

# DIFFUSION AND ADOPTION OF INFORMALITY CONCEPT IN PLANNING PEDAGOGY: REFLECTIONS FROM A NIGERIAN PLANNING SCHOOL

DIFUSIÓN Y ADOPCIÓN DEL CONCEPTO DE INFORMALIDAD EN LA PEDAGOGÍA  
DE LA PLANIFICACIÓN: REFLEXIONES DESDE UNA ESCUELA  
DE PLANIFICACIÓN NIGERIANA

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## Abstract

The efficacy of traditional planning orthodoxies is challenged daily in many cities in Africa and the global South with colonial planning legacies. For this and other failures, urban planning aspires to reinvent itself. One key line of attack has been to redress past mistakes and misconceptions in the discipline through a revitalised planning education. Amidst rapid informalisation of cities in Africa and across the world, the current article seeks to learn more about the diffusion or spread of informality concept (i.e., knowledge and associated skills) at global and national systems, and potential influences on planning pedagogy in a planning school. The results show that diverse perceptions of informality concept exhibit different diffusion cycles in global and national contexts, dispersed widely in scope and time between the more dominant 'informal sector' aspect and the less dominant but rising 'urban informality' dimension —a sort of nomenclature shift. Although anti-informality persists in Nigerian planning education, a new upsurge is nevertheless evident.

**Keywords:** informality, informal sector, innovation diffusion, planning education, pedagogy.

## Resumen

La eficacia de las ortodoxias tradicionales de planificación se ve cuestionada a diario en muchas ciudades de África y el sur global por sus legados de planificación colonial. Por esta y otras fallas, la planificación urbana aspira a reinventarse a sí misma. Una línea de avance clave ha sido corregir errores del pasado y conceptos erróneos en la disciplina a través de una educación de planificación revitalizada. En medio de la rápida informalización de ciudades en África y en todo el mundo, el artículo busca aprender más sobre la difusión o propagación del concepto de informalidad (es decir, conocimiento y habilidades asociadas) en sistemas globales y nacionales, y sus posibles influencias en la pedagogía de la planificación, en un escuela de esa disciplina. Los resultados muestran que diversas percepciones del concepto de informalidad exhiben diferentes ciclos de difusión en contextos globales y nacionales, dispersos ampliamente en alcance y tiempo entre el aspecto más

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dominante del “sector informal” y la dimensión menos dominante, pero creciente, de “informalidad urbana”. Aunque persiste la no-informalidad en la educación de la planificación nigeriana, es evidente un nuevo resurgimiento de la informalidad.

**Palabras clave:** informalidad, sector informal, difusión de la innovación, planificación de la educación, pedagogía.

## INTRODUCTION

It will require practitioners and educators alike to engage with different styles of research and teaching in order to enhance the effectiveness with which the planning profession responds to Africa’s rapid urban transformation. Africa’s future planners are faced with a prodigious task. Educational reform alone will be insufficient to drive a reorientation of planning values and skills. It must be accompanied by reform of legislation and practice. If this does not occur, the future in many African towns and cities will be bleak indeed.

VANESSA WATSON & BABATUNDE AGBOLA, *Who will Plan Africa’s Cities?*

Nowadays, the urban planning practice has become as gruelling as hitting a rapidly moving target. Not only are existing events questioning the basic tenets of planning, the role of urban planners and plan efficacy across the Global North and South, cities are increasingly becoming complex with many more actors and ‘wicked problems’<sup>1</sup> (i.e., ill-defined and intractable urban problems) (Hague, 2008; Parnell, Pieterse and Watson, 2009; Cirolia and Berrisford, 2017). In addition, the transition in administration from governmentality, that supported public interest-oriented planning, to governance with neo-liberal or market-oriented fervour, has undermined the social foundation of planning thereby making it less effectual (Friedmann, 2008; Lovering, 2009). And so, in trying to reinvent itself, the planning discipline is both looking inwards and outwards to interdisciplinary urban fields (Farmer, et al., 2006; Hague, 2008).

One of the most outstanding challenges facing urban planning today —mainly in, but not limited to, the Global South— is how to cope with rapid urbanisation, inequality, informality, and environmental degradation (Parnell, Pieterse and Watson, 2009; Watson and Odendaal, 2012; Song, 2016). In “informal cities” of Africa, planning norms and procedures, many of which are relics of colonial pasts, often run counter to the (informal) everyday city-building practices (Watson, 2009, 2011; Andersen, Jenkins and Nielsen, 2015a, 2015b; Onyebueke and Ikejiofor, 2017). Informality or the “state of exception from the formal order of urbanisation” (Roy, 2005, p. 147) vis-à-vis informal livelihoods, settlements, and practices often conflicts with planning rationality thereby limiting both the capacities of planners and the effective reach of plans to tackle these affected urban challenges. Scholars and societies<sup>2</sup> alike agree that in addition to reform of planning legislation and practice, revitalising planning education in Africa is a key to reversing those incapacities (Watson and Agbola, 2013). According to them, these measures are necessary to

<sup>1</sup> The term was originally used by Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber in 1973 epic article Dilemmas in a general theory of planning.

<sup>2</sup> The AAPS was founded in 2001 as a peer-to-peer network of mainly Anglophone African institutions offering professional training in urban planning. Its operational headquarters is current based at the originating institute —the African Centre for Cities in collaboration with the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics, both of the University of Cape Town, South Africa. It is a member of the Global Planning Education Association Network.

“ensure that future urban practitioners were equipped to respond effectively and meaningfully to urbanisation in Africa [and] the gap between what planning students were taught and the urban realities they confronted after graduation needed to be reduced” (p. 6).

Amidst rapid informalisation of cities in Africa and across the world, the current article seeks to learn more about the diffusion or spread of the informality concept (i.e., knowledge and associated skills<sup>3</sup>) at global and national systems, and potential influences on planning pedagogy in a planning school. Out of the multiple assemblage of concepts at varying stages of adoption and application in urban planning, why was it necessary to choose informality concept for this analysis? Apart from the rising global significance of informality with respect to the economy and city image (Roy and Al-Sayyad, 2004; Vanek, Chen, Carré, Heintz and Hussmanns, 2014), urban planning is as critical to the inclusion and spatial improvement of informality in the city as the phenomenon is to planning’s claims of professional efficacy (UN-Habitat, 2010; Devlin, 2011). Moreover, it is also imperative to explore some roots of anti-informality<sup>4</sup> in Nigerian planning education by considering the place of informality in the planning curriculum and its exposure to planning students (see Agbola and Wahab, 2010, p. 14). The present article has four sections. Section One corresponds to the introduction already given. Section Two reviews related literature on diffusion and adoption of the informality concept in contemporary knowledge commons, cycles of concepts and what those theories might signify for planning education. Section Three elaborates on the research methodology. Finally, Section Four spells out the results with a concluding section detailing some limitations and recommendations for further studies.

