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Academic Staff Perceptions on Graduate Students' Attitudes towards Academic Writing and Research in Selected Public Universities in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to find out academic staff perceptions of graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research skills in selected Public Universities in Uganda. It employed a phenomenological design and a qualitative approach. Graduate students, academic staff, and academic administrative staff as the study population. Study participants depended on the saturation of the findings collected. These participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data from academic administrative staff and academic staff were collected using an interview guide. A focus group discussion guide for graduate students was the second data collection tool. Data were analysed using the thematic data analysis technique. Results showed that academic staff perceptions of graduate students' attitudes on academic writing and research skills were negative. Negative perceptions were recorded on the generation of research ideas, enthusiasm, text structure, formal academic language, paraphrasing, plagiarism, and making citations. The study concluded that the perceptions of academic staff on graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research were generally negative on the generation of research ideas, enthusiasm, use of formal academic research language, paraphrasing, plagiarism, and making citations. Thus, it was recommended that supervisors/mentors should be retooled in active research-based instructional supervision where they can be encouraged to work in groups, and initiate professional activities, such as mentoring and coaching, to assist them in supervising and evaluating graduate students' research projects.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to write and conduct research is a critical component of academic success for graduate students. In today's competitive academic landscape, universities are placing increasing emphasis on the development of these skills, recognizing that they are essential for students to produce high-quality research and contribute meaningfully to their disciplines. In line with the aforementioned statement, recent studies have highlighted the importance of developing students' writing and research skills, with many arguing that these skills are not only essential for academic success but also for professional development and career advancement (Carter, 2013). Likewise, the pursuit of graduate education is a crucial step in the academic and professional journey, as it provides students with advanced knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to excel in their chosen field. However, the quality of graduate education is not solely dependent on the academic programs offered, but also on the attitude and skills of graduate students (Bridgstock, & Tippett, 2019). In particular, academic writing and research skills are essential components of graduate education, as they enable students to critically analyze complex information, think creatively, and communicate their findings effectively. However, Jenkins et al. (2007) found out that many graduate students lack confidence in their writing abilities, and struggle to develop clear and concise arguments. Similarly, research skills are often viewed as an essential component of graduate education, but many students may lack the necessary skills to conduct rigorous and effective research (Kiley, & Mullins, 2007). This might have been true with graduate students in public universities in Uganda raising the urgency for this current study to explore the lecturers' perceptions towards graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research skills.

Many students especially in Sub-Saharan Africa are struggling to maintain academic writing standards that are acceptable in higher education. This has increased the demand for academic development programs as a viable strategy to enhance scholarly writing and research required by students (Pineteh, 2014). Meanwhile, Ellen (2022) revealed that research is the central traditional identity of higher education institutions (HEIs), it was identified as the process that legitimizes the existence of an HEI, sets standards of excellence and quality assurance. However, there is a lack of understanding about lecturers' perceptions towards graduate students' attitudes toward academic writing and research skills, particularly in the context of selected public universities in Uganda.

NCHE (2020) indicated that AWR with associated with developing career pathways in various employment sectors and provides knowledge, innovation, and economic development at a local, national, regional, and global level. However, to realize the former, supervisors/mentors have to play a pivotal role. In the case of Uganda's higher education system, evidence has shown that in many universities scholarly writing and research are not prioritized and effectively offered to university students (NCHE, 2020). Students' writings in assignments and research were identified as lacking the academic tone, lacking access to effective research sources, being unable to address research directly and adequately, and above all failing to meet assignment deadlines. This challenge denies these students the inquisitive mind and research skills needed for national transformation and development. This dilemma is reiterated by Rwendeire Report (2017) which also established that academic writing and research are not effectively done by students leading to low knowledge generation.

Lecturers' perceptions of graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research skills that could have been essential in enhancing the academic writing and research skills of graduate students had not been empirically studied to explore how the influence on graduate students' academic writing and research. Therefore, this current study aimed to find out academic staff perceptions of graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research in selected Public Universities in Uganda.

Conceptually, Schillings et al. (2018) referred to academic writing as a distinct style of writing used by those in academic and research communities that is noted for its objectivity and uses critical analysis and presentation of well-structured, clear arguments based on evidence and reason. Meanwhile, Bordens, & Abbott (2011) defined research as an investigative process of finding reliable solutions to a problem through a systematic selection, collection, analysis, and interpretation of data relating to the research problem, to discover new knowledge about things around us. Whereas, Creswell (2009) defined research as the process of making claims and then refining or abandoning some of them for other claims more strongly warranted. In the current study perception of academic staff towards academic writing and research was studied based on structure, evidence-based, language, and critical analysis.

