

**KEYNOTE ADDRESSES
DELIVERED AT THE MEETINGS
OF THE COMMITTEE OF
DEANS OF POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOLS IN NIGERIAN
UNIVERSITIES (2014-2019)**

Edited by

Solomon O. Akinboye Ph.D

Immediate Past Honorary Secretary (CDPGS)

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CHAPTER SEVEN

MANAGING RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Keynote address presented at the 57th meeting of the Committee of Deans of Postgraduate Schools in Nigerian Universities held in the University of Lagos, Lagos, on 18th July, 2019

Introduction

I thank the organisers of the 57th Meeting of the Committee of Deans of Postgraduate Schools in Nigerian Universities for inviting me to present a keynote address at this event. I do not take this privilege lightly. I had an opportunity to be a member of this Committee from 1st August 2002 till 31st July 2006 during which period I served as Dean of the Postgraduate School at the University of Ibadan. I am aware that the Committee meets regularly at different locations in our great country and it must have been a veritable opportunity for the members to share ideas on contemporary issues in postgraduate education in particular and training and research at the university level in general. I do hope to share with you some of my thoughts on managing research and postgraduate programmes in the course of this keynote.

Some of the main issues I will outline briefly include the following: Range of Human Resources in a University; Postgraduate Students as the engine of a university; Ph.D. Learning Outcomes; Research Funding and Research Management; Code of Practise in Research Supervision; some case histories at the University of Ibadan; and some concluding remark.

RANGE OF HUMAN RESOURCES TO RESEARCH PROJECTS IN A UNIVERSITY:

CLASS A: THE PROFESSIONALS

- I. *Academic Staff* who normally engage in teaching, research and value-added community services.
- II. *Specialist research staff* (e.g. research fellows, postdoctoral fellows, postdoctoral researchers, etc.), whose sole function is the conduct of research.

CLASS B: AMATEUR RESEARCHERS

The principal objective is *to learn the "skills of the trade"* i.e. the ability to systematically conduct an investigation and have work subjected to peer review.

The project that is allocated to those individuals is the mechanism by which they focus their attention to learning the processes of research and is secondary to the principal learning objective.

This is not to suggest in any way that such researches should be dismissed as if they were of minor significance.

Challenges with Professional Researchers in Nigerian Universities

- In many universities in the developed world, it is difficult for a fresh PhD holder to secure a full faculty position.
- Post-doctoral positions offer a platform for professional development and mentoring (a stop-gap).
- Many Nigerian academics have had opportunity of post-doc positions for their career advancement in Europe and North America, as well as other parts of the world.
- Most universities in Nigeria are unable to offer post-doctoral positions, due to a surfeit of reasons including:
 - ❑ Lack of a critical mass.
 - ❑ Lack of funds.
 - ❑ Inadequate and obsolete research facilities.

Role and Importance of Postgraduate Research

- Professional research can be conducted in
 - University departments,
 - benefactorial research institutes (which are independent of universities but receive funding from charitable or industrial donations, organisations or individuals),
 - government research institutes (e.g. agricultural, veterinary, medical),
 - hybrid research organisations and institutes (which are an amalgam of the other elements, working in cooperation), and industry research facilities.

POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AS THE ENGINE OF A UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH EFFORTS

Many institutions are unable to sustain any meaningful research effort without postgraduate students. This arises primarily from *the difficulty in funding staff* whose sole purpose is to conduct research, rather than to teach or supervise research students.

Because of their typical turnover rate (three to five years), *postgraduate students tend to provide a highly-motivated, unencumbered, fresh input to research programmes* which can generally not be sustained by ongoing research staff over very long periods of employment.

Aims and Objectives of Postgraduate education*

- Train the next generation of researchers, manpower developers and improved teaching for undergraduates.
- To produce fundamental knowledge, and through this contribute to the attainment of cultural objectives.
- Further development of the spirit of enquiry.
- Development and encouragement of individual creativity.
- Development of spirit of team work.
- Collaborate to provide solution to prevailing national problems.
- Intensify and diversify programmes for development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the economy.
- Helping the individual, through specialisation, to extend his/her mental horizons, produce new orientations, and develop a depth of understanding in the relevant discipline.

