

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON BEST PRACTICES IN RESEARCH A CRITIQUE OF THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH FORMAT

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### **Abstract**

The practice of research in the academic field is one that has continuously evolved over time. Year in year out, formats and standards are changed to reflect “*current practice*”. The purpose of this paper on recommendations on best practices in research is to critique the research format of the Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University by bringing out its strength and recommending ways to increase the format. The focus here is on the necessity of certain subtopics in a particular section in the project work. For instance, “*Significance of the Study*” is located in chapter one of the project format of Education. Whereas, a “*Significance*” is drawn from the findings of a study and the findings of a study comes at the end of the work. If therefore, I am to tell the significance of my study in chapter one, this means I already know the findings. This have a great effect on the objectivity and independence of findings of the study. Since the findings are already predetermined, they are then under the manipulation of the author. This is the line of argument that the author maintained and intend to expose in this paper.

Keywords: Recommendation, best practice, critique, research, supervision, format...

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### ***Executive summary***

This recommendation is solely based on the author's perception and articulation of present aggregate happenings and the method of research in the Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State. These perceptions have been articulated and formulated over our years of assistive research guide with students of the five Departments in the Faculty – Vocational and Technology Education, Science Education, Arts Education, Social Science Education and Educational Foundations. The recommendations contained herein are

however, not intended to be forcefully considered utmost but to serve as an input to the Faculty format in our collective intention and responsibility to provide quality education to the Nigerian Students.

We are of the view that these recommendations, if adopted, will improve the quality, objectivity and standard of projects presented to the Faculty.

*Michael O. Jules (M.Ed, in V.)*

### **Disclaimer**

The author does not in any way, either outright or by inference, claimed that what is contained herein must be implemented but just a recommendation based on our perception on current practices in the Faculty. It is an appeal that this material be considered and utilized in our collective endeavor to improve the standard of our institution.

## **Introduction**

As an undergraduate student in the Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University, the author had the opportunity to compare the Faculty research format with those of other Faculties. The reason for this comparison was to see the best format amongst these Faculties. The major comparison the author did was with the Faculty of Political Science. Although the author observed that each format took their form as a result of the nature of the field of study, the author found that compared with other Faculties, the Education format have major strength against other Faculty research formats. For instance, the Political Science format in the Niger Delta University do not give Literature Review a chapter of its own, rather, it is included in chapter one with just three pages. But in the Faculty of Education format, Literature Review have a chapter of its own. This gives researchers to engage in a wide array of arguments concerning their studies.

Despite the strength of the Faculty of education Research format, the author still believes there are areas where the format and research practice especially in supervisory areas could be improved. The authors' intention here is to make meaningful contributions to the format for consideration. The author is of the view however, that the perceptions/views portrayed herein were formulated over time and not mere issues that came up today, hence, appealing for the Faculty's consideration.

Being a graduate of this institution, the author is very familiar with the happenings in the Faculty year in/out and this have helped formed his perceptions. The author is also concerned about the method of supervision by most supervisors which have overtime contributed to the plight of research students. The lack of uniformity of supervision, the different translation of the Faculty format by each independent supervisor has negatively impacted on students on a large scale. This has caused cancellation of numerous work during defence - works already guided by certain supervisors.

## **The problems**

### **1. Significance of the study**

It is believed that the benefits one would derived from a study is based on the findings of the work. This means that the researcher would find something first before he/she can determine who will benefit from such findings. Hence, it is mostly written "the findings of this study will benefit...". If this is the case, then why should **significance of the study** be place in chapter one when one has barely found anything? If in chapter one, the researcher already knows those whom the study will benefit, then, it is believed that the researcher already knows the findings of the study. This seeming pre-knowledge of the findings consequently alters the objectivity and independence of finding of study, and once the objectivity has been altered, the research is no longer worth consideration.

It should be noted however, that in the Faculty of Education research format, the *Significance of the Study* is located in Chapter One of the research format. This will make research students to formulate findings or at least, give significance that are not at par with the findings. It becomes a blind move to give a knowledge based on another knowledge that has not been ascertained. This is the first and primary area where the administrators in the Faculty of Education should look into.