The study was guided by the Social Constructivist Theory which has a significant framework in the context of academic writing, as it highlights the importance of social interactions and shared experiences in shaping our understanding and construction of knowledge (Dewey, 1916). In the context of graduate students, this theory can be applied to examine how collaborative writing and peer review influence the construction of knowledge. According to Social Constructivist Theory, knowledge is not an objective, fixed entity, but rather it is created through social interactions and negotiations between individuals. This means that knowledge is not predetermined or pre-existing, but rather it emerges through the process of communication, dialogue, and shared experiences.

In the context of graduate students, this theory can be applied to examine how collaborative writing and peer review shape their understanding and construction of knowledge. Social constructivist theory has constructs that relate to academic writing and research among graduate students such as; Shared understanding; in the form of collaborative writing and peer review facilitates a shared understanding among graduate students, as they work together to construct and refine their knowledge. This shared understanding can lead to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Construction of meaning; through collaborative writing and peer review, graduate students can construct meaning together by negotiating and refining their ideas. This process can help to clarify complex concepts and resolve ambiguities. Co-construction of knowledge; this theory emphasizes that knowledge is co-constructed through social interactions. In the context of graduate students, this means that they are not just constructing individual knowledge, but rather co-constructing knowledge with their peers. Emphasis on dialogue; Social Constructivist Theory emphasizes the importance of dialogue and communication in shaping our understanding of the world. In the context of graduate students, this means that collaborative writing and peer review should be designed to facilitate open and respectful dialogue. Agency and power dynamics; Social Constructivist Theory also acknowledges that power dynamics influences the construction of knowledge. In the context of graduate students, this means that teachers and peers may have different levels of influence or authority over the construction of knowledge.

Based on this theory, it was theorized in the current study that students in universities must have the art of academic writing and research as one of the key functions of a university. However, this conception hinges more on the attitudes, perceptions of academic staff and students towards academic writing and research. With positive perceptions and attitudes of faculty, the idea of mastering the art of academic writing and publication would be fulfilled among students. This study therefore aimed at investigating the perceptions of academic staff in universities regarding the attitudes of graduate students towards academic writing and research skills. Specifically, this study aimed at exploring the perceptions of academic staff regarding graduate

students' proficiency in academic writing and research skills; Exploring how academic staff perceive the impact of graduate students' previous educational backgrounds and experiences on their current attitudes towards academic writing and research; Assessing academic staff opinions on the adequacy and effectiveness of existing support mechanisms in enhancing graduate students' academic writing and research skills; and analyzing academic staff perceptions of graduate students' engagement with research activities, including participation in research projects, publication efforts, and involvement in academic conferences.

Problem Statement

The landscape of higher education continually evolves, highlighting the increasing importance of effective academic writing and research skills among graduate students. These skills are not only fundamental for academic success but also critical for the development of knowledge and professional competence in various fields (Lee, & Linder, 2020). The increasing emphasis on academic writing and research skills in higher education has raised questions about the perceptions of academic staff regarding graduate students' attitudes toward these essential competencies. Effective academic writing is pivotal for success in graduate studies and professional endeavors (Burgess et al., 2019). Despite the importance of these academic writing skills, many graduate students struggle to develop their writing and research abilities, leading to concerns about the quality of their research outputs and the ability to produce high-quality research papers (Omaswa Report, 2014; Rwendeire Report, 2017; NCHE, 2020). Similarly, many graduate students struggle to develop these skills, which can negatively impact their academic performance and future career prospects. Conversely (Omaswa Report, 2014; Rwendeire Report, 2017, NCHE, 2020) have further indicated that academic writing and research in many universities in Uganda is not given the due attention it deserves.

Many of these students lack progressive research ideas, fail to use an academic tone in their writings, fear receiving negative feedback, lack access to effective research sources, and are indecisive in formulating research topics. For instance, Kanaabi et al. (2022) revealed that several university rankings have revealed low levels of research and innovation in Higher Education Institutions in Uganda. This was evidenced by a few active researchers in Higher institutions of learning yet scientific research not only benefits individual academics but also benefits higher institutions of learning in terms of global recognition and prestige (Kanaabi et al., 2022). Likewise, they end up finding difficulties in writing academic papers, reflective essays, research proposals, and reports. Furthermore, these students were indicated as not highly innovative and creative since they lacked the requisite generic research skills needed while at work. Consequently, limited research might lead to difficulties in navigating the complex research process like proposal writing, dissertations/ thesis writing, and publications which further impedes research productivity. To date, there have been limited studies carried out to establish the perceptions of academic staff regarding graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research more so guided by Dewey's Social Constructivist Theory.