## DIFFUSION OF INFORMALITY CONCEPT AND INTERDISCIPLINARY ENCOUNTERS

When it was first presented in 1971 by Keith Hart, the informal sector (or informality) concept was known to have “so many conceptual errors, inconsistencies and blind spots” (Bromley, 1978, p. 1036), and even close to two decades afterwards it was still described as “an exceedingly fuzzy concept’ idea with little, if any, prospects” (Peattie, 1987, p. 851). Nevertheless, and to the sheer astonishment of many critics, the concept experienced a rapid diffusion and was first adopted by multilateral agencies (such as ILO, UN, and World Bank) and a number of city/national governments<sup>5</sup> that participated in the ILO’s World Employment Programme (WEP) as the early adopters/propagators. Bromley (1978) attributed this unexpected rise more to a coincidence of place, time and opportunity, without which the fledging concept “might well have sunk without trace” (p. 1036):

The rapid diffusion of the ‘informal sector’ concept since 1971 is attributed to the appropriateness of the time and place of its presentation, the importance of key institutions in the diffusion of ideas, the concept’s relevance to ‘apparently feasible and politically safe’ policy recommendations for international advisers and organisations. (p. 1033)

<sup>3</sup> The assumption here is that diffusion/adoption of informality concept implies the spread/espousal of informality knowledge and associated best practice approaches.

<sup>4</sup> Anti-informality signifies unfavourable attitudes and actions against manifestations of urban informality (informal business, shelter, and other practices) based on the belief that they constitute a quintessential threat to urban planning and ordered urban development.

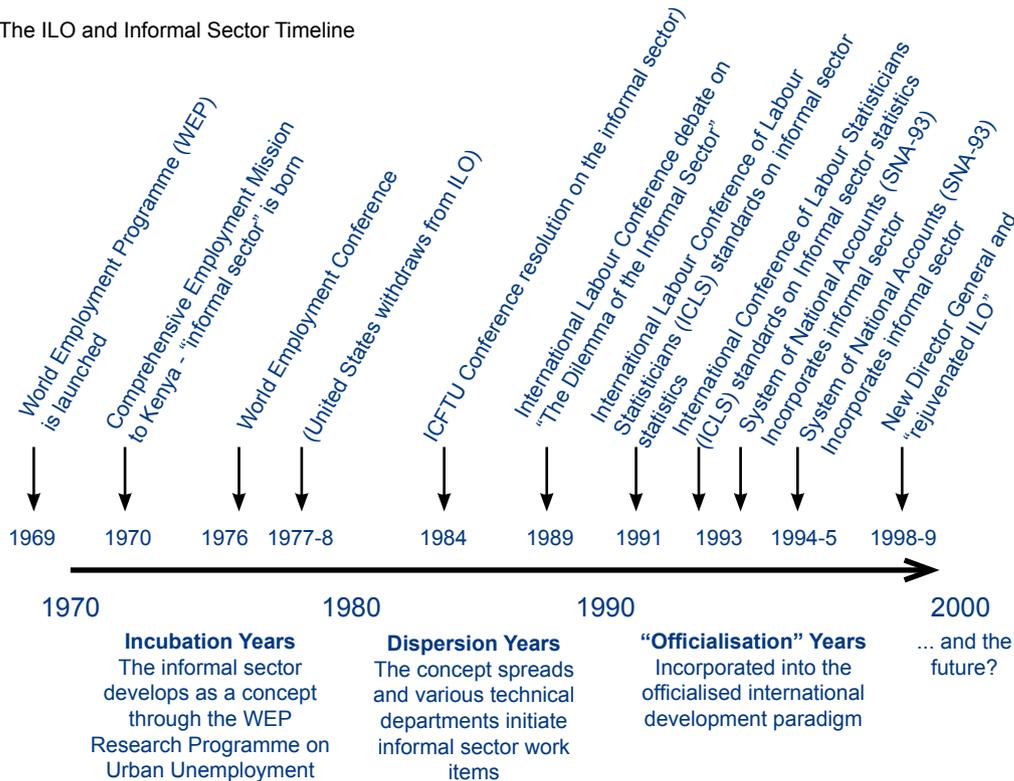
<sup>5</sup> Whereas the country missions of the ILO World Employment Programme involved Colombia, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Philippines and Iran, the city missions Belo Horizonte (Brazil), Calcutta (India), among others.

Collaborating this midwifing role during the incubation, dispersion, and “officialization” years of the concept’s development (see figure 1), Bangasser (2000), the ILO affirmed reflectively with an apparent sense of achievement:

As a final observation, it is fair to say that the concept of “an informal sector” has now entered the development paradigm. There is still plenty of divergence about how to define it, and even more about how to deal with it. But no one doubts that the informal sector exists, that it is large, most agree that it is growing, and that it will be around for a good while yet. This is no small achievement! In the terminology of cultural change, we have achieved an “un-freezing” of the old paradigm, which is a precondition for genuine progress. This kind of paradigm shift is what the ILO is really all about. (p. 28)

Over its nearly 50 years of existence, the concept has risen steadily in popularity, with all the innovation-adoption trail of the knowledge diffusion theory. Rogers (2003) defines diffusion as “the process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (p. 5).

The ILO and Informal Sector Timeline



**Figure 1.** Bangasser’s (2000; redrawn by the author) timeline of the of the three-phase institutional history of the informal sector.

Evidently, the cycles of the informality concept depict Everett Rogers’ four key drivers of components diffusion—the innovation per se (informality concept), the communication channels (e.g. ILO employment policy reports, government documents, academic journal institutions, books,

etc.), the time dimension (from 1971 onwards), and the social system or environments (ILO and other bilateral/multilateral agencies, government circles, academia, among other). The diffusion agents of innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards, in ascending order of resistance to a new idea (Rogers, 2003) are also essential for understanding the cycles of the concept of informality.

The “5-Hs” cycles model —Hype, High, Hiatus, Hangover, and Hindsight points— was proposed by Davidson (1999) to describe the cyclical trajectory of concepts in urban development management (see figure 2). Depending on their utility, values and effectiveness, new concepts and practices experience, either alternately or in combination with others, different degrees of popularity and reception over time. In the same vein, Friedmann (2008) recognises this practice-cum-theory building process as *translation*<sup>6</sup>, implying the conversion of “concepts and knowledges generated in other fields into our own domain and to render them accessible and useful for planning and its practices” (p. 248). In Africa, aside from informality, contemporary alike themes such as climate change, urban sustainability, infrastructure development, urban inequality and poverty alleviation, urban agriculture, public participation, land tenure systems, right to the city, and neoliberalism remain central leitmotifs of urban planning (see Parnell, Pieterse and Watson, 2009; Watson and Odendaal, 2013). Undoubtedly, each one of those concepts or topics has its own diffusion and adoption cycles.

