

Grantsmanship: Beyond Publishing or Perishing

By

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GRANTSMANSHIP: BEYOND PUBLISHING OR PERISHING

1. Research Activities Focusing on Societal Needs

On joining the Faculty in November 2010 it wasn't long to know the traditional orientation of any University is trifocal i.e. teaching, research and community service. However publish or perish was loudest. It is natural for any High Education Institutions (HEIs) faculty to take paper publication seriously towards the ultimate goal of professorship; and for some Vice-chancellorship thus explaining the slogan publish or perish. Late Justice Kayode Eso's Convocation lecture in SLT during Prof Oba AbdulRaheem's tenure which I attended awaken my consciousness as I struggle to find my feet. It was a time that ASUU was becoming a national issue. I had the first inkling of Grant-Research-Professor nexus from that eminent Jurist. Thus publication is contingent on research culture of an institution and the developmental progress of a nation. Research culture, Research Programme and Grantsmanship are nexus. It is in this arena (dominated from SL - Professors) that publishing is a fight in the agora of knowledge where failure is part of the process. This is at the center of what made Western, European & now Middle Easterner Universities and their countries what they are.

I followed the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, 1994 Cairo Conference, and 1997 Kyoto Protocol etc. I am particularly fascinated by the diplomacies and politics that went into them. It marvels me how finding a right "word" can stall the progress of such international gathering. Then United Nation Security Council was of keen interest. I used to wonder why our governments always satisfy international policy framework advocate such as Dublin Principle etc. In my congratulatory letter (16/11/2002) to Prof Musibau Akanji of Biochemistry dept. on his inaugural lecture (titled: 'Eat and die little by little') I wrote on a lighter mood: "The danger of dying by little from food additives consumption, including others as Rio summit declaration . . . and Kyoto protocol etc. are for the West, not us. My people in Alore . . . & entire Ilorin, the silent majority don't go to Mr Bigg's. We are happy with luru delicacy. But luru without maggi for us in Ilorin, NO Way". Nonetheless, following these events and Davos Economic Summit has some influences but also bring to surface the conflict between my ultra conservative-conservative and liberal political views. The attention given to UN activities paid off in my academia and became significantly insightful on what I term Symbiosis Collective Developmental Commitment (SCDC) among comity of nations; so paramount for EU, G7, BRICS, etc

I realized it was SCDC they celebrate when world leaders gather, clicking wine glasses and posing for pictures celebrating MOU signing or agreement at these summits. This SCDC actually precipitated on the intelligential gathering of academia, private sectors, and industry captains' articulation over period of years. Thereafter, call for research proposals based on individual countries determined contribution and interest usually chunk-out. High level, intergovernmental, intercontinental, among institutions, complex or secret research programs e.g. space station, terrorism etc. are carried out. Let consider the 2nd call proposal by African Dev. Bank on ACCF (deadline: 13/8/2017). I attempted but didn't get anywhere! It specifically stated the proposal must align with the national priorities of the beneficiary country/countries, as set out in the **National Development Plan**, UNFCCC-submitted **Nationally Determined Contribution**, and the **National Adaptation Plan**, among others. These documents are voluminous but we have them. What would one submit without first understanding what to align with in policy specific outcome? When President Trump pulled out USA from the climate change agreement, it was the **USA Nationally Determined Contribution** he was thwarting to implement by effectively barring federal funding for researches for the purpose among others.

So what is Research culture, Research Question and Research Program? When we consider today's knowledge based economy and the changing needs of employment, there is urgent need for paradigm shift beyond publishing or perishing. I persuade colleagues to find Late Justice Kayode Eso's Convocation lecture and read. And also to rewind former Governor Fashola 17th Lagos State University Convocation speech. We surely going to a future when deanship/chair of faculty/dept. shall not be chosen on election or stepdown compromise but on advertisement for candidate who can better articulate research programme and give leadership direction for the faculty in-line with University's mission and ultimate national goal. In high performing research environments there are some factors that are obvious. These include clear goals for coordination, research emphasis, distinctive culture, recruitment emphasis, resources, rewards and leadership with both research skill and management practice. I am sensitizing Pg. students to Graduate Assistants to SL cadres to get prepared.