In particular, lecturers' perceptions of graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research skills are critical, as they can influence the way students approach these skills and the level of support, they receive from faculty members (Hwang et al., 2017). In addition, the perceptions of lecturers, who are responsible for teaching and mentoring graduate students, towards their attitudes towards academic writing and research skills are crucial in understanding the root causes of this issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceptions of Academic Staff Towards Graduate Students Attitudes on Academic Writing and Research

Attitudes are conceptualized as representing characteristics that form the person's character and value system within the individual and those characteristics manifest inform of personal beliefs or judgments. Attitudes have been positively linked to research and academic writing efficiency. For instance, Addae, & Kwapong (2023) studied PhD Perceptions of Research Seminars in Doctoral Education in Ghana. The research aimed to investigate the factors that influence supervisors'

perceptions of PhD students' research quality and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the research quality of PhD students. It was based on a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. Results also revealed that supervisors identified several strengths and weaknesses in the research quality of PhD students, including issues related to methodology, data analysis, and writing style. Findings also indicated that supervisors' perceptions of PhD students' research quality were crucial in shaping the students' research experience and outcome and that there is a need for universities to develop strategies to improve the research quality of PhD students. Alternatively, this current study used a phenomenological design which was purely qualitative. Empirically, Kim, & Lee (2020) investigated the impact of supervisor-student relationships on PhD students' research experiences. With the use of a mixed-method approach methodology on 30 PhD students and 20 supervisors from a Korean university participating in semi-structured interviews. Results showed that positive supervisor-student relationships were associated with increased student satisfaction, motivation, and sense of belonging, while negative relationships were linked to feelings of isolation, frustration, and burnout. However, this study was carried out in Korea as part of the Asian university perspective while this current study was done in selected Ugandan public universities in the African context.

Kumar, & Kumar (2017) studied the writing skills of graduate students. Taking a desktop review of the literature. Findings revealed that academic staff were of the view that academic writing and research skills were essential for graduate students to produce high-quality research and to succeed in their academic and professional careers. However, there was a growing concern about the lack of adequate writing and research skills among graduate students. This hence indicated that academic staff had a belief that graduate students consider academic writing and research as an important aspect of their academic journey but limited by skill acquisition to competently do it. Alternatively, this study was an assertion based on the review of literature while the current study was empirical with field findings.

Khan et al. (2018) investigated attitudes towards research activities of university teachers. Quantitative data arrived at using the chi-square analysis technique revealed that university lecturers showed that students had positive significant attitudes towards academic writing research. Further, this study indicated that incentives enhanced academic staff's perception of graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research. Methodologically this current study was qualitative while the previously reviewed study was quantitative.

Whereas, Marin (2014) in a study about the academic writing process in Spanish universities' perceptions of students and faculty. Results revealed that both faculty and students understood the academic writing process differently. This also involved differences in the way they perceive revision and feedback in the research encounters. Alternatively, revision and feedback were not the only aspects of academic writing and research that were considered in this current study for instance; language, evidence-based, structure and critical analysis were considered. Allen (2018) studied facilitating graduate student and faculty member writing groups at the University of Japan. Results revealed that academic staff and students had issues related to time pressures, motivation varied writing abilities. These in one way or the other impacted their writing and research skills development. Whereas, Zulystiawati, & Ibrahim (2021) in the study about the dark tower, students' perceptions of academic writing showed that academic staff and students had perceived academic writing and research as scary, individuals perceived as not having previous knowledge of academic writing, not aware of the academic cultures and as interfaced with several barriers. This implied that the perceptions of academic staff regarding academic writing and research in that context were negative. Hence, this study verified whether a similar state of affairs prevailed in the selected public universities in Uganda.

Rowley et al. (2017) investigated academic behaviors and attitudes toward open-access publishing in scholarly journals. Findings revealed that academic staff and students across disciplines that as science, technology, medicine, arts,

humanities, and social sciences had differing attitudes towards academic writing. However, based on specific disciplines (individual discipline) academic staff perceptions towards student academic writing were consistent. Meanwhile, Lindahl, & Grace (2018) studied students' and supervisors' knowledge and attitudes regarding plagiarism and referencing. Results revealed that academic staff and students knew about plagiarism and considered it as academic dishonesty and mischievous. In the same study (85%) had positive perceptions of referencing, but there was little consensus about its principles. However, this study was based on percentages as descriptive statistics while the current study was qualitative.

