

Chapter 3

Evaluating Faculty Teaching of Research Methodology to Undergraduate Geography Students in a Nigerian University

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ABSTRACT

The effective ways of teaching research methods to students is a process closely connected to socializing students towards writing an effective research project before graduation and determines how successful and effective they are in conducting individualized research. Several factors apart from setting up a successful learning community are essential, but competencies determine faculty effectiveness. This paper appraises students' evaluation of faculty (SEF). It evaluates students' perception of competencies required by faculty in teaching research methodology to undergraduate geography students at the Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria. Using a questionnaire to gather data for the study, the paper argues that by evaluating the performance of faculty members, their knowledge, expertise, skills, and by applying certain adaptation mechanisms in teaching, the experience and effectiveness of teaching students' research methodology can be significantly improved. The authors use this medium to encourage colleges and universities, education planners and policy makers in Nigeria of the need to introduce and carry out SEF along side other evaluation techniques in determining faculty performances and effectiveness.

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INTRODUCTION

The Ahmadu Bello University is dedicated to excellence in teaching. Excellence means the state or quality of excelling; it is effectively providing learning experiences that prepare students for the challenges of the multifaceted, ever varying, and diverse workplace in society. Ahmadu Bello University is the largest university in Africa, south of the Sahara. It is composed of 12 faculties - Arts, Science, Education, Engineering, Vet Medicine, Medicine, Pharmacy, Agriculture, Law, Administration, and Environmental and Social Sciences. Its geography department was established in 1962. It is a foundation department of the university. Presently, it has a student population of 453 students. The university handles both local and international students. The staff strength of the geography department is show in Table 1.

Geography is offered as part of a four-year program and as a major in faculties of science and education. The teaching of undergraduate geography is characterized as applied and vocational in nature and aims to produce graduates who are scientifically and technically skilled and who possess report writing skills. Skill areas such as literature searches and reviews, data collection and analyses, and communication are all set in a problem-solving context where students learn about the research planning and management process (University of New South Wales, 2003),

The completion of an introductory course in research methods is a critical step for undergraduate students who will one day need to conduct their own original research. These courses are equally important for students who are not planning to conduct research in the future, because graduates still need to make informed decisions regarding research findings as part of their professional development. Consequently, research methods courses are an essential requirement of many undergraduate programs in the social and natural sciences. Research methods courses are challenging classes to teach because the technical complexity of the course material is quite high while student interest in this material can unfortunately be quite low (Ball & Pelco, 2006).

According to the University of New South Wales (2003), geography is the study of spatial and temporal variations of the phenomena that make up natural and human-dominated environments. The cultural significance of geography lies in its contribution to an understanding of the total environment. The geographer's skills also find practical application in the conservation and planned development of resources. Increasing numbers of geographers are employed as professionals in these applications. In the 21st century, geography is concerned with understanding the functioning of natural environments and human societies. Geographers study the natural processes, environmental problems, resource management systems, and social, cultural and economic processes that shape our interactions with nature.

Student-developed research projects involve original research conducted by a single student or a small group of students. Research projects provide a wonderful active-learning experience that students typically embrace with increased motivation and interest. Students learn first-hand the challenges of reviewing the relevant research literature when formulating research questions/hypotheses. Reading scientific research is much more purposeful when students direct this read-

Table 1. Staff strength of the geography department

Ranks	Numbers
Professors	2
Readers	2
Senior lecturers	1
Lecturer 1	6
Lecturer 11	5
Assistant Lecturers	4
Total	20

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