

# AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS OF THE CERAMICS POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA (1997 TO 2009)

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## Abstract

*This paper attempted to make an exploratory analysis of the Ceramics Postgraduate Programme of Industrial Design, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (1977 to 2009) from the perspective of a combination of Integrated Marketing Communication and the Viable System Model. The paper posits that while the curriculum plays a significant task in determining the quality of a Postgraduate Programme, the eminence of the department of the internal and external operations is fundamental to the success of any organisation and its marketing functions. The background and identity, communications and organisational structure, input and output of the programme were considered. These were found to contain some basic flaws that adversely affected the flow of data in the communications mechanism, which in turn hindered efficient operations of the Programme. Despite the flaws, the Programme has recorded considerable successes. This was attributed mainly to the personal efforts of the operators of the Programme through non formal communications channels. The need for a review of the background and identity essentials, improvement in the quality of input into the Programme as well as comprehensive database on the output of the Programme has been stressed and these add up to some of the essential determinants of the marketing functions of the Programme.*

## Introduction

Postgraduate (PG) research in Ceramics in Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria was approved for launch as a section of the Department of Industrial Design by the 37<sup>th</sup> Senate Meeting of the University held on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1977. Ahuwan (2005) has described the "Department of Industrial Design as the pioneer Department and leader in Industrial Design in the history of higher education in Nigeria". Therefore, this paper is moderately intended to serve as a food for thought to other Ceramics PG Programmes in Nigeria. The PG Programme in ceramics started with a Masters Programme and later the PhD Programme was approved for commencement in September 1987. Since then, apart from the research conducted by Sale (2010), there has not been any critical analysis of the demeanour of the PG research in Ceramics of ABU, Zaria. Thus,

the data used for this paper is derived chiefly from Sale (2010).

Some problems have been observed with regards to the department of research in ceramics in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. These have been in the main and enthusiastically attributed to some flaw and obsolescence in some functions of the curriculums in use (Ahuwan, 2010; Gukas, 2010; Sullayman, 2010).

This paper however, views that the question of the difficulties in the character of PG research in Ceramics should be approached firstly from the perspective of integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) and Control. This is because the manner of the internal and external operations of any PG Programme directly affects its performance with specific

reference to three indices, namely: potentiality, capability, and actuality. A mix of potentiality and capability result in latency, the outcome of capability and actuality is productivity and these are used to determine performance. The levels of these indices are directly dependent on the quality of normative, strategic and tactical planning of a PG Programme (Beer, 1981).

Also, it has become lucid now that the content and scope of PG research in Nigeria is significantly being auspiciously inclined towards the philosophy of economic and marketing oriented members of the external environments of our institutions of higher learning. Moreover, it is now getting clearer to the PG Programmes that the marketing approach to the issue of viability has become unavoidable. Furthermore, following the current specific policy of gradual withdrawal and eventual total disengagement of funding as highlighted in the national policy on education (Elechi, 2005; Mangwat, 2005; Ibrahim; 2005), the momentum of the issue of exploring other sources of funding has in recent times been gaining considerable attention from some institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. In recognition of this, ABU, Zaria singled out the mounting of "flexible market-driven programmes" as a requisite for it to be able to fulfil its desire to achieve its aims of PG training (Mangwat, 2005).

This paper thus attempts to make a holistic view of the academic and organizational communications processes of the PG Ceramics Programme of Industrial Design ABU, Zaria. Moore (2010) observed that:

Communication is always one of the most important and vital strategic areas of an organization's success. You can have the best or most innovative products or services, but if your internal and external communications are weak, then the demand for your products or services raises a personal flag of concern. When communicating the value of your products or services, you want to focus on how they will benefit your clients.

Ineffective communications systems have earlier been identified by Ahuwan (1981) as a major constraint to the achievement of goals in

some academic institutions in Nigeria. The approach in this paper therefore makes it essential to consider the point of focus from the perspective of a combination of IMC and the Viable System Model (VSM). While the VSM deals with the efficiency of functions of the communications channels, the IMC gives emphasis to reciprocal engagements of trade relationships within the various elements of an organisation as well as between it and its various relevant external environments. These thus provide a basis for the development of coordinated persuasive and graphic communication materials that could assist in establishing and maintaining effective internal and external operations of a PG Programme (Sale, 2010).