Whereas, Su, & Huang (2022) in a study about understanding students' perceptions of feedback valences in academic writing. Results revealed that students and Faculty had attitudes that praise was more significantly important than criticism in their academic writings. Also, students and faculty had the view that praise was more useful and developed a sense of motivation to continue writing. However, in this current study perceptions of academic staff towards academic writing and research were not based on praise as a sole dimension.

Japsen et al. (2012) studied academic attitudes towards PhD students' teaching, preparing research higher degree students for academic careers. Using more quantitative descriptive results, revealed that academic staff perceived that research supervision among graduate students was one of the most valuable aspects of their work and that it greatly influenced their career growth and expectations. This meant that academic staff had positive perceptions towards graduate students' research component of academic writing. However, this study was based on quantitative description results while this current study was qualitatively done. In more or less the same way, Ali, & Coate (2014) added that your supervisor was both a support and a devil's advocate, and sometimes critical even when you may feel more or less suicidal, but not destructively critical. There is a clear line to be trodden and it needs to be walked in the context of respect and interest with feedback coming promptly and pointing to the good as well as the bad.

Empirically, Coleman, & Tuck (2019) explored the nature of academic drift through a study of lecturer perspectives on student writing in a vocational university. Lecturers perceived graduate students as constricted by the narrow vocationalist agenda, which created negative perceptions towards academic writing and research. Hence, academic staff had negative perceptions of graduate student's academic writing and research. However, this study was a desktop review of literature while this study was empirical. Hence, this suggested that academic staff had positive perceptions of academic writing and research. Khuram et al. (2021) investigated academic attitude subjective norms on international doctoral students' academic perceptions. Results revealed that high-rated supervisor perceptions towards academic writing and research greatly determined the level of support offered to graduate students doing research. With these positive perceptions, doctoral student's success in their academic writing was guaranteed. However, this study was descriptively analyzed using frequencies and percentages while this study was qualitative.

Behar-Horenstein et al. (2010) investigated mentoring undergraduate researchers given students' and professors' perceptions. Professors perceived mentoring graduate student's research as critical in their academic work and with this they were frequently available and regular for student mentoring. However, some professors' availability was infrequent thus denying graduate writing as expected. However, this study was done in the University of Florida, America while this current study would be done in selected public universities in Uganda. Nonetheless, Horta, & Santos (2020) investigated organizational factors and academic research agendas. Using qualitative data, results revealed that academics with high levels of commitment were likely to create research agendas that assume more conservative, discipline and risk-averse traits with less potential to achieve the intended innovative research outcomes.

Requant et al. (2018) studied supervisors' perceptions of research competencies in the final year project. Using qualitative data that were thematically analyzed, results revealed that supervisors do understand research competencies within a broad frame of their teaching and are also in

the know that their personal roles range from motivating, raising awareness of what has been learned during the degree course, and explaining specific concepts or processes. However, this study did not use the academic literacies model as this current study.

Meanwhile, Boyd, & Smith (2016) studied the contemporary academic, orientation towards research, work, and research identity of higher education lecturers in the health professions. Findings revealed that a significant proportion of lecturers in health professional fields, even of those working in research-intensive universities/appear to subvert, the paradigmatic primary accorded the higher education sector to research outputs and identity of the researcher. Furthermore, Xie, & Postlethwaite (2018) studied Chinese academics' perceptions of research quality. Using a phenomenological study, results revealed that academic staff viewed the quality of research outputs of students in methodology contextualization and impact. However, they perceived the research dissemination abilities of students as still wanting. Besides, this study was carried out in China whereas this current study was carried out among academic staff in the selected public universities in Uganda.

In addition, Wilson et al. (2012) investigated academic perceptions of the purpose of undergraduate research experiences in research-intensive degrees. Using quantitative methods, results revealed that supervising academics reveal a range of intentions some of which address the higher order and critical thinking skills associated with research or independent learning. However, this study was analyzed using quantitative methods while this current study objective was qualitatively done.