Doctorates are awarded to students who have demonstrated the creation and interpretation of **new knowledge**, through original research or other advanced scholarship of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication.

Ph.D learning outcomes

- Research skills and techniques
- Research environment
- Research management
- Key (transferable) skills:

- Personal effectiveness
- Communication skills
- Networking and team working
- Career management

Research skills and techniques

To be able to demonstrate:

- the ability to recognise and validate problems;
- original, independent and critical thinking, and ability to develop theoretical concepts;
- a knowledge of recent advances within one's field and in related areas;
- an understanding of relevant research methodologies and techniques and their appropriate application within one's research field;
- the ability to analyse critically and evaluate one's findings and those of others;
- an ability to summarise document, report and reflect on progress.

Research environment

To be able to:

- show a broad understanding of the context in which research takes place;
- demonstrate awareness of issues relating to the rights of other researchers and of research subjects e.g. confidentiality, attribution, copyright, ethics, malpractice, ownership of data and the requirements of the Data Protection Act;
- understand relevant health and safety issues and demonstrate responsible working practices,
- understand the processes for funding and evaluation of research;

- gain an understanding of the process of academic or commercial exploitation of research results (PATENTING OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY).

Research management

To be able to:

- apply effective project management through the setting of research goals, intermediate milestones and prioritisation of activities;
- design and execute systems for the acquisition and collation of information through the effective use of appropriate resources and equipment;
- identify and access appropriate bibliographical resources, archives, and other sources of relevant information;
- use appropriately information technology for database management, recording and presenting information

Key (transferable) skills: Personal effectiveness

To be able to:

- demonstrate a willingness and ability to learn and acquire knowledge;
- be creative, innovative and original in one's approach to research;
- demonstrate flexibility and open-mindedness;
- demonstrate self-awareness and the ability to identify own training needs;
- demonstrate self-discipline, motivation and thoroughness;
- recognise boundaries and draw upon/use sources of support as appropriate;
- show initiative, work independently and be self-reliant.

Communication skills

To be able to:

- write clearly and in a style appropriate to purpose, e.g. progress reports, published documents, thesis;
- construct coherent arguments and articulate ideas clearly to a range of audiences, formally and informally through a variety of techniques;
- constructively defend research outcomes at seminars and viva examination;
- justify one's own research to the funding bodies and promote the public understanding of one's research field;
- effectively support the learning of others when involved in teaching, mentoring or demonstrating activities.
- justify one's own research to the funding bodies and promote the public understanding of one's research field
- effectively support the learning of others when involved in teaching, mentoring or demonstrating activities

Networking and team-working

To be able to:

- develop and maintain co-operative networks and working relationships with supervisors, colleagues and peers within the institution and the wider research community;
- understand one's behaviour and impact on others when working in and contributing to the success of formal and informal teams;
- listen, give and receive feedback and respond perceptively to others.

Career management

To be able to:

- appreciate the need for and show commitment to continued professional development;

- take ownership for and manage one's career progression, set realistic and achievable career goals, and identify and develop ways to improve employability;
- demonstrate an insight into the transferable nature of research skills to other work environments and the range of career opportunities within and outside academia;
- present one's skills, personal attributes and experiences through effective CVs, applications and interviews.

Time Management

- Many postgraduate students are not able to manage their time effectively due to:
 - ✓ juggling paid work, family commitments and study;
 - ✓ being away from formal study for some years, thus be unsure of academic expectations;
 - ✓ unfamiliar with changes in scholarship or advances in information technology;
 - ✓ marital obligations involving marriage, pregnancy, child bearing and rearing, as well as excessive socialisation, notably society parties.