## **2. Declaration page**

The preliminary pages of project in the Faculty format lack a declaration page. It would be better if the researcher declare that his work is original and not copied. This Declaration Page is included in most Faculties' research formats.

## **3. Discussion of research objectives**

In the faculty format, the review of related literature only contained theoretical framework, conceptual review, relevance of concepts, empirical evidence and summary of literature. The format does not contain Discussion of Research Objectives. However, the discussion of objectives has been given special consideration by many supervisors (if not all). If this is so important, it could as well be embedded in the format. This is so important because students (including the author in his final year as undergraduate) are advised to adhere strictly to the Departmental format – ably called *The Faculty Bible*. It will then be misleading when after following the format, other issues are brought up that are not in the format. A proper guide in this direction is needed by including a subtopic – ***Discussion of Objectives*** to the Literature Review in the Faculty format.

## **4. Summary of literature**

In general, summary has to do with the summation of main ideas which usually comes at the end of a work. The author therefore, is questioning the suitability of the Summary of Literature in chapter two. The question to be asked here is that “should a study really have two summaries? It will be very necessary if whatever is to be written in the summary of literature review in chapter two is added to the summary of the study in chapter five. This is to ensure uniformity of purpose in the summary of studies submitted to the Faculty.

## **Supervisory issues**

From the authors' observation as an independent researcher who previously worked without any link with the Faculty, the author discovered that supervisory methods do posed problems for research students. This is because nearly all supervisors have their separate format and method of supervision slightly different from the general Faculty format. To this end, students' works are regularly changed or cancelled during defence. There was a work the author typed where the supervisor demanded discussion of findings be taken to chapter five from chapter four. After such change against the Faculty format, during defence, the student was asked to take the discussion of findings to its rightful place in chapter four where it was before.

There was also another instance where the supervisor corrected a citation at the end of a statement from e.g. (Michael, 2018) to Michael (2018). How can the student who already knew that the supervisor is wrong tell the supervisor that sir/madam, this is wrong? Of course the author advised the student to effect the error from the supervisor that later, during defence, the panel will see it and change it back. Of course, the student defended and the error was seen and corrected. The problems here are the errors and discrepancies in supervisory techniques of project supervisors. It has caused students additional time, money and mental, emotional and bodily stress.

The author has witnessed numerous instances where supervisors will guide the work in a particular direction, but during defence, cancellation would be done not as a result of the student's inability to prepare a good write up, but as a result of poor supervisory technique. In fact, in the current supervision year, a work was cancelled during the proposal defence in one of the Departments because the topic is not a Faculty related topic. When the student approached the supervisor, the supervisor said "why was she not informed that topics not related to the Faculty are not accepted?" My question to the student was "is she a new lecturer in the Department?" These are things that the Faculty and Department administrative heads should be aware of.

This disparity in supervisory style has caused students more financial resources as each cancellation has to do with reprinting of same work over and over again. Pity should be extended on the suffering students.

### **Method of training/preparation**

The author wants to assert that the method of preparing students to carry out their research is inadequate. We want to draw our attention back to the 2013/2014 session. Prior to proposal defence, the Department of Vocational and Technology Education held a seminar aimed at orienting final year students on the proper way to carry out their research work. Three colleagues who were present at the seminar told us at different times that when the seminar was on going, they had no choice but to give way to tears. Their reasons? They have written their project work in direct opposite of what they were hearing. The gap here is the method of preparation. These students may have been exposed to the right thing at the wrong time. On the author's part, there were numerous research terminologies and practices that the author knew only after graduation. Knowledge gotten from personal study. I wonder how it would look like for my colleagues who hardly engaged in in-depth personal study.