Murray & Sharpling (2019) studied traits of academic value in student writing, and insights from a psychometric approach. Results revealed that academics had perceived discrete traits associated with weaker essays. Such traits include poor introductions, a tendency to be overly formulaic, and vagueness of language and ideas. Others include an insufficient sense of audience and what should be treated as given and new information, limited and imprecise vocabulary, lack of relevance, failure to

juxtapose ideas, inappropriate register and weak conclusions. However, this study was not guided by the academic literacies model as was the case with this current study. Meanwhile, Ofte (2022) investigated collective meaning-making in collegial conversations, from the perspective of teacher educators' talk about students' academic writing. Using qualitative episodes (talks) on academic writing results indicated that teacher educators had perceived students' academics as lacking disciplinary rigor and tone. This hence implied that academic staff indicated that academic staff perceived students' academic writing skills as still below the disciplinary orientations. Methodologically, this study is based on conversation talks while this current study employed several methods (interview and focus discussion).

Nonetheless, French (2019) investigated academic writing as identity work in higher education as a strategy for forming professional writing in higher education. Results revealed that academic staff agrees with greater awareness of tacitness and complexity of practices around academic writing. They also showed students are more confident and innovative to develop as academic writers. Besides, this was a desktop review of the literature while this current study was empirical with field study findings. In addition, Ooms et al. (2018) in a study about moving up the ladder, heterogeneity influences academic careers through research orientation, gender, and mentors. Using sequential logic models, results revealed that academic staff who bridge the quest for a fundamental understanding of academic careers have to develop students' positive perceptions towards research and academic writing.

METHODOLOGY

The study was descriptive in design and qualitative in approach. Participants were selected from four public universities in the different regions that make up Uganda. These participants were selected from humanities and science faculties and involved academic staff, academic administrative staff and graduate students. The actual number during data collection depended on the saturation of data collected. All participants were sampled using a purposive sampling technique based on their

responsibilities and rank/designation. Data from academic administrative and academic staff were collected using an interview guide. Data from students were collected using a focused group discussion guide. This data was transcribed, coded, edited, and analyzed using themes and sub-themes on each of the major elements of the study's key variables. Finally, the thematic data analysis method was used as the main data analysis technique.

RESULTS

To study this objective, several themes were created. For instance, the academic staff's conception of academic writing and research, the academic staff's perceptions of students' academic writing and research abilities, the guidance and support academic staff offer to graduate students in their journey of academic writing and research, and challenges encountered by graduate students in their academic writing and research.

Academic Staff Perceptions of Academic Writing and Research

Academic staff from public universities conceived academic writing and research in several ways. Among them included perceiving it as writing a thesis, dissertation, journal article, book chapter, project papers, and conference papers among others. These types always entail reporting the research process as a composition. Academic writing which was perceived as having a wide range of forms was regarded as a discipline in itself. This discipline contains different components ranging from title writing to bibliography and attributes related to their writing that include language expression and form. Meanwhile, another academic staff from Mbarara University of Science and Technology conceived academic writing and research as an obligatory dimension of academic life where it is viewed as the process of sharing research ideas with other scholars by pre-determined rules, standards and principles.

Conversely, another academic staff from Gulu University conceived academic writing and research as a process that calls for consistent following of the steps of scientific writing. Academic writing is one of the steps of the academic research process through which scientists report situations of thinking, experience, observation, and application/ testing among others in a bid to arrive at concrete solutions for scientific problems identified. Meanwhile, another academic staff from Busitema University conceived that academic writing skills are often critical indicators of a successful experience in post-graduate studies. It allows scientific research to be shared with other researchers and has an important place in graduate education because individuals at this stage of education gain experience in their fields with their academic writing experiences and are referred to as field experts when their education has been completed. Therefore, all these conceptions of academic staff on academic writing and research point to the fact that conducting research, sharing and disseminating this research is a practice that people in the academic world constantly experience. Thus, in this process, academicians carry out the act of academic writing to bring their findings into the world of science. However, this must be done following the rules and principles of writing genres.

Academic Staff Perceptions on Graduate Students' Attitude towards Academic Writing and Research

Academic staff perceptions of students' academic writing and research skills were studied based on enthusiasm towards academic writing and research, student generation of ideas, text structure, language, and paraphrasing. It also covers plagiarism, making citations, synthesizing, time allocation, and publication. Results on each of the above are offered in the following sections.

Enthusiasm of Graduate Students towards Academic Writing and Research

On the first aspect of enthusiasm towards academic writing and research, results from academic staff revealed mixed outcomes when it comes to student enthusiasm for academic writing and research. Participant 1 from Makerere University stated that,

> *Students are always not ambitious toward research and writing. The moment you talk about research and academic writing as one of the requirements of graduate studies, students always feel threatened and are not readily*

willing to read widely and access evidence and relevant materials.