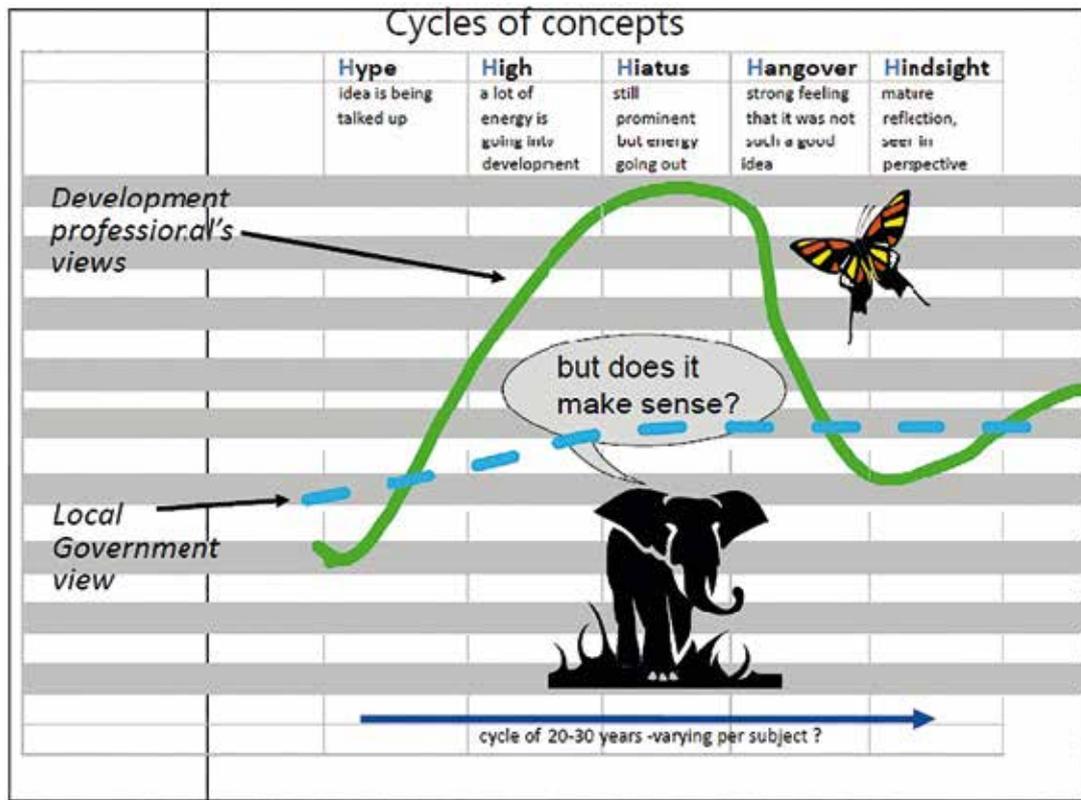
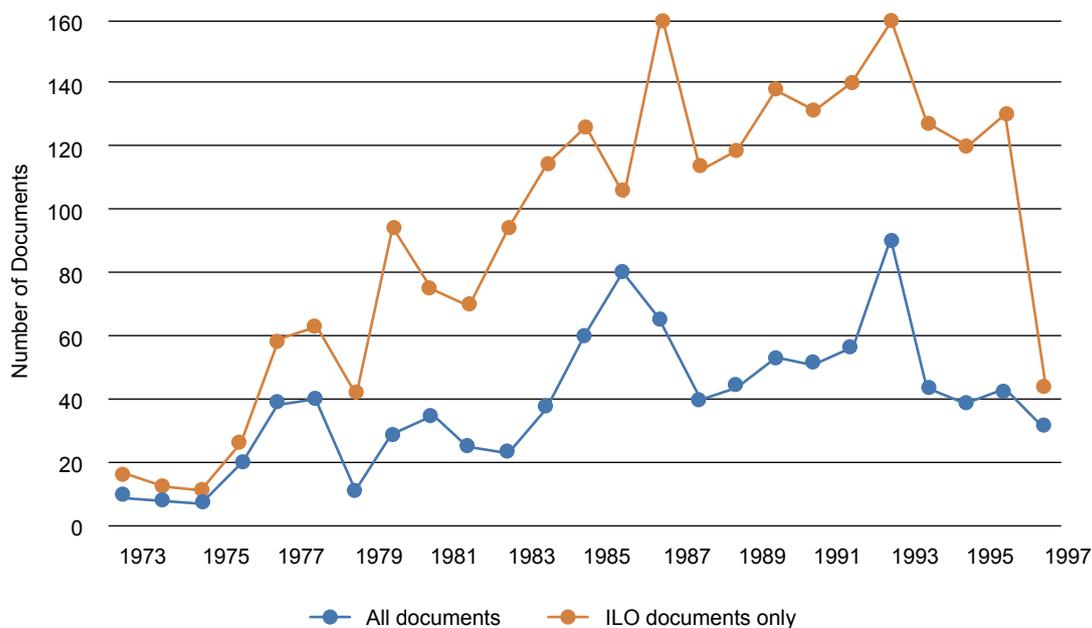


Figure 2. The 5-Hs cycles of a concept.

Source: Davidson (1999).

<sup>6</sup> John Friedmann believes “theorising in and about planning” contributes to the development through three basic mechanisms —philosophical engagements, adaption and translation.

Analysis about the studies on the concept diffusion have often equated the rate of spread or diffusion with the number of publications or the search list (for example, Bangasser [2000], *informal sector concept*; Leimgruber [2012], *three-pillar pension concept*). Basing his assessment on the quantity of document entries per year on the ILO LABORDOC database over a 24-year (between 1973 and 1997), Bangasser’s (2000) diffusion cycles of the informal sector concept (see figure 3) essentially conform the S-shaped or sigmoid growth curve that characterise most diffusion outcomes portraying unique innovator(s); few early adopters, more numerous on an early majority, down to less numerous on a late majority, and in later course, few laggards (Rogers, 2003). The gap between the “All Document” and “ILO Documents only” curves suggests that the time lag could likely occur either during innovation adoption process (knowledge, persuasion and decision, implementation and confirmation) or between different social systems. Leimgruber (2012), in his own work, sought to verify the national roots and international diffusion of the three-pillar pension concept between 1970 and 2009.



