

THE CHALLENGES OF WRITING DISSERTATIONS IN CRIMINOLOGY: AN ANALYSIS OF OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the difficulty of students enrolled in a master's 2 in criminology to write an end-of-cycle dissertation. The work poses the problem according to which the difficulties in writing dissertations remain among students despite a long tradition of producing dissertations and theses, with an audience of high-level teachers of all grades. The objective of the study is to understand the reasons behind the difficulties of students in mastering the process of producing dissertations and theses. The study focuses on the promotion of students enrolled in master 2 during the academic years 2017 to 2021 who have supported but also those who are in the production phase and pending defense. Our study is based on the hypothesis according to which the hourly volume devoted to the methodology course at the level of the pedagogical model explains the difficulties of students in understanding and producing theses. The methodology of this study consisted of exploring the dissertations already defended, consulting the years of registration and defense, as well as interviewing those concerned and a certain number of teachers responsible for supervising the students. The results of the study show a long tradition of producing works, an audience of high-level teachers. Also, we note that the time devoted to the course is insufficient which does not allow to do exercises. The essentially theoretical teaching of the course is also one of the reasons at the heart of the students' difficulties.

Keywords: Challenges - Writing - Dissertations - Criminology - Analysis – Obstacles - Côte d'Ivoire.

1. INTRODUCTION

The production of an end-of-cycle thesis is a major exercise in the academic and especially university environment. Before the advent of the LMD system, African universities, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, had a so-called traditional system that allowed students who had opted for research to produce a first research work in a master's degree. After this first university work, they produced a second at the level of the Diploma of Advanced Studies. All these things allowed students to have an experience, if not a culture, of writing a scientific work. With the introduction of the LMD system, university practices in the production of dissertations and theses have also undergone a change. From now on, the first research work is produced in Master 2, i.e. in the fifth year of university study. In Côte d'Ivoire, the LMD system was introduced when university classes resumed after two years of closure following the post-election crisis of 2010-2011.

In this process of producing research work, theoretical courses on the conduct of this work are given to learners by teachers who are best equipped in research methodology. Also methodological works are recommended to them in order to produce. Whether at the local or international level, methodological books abound and constitute a base of knowledge at hand.

To this end, N'DA Paul (2015) devotes an entire book to the conduct of both classical and professional master's work for the realization of dissertations. In this book, he highlights the main stages in the production of a research work, from the choice of the subject to the defense, including the choice of the supervisor.

N'DA Paul (2006) sheds light on the writing of the dissertation by giving fairly clear and enriching explanations that help any learner in research in the social sciences to orient himself. This book is a compass that guides any researcher, whether he or she is in the initiation phase or an experienced researcher.

BARIBEAU Colette (2009), in her article on qualitative analysis, explains the rudiments necessary to produce the analysis of qualitative data in social science research. (Dumez, 2012) paints the process of scientific research by making a point of honor in qualitative research. His work, although interested in methodology in a does not seem to pay particular attention to the learners' difficulties. He certainly explains the approach, but he omits that this approach, although explained, is confronted with the problem of the students' mastery of this approach. Our work therefore fills this gap in methodological productions by shedding light on the obstacles to the production of knowledge by students.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2016) is in the same vein as all the methodological work. Explain the approach, say how things are done in theory. However, in practice or in the test of reality or the field, several difficulties are encountered by students. Questions that methodologists all seem to be brushing over on this reality. For us, it is true that we must explain, but we must also enter the world of learners to know their scientific reality. In doing so, we draw the attention of future or aspiring researchers to the world of research so that they are prepared to embrace it. Our approach is not to create a phobia of research in these young people, but rather to help them protect themselves from the psychological weapons necessary to embrace research. Royer (2012) and Yves (2015) follow in the footsteps of other researchers by adopting the dynamic of learning to do without taking an interest in the different experiences of the learner's learning situation. This is what we try to do through our work, that is, to describe the reality of the apprentice-researcher.

Yannick et al (2018) are interested in the impact of the different editorial strategies put in place on the relative share that will be given to quantitative empirical research in criminological discourse. This reflects innovations, the diversity of authors and their origins as well as the rise in standards. They do not address the issues of research problems or difficulties.

In addition to books and articles dealing with issues related to the methodology of writing academic papers, teachers who have demonstrated notoriety in the conduct of work exist and devote time to supervising the work. We note that the UFRs have archives and libraries making available the work already supported.

