
Towards Developing the Orientation Programme Content for the First-Year Students at the University of Dodoma

Habibu Dadi Ali

Assistant Lecturer, Department of Educational Management and Policy Studies, University of Dodoma-Tanzania

Abstract: *This article presents the stakeholders' perspectives on the current status of the orientation programme for first year students at universities. Survey method involving exploratory case study design was employed using the qualitative approach to generate the data, i.e. interviews and focus group discussion and later on subjected to qualitative analysis. Data were obtained from 88 informants who included 80 first year students who were pursuing bachelor degrees, 4 wardens and 4 deputy deans of students at the University of Dodoma. This sample was determined by saturation criterion and they were selected using purposive random sampling technique. The findings show that the orientations programme currently being executed at UDOM focuses much on students' social adjustment behaviors while there is a little attention paid on the academic adjustment aspects. Besides, the study came up with the orientation course content for the upcoming orientation programme. Such contents are – campus tour, GPA, course information, UDOM SR, examination rules and regulations, lecture pre requisite, role and function of student advisor, accessibility of library resources, academic survival skills, and financial management were suggested as the key content of the orientation programme. In the light of these results, the paper concludes that UDOM has to develop its orientation programme by taking the learners' needs into account as they are the primary beneficiary of such programme. Similarly, during the orientation programme, considerable attention needs to be paid to issues related to academics aspects since they are crucial in their academic journey.*

Keywords: *Orientation programme, content, first year students, the University of Dodoma*

1. INTRODUCTION

A number of literatures inform that orientation programme for students at universities is requisite and, therefore, requires a particularized attention. The importance of the programme is necessitated by the fact that there is a large number of students who drop their studies after they are enrolled in universities because they fail to cope with the life and activities at university (Urquhart & Pooley, 2011; Ingamells & Lrmar, 2010). Related to this problem is that many university students, particularly first year students, fail to complete their programme timely and the few programmewho survive at universities do not attain the desirable performance which is habitually measured in terms of Grade Average Point (GPA) (Forde, 2002; Jean, 2010). Some researchers have successfully described the reasons for this problem but a close interpretation of the problems indicates that the ultimate source of all these is the students' lack of schematic frame of reference on how to go about learning at the University. This is argued to create a transition shock for this new environment (Glass, 2010; Rwejuna, 2013). Put it more specifically, the lack of orientation programmes is seen to be caused by unfamiliarity of tertiary study and its academic prerequisite, a lack of academic preparedness, and a lack of self-confidence to engage academically which is important to create a fence for the students to have a successful transition into the higher education learning environment. This being the case, there is a high need for universities to orient students with the procedures and practices at universities. An important point of emphasis is that the design of the programme should be very clear, comprehensive and should be need-based orientation programmeme content that could make students be institutional fit.

Globally, it is maintained that the first year experiences at the college/university are pivotal for the academic, intellectual, social as well as the emotional maturity of students (Davis, 2013, Tinto, 1993; Murphy, 2001; McInnis, 2001; Yaani, 2016). These scholars further emphasise on the need for orientation on the argument that, when students join universities, they face loads of challenges as they get in socially and academically different environment which is again different from the ones they are used to. It is this reason that universities picked the decision to offer orientations to fresh students at a university programme to help the students in their social and academic adjustment at the University (Robinson, Debra, Burns & Gaw, 1996). Some scholars also, having observed the same challenges reiterated the importance of having orientation at universities. For example, Ali and Hassan (2014) argued that, for most students, transition to university classroom requires an adjustment of academic habits and expectations. This is due to the fact that first year students find

the university is characterized by larger class, lots of work, lecturers use different teaching styles, the volume, as well as the frequency of written work, are higher. It is important for students to respond to these new demands by studying hard, change their study habits and re arrange their priorities. Similarly, some researchers have shown that upon entry into university, first year students face different psychological problems which need to be addressed through a provision of extensive social support or social adjustment aspects (Ismail, Mahmud, Qadus & Muhamed, 2013). The social adjustment aspects include things such as helping students in making new friends, participating in cultural activities, team sport, and students' organizations and to use the university recreational activities. Eventually, these social and academic aspects play a significant role towards the students' academic achievement at university (Al-Khatib, Awamleh & Samawi, 2012). Moreover, research findings from various studies concluded that students' achievement at the college is strappingly influenced by the experiences that the first year students come across during the time of orientation (Davis, 2013). These experiences, in and outside the classroom environment, serve as a foundation from which the rest of the students' college experiences are built (Murphy, 2015).