**Figure 3.** Number of documents on the informal sector registered per year in the ILO LABORDOC database.

Source: Redrawn by Bangasser (2000, p. 17).

Regarding the former event, Fichman and Kemerer (1999) have defined the *assimilation gap* as “the difference between the pattern of cumulative acquisitions and cumulative deployments of an innovation across a population of potential adopters” (p. 258). The gap compensates for increasing returns on adoption (emulation/imitation) and certain knowledge barriers in innovation diffusion process. In the present paper, the idea is to compare the diffusion cycles of three social systems—informality knowledge commons at the global, national, and planning school levels.

With successive entrance of new disciplines —anthropologists/sociologists, economists, geographers/urbanists, as well as architects and urban planners— into the informality debate, the

concept kept garnering new meaning and significance<sup>7</sup> with vast interdisciplinary benefits. Yet, from the participating disciplines, urban planning appears reluctant to “come to terms with informality and poverty” in Africa and the rest of the Global South (UN-Habitat, 2010; Watson, 2011). Watson (2011) explains:

Overall there is very little indication that the issue of informal work is an important part of planning curricula, and in many parts of the global South it is likely that planning students are being taught that the urban informal economy is a negative feature of cities and that their planning skills should be used to remove and repress it. The overriding vision of what constitutes an “ideal city,” and is thus promoted by politicians, planning professionals and academics in many parts of both the global North and South, does not contain informality at all. (p. 18)

In Nigeria, for instance, Agbola and Wahab (2010) have traced the alluded strong anti-informality orientation of Nigerian planning system to the “gross under-representation” of the concept in the curricula of both its planning schools and professional practice examinations. This, in a way, epitomises incessant mismatches in knowledge and skill proficiencies between what planning students are taught in most African planning schools, and what subsists in the cities and actual planning practice (Diaw, Nnkya and Watson, 2002). In fact, there is little wonder on why the AAPS has pinpointed urban informality as one the major focus of its proselytising mission in member planning schools (Watson and Odendaal, 2013).

The raging debates in planning education are motivated by the changing demands on the discipline. Apart from routine attempts by planners to respond to changing urban challenges, the academia and professional practice institutions tend to play key roles in planning reforms (Friedmann, 1996; Watson, 2011). As expected, the nature and patterns of knowledge and skills transferred to planning students are evaluated through curriculum contents, as well as various pedagogic approaches (such as classroom lectures, studios, internship or work-based learning, experiential learning and many other modules) (Frank, 2006; Watson and Odendaal, 2012).

### MEASURING THE DIFFUSION CYCLES OF INFORMALITY CONCEPT

For the purpose of the current study, we adopted an analysis composed by two stages. The first one covered the global and national dimensions of the diffusion thereby fostering a fitting background, while the second dimension focused on the selected planning school. The first stage involved the evaluation of the diffusion cycles of the informality concept on global and national (Nigerian) systems from 1971<sup>8</sup> to 2016 with the aid of the Google Scholar search engine, an approach analogous to the one used with acknowledged success by Leimgruber (2012). The advanced search template of Google Scholar facilitated suitable search processes refined in an order of 5-year intervals from 1971 to 2016. Since the informality concept is a heterogeneous (and not a homogenous) concept, two common dimensions of the concept denoted by two metonyms —“informal sector” and “urban informality”— were used as keywords in order to obtain well rounded search results or hit figures; first to account for the global diffusion. Then the national diffusion rates were isolated by simply adding the word “Nigeria” to the two keywords to finally read “informal sector Nigeria” and “urban informality Nigeria”, thereby limiting the search to the specified national scope.

<sup>7</sup> There has been a gradual departure from the focus on the concept of informality or formality, in Boudreau’s and Davis’ (2016) words, “as objects (i.e., an economic sector, a form of human settlement, a set of political habits)” (p. 154) to an alternative focus as evolutionary processes and mechanisms.

<sup>8</sup> The year 1971 is considered the inception date of the informality concept (see Bromley, 1978, p. 1033), and hence, its choice as the base year in the analysis.

The second stage, on the other hand, comprised of a review of the undergraduate thesis records (1987 to 2016) and the curriculum of the UNEC-PS.<sup>9</sup>

The titles of the students' theses were categorised into 13 different conceptual topics to ascertain the diffusion or adoption of the informality concept in a comparative sense. The topics included: development control, housing development, industrialisation, informality, infrastructure planning, open spaces/landscaping, pollution/environment, recreation/tourism, and rural development. The rest are traffic/transportation, urban development, waste management, and others (comprising of topics ranging from regional development to cultural and historic studies). At this point, thesis research is taken as a surrogate of knowledge/skill acquisition, since the undertaking involves not only knowledge exchange and cooperative efforts between the planning students or planners-in-the-making and their lecturer-supervisors but is "often used as a culminating measure of a student's educational achievements" (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010, p. 291). Since planning curricula are often tailored to cover requisite knowledge, skills, and values (Frank, 2006), we first sought to establish the place of the informality concept in the undergraduate curriculum of UNEC-PS, relative to other resulting themes; and then searched for possible relationship between the curriculum emphases (as measured by the word count of the key thesis topics in the programme) and revealed patterns of thesis focus in the UNEC-PS. While the former was facilitated by the Advanced Search option in Microsoft Word, a simple linear regression on Microsoft Excel made the latter analysis possible. Before proceeding to the results, it is pertinent to give a brief description of the case study.

The Department of Urban and Regional Planning of the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (subsequently abbreviated as UNEC-PS) was purposively chosen for this aspect of the study. The UNEC-PS was established in September of 1982 to run a five-year Bachelor's degree in Urban and Regional Planning (which is the emphasis of the current research) with the initial curriculum and pedagogy developed under the guidance of the Department of Town and Regional Planning, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow in the United Kingdom (see Uchegbu, 2010). The then fledgling planning school started with about 20 pioneer students and an academic staff of five lecturers with occasional visitors from the University of Strathclyde<sup>10</sup>. Later in 1992, the Master and Doctorate programmes in Urban and Urban Regional Planning were introduced. Today, 34 years after its founding, UNEC-PS has a total student population of about 220<sup>11</sup> and an academic staff of 15 with two graduate assistants and three technical staff members. It is, in fact, one of the oldest of the 34 planning schools in Nigeria and one of the 55 members of planning schools at the AAPS. Baring minor differences, the curriculum and programme of UNEC-PS is archetypal of other planning schools in Nigeria due to the periodic accreditation and standardisation by the Nigerian Universities Commission, Nigerian Institute of Town Planners and Town Planners Registration Council of Nigeria with a pedagogic orientation towards physical design and techno-instrumental approach in urban management (Uchegbu, 2008; Watson and Agbola, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> For easy access, both documents are self-archived in an online data repository with the link address: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319101904\\_Undergraduate\\_Thesis\\_Catalogue\\_of\\_the\\_Department\\_of\\_Urban\\_and\\_Regional\\_Planning\\_University\\_of\\_Nigeria\\_Enugu\\_Campus\\_NIGERIA\\_1987-2016\\_AND\\_Undergraduate\\_Programme\\_or\\_Curriculum](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319101904_Undergraduate_Thesis_Catalogue_of_the_Department_of_Urban_and_Regional_Planning_University_of_Nigeria_Enugu_Campus_NIGERIA_1987-2016_AND_Undergraduate_Programme_or_Curriculum)

