we were only told about them during the lecture-like presentation we had at the old pavilion. I expected other activities including field-trips![MI-4]

Literature in the field of education suggest that outdoor and adventure orientation programmes typically possess many of the same goals as most traditional programmes (Gass, 1999). Vlamis (2002) is of the view that in the 21st Century orientation programme should mostly take the outdoor nature and should involve adventure experiences combined with reflection activities.

The next highest rated nature of the orientation programme on the questionnaire instrument was the 'departmental activities' which recorded the mean and standard deviation $M= 4.07$ and $SD= 1.76$ respectively. Then finally the students rated the 'individual/online' part of the programme as the lowest ($M= 2.59, SD= 1.31$) on the questionnaire.

Thus, the study revealed that the orientation programme organised for the students in the Faculty of Educational Studies of the University took various forms and were comprehensive. Some authorities in the field of education are of the view that, to accomplish orientation goals and for it to have a positive impact on retention, it is imperative that orientation be considered a comprehensive process rather than a single event (Mullendore & Banahan, 2005). Robinson, Burns and Gaw (1996) argued that orientation programmes for first year students (new students) can take many forms, from online versions, to on ground, traditional day events, to outdoors or wilderness experiences"(p.25). He argued further that the aim of all of these forms of orientation programme is to assist students in their transition to the university, generate a higher degree of learning both in and out of the classroom, aid in social integration, and help students find their niche in the campus community.

5.2. Perspectives of the Students on the Orientation Programme

This section sought to find out the perspectives of the students on the orientation programme. Based on the responses to the Five-point Likert-scale, an item analysis was carried out to ascertain the extent to which the students perceive the orientation programme.

Table 2: Distribution of Perceptions of the Students on the Orientation Programme

| Statement | SA F (%) | A F (%) | U F (%) | D F (%) | SD F (%) |
|---|----------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1. I think the duration for the orientation was too short | 142 (51.1%) | 42 (15.1%) | 7 (2.5%) | 42 (15.1%) | 45 (16.2%) |
| 2. In my view, the orientation programme was the beginning of campus life | 92 (33.6%) | 138 (50.4%) | 16 (5.8%) | 20 (7.3%) | 8 (2.9%) |
| 3. There was no opportunity for me to share my frustration during the orientation | 97 (35.1%) | 79 (28.6%) | 25 (9.1%) | 58 (21.0%) | 17 (6.2%) |
| 4. There was nothing new to learn from the orientation programme | 82 (29.7%) | 29 (10.5%) | 12 (4.3%) | 98 (35.5%) | 55 (19.9%) |
| 5. I think there was the need to take all first year students round the campus to expose them to the important facilities of the University | 129 (47.3%) | 106 (38.8%) | 9 (3.3%) | 18 (6.6%) | 11 (4.0%) |
| 6. I think the venue was conducive for the programme | 70 (25.8%) | 76 (28.0%) | 21 (7.7%) | 67 (24.7%) | 37 (13.7%) |
| 7. In my view, orientation should help students feel wanted and fit to make their own decisions | 86 (32.0%) | 109 (40.5%) | 36 (13.4%) | 19 (7.1%) | 19 (7.1%) |
| 8. I think the orientation programme provided the basic knowledge to students about the available resources in the University | 93 (34.2%) | 106 (39.0%) | 37 (13.6%) | 19 (7.0%) | 17 (6.3%) |
| 9. I think there was no adequate information about the orientation so the attendance was not encouraging | 71 (26.3%) | 52 (19.3%) | 33 (12.2%) | 71 (26.3%) | 43 (15.9%) |

Table 2 presents the perspectives of the student respondents on the orientation programme. With regard to item 1, as many as 184 respondents, representing 66.2% agreed that 'the duration of the programme was too short, 7 respondents representing 2.5% were uncertain about their responses, while 87 (31.3%) were in disagreement with the statement. These responses therefore suggested that most of the students were dissatisfied with the duration of the orientation programme organised for them. The interview data also revealed that the interviewees complained about the shortness of the duration of the programme:

The programme was organised for so many students within some few days so those who organised the programme did not give us enough time to ask questions and to seek clarifications on some of the issues raised [FI-2].

I was registering some courses and when I got to the venue of the programme, they told me they were about to close! I thought adequate time would be allocated for the programme so that things could be

explained clearly to us [MI-6].

Thus it appears that the duration of the orientation programmes did not permit the students to seek clarifications on some issues bordering their minds and to allow those who organised the programme enough time to explain issues properly to the students. This suggest that the needs of the students were not adequately met and the interaction between the students and the programme organizers was ineffective.