Though a number of universities across the world have come up with orientation programmes to provide the incoming students with resources and information it is not yet clear if the programmes at universities are designed in appropriate ways to successfully meet the university demands and acclimatize them to the new learning environment. However, the exact orientation practices may differ depending on the structures of the university and the key requirements of the students at a certain point in time. It has been put into emphasis that the information on academic programmemes, campus resources, administrative processes, facilities and other core curricular programmes are important to emphasise in orientation (Murphy, 2010). What makes this study important is the fact that the majority of students at universities kept performing poorly and the majority dropped studies even though orientation programmes are offered at universities. It was assumed that the programmes would have helped to address this challenge since the purpose of the programmeme is to help new students with their adjustment to the university, assisting family members in understanding the demands of the college environment and, more importantly, helping new students succeed academically. The continuation of such failures and drop outs give necessity to such studies, especially to assess the contents of the programmes and finally establish if they are fit to enable students to overcome the challenges leading to their failures and drop out of school. Programme other universities, worldwide; have successfully addressed the challenge by preparing a syllabus that contains important components of the orientation programmes. For example, Life University in the United State of America (USA) clearly spells out its orientation practices for the students will be conducted to three main categories (Life University, 2016). The first category is to do with information whereby the students will be provided with information to meet individuals from different offices on campus. The students are also helped to get the connection to the incoming students, current students, faculty, administration and staff members. Besides, the students get information one-on-one advising and course registration. Besides, Jomo Kenyata University of Agriculture and Technology in Kenya is clear in its guidelines that students will be given orientation in the following main areas—registration (course registration), students matters (academic leave, transfer of studies, change of courses, resumption of studies and disciplinary matters) examination regulation (student progression, supplementary examinations, special examination, repeat, discontinuation, appeal for re-assessment, deregistration, award of degree, supervision of project) IT and IT infrastructure (free Wi-fi services, students ID) library services (e-library and physical library) financial matters and counseling services (Jomokenyata University, 2016).

While the contents and importance of orientation practices are stressed everywhere, there is little or no information about the content of orientations in the universities around Tanzania and the challenges in universities are high. This lack of information from the literature raised some questions regarding whether the orientation programme suits the needs of the students considering that the orientations are offered at universities everywhere and a good reference for this is the University of Dodoma. Although the University of Dodoma does not give a clear cut guideline for the orientation services, still the orientation is conducted in every academic year. The aim of the orientation is to facilitate a smooth transition from high school, and other non-tertiary level of education, into the tertiary levels. Since the inception of the University in 2007, it is nearly eleven years now; still it appears to be no empirical evidence suggesting the status of the orientation practices as well as the effectiveness of the same towards the university students' social and academic adjustment behaviour. The void in the aforementioned areas provides an impetus to examine the current status of the orientation programme and its influence on the students' social and academic adjustment behavior together with developing course content for the prospective orientation programme.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at the University of Dodoma (UDOM) in Tanzania. The selection of the university was appropriate in that it has seven different colleges which offer orientation course separately and each with its own course contents. However, only four colleges from the University were sampled to participate in the study. The study employed a survey method using qualitative research approach to generate and analyse data from the field. The choice of the exploratory case study design was determined by the fact that the researcher was not aware of the current status of orientation programme contents and its influence on the students' social and academic adjustments programme. The target population comprised of all first year undergraduate students, warden and deputy deans of students at UDOM. The choice of the sample was determined by saturation whereby eighty students, four deputy deans and four wardens were selected using purposive random sampling technique. An interview guidelines and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were categorically used as data collection instruments. The interviews were conducted with wardens and deputy deans to have their views on the status of the orientation programme and its influence towards students' social and academic adjustments. The interviews were further extended to capture information regarding the framework for effective implementation of the orientation programme. For further authentic information about the subject at hand, a FGD was conducted to capture the experiences of students pertaining to the status of the adopted orientation programme and how the current programme influences the social and academic adjustment behaviour of students. Eventually, the research sought to know how the programme could be implemented effectively. Besides, the formulations of the need based content for the new orientation programme were outlined through FGD. All the interviews and focus group discussions were exclusively in Kiswahili and the responses were translated into English language. This was done to allow the respondents use the language they are more confident. The proceedings of focus group discussion and interviews were recorded verbatim by using tape recorders. Thereafter, they were transcribed in Kiswahili and then translated into English. Data were analysed following a thematic analysis frame work, in which themes, subthemes and its corresponding phenomena were identified, and illustrated using participants' quotes.