Parameters used to assess the outputs from a research project

- patents
(i.e. protected knowledge that, given further investment, can potentially be converted into a financial return);
- successful peer reviews of knowledge
(i.e. publications that have been referred by knowledgeable outsiders and deemed to have merit);
- books (i.e. texts that *contain core knowledge* derived from research and which can pass that knowledge on to future generations).

The following categories of books have less significance:

- A compilation of existing knowledge in an area, in a new form
- Books of creative works of art, plays, novels, collections and poems
- royalties
(i.e. *monies* that can be derived from those willing to use and pay for the knowledge that has been generated), and
- consultancies
(i.e. *monies* that can be paid for the use of individuals who have increased their knowledge as a result of research).

Capacity building

- The number and the quality of postgraduate students, especially PhDs, produced.

Research funding – why is it important?

1. Mechanism for ongoing *peer-review* of research.
2. Shapes research agendas where *impact* is vital.
3. Enables new and re-focuses current *collaboration*.
4. Builds *sustainability* into the research culture.

Funding research

- Public funding:
 - Economic competitiveness for the benefit of the nation.
 - Improved quality of life for the population.
- Private funding:
 - Economic benefits for the funder.

University Research

- Bigger questions need bigger teams and bigger resources (equipment, databases, etc.)

- more collaboration.
- more complexity.
- In all subjects, less research can be done without additional resources.
- Increasing student numbers/teaching requirements mean less time for research, unless funded.

Funded research

- More researchers seeking funding.
- More competition.
- More 'strings attached' to public funding – value for money for the taxpayer.
- Hence, more terms and conditions on research funding.
- Same issues worldwide!

Other issues affecting research

- Increase in general legislation/regulation affecting research:
 - Ethics - protecting research subjects (human/animal).
 - Government policies on university funding.
- Research assessment.
- University reputation:
 - League tables.
 - Global competition for students & research.
- Technological change:
 - Online systems, e-services.

Other issues: competing demands

- Academic agendas versus Government targets.
- Operational requirements.
- Universities' role in economic development.
- Organisational complexity.
- Delivery of 'excellence.'

- Multiple effects on research performance.

Changes

- Integration of functions:
 - Finance, personnel, legal, secretarial.
- Professionalisation of the activity and the people.
- Active institutional management of research.
- Whole-process, whole-life management.

Managing research

- More administration required for research.
- More administration required of researchers.

Or

- Research administrators required

The roles of research administration include the following:

- Funding identification
- Proposal support
- Proposal writing
- Costing and pricing
- Contract development and negotiation
- Post-award financial administration
- Project management
- Researcher development
- Funder or subject-specific support
- Ethics, governance and compliance
- *PhD student administration*
- Systems and information management
- Reporting
- Policy development
- Dissemination & Knowledge Transfer

Institutional Issues

- What role does the institution want to play in knowledge/technology transfer?
- Is the institutional structure supportive of knowledge/technology transfer?
 - Institutional mission.
 - Institutional policies and procedures.
 - Institutional culture.
 - Are institutional goals and objectives defined and understood by all?

Research Management Issues

- Ensuring full dissemination and use of research results.
- Having appropriate policies in place:
 - Exploitation/Knowledge Transfer;
 - Costing and pricing;
 - Conflicts of Interest;
 - Rewards, incentives and personal fees;
 - Secondment.

The roles of a University Research Management office include the following:

- **Define research agenda** from time to time in collaboration with the various academic and administrative units.
- **Develop staff capacity** for research through training programmes (local/overseas), workshops, conferences and seminars.
- Encourage and foster **interdisciplinary research**.
- Encourage **mentoring of emerging scholars**.
- Assist in **sourcing grants** for projects that align with the University strategic research vision and mission.
- Ensure **proper management of funds** in strict compliance with the University financial regulations.

- Ensure *ethical performance* of research projects.
- *Monitoring and evaluation* to ensure good performance of funded projects.
- Timely and effective *dissemination of information* on research activities.
- Assist with *patenting and intellectual property rights*.