<sup>10</sup> Whereas received a total of 4 visitors from the University of Strathclyde (namely: James Milligan [in 1981/82 session], Janet Brand [1983/84], Professor David William [1983/84], and Anthony Ramsey [1985/86], the five pioneer staff members were Mr Louis Umeh, Dr. Harold Mba, Mr Aaron Braimah, Mr. Clifford Ham (an American) and Mr. Jacob Okra (a Ghanaian).

<sup>11</sup> A breakdown of this figure includes 150 undergraduate, 52 Master's, and 18 doctorate students.

**GLOBAL DIFFUSION AND TRANSLATION OF URBAN INFORMALITY KNOWLEDGE**

**Global versus national diffusion of the informality concept**

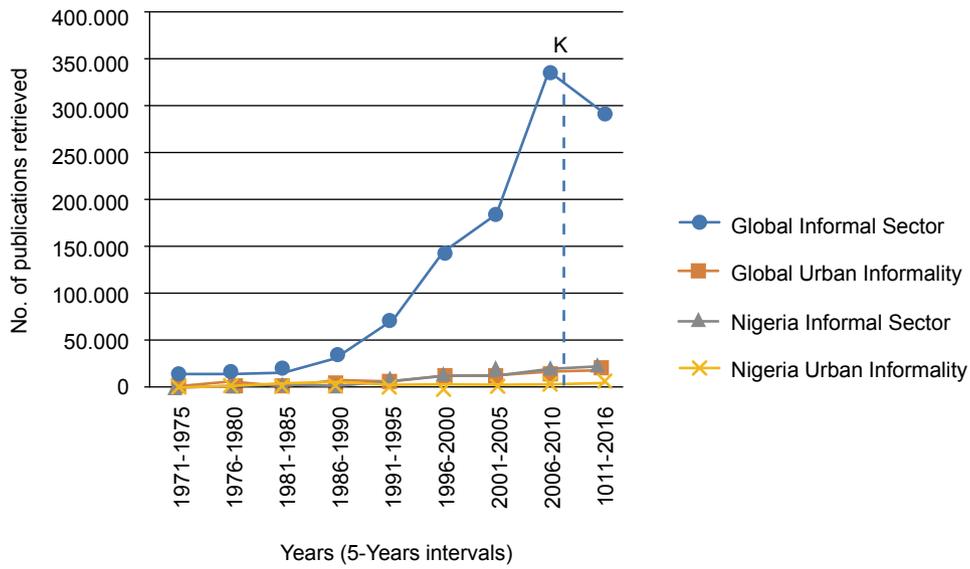
Based on the numerous Google Scholar hit figures in table 1, a graph showing the diffusion/adoption cycles of informality concept was resultant (see figures 4a and 4b). The manifested trends reveal that the informality concept has come a long way —spanning over nearly half a century from its propitious origin in 1971. In particular, at least three general points are noteworthy. First, within the contemporary dissemination of the informality concept at the global level, the ‘informal sector’ dimension of the concept constitutes a considerable proportion of the available stock of published materials as denoted by the overhanging ‘informal sector (global)’ curve in figure 4a, and overpasses by far the ‘urban informality (global)’ equivalent. This might also be interpreted as nomenclature convenience or acceptance. Second, there is a similar diffusion disparity in dimensions within the Nigerian context, albeit occurring at an infinitesimally lower rate (see figure 4a and 4b).

**Table 1.** Diffusion of dimensions of informality concept in Nigeria and the world (1971-2016)

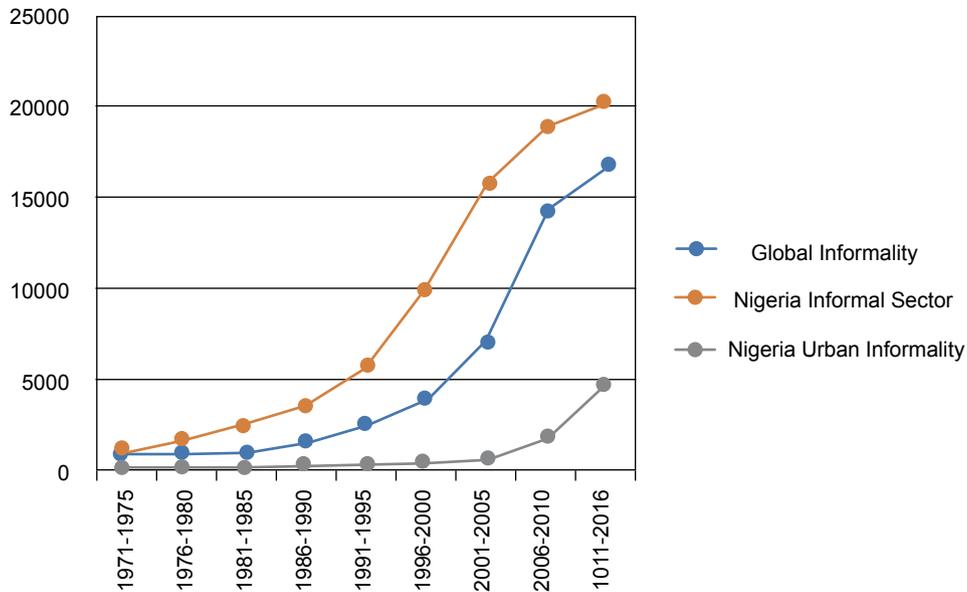
Year (Intervals)	Occurrences or “Hits” in Google Scholar Search							
	Nigeria				Global			
	Informal Sector	%	Urban Informality	%	Informal Sector	%	Urban Informality	%
1971-1975	963	1.23	31	0.40	9370	0.85	894	1.84
1976-1980	1590	2.03	50	0.65	15400	1.40	961	1.98
1981-1985	2340	2.99	63	0.82	18600	1.69	1120	2.30
1986-1990	3470	4.44	118	3.07	31400	2.85	1490	3.07
1991-1995	5590	7.15	185	2.40	69500	6.30	2370	4.88
1996-2000	9870	12.62	312	4.04	142000	12.87	3910	8.05
2001-2005	15600	19.94	596	7.73	186000	16.86	7050	14.51
2006-2010	18800	24.03	1720	22.29	338000	30.64	14200	29.22
2011-2016	20000	25.57	4640	60.14	293000	26.56	16600	34.16
TOTAL (Sum)	78223	100.00	7715	100.00	1103270	100.00	48595	100.00
TOTAL (Search)	81900	+3.677 †	7740	+25 †	1450000	+346.730†	28300	-20.295 †

† These italicised figures are the variances between the total search hits (1971-2016) as a summation and as a discrete search. This confirms some inconsistencies identified with the Google Scholar search (refer to Jascó, 2005).