3. RESULTS

The results of this study about the orientation programmes offered at the University are presented under four main themes, namely the current status of the orientation programme, influence of the current orientation programme on the students' social and academic adjustment behavior, the perceived orientation content for the prospective orientation programme and the frame work suggested for the effective implementation of the newly developed OP. These themes were deductively generated from the specific objectives of the study whereas unveiled phenomena were inductively developed from the data explored from the respondents.

3.1 The Current Status of the UDOM Orientation Programme

Theme	Sub-Themes	Unveiled Phenomena
Current Status	Social Adjustment Behaviour	<i>Orientation on:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Management, • Role of student government • Strategy to choose focused colleague • Remaining healthy and benefits of students health insurance
	Academic Adjustment behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students bylaws <i>Over sighted part of orientation:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic survival skills – study skills, effective times management, use of library resources, issues of GPA

In this sub – section, an attempt is made to understand the current status of the orientation programme at UDOM as perceived by the students and the programme coordinators. The status of the programme is explained under two major subthemes and the corresponding phenomena in Table 1.

A close analysis of the data obtained through this study informs that the social adjustment and academic adjustment behavior are the two major dimensions that characterize the status of the orientation programme at UDOM. Besides, most of the students held the opinion that the current practice of the orientation programme is more focused on the aspects of the

social adjustment. More particularized explanations on this are seen in the tendency to orient the programme on the financial management. This means that the new students at the University were educated on how to spend the loans money they get from the government sparingly. To emphasize this sentiment, one of the first year students remarked the following:

What I recall during orientation programme is that, as first year students at the University of Dodoma, were reminded that, the money we were given is not a upon completion of our studies. Thus, we should use it cautiously for the pre determined goals – To support our studies and not otherwise (FGD: February 2017).

Further, it was reported that students are informed about the role of the students' government, as it safeguards the students' interest and rights at the University. Further investigations on this revealed that its focus is to make students respect the government. Similarly, the students were informed about the importance and strategies to get friends to get along in the course of their studies at the university. The phrase "a friend in need is the friend indeed" was used to emphasize the need the strategies to select the friends. One of the students had this to say with regard to this training during orientation:

During the orientation programme, we were oriented on the importance of having good relationship among ourselves. It was underlined that having a good relationships and choosing focused colleague and creating an effective team can help us in case one of us faces any problem (FGD: February 2017).

Moreover, most of the students expressed that they were oriented on the need of joining health insurance, what are the benefits of it and how could they maintain their health. At this point, one of the Deputy Deans of the students had the following to say:

In fact, our students are coming from families with a different financial background. It is likely that, if a student goes sick, a number one assistant for that student is health insurance. Thus, we recommend to them that they have to get registered with health insurance of their choice for their own benefits (Interview, February 2017)

Furthermore, the study unveiled that the current orientation programme spends sometimes in educating the students on the importance of understanding and respecting the students' bylaws. At this point, the students are notified that students' bylaw it is like their constitution for the whole period of their stay at UDOM. The following quote from one of the students suffices to emphasize on this function of training during the students' orientation.

We are enlightened that one of the very important documents for us is students' bylaw. This document outlined dos and don'ts for all students during their student hood at UDOM. Failure to respect this document could lead to frustration to the student followed by a serious punishment (FGD: February 2017).

It is revealed contrarily from the FGD that the orientation programme puts less interest on developing the students' academic survival skills which are expected to help the students to continue as students at the university. The students viewed categorically that issues like the study skills, effective use of library resources, effective time management, a concept of GPA and its calculation, and the category of GPA together with its interpretation is undermined in the orientation. Inadequate information relating to GPA may adversely affect the students' academic progress as claimed by. as the following quote was taken during the FDG to illustrated this finding:

Indeed, the academic aspects are given less concentration during the orientation programme. More often than not, things that help us to survive at the university are overlooked. Sometimes we feel like failing our studies because we are lacking some key academic skills like academic survival skills (FGD: February 2017).