2. Essence of Grantsmanship

Grantsmanships are the hallmarks of University Professors in USA and other developed countries; the basis of their reputation in research excellence and scientific rigor usually flaunts in their CV. It is the only path for real-time problems solving and collaboration outside one's university or even country. Most grants cover PhDs & Masters programmes sponsors, internship's, conferences' etc. Grant based proposal application from my efforts & experience is completely different from PhD proposal. It worths all efforts to enshrine this culture and value. My colleagues that will take research leadership in the next 2 decades should go beyond pride on PhDs supervised with self-sponsorship but from their own won grants. That should be the mindset to start developing now. Only Universities MOU that is proposal-based are productive in term of sustainability, results-applicability, collaboration, learning and mentoring. In western countries academic positions requirements from SL (Asst Prof. in USA) are beyond the submission of 35 copies CV. The requirements filter those who have no business in academia. Candidates' grants attraction capabilities are often clearly spelt out. Early careers researchers know this very well whether on tenure or non-tenure track.

Researches meant for grant proposal calls are structured inquiry. But the inquiry must be methodologically organized to lead to conclusions even if negative and always become a research program. The art and craft need to be learnt with sustainable interest and self-efforts. But where one is opportune to have 30 or more years' career, it is expected to strive for a mindset of bigger picture at heart and keep working out instrumental behavior towards grantsmanship than only for promotion. Hence, the urgent need to enter the research pursuit with laid out directions and ideas, thus forming the starting platform for development of systemic academic grantsmanship, sustainability, true successors grooming & national development. Academic should endeavor to come up with a continuous research idea topics (diary) of interest and relevance with proposal development beginning from final year undergraduate work. In 1989 "The Unilorin Engineer", the official publication of the Nigerian University Engineering Student Association (NUESA) was at Vol. 5. Sectarian and the departmental engineering students' associations has drown it completely from frontiers of several undergraduates' journals.

Faculty of Engineering is as old as Ivory Tower University of Ilorin. Atimes, I got lost completely in abysmal of deep thought. Is it not ironical the faculty can't emphatically claim to know, say, that 1.7 Million vehicles entered the campus in 2014. This information alone for longer period can motivate private investor in public-private partnership for maintenance of University road that lead to the campus main entrance among other innovations. The clay brick road at Agric and Biosystems Engineering (courtesy of then Dr. Edward Akinyemi from Civil Engrg Dept) stood the test of times. Where is our orange juice extractor?

This is where individual efforts and like minds matter most. Otherwise, it would remain lamentations when little continuous action which can make difference gradually are ignored. We can only improve and perfect on what is put to live usage. I believe there are several undergraduates' projects that can be put into usage in the faculty and campus area. What people see around will bring attention and support for the faculty. Again and for instance the engineering students could design and construct traffic light at Okeodo junction as a final year project of a team of Civil, Mechanical and Electrical students, even if it takes 4 years for recurrent final year group project to perfect. I believe that for Nigeria to move from consumerism to industrialization, research must not be purportedly academic exercise. This is one of the shortcoming of overly publication ambition which also led to annual projects with recommendation to government or policy makers on the shelf. It so sadden thick grass growing under our feet. In this vein, former governor Fashola berated academia when he banned LASU honorary doctoral awards. I am sad & bewildered.

3. Prof. Olugbenga O. Mokuolu – The Unilorin's American Warren Buffet

The precise year I can't remember when Mr. Warren Buffet first made initial contribution of his investment share to the tune of \$1.5 billion and not substantial to him, until it reaches his target of \$30 billion. I was humbled to stand still when Mr. Buffet tagged his contribution to Bill and Melinda Foundation but not himself. Prof. Mokuolu, a grantsmaster of international repute. I have worked with him and served his committee on Research Ethic before I joined the faculty. He donated a Malaria Research Centre (building & Equipment) through his research grants inside University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital. One day I went to his office on my curiosity. It was an idea he put down on paper in 2009. Research Grant according to Prof. Mokuolu (6/8/2017) "is not primarily a means of supplementary income. But your research output may enhance your value and hence increase your income" Professor Mokuolu is a living witness to this assertion. Research colleagues that will be coming to direct the research agenda of the faculty in 20 or more years' time need to make the decision now and know that nothing is difficult to achieve for a willing hearts (Abraham Lincoln).