Excellence in Postgraduate Research Supervision

- Experience and track record of training institution
- Research environment
- Research funding
- Quality of students
- Quality of staff
- Postgraduate training structure
- Curricular review
- Applicable research
- Public Service
- Mentoring

The Research Environment

- The University will only permit doctoral research programmes to be offered where it is confident that students can be trained and supported within an environment that is supportive of research.
- It defines such an environment at the subject level in terms of:
 - the availability of supervisors with relevant experience and recent publications in students' project areas;
 - facilities for research which at least meet those needed for research of national and international standards;
 - acceptable submission rates (70 percent with 4 years for full-time students and 6 years for part-time) and completion rates (80 percent awarded the degree either outright or subject to minor changes or revisions).

Pre-Entry Information

- In order to enable students make an informed choice, the University requires that units offering research degrees provide clear, accurate and comprehensive pre-entry information to potential applicants.
- This should inform them as fully as possible about research opportunities, training, resources, completion times, expectations and demands upon research students (including financial ones), entry requirements, the admission process, information about scholarships, and appropriate contacts.

Entry Standards and Applications

- The University defines the minimum standard for admission to research programmes as a relevant academic or research Master's degree.
- In addition, the University requires evidence of acceptable competence in the English language to be submitted at the time of application.

Selection of Research Students

- In order to assist the match of students with research projects and supervisor(s), the University requires that there should be rigorous selection policies and procedures at the Departmental, Faculty and Postgraduate School levels.
- The University requires that criteria for selection should be made clear in writing. They should normally include evidence of:
 - the suitability of the candidate to undertake a doctoral programme, including proficiency in the English language;

- the suitability of the candidate to undertake a research project in the proposed field of study within the allotted time frame;
- the availability of a supervisory committee that is qualified to supervise the candidate in the research project;
- the availability of resources to support the candidate's research project to a successful conclusion.

Induction into the University and the Postgraduate School

- The University requires the Postgraduate School to provide students with an appropriate induction programme within three months of registration to enable them acquire an understanding of the academic and social environment within which they will be working.

Induction Programme

- The induction programme is intended to familiarise students with:
 - an introduction to the University which include:
 - its history, development and postgraduate portfolio;
 - relevant regulations, policies and procedures relating to research degrees.
 - induction into matters relating to students' relationships with the institution including:
 - the University's expectations of research students;
 - the challenges physically faced by research students;
 - institutional facilities available to students including the learning support infrastructure;
 - institutional provision for student welfare and other support arrangements;
 - complaints and appeals procedure.

The Development of Relevant Knowledge and Skills

- The Postgraduate School will ensure that research training programmes offer students the opportunity to develop a relevant range of knowledge and skills including skills for employment.
- The University requires that, for individual research students, the Postgraduate School should make appropriate arrangements:
 - to identify their training needs;
 - to identify gaps;
 - to provide opportunities for development;
 - to record the development of skills in a Research Training Portfolio;
 - to ensure that students are introduced to relevant academic networks;
 - to advise them on opportunities to attend seminars, and conferences;
 - to encourage them to present papers at such conferences;
 - where appropriate, to encourage them to publish;
 - to support career development.
- The University requires that research students should complete the research training programme and any prescribed taught courses, and successfully complete any assessments and/or examinations.
- It requires that research students maintain regular contact with “main” supervisors. The normal minimum requirement is that they should meet with the main supervisor at least once a month, and attend regular progress meetings with the supervisory committee twice a session.
- The Postgraduate School should maintain an up-to-date register of staff members that are qualified to engage in research supervision.

- The Postgraduate School should establish a maximum period of absence for any member of the supervisory committee, not exceeding three months, following which appropriate alternative arrangements will be made by the Postgraduate School to ensure continuity of supervision.
- In order to ensure that individual supervisors are not overloaded, the Postgraduate School must set appropriate limits on the number of research students who may be supervised by a main supervisor, subject to a normal maximum of six.
- Where the Postgraduate School allows main supervisors to take responsibility for more than six students, the University requires them to make arrangements to ensure that there will be adequate contact between student and supervisor and that the latter is not overburdened.