With regards to the influence of the enacted orientation programme on students' social and academic adjustment behavior, by and large number of the students claimed that the content of the current orientation programme helps them towards their social adjustment. It was emphasized that there is a need to develop friendship with other students, knowing the importance of sports at the university, managing stress one's own, dress code, financial management and health issues but not in the academic adjustment like academic survival skills. Parenthetically, one of the students remarked that:

Socially, the orientation programme helps us. At least we got an understanding on the need of making effective friendship at this university. For example, we were alerted that, life becomes impossible here if the students cannot build their effective teams. However, we are still shallow in terms of understanding the academic demands of the university along with exploring the key study skills that can give us a light for our success (FGD: February 2017).

Similarly, the interviews with one of the deputy deans was unveiled that the orientation programme helps students in the social adjustment behavior as the immense differences have been observed before and after the orientation programme. This was further corroborated by expressing the following:

The orientation programme helps the students predominantly towards changing their social behaviour. For example, before the orientation programme, it is very possible to see the students with untidy hair, but after the orientation programme the same student you would see him very smart (Interview, February 2017).

Contrarily, a warden further claimed that the orientation programme conducted currently has less contribution towards students' social and academic adjustment behaviour. In this regard, one of the wardens had to say:

...orientation programme does not help students much, if it helps, may be it helps particularly in understanding the importance of time table. For example, once the time table is out, you can see them asking one another did you get the time table? This makes awareness on time table among all students. (Interview, February 2017).

3.2 The Suggestive Orientation Programme Content

The last and central theme of the study was to capture the participants' views on the relevant content for the new orientation programme. The content is summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1:

S/N	Content	Description
1.	Campus Tour	• Visiting college and university central administration, lecture theaters, library, dispensary, banks, cafeteria and playgrounds
2.	GPA issues	• Meaning and importance of GPA and its calculation, interpretation of different GPA and its implication
3.	Course information	• Information about course credits, list of minor and major courses, and demonstration on course registration for first year students
4.	UDOM SR	• Detailed information about the UDOM SR
5.	Examination Rules and Regulations	• Detailed information about rules and regulation of course work and the university examination.
6.	Lecture Prerequisite	• Why and how should students get ready before attending a session
7.	Role and Function of Students' advisor	• Guiding and supervising while students in the academic and other social problems
8.	Access to Library Resources	• Location of the discipline and subject wise learning resources, provision of on line resources etc.
9.	Academic Survival Skills	• Issues of study skills, techniques of time management, techniques of making effective study group
10.	Financial Management	• Judicious expenditure of money, priority wise expenditure

As well, the stake holders were asked to express their views on how the orientation programme could be implemented effectively? The suggested ideas were that, need assessment must be at first before launching the orientation programme. Secondly, orientation programme evaluation mechanism is required to determine the strength and weakness of the same. Thirdly, success story needs to be shared by the outgoing graduates. Fourthly, duration of the orientation program programme needs to be increased from two to five days. Fifthly, manual of the orientation programme is required to be provided after the programme session. Sixthly, department wise orientation programme is required to deliver. Finally, the university should publish the orientation manuals on her website for the let comers. Furthermore, one of the student representatives in this regard, expressed in the following quote:

...if we are to make the orientation programme more effective, the organizers of the programme should make sure that they arrange the orientation programme according to the needs of the students who are the

primary customers... but not just on the basis the organizers' wishes. Otherwise, orientation programme will have no meaning whatsoever for us and for other upcoming students as well (February 2017).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The most important result of this study is that most of the orientation programme currently conducted at the University of Dodoma place much focus on developing the students' social behavior. On the other hand, students' academic survival skills receive less attention in the orientation. It seems that this is a common practice in other countries also where orientation is also centred on life skills than academics. For example, it is argued by Keng'ethe and Muhoro (2014) that in, higher learning in South Africa, orientation programme overlooks the academic aspect programme. Following this finding, it is suggested that the University of Dodoma and other universities with similar practices should take lessons from some of the universities, like the Jomo Kenyata University of Science and Technology, the University of Oulu, the University Malaya whose orientation programmes incorporate academic skills (for more information about this, see Mwaura, 2015; UO, 2016; UM, 2016).