### **Background and Identity of the Ceramics PG Programme**

Available data (Sale, 2010) has shown that the Ceramics PG Programme, like that of all the other sections in the Department of Industrial Design ABU, Zaria, has not yet done any formal identification, analysis and categorisation of its stakeholders. The Ceramics PG Programme has not yet developed its own shared background and identity essentials such as philosophy, ideology, purpose, vision, mission and objectives. From the perspective of this paper, the Ceramics PG Programme, as a unit of operations, needs to develop its own statements of background and identity essentials highlighting its own peculiarities. The background and identity essentials need to be developed in line with those documented for the entire PG Programme of the Department which, albeit with the passing of time, have been found to be deficient with regards to their specificity and sharing among participants of the programme as well as their relevance to current realities in the internal and external environments. Moreover, available data confirmed that the background and identity essentials have never been subjected to any critical review.

These predicaments with identity and background essentials, reveal fundamental blockages in the communications mechanisms of the Ceramics PG Programme. This has, in turn, hindered the flourishing of innovation, adversely affected its marketing functions and thwarted any role for the production of its

identity graphics and other advertising materials.

### **Communications and Organisational Structure of the Ceramics PG Programme**

Most of the communications channels in the structure of the Ceramics PG Programme which deal with downward, upward and horizontal communications suffer from very low flow of variety; this has reduced their effectiveness. This has resulted in the development of non-formal channels. That is, the human and machines communications channels that have not been recognised for the functions of the programme. This might not be healthy for the system especially with regards to the fact that it could allow the flourishing of the grapevine.

The PG research in Ceramics has not yet developed any real time comprehensive database. This has limited the capabilities of the monitoring channels that could have been used to obtain relevant data on signs of tension in the operations of the Programme once in a while. Monitoring channels which deal with audits, spot checks, surveys and so forth are useful in ensuring that the management of operations are not authoritarian but allow autonomy of their functions. Invariably therefore, this has contributed in limiting the capacity of the programme to make appropriate self-adjustments in real time when required.

### **Organisational Input into the Ceramics PG Programme**

Several aspects of the input into the Ceramics PG Programme appeared to be very inadequate or even completely lacking. For example, while the number of staff appears to be improving, they still suffer from excessive workloads. There is low participation of staff and other stakeholders in the processes of enrolment of candidates as well as in other functions of the Ceramics PG Programme. This is probably because some specific areas of research interests have not been clearly declared by staff prior to the commencement of enrolment of candidates into the Ceramics PG Programme.

The conditions of most of the facilities on ground are very inadequate for Ceramics PG research. Some of the facilities on ground, such as the electric kilns, wood kilns, jigger-

jolley equipment and so forth, are completely broken down. Most of the other facilities available are totally obsolete. This condition is further compounded by the fact that the sources of funds for the Programme are completely non-functional. For example, the Ceramics PG Programme does not have any specific funding for logistics and research from any government or non-governmental or individual sources. Moreover, it does not have any internally generated funds and has not yet developed any strategy or strategies for improving its current conditions of funding.

The Ceramics PG Programme requires internal and external communications policies and plans that could facilitate effective linkages between it and the policy makers and operators of the rest of the PG Programmes in the Department. The communications policies are also essential mechanisms for ensuring that the Ceramics PG Programme is sensitive to its identity and policy issues as seen by the policy makers any time they have been raised. Furthermore, they are useful for setting up agenda for communications audit for the Ceramics PG Programme. Thus the communications policies and plans are essential for affirming cogent points in which various types of persuasive communications could be used for improving efficiency in the internal and external operations of the Programme.

### **Output of the Ceramics PG Programme**

The rate of graduate output for the Ceramics PG Programme has been steady with increase in the number of PhD graduates between 2004 and 2009. The PG research in Ceramics is thus categorised into thirteen content areas. Many of the research cover areas that overlap with those in other categories. For instance, some of the works concentrated on glazes but gave considerable attention to porcelain, stoneware or earthenware bodies as variable that interact significantly with the qualities of various glaze compounds.