The Development and Approval of Research Project Proposals

- Research project proposals may be developed prior to the recruitment of a student for purposes of obtaining funding or subsequently by the student following enrolment or the successful completion of the taught part of the programme.
- Where the research proposal is developed by the student, the University requires that the supervisory committee supports the student in the development of the research project proposal. In particular, the committee needs to ensure that the project is achievable within the time-scale of the programme, and to confirm that sufficient resources will be available to support it. The University requires that the Postgraduate School should determine appropriate time-scales within which students are required to submit research project proposals, not exceeding nine months from registration.

- The University requires the supervisory committee to evaluate research proposals against the following criteria:
- clarity of the project's aims and objective;
- that the implementation procedure of the aims and objectives are clear, standard and achievable;
- that the student has (or can acquire) the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes to successfully complete the project;
- that the proposed supervisory committee has, or will be able to acquire the skills, knowledge and aptitudes necessary to supervise the project to a successful conclusion;
- that the project is suitable for the programme of study and for the award;
- that it can be completed within the time-frame for the programme
- that sufficient resources will be available to complete the project;
- in cases where the project involves extended absence from the University on fieldwork or work in collaborating organisations, that appropriate arrangement will be made to support and monitor the progress of the student.

Progression and Monitoring

- The University requires that supervisory committees should formally monitor the progress of students on doctoral programmes through annual reports to the Postgraduate School. Where appropriate, reports on progress should be made to sponsors and copied to the Postgraduate School. The mechanisms for this will be as determined by the Board of the Postgraduate School from time to time.

- The Postgraduate School requires that the progress of the student should be formally reviewed annually by the same departmental postgraduate committee that approved the research project and the supervisory arrangements, such reviews should be accompanied by at least one written progress report, a presentation of results and oral examination by the panel, or an open presentation with critical feedback from their peers and staff in the subject area.

Examination

The regulations of the University require that all research degrees be examined by four examiners, comprising the Head of Department (Chairman), the Supervisor (or another Internal Examiner, if the Head of Department is also the Supervisor), an Internal/External Examiner from outside the Department, and an External Examiner.

- The University requires that external examiners be demonstrably research-active in relevant fields.
- The proposed examiner must have attained both national and international eminence in a particular academic discipline relevant to the candidate's research topic, and must be the academic or equivalent status of at least Reader or equivalent.
- Scholars who had been on the staff of the University within the last five years shall not qualify for appointment as external examiners.
- An individual shall not be eligible to serve as external examiner after three years of disengagement from the university system/research institute.
- The University requires that Heads of Departments and Departmental Postgraduate Committees should be responsible for the nomination of examiners for research degrees, in consultation with the supervisory committee.

- Following the oral examination, the University requires that examiners write a joint report and make an appropriate recommendation in respect of the award. However, in cases where they disagree they should then write separate reports. Where the recommendation is re-submission, the report should include a statement of the work to be done to achieve the award within the period allowed under the University's regulations.
- In addition to reporting on the thesis and the candidate, examiners should be requested to provide comments on the broader issues of the research training and the environment.

Complaints

- The University has established procedures for complaints about a service, member of staff or another student. A complaint may be made by any student, including a research student. Details of the complaints procedure are set out in the Regulations Governing Higher Degrees given to all research students upon admission.

PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING RESEARCH SUPERVISION

- A student's progress should be reviewed regularly
- Avoid misunderstandings
- Co-supervisors
- Grievances/appeals

Policy Framework

- Staff and Student Grievances
- Research Misconduct
- Intellectual Property Rights

- Regulations for Specific Higher Degrees of the University

SOME CASE HISTORIES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

CASE HISTORY 1: A Research student was a member of a research team and when it was time for her to submit her PhD thesis there was a petition from her Department that she had copied work from a big research project. As Dean of the Postgraduate School, it was my lot to set up an Ad-Hoc Committee to investigate the matter in order to protect the sanctity of our degrees. Unfortunately the petitioner was unable to produce the report from which the student purportedly copied from. Nonetheless, the issue enriched our regulation and we came up with what is now contained as

Section (f): General regulations Governing PhD Degree Programmes at the University of Ibadan

- Where the student is a member of a research team and the thesis incorporates the result of the team's work, the nature and extent of the candidate's contribution to the work and those of his/her colleagues must be fully indicated. The candidate's thesis shall not incorporate more than 30% of the team's work. Pursuant to this regulation, where such incorporation has taken place, report on the team's work shall be deposited with the Secretary to the Postgraduate College.