4. Academic Publication & Rejection

i. Dr Olayinka G Okeola – Academia through the corridor & back door

Yes, the back door. My 2/3 of working life was on Physical Infrastructure development different from Ph.D. Civil Engng (Water Res.). I was coming with a student-centered focus with ambition to institute professorial chair in the name of my mother and endow Public lecture in the department of Economic. My first paper from the thesis was rejected and I was dejected. With 7 months of reworked as par the reviewers' comments, the paper was accepted after a year. For the main PhD paper, after over 2 years and 3 reviews included responses to 3-4 pages of reviewers' query each time was finally rejected. The rejection letter ends: "I hope the outcome of this specific submission will not discourage you from submitting future manuscripts". Another one was a woeful rejection by 3 reviewers with a particular caustic reviewer that I wrote should be replaced. Surprisingly he wrote a response which made me held my breath in shame. The Editor-in-Chief Professor Schwartz after considering my unrelenting efforts suggested getting a co-authoring to improve on it. He got me Prof. Rob Schincariol (Canada). Rob said he never researched in Africa and he got me Dr. Geoffrey Parkin (Newcastle) and still no success.

ii. Contact Sports

All academic discourse in University is a contact sport either mentoring or executing it. It is instructive for early career academia to wholeheartedly embrace criticism of their work as pathway for improvements and among

several steps toward academic stardom. The seniors whose presence at a seminar is to intimidate the juniors from contributing or shield their candidate renders a colossal terrible disservice to academia and our country, Nigeria. It is important to stress that paper rejection is part of the road to grantsmanship. Prof. Wole Soyinka once said “those who want to write are welcome. But they should be ready for rejection list”. Renowned Water Resources Prof. Biswas also said, “that knowledge does not advance by consensus: if it did, we would still be living in the dark ages”. Yes, there are challenges. But lamentations can’t take us anywhere. Is Unilorin not the same University where Prof. Mokuolu excelled and became a grantsmaster? It is the result of over 20 years’ conscious committed efforts. The byproducts of grantsmanship are quality paper publications, professorship, great mentorship, employer, and of course affluent. The University in which no or a low research culture is evident, according to Cheetham, “a situation which may entail repetition of existing knowledge and skills may, over time, reproduce a stagnant culture in which inquiry and critical discourse may not be valued”. Let us reflect on Cheetham’s statement. Grantsmanship is part of (real) academia fulfillment and also key to UN agencies (etc.) bid responses from Expression-of-interest (EOI), Request for proposal (RFP) & Concept Note.

5. Conclusion

Every generation, nations, Universities have their main questions that affect public policy and therefore are amenable to scientific inquiry. What are the Nigeria, University of Ilorin, Faculties, Departments’ main questions? Have you wondered about the prong of collaboration among the “BRICS”? University serves as an enigma of development and advancement in civilized countries. They drive passionate leaders. Nigeria started the first television broadcast in Africa while South Africa went digital before us. Nigeria had FECTAC 77. I was a St. Michael Catholic School pupil and remembered clearly we were given holiday to enjoy this epoch event. That is our national theatre was in place when United Arab Emirate (UAE) was not known. I doubt if Nigeria has an Ambassador then in UAE. But today the UAE Opera House is booked till July 2018. I believe as God’s privileged elite academia, we should be challenged for renewed interest and love for our dear Country. The early career academia cannot afford the past complacency in 30 years’ time. My grave concern was borne out of the fact that “the past is the best prophet of the future” (Lord Byron). Africa, My continent with only 2% contribution to the world trade and less than 3% to world income is waiting. Nigeria is waiting. University of Ilorin is waiting. The 5-10% universities bracket don’t make shallow noises. So their equivalent journals don’t advertise, collect money or send unsolicited email to publish with them. It is about excellence. It is a drive from inside not outside.

My experience in UN Security Council and leadership of nations reinforces this belief. There are nations and giant individuals. **They do not climb a mountain with an intention that the world should see them.** Rather they climb the mountain with the intention to see the world. That is the attributes in and mindset of Nobel Prize winners and all contributors to collective goodness. They can delay gratification. There are elections that I had prayed sincerely for a particular candidate not to win for a country I am not a citizen or ever visited. Why? Because I know a person can be a giant of unimaginable. I am appealing directly to all early career academia in the Faculty from pg. students to renew their mindset for a bigger picture of the next 3 decades. In this subject, it is not even normal for everyone to be passionate about it. That is not a problem except the many tempting parking lots on the highway. This is my own contribution toward engendering courage and motivation for those who have not really decided to see beyond publish or perish by focusing on the big picture through committed personal effort. Let us imagine Prof. Mokuolu, a Minister of Health or Special Assistant or Adviser. God bless Nigeria. God Bless My Alma Mater –University of Ilorin. **OG**