After the author's final year examination (January, 2014), he submitted some examination question papers extracted from a 100 level student of Delta State University, Abraka (DELSU) to Dr. F. C. Akpotohwo, the then Head of Department of Vocational and Technology Education, Faculty of Education, Niger Delta University. In the question paper were questions on research methodology that even the author as a graduate of the Niger Delta University then could not have

answered without personal study that they were dishing out to year one students in DELSU. The author submitted the question paper and the corresponding material to the HoD to intimate him of what can be done to improve the research skills of undergraduates here. Although the *Vibrant* HoD must have done what he could, final year students in the Faculty still exhibit high level lack of knowledge in research processes. This, most supervisors have taken advantage of.

### **Recommendations/Way Forward**

Based on the problems listed above, the following recommendations were put forward for consideration.

1. Since the significance of a study is drawn from the findings of the study, and the findings of a study comes at the end of the work, it is hereby recommended that the significance of the study in the Faculty format be placed after the findings of the study. This is to justify drawing the importance/significance from the findings. It is not professional to signify the importance of a study in chapter one, whereas the findings have not been established. It is therefore, recommended that significance of the study be taken to chapter five, probably after **Implications of the Study**. This will enable the researcher to signify the benefits based on findings and will also contribute to the objectivity of the study.
2. As regards the project format itself, a declaration page after certification will also be necessary to enable the student to declare and sign that such work has not been initially submitted before that his/her work is original and authentic.
3. Since importance has been attached to the discussion of objectives in chapter two (literature review) of the research work, such addition should also be reflected in the Faculty format to avoid ambiguity. This is also because it is the same Faculty that preaches a religious follow-up of the format, whereas such addition is not reflected in the format.
4. The summary of literature review should be removed from the format and its content added to the summary in chapter five. It may not amount to best practice to have two summaries in one work. To this extent, the summary in chapter five should be a complex summary of the work from chapter one to the findings. This will add meaning and credibility to the research work.
5. It is also important that all supervising lecturers be involved in a Faculty sponsored seminar on project supervision. This is to ensure that there is uniformity in project supervision amongst all lecturers. This is because the type of corrections received by students from their supervisors brought to us to effect at the computer centers most times leaves us wondering why such supervisors makes such corrections when in the final defence, such corrections are reverted because they do not follow the faculty format. Hence, a supervision seminar is needed to unify supervisory techniques amongst supervisors. This area is so important because we cannot put aside peer influence in the process of building a research work by students. Oftentimes, research students look into each other's work to conform to the Faculty format. They have the format but hardly knows how to follow it through Hence, they use corrections from their colleagues

to follow the format. Therefore, if a work is wrongly corrected by a supervisor and another student use the work, it is probable that such student may also reflect the errors inside the model work.

6. In other institutions, specifically the Delta State University, there are courses from 100 level basically on research contents. Students from the onset are exposed to several documentation terminologies, referencing styles, material utility, material sourcing and other research related methods. When these students get to final year, it becomes very easy for them to find their way around in sourcing and utilizing materials in the library and internet instead of mainly copying the research work of others. This does not mean that the Faculty has not strived in this direction Nevertheless, it may not have been effective and meticulous enough to bring out the desired results.

Our concern herefore, is that students should be exposed to research work early enough to enable them become partially (if not fully) competent and independent in carrying out their research work.

7. The relevance of concepts in the review of literature should be removed. This is because a meticulous conceptual review with adequate explanations could make the relevance of concepts look like a repetition. Moreover, it has little or no significance to the study.
8. Due to technological advancements which is also inherent in our educational system today, it is therefore, recommended that an *e-supervisory* system be adopted by lecturers of the Faculty where projects will be supervised online with the use of emails. This will reduce cost, reduce paper work, improve efficiency, ensure time utility and so on. Also, to verify the authenticity of work done, lecturers should utilize plagiarism detector softwares. This will drive students to become hardworking and reduce plagiarism.

## **Conclusion**

Over the years, the author has consistently followed happenings in the Faculty – including the first international conference till date. This third party observation has given the author the needed insight to make these recommendations. The author has also made previous submission to the then Department of Vocational and Industrial Education which also borders on research projects. The submission was more on questions and answers administered to year one students of Delta State University. Questions that we, the then graduating students do not have answers to that ordinary year one students are doing justice to. We intend to continue to make even more submissions were the need arise in our collective bid of impacting quality knowledge on the younger generation. Next, the searchlight will beam on some aspects of the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style in juxtaposition with the Modern Language Association (MLA).