Source: Google Scholar search conducted by the author on 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2017.



**Figure 4a.** Number of publication on dimensions of informality concept per yearly intervals.



**Figure 4b.** Number of publication on selected dimensions of informality concept per yearly intervals without the “Informality (global)”

Third, out of the four curves in figure 4a (with a close-up in figure 4b), only the “informal sector” (global) conforms a S-shaped innovation diffusion curve, signifying an initial slow growth at the inception which later led the way to a rapid growth until its saturation point sometime between 2006 and 2010 (point of stabilisation or saturation, “K”, in figure 4a), after which a sharp decline sets in. Incidentally, the bifurcation of the concept into informal sector and informal

economy in 1992<sup>12</sup> had no apparent effect on the diffusion profile. This decline contrasts with the other three curves (“informality-global”, “informal sector-Nigeria” and “informality-Nigeria”) that remain on the rise after 2006-2010 (see figure 4b), giving indications of nomenclature shifts in the concept across the global and Nigerian knowledge commons.

Furthermore, a comparison of figures 4a and 4b shows that Nigeria represents a typical case of delayed diffusion. Whereas the global saturation occurred in the 2006-2010 period, Nigerian equivalent for both “informal sector” and “informality” is still non-existent during that period. Table 2 buttresses this time lag (adoption gap) and the varying diffusion impacts of the pioneering publications.

**Table 2.** Two pioneering publications on informal sector in the three social systems and their citation status

Social systems (segmented knowledge commons)	Publications	Type	No. of Citations
Global	Hart (1970)	Journal article	298
	Hart (1973)	Journal article	2.889
National (Nigeria)	Fapohunda, Reijmerink and Dijk (1975)	Working paper	12
	Mabogunje and Filani (1977)	Working paper	9
Planning school (UNEC-PS)	Onyebueke (2000)	Journal article	15
	Onyebueke (2001)	Journal article	20

Source: Author’s analysis as at 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2017.

The adoption gap of about 3 to 5 years between the global and the Nigerian systems is, however, much shorter than the 20 to 25 years it took to diffuse the planning school in question. In fact, the short global-national adoption seems artificial since it was part of the ILO officialization mission to Nigeria as Onyebueke and Geyer (2011) had earlier noted:

The “informal sector” nomenclature first entered the Nigerian urban labour market discourse in 1975 with the publication of the ILO Working Paper titled *Urban development, income distribution, and employment in Lagos* undertaken by Olanrewaju J. Fapohunda, Mein Pieter van Dijk, and Jap Reijmerink. (p. 67)

What still remains overlooked, however, is the way to characterise the rather slow diffusion of this ubiquitous concept in this particular planning school and its possible translation into planning pedagogies.

### Diffusion and translation of informality concept in UNEC planning school

An evaluation of the database of undergraduate thesis from 1987 to 2016 reveals a total of about 13 thematic categories as summarised in table 3.

<sup>12</sup> This was by The Meeting of Experts on Labour Statistics, as known as the Delhi Group, reached a resolution in 1992 in preparation of the 15th International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE) to separate non-standard employment (informal economy) from informal work (informal sector).

**Table 3.** Undergraduate student thesis themes at the UNEC Planning School (1987-2016)

S/N	Dominant Themes/Concepts	Number of Thesis*	Percentage
1	Development Control	52	10.51
2	Housing Development	71	14.34
3	Industrialisation	5	1.01
4	Informality	28	5.66
5	Infrastructure Planning	25	5.05
6	Open Spaces/Landscaping	20	4.04
7	Pollution/Environment	41	8.28
8	Recreation/Tourism	27	5.45
9	Rural Development	49	9.90
10	Traffic/Transportation	53	10.71
11	Urban Development	37	7.47
12	Waste Management	55	11.11
13	Others	32	6.47
TOTAL		495	100.00

\* For a fuller detail of the evaluation, refer to the online data repository at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319101904\\_Undergraduate\\_Thesis\\_Catalogue\\_of\\_the\\_Department\\_of\\_Urban\\_and\\_Regional\\_Planning\\_University\\_of\\_Nigeria\\_Enugu\\_Campus\\_NIGERIA\\_1987-2016\\_AND\\_Undergraduate\\_Programme\\_or\\_Curriculum](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319101904_Undergraduate_Thesis_Catalogue_of_the_Department_of_Urban_and_Regional_Planning_University_of_Nigeria_Enugu_Campus_NIGERIA_1987-2016_AND_Undergraduate_Programme_or_Curriculum)

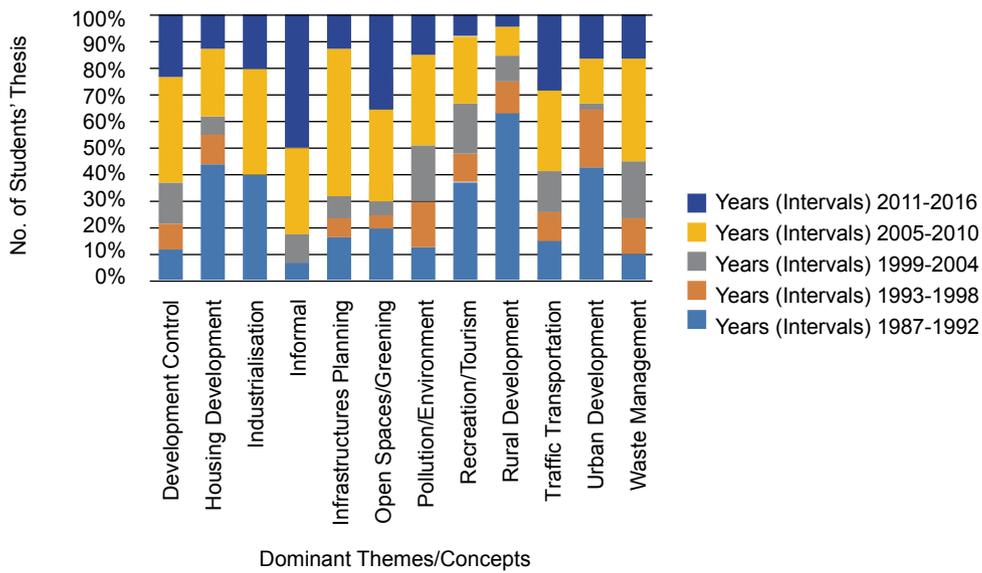
Source: Author's analysis, August 2017.