Also, the fact that majority of the students indicated that the duration of the programme was short and inadequate could explain why most of the 176 (63.7%) disagreed that 'there was an opportunity for them to share their frustrations (Item 3). Only 75 (27.2%) of the respondents indicated that the programme offered them the opportunity to discuss issues bordering them. During the period of adjustments, new students appear to experience some sort of social, emotional and academic challenges and, therefore, need more information about the environment. Denying them such opportunity could affect the effectiveness of their integration into the university environment.

Moreover, the responses to Item 5 suggested that the students expected the organizers of the programmes to take them round the University campus to expose them to key facilities with as many as 235 (86.1%) agreeing to the statement, 9 (3.3%) were unsure about their responses, while 29 (10.6%) disagreed to the statement. However, it appears the expectations of the students were not met, as the following comments suggests:

".....when we talk about orientation programme, what I know is that, the newly admitted students are expected to be introduced to the facilities in their new environment so that they can effectively adapt well to the environment. But the orientation programme that was organised for us was somehow different because we were not introduced to the University's facilities. It was about how to manage campus life and how to study"[FI-5].

In addition, a male interviewee commented:

"I was expecting that the University authorities will take us round to see and know the University's facilities but we were only told about them" [MI-5].

One of the Female Interviewees, however, expressed satisfaction with the way the programme was organised and the opportunities is provided, commenting that:

"I was satisfied with the orientation programme because I had the opportunity to meet with the University authorities and student leaders. I also got to know the rules and regulations of the University through the orientation programme. I made so many friends too. So after the orientation programme I had a wide network of friends"[FI-2].

These comments suggest that the first-year students had different perceptions and expectations about orientation programmes, which the University authorities need to take into consideration in order to facilitate their integration in the new environment. The students had diverse perceptions about orientation programme at the University of Education, Winneba. This presupposes that students perceive orientation programme based on their individual needs on Campus. Once the programme meets the needs of an individual student, he/she perceives that the orientation was good.

The data in Table 2 also suggested that the majority of the respondents (199), representing 73.2% agreed that the programme provided the students with basic knowledge about the resources available at the University campus (Item 8), 37 (13.6%) were unsure about their responses, while 36 (13.3) disagreed to the statement. One of the main purposes of student orientation programmes is to facilitate their adjustment into their new environment and students having key information about the resources in the environment facilitates such process.

Also, though the majority of the students 123 (45.6%) agreed that there was inadequate information about the orientation programme, affecting attendance negatively (Item 9), a significant number 114 (42.2%) disagreed to the statement. The interview data also confirmed that some of the students received little information about the programme, affecting attendance. MI-7 commented:

I know there would be an orientation programme for we the first years, but the details were not provided. I am sorry to tell you that most of my friends did not attend some sessions of the programme because they did not hear about it.

The responses suggested that most of the students were unaware of the programmes, implying that the publicity of the programme was inadequate or ineffective. The students failure to attend the programme implies that they

had little or no information about the institution in which they had been admitted, both key human and material resources in the University, little information about the programmes understudy. These could affect their integration into their new university context negatively.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study suggested that the orientation programme at the University took different forms, including indoor, outdoor, departmental and online activities. However, the indoor activities dominated and was restrictive as the students were not taken round the campus to expose them to the available facilities. Therefore it is recommended that the University's Students Affairs Office in collaboration with other relevant offices should ensure that the programmes are comprehensively organised to include more outdoor or wilderness experiences, online versions and traditional day events (Robinson et al., 1996). These could offer the students opportunity to interact among themselves more meaningfully and network for their personal growth and academic success.

The study also concluded that the duration of the programme was too short and inadequate. Therefore, the organizers of the programme at the University should ensure that adequate or sufficient time is allocated to the programme. This would offer the students opportunity to ask questions, seek clarifications on issues bordering their minds, and gather relevant information about the University environment and nearby communities to facilitate their adjustment.

The study revealed that orientation materials for the Faculty of Educational Studies students at the Winneba Campus of the University of Education, Winneba, are not usually adequately designed. It appears orientation programme could be better organized if well-designed written materials are provided in advance to the students. It is therefore recommended that the Office of Students Affairs should ensure that the materials for the orientation programme such as brochures, magazines, pamphlets and student handouts are readily available and dispatched in advance with the admission letters. When this is done, students will be more likely to come to the University with well-framed mind and understanding of campus life, helping them to adjust quickly to the campus environment. Last, but not the least, the study suggested that a significant number of the students did not attend the orientation programmes because the publicity was ineffective. Therefore, it is recommended that the Office of Students Affairs in conjunction with the relevant offices such as the Office for Institutional Advancement and the Publication Unit at the University should use the institution's Website and social media sites, campus radio station and the print media available to publicise the orientation programme, so as to encourage attendance. The advertisement could also highlight the relevance of the programme to the students' social and academic experiences at the University.

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