## **Appendix I**

### **The current faculty format**

#### Front matter

Title page

Certification

Dedication

Acknowledgements

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List of tables

List of figures (if any)

Abstract

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- 1.1 Background to the study
- 1.2 Statement of the problem
- 1.3 Purpose of the study
- 1.4 Research questions
- 1.5 Research hypothesis (if any)
- 1.6 Significance of the study
- 1.7 Scope of the study
- 1.8 Operational definition of terms

### **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

- 2.1 Theoretical framework (i.e. related theories) if any
- 2.2 Conceptual review (i.e. essential concepts in the study)
- 2.3 Relevance of these concepts to the field of study
- 2.4 Empirical evidence (i.e. recent studies in relation to the study)
- 2.5 Summary of literature

### **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1 Research design
- 3.2 Population of the study
- 3.3 Sample and sampling techniques
- 3.4 Instrumentation (i.e. description of the instrument(s) used)
- 3.5 Validity of the instrument
- 3.6 Reliability of the instrument
- 3.7 Administration of the instrument/method of data collection
- 3.8 Method of data analysis

### **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

- 4.1 Analysis of demography (personal) variables
- 4.2 Analysis of research question
- 4.3 Test of research hypothesis (if any)
- 4.4 Discussion of findings

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 Summary (i.e. highlights of the main results)
- 5.2 Conclusion (drawn from study)
- 5.3 Educational implications of the study
- 5.4 Recommendations
- 5.5 Limitations of the study
- 5.6 Suggestions for further research

### **BACK MATTER**

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Questionnaire

## **Appendix II**

### **Proposed adjusted/reviewed format**

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Title page

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**(Declaration)**

Dedication

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**BACK MATTER**

References

Questionnaire

### Appendix III

#### Faculty of political science research format

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY  
WILBERFORCE ISLAND  
BAYELSA STATE

#### NEW PROJECT FORMAT

#### CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Background to the Study
- 1.2 Statement of Problem (Including Research Question)
- 1.3 Clarification/Definition of Terms (This should flow from the problem statement and linked to the literature review)
- 1.4 Literature Review (Not more than three typed double space pages – Students must ( 1) limit themselves to works that have specifically tried to answer the research question either in the locality or elsewhere in the world; ( 2) Students must state the gap to be filled)
- 1.5 Objective of Study (General - one sentence) and Specific - Should be listed))
- 1.6 Importance / Significance of Study (This should highlight major findings and their importance)
- 1.7 Conceptual/Theoretical Framework
- 1.8 Hypotheses / Propositions

#### References

#### CHAPTER TWO

#### METHODS OF STUDY

Research Design (type of research); Sources of Data; methods of data collection; population/sample of study and sampling procedure, tools for data collection, methods of data presentation and methods of data analysis ( format, scheme, criteria or logic of analysis)

#### References

#### CHAPTER THREE

#### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS / ARGUMENTATION OR INTERPRETATION

- (a) Presentation and analysis of data; discussion of findings (Evaluation and statement whether hypothesis was confirmed or rejected)
- (b) Analysis, Interpretation and Argumentation of Facts. Propositions, etc.

References

CHAPTER FOUR  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

- 4.1 Summary of Findings
- 4.2 Conclusion (Based on findings)
- 4.3 Recommendations (Based on findings and conclusion)

References

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

CHARACTER FOR TYPING: Times New Roman

FONT SIZE : 12

SPACING: Double spacing

TOTAL NUMBER OF PAGES: Not more than 50 pages

REFERENCE STYLE: Latest edition of APA Reference Style

ABSTRACT (Single spacing, no paragraph, and not more than 200 - 300 words)

This is a summary of the whole work and should contain the following: Problem of Study, Objective of study, method of study, Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations (if any)

PROJECT TITLE

- (a) Not more than 25 words
- (b) Should be bound in time space