This view was in line with that of an academic staff from Busitema University who said,

During our study times, graduate students were actively engaged in wide reading and were anxiously motivated to identify study concerns in their broad fields of learning. However, in today's universities, graduate students are too lazy and want to acquire papers minus going through the rigorous process of reading, writing works, and research papers.

These findings revealed that graduate students are not as anxious as would be expected. This narrows the chances at which they would come up with quality academic writing and research. Besides, some of the participants revealed that some anxious graduate students have a deep passion for research and academic writing.

Another academic staff from Gulu University revealed that,

Graduate students in this university are too anxious when it gets to academic writing and scientific research. I have witnessed many students coming for consultation on research-related matters and how to proceed when it comes to writing and publication. This has allowed many of these students to complete their work on record time.

This finding implied that some of the academic staff had agreed that some graduate students have the enthusiasm and motivation required when it comes to academic writing and research.

Academic Staff Perceptions on Students' Generation of Research and Academic Writing Ideas

The second major aspect of the academic staff's perceptions of graduate students' attitudes toward academic writing and research was the students' generation of research ideas. Like the previous aspects of student enthusiasm, academic staff had perceived graduate students as very slow when it comes to the generation of academic research and writing ideas.

Academic staff 2 who was interviewed from Makerere University revealed that,

One of the areas challenging graduate students is that of generating research ideas. Students always spend many years struggling to get research ideas. This problem makes many of these graduate students drag on the course interfering with their study programme completion.

Meanwhile, another academic staff 3 from Makerere University revealed that,

Conceiving research ideas among graduate students is a serious problem affecting their progress on the course program. So far, we have a large number of graduate students who have completed their study lectures and have not conceived research ideas. When time passes, they run out of the course.

These findings revealed that graduate students are perceived as individuals who find it difficult to generate research ideas. Besides, academic staff 2 from Gulu University revealed that,

Graduate students from our university are always readily able to create ideas related to their study programs or their courses of specialization. At times we face challenges when a student is doing zoology but ends up choosing a problem in another discipline.

The aforementioned finding revealed that some of the graduate students are not able to create ideas in their disciplines which makes it hard to come up with quality papers and research.

Academic Staff Perceptions on Graduate Students' Text Structure in Academic Writing and Research

The third aspect considered academic staff's perceptions of graduate students' attitudes toward academic writing and research skills was that of text structure. On this aspect, to a great extent, academic staff showed that graduate students are in the know of the required structure of their academic writing and research works. This was envisaged in the responses which indicated that faculty is aware of the sequence of their write-up following the

guidelines provided by universities and publishing houses.

Specifically, one of the faculty who was interviewed from Busitema University stated that,

> *Graduate students at this university know the correct structure of their writing and research papers. In my interaction with my supervisees, I have witnessed that my supervisees have a clear picture of what comes first, followed by which depending on the guidelines provided. It is uncommon to find students structuring work outside the structure provided by the university.*

This finding suggested that graduate students at Busitema University can structure their work properly based on the structure provided by the university.

Another faculty interview from Makerere University also stated that,

> *Graduate students at Makerere University always sequence their academic writing and research works properly. This sequencing of work has greatly allowed them to complete their research projects on time. They all know that the first thing a graduate student has to do is to read and conceive an idea and write background information.*

These results implied that academic staff in general had a view that graduate students can effectively and properly structure their work while writing academic texts. However, some of the academic staff had a belief that students could not structure their work properly in writing academic texts. Specifically, faculty interviewed from Busitema University stated that,

> *Surprisingly, many graduate students do not know what comes first when it comes to writing academic texts. It is common to find graduate students bypassing guidelines given to them by their mentors and research committee.*

This finding implies that structuring academic texts following research writing guidelines either by one's university or the authors' guidelines is still a big detriment to academic writing and research skills in public universities where the study was done.

Academic Staff Perceptions of Language Used by Postgraduate Students in Academic Writing and Research

The other aspect of academic staff perceptions towards graduate students' academic writing and research skills was that of the use of appropriate academic language. Faculty who participated in this study revealed that graduate students in general had language problems in their academic writing and research.

Faculty interviewed from Makerere University revealed that,

> *Graduate students in this university have language problems while writing academic texts. Such students always do not know which language is appropriate for which audience. This challenge has affected many as they use complicated and casual language that makes their audience unable to understand their academic work.*

In the same vein, faculty interviewed from Gulu University revealed that,

> *Each paradigm has its linguistic style for instance, if it is a qualitative study, one has to use qualitative language different from that of a quantitative study. However, our students mix up things which makes them produce academic work that is not in tandem with appropriate academic language.*

Hence, the views of these aforementioned participants revealed that language used in academic writing and research according to academic staff is still not in congruence with their discipline and paradigm selected. Besides academic staff interviewed from Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST) showed that,

> *Some of the graduate students at this university are aware of the appropriate academic language needed in their academic texts. This makes it easy to write academic texts with ease since the academic language used can allow graduate students to articulate their research ideas.*

These findings implied that lecturers at times perceive some graduate students' attitudes on appropriate use of language as effective.