Also, the works on refractories for example involved considerable efforts on the fabrication of appropriate moulds and other equipment for making the product prototypes. However, the categorisation of the research areas in Ceramics is shown in the table 1 below:

Studies on glaze appear to have received the most attention in the categorization of PG research in ceramics. The works done in this category include the production of various glaze compounds, ceramic oxides, stains and enogobes for colouring. Research on porcelain bodies includes formulations for electrical insulators and the production of various porcelain bodies suitable for throwing and casting. Others include the compounding of bodies suitable for the production of pyrometric cones, bodies for bone china and various formulations for ceramic stoneware suitable for making products such as floor tiles, table wares and the like. The research on ceramic small-scale industry covers feasibility studies on ceramic cottage industry. Others include the development of ceramics products suitable for ceramic industries in Nigeria. The category of kilns and ceramic firing mechanism, which as mentioned in the foregoing appear to have received considerable attention from some organizations involved in the construction of gas kilns and wood kilns. The firing mechanisms involved the fabrication of kerosene and gas burners. PG research on refractories seems to have started getting the attention of some relevant members of the external environment of the Programme. This category covers studies on the production of kiln shelves and props and refractory bricks which are not readily available locally. The PG research conducted on traditional pottery covers various aspects of clay work of the Ngas people of Plateau State, the Hausa of Kano State and the Gbagyi of the Federal Capital Territory in Nigeria. Some more PG research which falls in their own separate categories is the production of prototype ceramic gas stove and experiments with the techniques of screen printing in pottery decoration.

Some on-going PG researches in ceramics are in the category of equipment fabrication, such as electric and manual potter's wheel and manual hydraulic press for the production of kiln shelves for ceramic industries. Another on-going work involves experiments on the use of granite sewing waste in developing ceramic bodies and glazes.

It is worth noting that all the experiments conducted in ceramics so far, used local raw materials. Thus, on the whole it could be plausible, to observe that a lot of research into

local raw materials as well as traditional pottery appears to have been done in ceramics. But those which covered the areas of glazes, porcelain bodies and ceramic stoneware especially have highlighted a basic limitation arising from lack of appropriate facilities and equipment. The researchers had to depend mainly on the use of 'empirical analyses'. They could not do more in-depth scientific and technological inquiries.

An observation from the categorization of PG research in ceramics shows that the works done so far have covered areas that could suffice given adequate facilities and equipment, to warrant the flourishing of more scientific and technological approaches as have already been advanced in the areas of body formulations for electric insulators, prototypes and refractories.

There is however, scarcity of data on all the matters of employment of the students and graduates of the PG Programme. Moreover, apart from some scanty information on the candidate's application forms, the PG Programme does not have any data on the employment matters of its students and graduates stored in any available records.

Consultancy services, conferences, exhibitions with the aim of promoting the Ceramics PG Programme and generating funds, have not been previously conducted. In addition, a search through available records has revealed numerous outstanding research results indicating breakthroughs in diverse areas as highlighted above, which have not yet been presented to the appropriate levels by the Ceramics PG Programme. These too highlight a weakness in some essential channels which the Ceramics PG Programme could have taken advantage of for mutual interaction with its internal and external environments.

### **Conclusion**

The Ceramics PG Programme of Industrial Design in ABU, Zaria has made tremendous advances in the quality of its output in spite of the myriad of obstacles and limitations experienced in the low quality of its organisational input. These successes have been attributed to the personal efforts of the operators of the Ceramics PG Programme rather than that of the formal organisational functions. For the formal organisational

functions of the Ceramic PG Programme to succeed, the paper has highlighted the need for it review its background and identity essentials and conduct communications audit with a view to improving the efficiency of all the formal communications channels. The paper indicated necessity to improve the conditions of input into the Ceramics PG Programme with particular reference to staffing, staff and other stakeholder's participation in enrolment of candidates, better funding and development of strategies for internally generated revenue and

the formulations of communications policies to advance the efficiency of internal operations as well as promote the development of relevant persuasive communications with the external environment. In view of the breakthroughs achieved so far, it is requisite that the Ceramics PG Programme develops real time employment records of its candidates. It is crucial to note from the foregoing thus far that efficient internal operations is fundamental to effective external functions or marketing successes of any organisation.

Table 1: PG research categories ceramics

	Number of Theses and Dissertations						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Glazes	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Porcelain bodies	*	*	*	*	*	*	
Ceramic small-scale industry and marketing	*	*	*	*	*		
Kiln and Firing mechanisms	*	*	*	*	*		
Studies on traditional pottery	*	*	*	*			
Refractories	*	*	*				
Ceramic education	*	*	*				
Ceramic stoneware	*	*	*				
Bodies for electrical insulators	*	*					
Ceramic printing and decoration	*						
Ceramic prototype of products	*						
Pyrometric comes	*						
Bone china production	*						

Source: Sale, 2010

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