In the main, following the findings of this study, the UDOM has to develop its orientation programme by taking the learners needs into account as they are the primary beneficiary of such intervention. Even, understanding students' needs will pave a way for designing the subsequent orientation programme with more sensitively. However, in this respects, sustainability and efficacy of the orientation programme are highly contingent on the involvement of key stakeholders.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to all participants and colleagues who have contributed immensely towards accomplishment of this article. I am forever grateful to my mentor Dr. Narayan Prasad Behera for volunteering his time to ensure that I produce a good article. Indeed, Dr. Behera has always been giving my life a new meaning and purpose. Besides, Dr. Behera has been practically inspiring me to reach higher heights in Academia

REFERENCES

- Al-Khatib, A. D, Awamleh, S.H & Samawi, S. F. (2012). Students' Adjustment to College life at Albalqa Applied University. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* , 2 (11), 7-16.
- Davis, M.J. (2013). *The Impact of Orientation Programme on Students Success Outcome and a Rural community College* .Un published PhD thesis, The Eastern Kentucky University, USA.
- Forge, M. (2002). Quality of life and Resiliency .*Community College Journal*, 72(3), 25-27.
- Glass, M. (2010) .*College Transition and experience of students with mental illness*. Un published PhD thesis, Polytechnic Institute and state University, USA
- Jean, D. (2010). *The Academic and Social Adjustment of First generation College Students*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Seton Hall University, United State of America.
- JKUAT.(2008). Orientation Guidelines for new students.
- Keng'ethe, S.M & Muhoro, P. (2014). Exploring hurdles associated with the orientation of the freshmen in the Institutions of higher learning. The case of two former Black University in South Africa, *Mediterranean Journal of Social sciences*, 5 (23), 1242-4249.
- Kombo, D. K. & Tromp, L. A. D. (2006). *Proposal and thesis writing: An Introduction*. Nairobi-Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa.
- Larmer, S. & Ingmells, A. (2010). Enhancing the first year University experience: Linking University orientation and engagement strategies to students' connectivity and capability. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 5(2), 210-223.
- Life University. (2016). *New students' Orientation Guide*. Life University, USA.
- McInnis, C. (2001). Researching the first year experience: where to from here? *Higher Education Research and Development*, 20 (2), 105-114.

- Murphy, A.(2001). *Recognizing and responding to students of concern*. Paper presented to law school behavioral Intervention Team, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.
- Murphy, A. (2015).*Incorporating students' safety and wellness in first year seminar curricular*. Paper presented for Raidar Ready instruments, teaching learning and professional development center, Lubbock, TX.
- Murphy, C.S. (2010). *First year students' experience: Examining students' satisfaction and the use of learning community in the first year of college*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, USA.
- Mouhamed, FM; Qadous, I. H. A, Mahmud,A.Z & Ismail,W.(2013). A study of Adjustment(Academic, Social and to the Urban(Environment among the Malaysian students at Jordan Universities and its correlation with their academic achievement. *International Journal of sustainable development*, 6(6), 23-36.
- Neape, P; Thapa, S & Boyc, C. (2006). Preparing a Case Study: A Guide for Designing and Conducting a Case study for Evaluation Input. Retrieved May 16, 2017 from http://www2.pathfinder.org/site/DocServer/m_e_tool_series_case_study.pdf
- Robinson, D. A. G., Burns, C.F & Graw, K. F. (1996). Orientation programmes: A foundation for students learning and success. *New Directions for students services*, 75. 55-68
- Rwejuna, Z. R. (2013). *Factors Affecting Completion Rates at the Open University of Tanzania*. Un published PhD thesis, Open University of Tanzania, Tanzania.
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving College: Rethinking the causes and cure of students' attrition* (2nd ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- University of Malaya. (2016). Guideline for new Students' semester II 2016/2017 Academic session. Retrieved from https://isc.um.edu.my/docs/librariesprovider83/academics/ug/guidelines-for-new-students-semester_ii_20162017-04112016.pdf?sfvrsn=6.
- University of Oulu. (2016). Guidelines for new students 2016-2017.Retrieved from <http://www oulu.fi/external/international/newstudentsguide.pdf>.
- Urquhart, B. & Pooley, J. A. (2007). The Transition experience of Australian Students to University: The importance of social support. *Australian Community Psychologist*, 19(2), 78-91.
- Yaani, M. K. (2016). *New Students' Orientation and First Year Retention Rate of Associated Degree Nursing Students*. Un published PhD thesis, University of Central Florida, Orlando-Florida.