Academic Staff Perceptions on Students Paraphrasing in Academic Writing and Research

Faculty who participated in this study revealed that paraphrasing among graduate students is one of the serious challenges that these students encounter.

An academic staff from MUST revealed that,

> *Paraphrasing texts into a student's language is still a challenge. This is because it requires one to carefully read, interpret, and paraphrase that information in his or her language. This requires also time and expertise in the language. However, many graduate students don't have the time to sit down and thoroughly read and paraphrase work in academic texts.*

In addition, another participant in Busitema revealed that,

> *Paraphrasing is an easy task for graduate students. We always train and guide these students on paraphrasing, but a few always find challenges in synthesizing academic texts.*

This finding indicated that paraphrasing is another big challenge faced by graduate students in the public universities where the study was done.

Academic Staff Perceptions on Students and Plagiarism Aspects in Academic Writing and Research

Results on lecturers' perceptions of students' attitudes towards academic writing and research considered students' attitudes towards plagiarism. Academic staff showed that graduate students do not practice plagiarism much. However, in some cases, some graduate students engage in plagiarism.

One of these participants D from Gulu University revealed that,

> *Graduate students in this university rarely engage in plagiarism. They can sit, write and come up with their original work. I have been supervising students at the graduate level and for six years I have never recorded any plagiarism cases.*

This finding is not any different from lecturer A from Makerere University who revealed that,

> *I have supervised many graduate students until completion of their courses but no serious plagiarism cases have been identified.*

This suggested that plagiarism is rare in the universities where the study was done. This implies that ethically, these graduate students comply with the writing standards to produce quality work. Furthermore, academic staff from Busitema University showed that,

> *Some students tend to zerox information and present it as theirs. Last semester, I identified four students who had plagiarized the work of their masters' proposals. When I tested it in a plagiarism test, I was surprised that most of what they had presented was plagiarized information. As a department, we decided that these students drop those topics and come up with new areas of research.*

In line with the above, another academic staff from Makerere University stressed that,

> *Students are now conscious and know that the university has anti-plagiarism software. In this department, we no longer allow students to submit their work untested. This has greatly limited students from engaging in cases of plagiarism.*

These results revealed that there were some elements of plagiarism in the academic text of graduate students' research work in the public universities where the study was done. Furthermore, on plagiarism academic perceptions on student attitude towards academic writing and research skills, academic staff from Makerere University narrated that,

> *To cite the references appropriately and completely, to contribute to the field through the originality of the study, to cite all primary and secondary sources throughout the text, and in the references section.*

Whereas an academic staff from Makerere University stated that,

Researchers should avoid replication of the same studies and this increases the originality of their academic pieces of work.

These results implied that academic staff replication of knowledge was highly detected and considered a serious offense once when detected students' research skills and academic writing can be greatly damaged. An academic staff from Busitema University on academic staff' perceptions about graduate students engaging in academic malpractice in research and academic writing revealed that,

Most importantly, academic work should not be done to obtain personal benefits (incentives, inflating the number of publications) rather it should be for creating scientific value. A genuine problem should be identified and a real result oriented towards that problem should be presented and at least one or two suggestions focusing on the solution should be proposed.

This suggests that in all ways, graduate students were recommended to avoid replication or inflating research works and papers with no clear problem and solution arrived at. Doing this poses an educational waste.

Academic Staff Perceptions of Students on Making Citations in the Process of Academic Writing and Research

Making citations, academic staff in the universities where this study was done revealed that graduate students have positive attitudes toward making citations in their academic writing and research works. Specifically, academic staff from Mbarara University of Science and Technology stated that,

Graduate students know and do cite in their academic writing papers, dissertations, and publications. In the essays and proposals submitted to university graduate school, postgraduate students exhibit that they have mastered how to cite properly using the recommended APA writing format.

Meanwhile, one of the academic administrative staff from Busitema interviewed also revealed that,

Postgraduate students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology can properly cite in their texts. This citation follows the guidelines provided once you read and check the sources of information referenced. It is easy for one to identify them online.