Whereas the first four major themes —housing development (14.34 %), waste management (11.11 %), traffic/transportation (10.71 %), and development control (10.51 %)— make nearly half (46.67 %) of all the students' research in UNEC-PS, the last five minor ones —industrialisation (1.01 %), open spaces/landscaping (4.04 %), infrastructure planning (5.05 %), recreation/tourism (5.45 %), and informality (5.56) —make up only 21.11 %. And so, the informality concept is among the least researched topics among undergraduate students here. However, a breakdown of this statistics in table 4 clearly shows that apart from, perhaps, traffic and transportation, it is the only subject matter attracting cumulative attention, nearly all (85.19 %) of which occurred in the last one decade or so (see figure 5).

**Table 4.** Undergraduate student thesis themes at the UNEC Planning School by year (1987-2016)

S/N	Research Themes	Years (Intervals)					Total
		1987-1992	1993-1998	1999-2004	2005-2010	2011-2016	
1	Development Control	6	5	8	21	12	52
2	Housing Development	31	8	5	18	9	71
3	Industrialisation	2	0	0	2	1	5
4	Informality	2	0	3	9	14	27
5	Infrastructure Planning	4	2	2	14	3	25
6	Open Spaces/Greening	4	1	1	7	7	20
7	Pollution/Environment	5	7	9	14	6	41
8	Recreation/Tourism	10	3	5	7	2	27
9	Rural Development	31	6	5	5	2	49
10	Traffic/Transportation	8	6	8	16	15	53
11	Urban Development	16	8	1	6	6	37
12	Waste Management	6	7	12	21	9	55
13	Others	10	2	5	9	6	32
TOTAL		135	55	64	149	92	495

Source: Author's analysis, August 2017.



**Figure 5.** A stacked bar chart of undergraduate student thesis themes at the UNEC Planning School by yearly intervals (1987-2016).

What factors could be responsible for the thematic variations in undergraduate theses over the years? Could they be outcomes of students' inquiring minds about cities and planning or just another easy escape? Are those upshots coming from the thesis supervisors' research interests, current academic trends or a combination of both and perhaps other yet-to-be disclosed factors? Do these variations in urban research themes stem from the restless throes of cities, the planning studies curriculum or what the urban policy dictates? Even though these important issues are beyond the scope of the current study, by a preliminary foray we explored the possible relationship between the curriculum content (as measured by the word count of the key thesis themes in the programme) and the revealed patterns of theses focus in UNEC-PS (see table 5). A linear regression analysis was used to consider whether the curriculum content (independent variable) is responsible for, or can yield a prediction of, a theme variation in undergraduate thesis in UNEC-PS (dependent variable). The very low correlation coefficients, or R squared ( $R^2$ ), of 0.232 and 0.247 for the two equations (word counts outside and inside the brackets with variation in thesis themes) at a confidence level of 0.05 leave little or no proof of any relationship between the independent and dependent variables (for details of the regression results, see the Appendix).

**Table 5.** Curriculum emphasis on key thesis themes versus students' research interest (1987-2016)

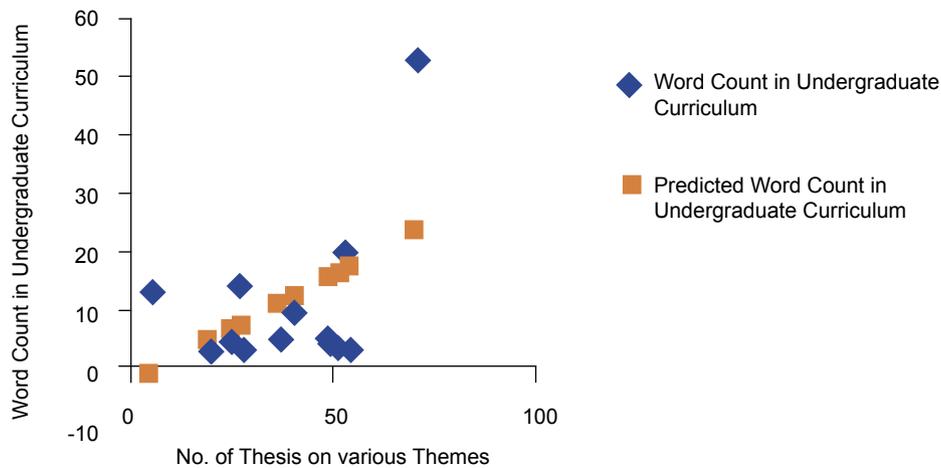
S/N	Recurrent Theme/Concept	Word Count in Undergraduate Curriculum	No. of Thesis on various Themes
1	Development Control	3	52
2	Housing (Development)*	53(45)*	71
3	Industrial (Industrialisation)	13(2)	5
4	Informal (sector/settlement)	3	27
5	Infrastructure	4	25
6	Open Spaces (Landscape)	2(20)	20
7	Pollution (Environment)	9(12)	41

S/N	Recurrent Theme/Concept	Word Count in Undergraduate Curriculum	No. of Thesis on various Themes
8	Recreation (Tourism)	14(10)	27
9	Rural Development	4	49
10	Traffic (Transportation)	19(28)	53
11	Urban Development	5	37
12	Waste (Waste Management)	2(1)	55

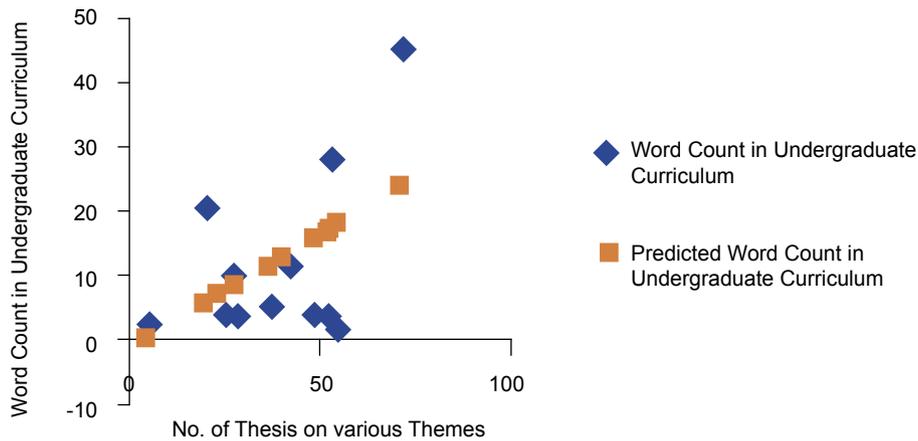
\*The keywords and numbers in brackets are equivalents. Word counts without and in brackets in column 2 were analysed successively with the numbers of thesis on various themes in column 3.