Such archives are likely to boost research and give learners guidance for their work. However, we note that students have difficulty producing end-of-cycle work despite the proliferation of available resources. So faced with this problem, he is open to question the fundamental reasons that slow down the production of end-of-cycle work among students. In other words, what justifies the stagnation of writing among students?

The understanding of this question lies in the hypothesis that the switch to the LMD system without real measures to support and prepare students for research work is at the origin of a students' inadaptation to the new system. Inadequacy responsible for production difficulties.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Site / Study field

The present work was carried out in the Criminology training and research unit at the Félix Houphouët Boigny University in Abidjan Cocody.

2.2 Survey population

Our target population is mainly made up of students enrolled in Master 2 in the last four years. Most of these students have defended, those in the process of defending their thesis and those in the production or research phase. In addition to students, the study took into account UFR teachers, in particular teachers at rank A (lecturers and full professors) and B (assistants and assistant professors). The students' choice lies in the fact that they are concerned with the production or realization of the dissertations. Also, it should be noted that they are the most likely to complain or to show more difficulties in writing briefs. The use of teachers or their involvement in the study is based on a collection of data in the practices of training in terms of teaching, methodology, but also their vision of teaching time at the level of the pedagogical model.

2.3 Sample of the survey population

Our survey sample is made up of 130 students regularly enrolled in Master 2 over the last four years who have defended, defended or are in the process of producing their work. We also took into account about thirty teachers from the UFR of all grades. This distribution of the sample is as follows:

Population	Actual	Percentage
A-Rank Teachers	5	3, 12
B-Rank Teachers	25	15,62
Students who defended Over the past four years	30	18,75
Students in the process of defending their defense	20	12,50
Students in the process of writing or producing	80	50
Total	160	100%

Our criteria for choosing respondents are based first of all on the database of UFR teachers but also on the registration lists of students in the second year of the master's degree over the last four years.

At the level of teachers, in addition to the general criterion of belonging to the institution, we had defined additional criteria, particularly for A-rank and B-rank teachers.

For A-rank teachers, we had included the criterion of participation in at least one thesis defense and the supervision of at least five Master 2 theses.

For B-rank teachers, we had given priority to assistant professors with at least one year's seniority in the position of assistant professor and who had supervised and defended at least two master's theses.

4. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES**4.1 Document study**

Several documents were useful in carrying out this research. Indeed, thesis work and master's theses defended were consulted to immerse themselves in the methodological difficulties encountered by all candidates for the production of an end-of-cycle university thesis. In addition to the work of students (dissertations and theses) consulted, we were interested in the methodological works of dissertation writing. These include BOUTILLIER & al (2019), SALVETAT and DRILLON (2020), N'DA (2015), LIVIAN (2015).

4.2 Inquiry

The interrogation survey made it possible to interview our entire survey sample in order to collect information related to difficulties in writing dissertations. To this end, we conducted interviews with our various interlocutors through an interview guide.

Through these interviews, it was possible to collect data testifying to the concerns of the respondents.

4.3 Data analysis

Qualitative analysis was favoured in this study. It covered, among other things, documents from the administration, in particular the minutes of the defenses of dissertations and theses.

5. RESULTS

5.1 A long tradition of producing academic work with an audience of high-level teachers.

The results of the study show that the Criminology Department has a long experience in the production of research work.

With regard to the defense reports, we note the realization of several research works. This work reflects a long experience in the practice of criminological research.

5.1 A long tradition of producing academic work

5.1.1 Summary table of Master's and Master 2 theses defended between 2003 and 2009

Year of defense	Number of Sustained Memories
2008-2009	45
2007- 2008	61
2006-2007	56
2004-2005	62
2003-2004	58
TOTAL	282

Source : Defense reports, UFR Criminology.

5.2.2. Summary table of DEA dissertations defended between 2002 and 2009

Year of defense	Number of Sustained Memories
2008-2009	22

2007-2008	19
2006-2007	17
2005-2006	08
2004-2005	15
2003-2004	07
2002-2003	11
TOTAL	99

Source: Defense minutes, Criminology Department

5.1.3. Summary table of DEA / Master 2 dissertations defended between 2015 and 2021

<i>Year of defense</i>	<i>Number of Sustained Memories</i>
2020-2021	24
2019-2020	17
2018-2019	30
2016-2017	75
2015-2016	63
TOTAL	209

Source : Defense reports, UFR Criminology.