On the other hand, an academic staff from Makerere University stated that,

At times students can present over a page with no single citation. It is hard at his graduate level for one to write big paragraphs and pages with no single citation as this depicts amateurism and failure to scientifically evidence our claims. This scenario denies us to confirm the authenticity of the results provided.

These results suggested that some graduate students in the universities where the study was done can at times fail to make citations to support their claims. In line with the above, another academic staff from Gulu University showed that,

There are situations when a graduate student cites one source. To a large extent when you read their work, you find out one single citation is coming now and again on all the pages. These limits threw the development of their ideas and critical debate among the authors cited.

This also indicates that making citations is somehow a difficult and challenging task among graduate students in the universities where this current study was done.

Academic Staff Perceptions of Students on time Allocation aspect in Academic Writing and Research

On time allocation for research and academic writing results from study participants revealed that graduate students have limited time for research and academic writing. One of the lecturers B from Busitema University stated that,

Our graduate students are a working class, they have limited time to sit down and read extensively. This has limited many to the development of critical and analytical skills to be proficient researchers.

This view was supported by another academic staff from Makerere University who indicated that,

Time is an essential resource when it comes to academic writing and research skills. However,

our graduate students cannot effectively balance work, family, and academic writing as time is scarce and limited for them to fulfill their academic writing and research mandates.

This hence suggests that time is so significant when it comes to academic writing and research. However, this time is limited on the side of graduate students. Therefore, the general finding on this objective was that academic staff perceptions towards graduate student's academic writing and research skills were negative. These negative perceptions were recorded on the generation of research ideas enthusiasm, text structure, formal academic language, paraphrasing, plagiarism and citations.

DISCUSSION

Results on this objective revealed that academic staff perceptions of graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research were negative. These results meant that the academic staff's perceptions of graduate students' attitudes toward academic writing and research did not match the expectations of research rigor. The negative perceptions of academic staff on graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research were recorded on the structuring of academic texts, generation of research ideas, paraphrasing, making citations, and plagiarism, among others. These findings were in direct agreement with previous researchers such as Zulystiawati, & Ibrahim (2021) who revealed that academic staff perceptions of graduate students' attitudes towards academic writing and research were perceived as scary, individuals perceived as not having previous knowledge of academic writing, not aware of the academic cultures and as interfaced with several barriers.

In addition, the study findings revealed that perceptions of academic staff on graduate students' attitudes toward academic writing and research were generally negative. This corresponded with the findings of Alostath (2021) revealed that faculty members of graduate students had a perception that graduate students did not have the rigor and demands of academic writing at the master's level. In the same vein as the study findings, Kaumala et al. (2019) revealed that academic staff perceived students as not aware of organizing ideas in their academic writing and research.

On the critical view the findings that revealed negative perceptions of academic staff on graduate students' attitude towards academic writing and research differed from Nsereko (2018) who established that, doctoral supervisors had positive perceptions towards students' academic writing and research skills. These academic staff were positive in undertaking the responsibility of determining students' research outcomes. All in all, this study concludes that perceptions of academic staff on graduate students' attitudes toward academic writing and research were generally negative.

CONCLUSIONS

The study highlighted a concerning gap between the expectations of academic staff and the actual abilities of graduate students, suggesting a misalignment that may hinder students' academic progress. Moreover, the perceptions of academic staff were significantly influenced by their experiences with graduate students. The study also revealed differing perceptions among academic staff based on their disciplines. Faculty in the humanities emphasized the importance of narrative construction and theoretical engagement in writing, while those in the sciences focused more on empirical data analysis and the clarity of presentation. These differences suggest that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to teaching academic writing and research skills, underscoring the necessity for tailored support that aligns with the distinct needs of various fields of study. Further, the findings illuminated the significant role of institutional support in shaping students' attitudes towards writing and research. Faculty members expressed a desire for more structured programs and resources, such as workshops on academic writing, peer mentoring systems, and access to writing centers. Such initiatives could foster a more conducive environment for developing essential writing and research skills, ultimately motivating students to engage more positively with their academic work.

Ultimately, this study underscores the need for a collaborative approach among faculty, students, and university administrations to bridge the gap in academic writing and research competencies. By fostering an environment that supports skill development, enhances motivation, and

acknowledges the diverse needs of graduate students, public universities can better prepare their students for the demands of academic scholarship and professional practice. Future research should continue to explore this dynamic, particularly by examining the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to improve graduate students' writing and research attitudes. Identifying innovative strategies to encourage students to embrace and excel in these critical areas will not only benefit individual learners but also enhance the academic rigor and reputation of the institutions involved.

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