Case History 2: A Research Student Overstaying

A recent unfortunate case was on the social media concerning a colleague in our Department of Mathematics who was also a research student. The story line was to the effect that he has registered for a PhD since 1994 which he was unable to complete. We had to investigate the matter and the Ad-Hoc

Committee submitted a report which we forwarded to Senate of the University and the Federal Ministry of Education. Some of the matters arising from Ph.D. candidates who may have overstayed on their research include the following:

- The University should generate a database of its academic staff who are on their PhD programmes and their progress, with a view to coming up with policies that would ensure timely completion of such programmes. Stronger monitoring and tracking of lack of progress should be pursued.
- The University should develop and provide holistic health care services that do not focus only on physical health and fitness, but also on mental health in the work place.
- The University should generate a database of staff who have been on their PhD programmes for more than four years. The challenges and barriers encountered by these staff should be identified and addressed.
- Stronger policies on staff engagement, disengagement, health and housing should be implemented.

Case History 3: Appointment of External Examiner

I had two examples from the former Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry at the University of Ibadan. In one case, the proposed external examiner was a Reader in one of our Federal Universities which for the purpose of this talk shall remain unnamed. I was not impressed with his Curriculum Vitae in terms of his research publication profile. In order to have a second opinion, I took his CV to the Head of our Department of Economics. I requested him to help have a look at the CV and what he taught of the gentleman. He informed me that the nominated external examiner for one of our Master programme should at best be a Lecturer Grade I. That was the end of the

matter as I quickly contacted the Head of Department to make a fresh nomination and he complied.

The second case was in the Department of Animal Science in respect of a Ph.D oral examination. The proposed External Examiner from the University of Benin was a Senior Lecturer. Ordinarily, we typically appoint Readers and Professors as External Examiners for our Ph.D candidates. However, in this particular instance, I was highly impressed with the publication profile of the person nominated. Even though he was then not yet on the professorial cadre, I was under no illusion that he was an outstanding scholar of repute. I had no difficulty in approving his nomination. I was vindicated as he was elevated to the rank of full professor a little while later. The person is Prof. Musibau Adungbe Bamikole, Dean of Agriculture at the University of Benin.

Other Engagements of the Postgraduate College at UI:

- The Multidisciplinary Research Discourse Series.
- Publication of Abstracts of theses and dissertations.
- The UI Postgraduate College Scholarship Scheme.
- The UI Postgraduate College Teaching and Research Assistantship Scheme.
- The UI Postgraduate College Financial Aid for International Students.
- The UI Postgraduate College Scholarship Scheme for Postgraduate Students Living with Physical Disability.
- Overseas Conference Grant Scheme for Postgraduate Teachers.
- Local Conference Grant for Postgraduate Students
- Funding Support for Academic Journals, Central Research Laboratory, Office of International Programmes and the Research Management Office.
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- Overseas Conference Grant Scheme for Postgraduate Teachers.
- Local Conference Grant for Postgraduate Students.
- Funding Support for Academic Journals, Central Research Laboratory, Office of International Programmes and the Research Management Office.
- Recently, the Postgraduate College awarded a **Post-Doctoral Fellowship** to a candidate who recently completed his Ph.D.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In order for us to continue to remain relevant, the Postgraduate programmes in our universities have to be continuously strengthened. This is a veritable way to increase the creation of new knowledge for the benefit of society. Postgraduate education is an integral part of the essence of a university; hence, there is need for a synergy between the leadership of the Postgraduate School/College and the central university administration.