5.1.4. Summary table of theses defended

Year of defense	Number of Theses defended
2021 as of October 29	25
2020	06
2019	08
2018	09
2017	05
2016	09
2015	04
2014	09
2013	28
2012	02
2010	05
2006-2009	09
TOTAL	119

Source : Defense reports, UFR Criminology.

5.2 An audience of high-level teachers of all grades.

The Criminology Training and Research Unit has a large number of permanent and non-permanent teachers. They come from the Félix Houphouët Boigny University as well as from other universities in the country. They are mostly Teacher-Researchers of rank A (Full Professors and Associate Professors) and Rank B (Assistants and Lecturers).

There are forty permanent teacher-researchers, namely Seven A-rank teachers and thirty-three B-rank teachers, including seven assistants and twenty-six assistant professors.

A-rank teachers have this good experience in supervising research work, hence their quality as supervisors of master's theses and as supervisors or co-supervisors of theses. Assistant professors have the ability to supervise master's work according to their specialty.

These combined skills have the advantage of allowing students to produce work of an excellent level with regard to academic standards.

5.3 The relative sufficiency of the learning time

The volume of hours devoted to the methodology course is criticized by both teachers and learners. Indeed, the pedagogical model devotes a volume of hours to the methodology course from the first year to the Master 2.

Table 4: Hourly volume of the methodology course.

LEVELS OF STUDY	HOURLY VOLUME	PERCENTAGE
LICENCE 1	60H/600H	10%
LICENCE 2	40H/600H	6,66%
LICENCE 3	40H/600H	6,66%
MASTER 1	60H/600H	10%
MASTER 2	30H/300H	10%
TOTAL	230H/2700H	08,51% / 100

Source: Pedagogical model, UFR Criminologie.

The table highlights the volume of hours devoted to the methodology course. Only 7.77% of the hours are devoted to methodology at the bachelor's level, i.e. 140 hours of courses out of 2700 hours. Master's degrees record 90 hours of methodology courses out of the 900 hours of courses planned in master's degrees, i.e. 10% of the hourly volume. We also note that a student who enters Licence 1 and completes his or her Master's 2 course receives in theory 230 hours of courses out of the 2700 hours provided for in the pedagogical model, i.e. 8.51% in terms of the volume of theoretical teaching in methodology. We say in theory because of the strike situations that disrupt the course of classes but also because of the circumstances related to the teacher and the students. These situations reduce the theoretical time. Thus, in practice, the volume of hours devoted is not respected and is not executed because it is necessary to move quickly. Often, the number of hours is contracted due to the educational objectives or imperatives defined by the university in order to

save the academic year. These objectives actually reduce teaching time, which is also drastically reduced by the teacher in charge of leading the course. As a result, the student receives less of the theoretical volume announced in the model. The teacher performs about less than a third of the hourly volume. All these circumstances disadvantage learning in the student.

5.3 Students' difficulties in producing

The majority of the students surveyed have enormous difficulties in producing academic work. The difficulties are related to adapting to academic standards, among other things. Indeed, most students are not experienced in the use of academic standards. They are often in the use of hybrid standards due to lack of knowledge. Sometimes they use the Chicago standards, sometimes the MLA or APA standards without distinguishing between these standards.

For Z: *" Our students do not master the use of the recommended standards. While they are being asked to use the APA standards, they will add other standards to the presentation. This distorts the presentation of the work. They must strive to respect the standards of the institution. However, there are some garish amalgams. »*

According to YB : *" Most students enrolled in Master 2 neglect the methodology course. They consider it a lesser course. It is when they are in the writing phase that they realize the need for this course. Some are running away from their supervisors.*

Before, we were looking to meet our supervisors. But today, the opposite trend is true. It is the teachers who run after the taught without having them. »