Source: Author’s search of the undergraduate curriculum of UNEC-PS using Word Editing devise (Find) August 2017.

Observe the *line of best fit* plots in figures 6a and 6b. Moreover, the respective *p*-values of 0.112 and 0.100 are great than 0.05, a further confirmation that the relationship is not statistically significant and that any trivial hint could have been by chance. We can therefore infer for certain that the curriculum content alone is not a significant determinant of students’ choice of thesis topics in UNEC-PS.



**Figure 6a.** Line of Best Fit plot for curriculum content versus thematic variation in undergraduate thesis topic in UNEC-PS (word counts outside brackets).



**Figure 6a.** Line of Best Fit plot for curriculum content versus thematic variation in undergraduate thesis topic in UNEC-PS (word counts in Brackets).

**CONCLUSION AND LESSONS FOR PLANNING PEDAGOGY**

Events of the past two decades or so in African cities have revealed that urban planning discipline has fallen on hard times. These are troubling times when the majority of planning efforts are perceived as “a catalogue of failures” and characterised as “centralized plan-making, rigid regulations, lack of implementation capacity, abuses of human rights, corruption and many more negative traits” (Cirolia and Berrisford, 2017, p. 71). Worse still, even though the larger proportion of the labour force of nearly all African countries are employed in the informal sector, anti-informality still holds sway in most planning undertakings (UN-Habitat, 2010), and several planning schools and educators are not immune to this negative conduct (Watson and Agbola, 2013). This, despite the high hopes reposed on planning educators, as the current between AAPS and Slum/Shack Dwellers International aptly specifies: “the education of planners has a fundamental impact on both their values and understanding, responses and practices, in relation to urban informality” (Association of African Planning Schools & Slum/Shack Dwellers International, 2010, section 1).

The diffusion cycles of the informality concept, as depicted by the dissemination rates of ‘informal sector’ and ‘urban informality’ metonyms, with the global and national systems or knowledge commons exhibit divergent curves, widely dispersed in both scale and time. Generally speaking, diverse nomenclatures or perceptions of the informality concept exhibit different diffusion curves or cycles in the global and national contexts. In different respects these cycles tend to substantiate earlier submissions of both Davidson (1999), on cycles of concepts, and Bangasser (2000), on the initial spread of the informal sector idea. Regarding the knowledge of the informality concept, significant mismatches still remain between the planning curriculum, the undergraduate planning research/training and the urban realities in many Nigerian planning schools. This is a confirmation of an earlier observation by Agbola and Wahab (2010). Since concepts, constitute the building blocks of urban planning, or any other discipline for that matter (Davidson, 1999; Friedmann, 2008), it becomes imperative for planning schools to undertake evaluations of facets or whole of their programmes from time to time. These would provide the necessary feedbacks to harmonise emergent mismatches and enable the inculcation of requisite knowledge, skills, and values to planning students.

While the results showed above are fairly useful for assessing the origin, spread and adoption gaps associated with the informality concept adoption within and across the global, national and planning school environments, they only present a partial picture of the multifarious knowledge diffusion and translation within the contemporary planning practice and education. Ideally, a more detailed scrutiny of such knowledge/skill flows in planning school scenarios would inevitably incorporate multiple conceptual strands, rather than the current single conceptual strand approach. In other words, including more thematic categories (not just informality) into the diffusion analysis would yield a more complete picture and probably unravel the factors that determine the students' research choices and the thematic focus of the dominant planning pedagogy in specific planning schools.

Another study limitation is associated with the Google Scholar search engine. It facilitates free and fast discovery and retrieval of broad sets of electronically published materials in specifiable option formats. Yet, the nondisclosure of its content coverage and update frequency as well as some inconsistencies in search results are the search engines major drawbacks, and therefore a limitation of this study. However, since the emphasis is on the number of hits per time interval, content exactness is not paramount in this case, and so the validity of the results and conclusions are still intact.

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**APPENDIX****Appendix A. Result summary output of the curriculum content versus variations in thesis themes (curriculum content variable outside the brackets, refer to table 5)**

Summary Output	
Regression Statistic	
Múltiple R	0.48212198
R Square	0.232441604
Adjusted R Square	0.155685764
Standard Error	13.19668912
Observations	12

Anova					
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	1	527.3906292	527.3906292	3.028334687	0.112446783
Residual	10	1741.526038	174.1526038		
Total	11	2268.916667			

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-Value	Lower 95 %	Upper 95 %	Lower 95,0 %	Upper 95,0 %
Intercept	-3.519550342	9.128586122	-0.385552625	0.707902579	-23.85930774	16.82020706	-23.85930774	16.82020706
No. of Thesis on var	0.374966676	0.215472303	1.740208231	0.112446783	-0.105135535	0.855068886	-0.105135535	0.855068886

Residual Output		
Observation	punt in Undegraduat	Residual
1	15.97871679	-12.97871679
2	23.10308362	29.89691638
3	-1.644716964	14.64471696
4	6.604549898	-3.604549898
5	5.854616547	-1.854616547
6	3.979783169	-1.979783169
7	11.85408336	-2.854083356
8	6.604549898	7.395450102
9	14.85381676	-10.85381676
10	16.35368346	2.646316538
11	10.35421665	-5.354216653
12	17.10361681	-15.10361681

**Appendix B. Result summary output of curriculum content versus variations in thesis themes (curriculum content variable outside the brackets, see table 5)**

Summary Output	
Regression Statistic	
Múltiple R	0.496575958
R Square	0.246587682
Adjusted R Square	0.17124645
Standard Error	12.17951587
Observations	12

Anova					
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	1	485.5105972	485.5105972	3.27944659	0.100545164
Residual	10	1483.406069	148.34066069		
Total	11	1968.916667			

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-Value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95,0%	Upper 95,0%
Intercept	-2.434506354	8.424973762	-0.288963078	0.778511321	-21.20651772	16.33750501	-21.20651772	16.33750501
No. of Thesis on var	0.359770728	0.198864148	1.809128149	0.100545164	-0.083326206	0.802867662	-0.83326206	0.802867662