Beyond the difficulties in using a single academic standard, there are difficulties related to the level of language among students. Language is one of the difficulties identified among candidates for writing a scientific paper. The work presented by students in the course of research is often riddled with clumsiness in terms of language expression. The clumsy use of logical connectors and the poor organization of thought are all difficulties that learners experience. For students, sentence structure is a bottleneck. Indeed, not being used to scientific writing, they have enormous difficulty articulating sentences. They sometimes write using the colloquial style. The difficulties can also be observed in the weakness of the reading culture. They read little and are often confronted with the problem of the density of their literature review. Not only is density a problem, but articulation at the editorial level is another problem. The difficulty arises insofar as the principles of writing the journal are unknown to the learners. They are unable to identify the succinct summary of the work read, the inadequacies, the strengths and their personal orientation. The choice of subject according to the students' backgrounds is a major problem for some students. Indeed, students enrolled in the courses should choose their subject taking into account these options. Sedimentation adds to their problems. Students enrolled in the different courses express many difficulties in formulating the research topic because they are bound by obligations to choose the subject according to their background. For example, students in reintegration or in the care of the victim formulate most of their topics by showing their background. The same is often true for students enrolled in security who experience this same difficulty. Indeed, they often have this "obligation" to highlight the concept of safety in the formulation of the subject. The difficulty of choosing the subject disturbs and often delays students in completing the work. They often move

from one framer to another, which slows down the pace of execution of the work to be produced. For students who should defend their Master's degree in one year, some only defend in the second or even third year of registration.

The unavailability of some supervisors is one of the difficulties encountered by students.

According to I K: *" I find it difficult to meet my supervisor often because he doesn't have time. Very often, he tells me that he is busy because of the hours of classes to be honored but also because of his own research. »*

For M.G : *" The time that my supervisor often gives me to discuss my subject is relatively insufficient. Often we talk for just about half an hour on certain points. At times, we digress more, that is to say that we often address other issues than those related to work. This makes it difficult to evolve the work. »*

A D R says: *"Some of our supervisors often seem unmotivated, which is why they don't make themselves available. Often they use illness, fatigue or lack of time as an argument to often leave us floundering alone. It is often at the time when we have to argue that certain adjustments are made. Otherwise, most of the time, they don't follow us from start to finish. They leave us to fend for ourselves. This does not help us to finish in time and avoid criticism from the members of the jury. "*

5.4 The LMD System: A system that was insufficiently proven before its implementation

Academic actors have not been adequately prepared for the adoption and implementation of the system. The standards imposed by the system in terms of teacher-student ratios remain poorly applied. Working conditions related to learners' personal time are insufficiently developed and poorly exploited by the actors.

For ISS: *" We inherited a system without being sufficiently prepared for it. After the reopening of universities after the post-election crisis, we have fallen into a system of forceps. The recommendations of the system are not being implemented properly because the means to implement them have not been made available to us. »*

The system has certainly introduced innovations in the way of teaching and evaluation, but it must be recognized that it is not well known and mastered by the teachers themselves. Under the argument that we need to teach differently, some teachers skim over the course they have to do. All things that do not promote the proper implementation of the system. The restitution of training seminars in order to put all actors at the same level of information is often insignificant.

For K.G: *"We are in a system whose ins and outs are not sufficiently disseminated. The exchange of experiences of this system is not sufficiently shared, so much so that only a few practice it. For me, the system exists only in name. At the limit, we are more in a hybrid system. In reality, it is an LMD with variable geometry. »*

6. DISCUSSION-CONCLUSION

Our study focused on the difficulties of students in producing research work in Master's degrees

2. The work raised the problem that difficulties in writing dissertations remain among students despite a long tradition of producing dissertations and theses, and an audience of high-level teachers at all grades. The objective of the study was essentially to find the causes behind the difficulties in producing end-of-cycle work. The results of the study showed that there is a long tradition of research production. In addition to this long tradition, there is an audience of high-level teachers. However, these advantages suggest that the teaching time of the methodology course is relatively insufficient. This inadequacy is also at the origin of the difficulties of Master 2 students in writing their end-of-cycle theses. The study allowed us to discover difficulties inherent to students but also difficulties attributable to teachers and the LMD system.

Our hypothesis compared with empirical data is confirmed by observations. It must also be recognized that our work differs from other research work in methodology. While the other works of N'DA, GRAWITZ, CHAUCHAT, TOURE strive to explain the process of scientific research, ours is interested in the underperformance or difficulties of students enrolled in Master 2 to write their end-of-cycle dissertation. It departs from the work that we are used to seeing in the field of methodology. It is one of the first research works of the Criminology Department to focus on the difficulties experienced by students, and in particular those that tend to slow down or delay their production of end-of-cycle dissertations.

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