



TRANSCRIPT OF LECTURE DELIVERED ON MAY 11, 2019.

(FORUM 1)

THEMES:

***Choosing a Research Topic and Writing a Research Proposal**

****Having a Scholarly Publication**

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Session 1: CHOOSING A RESEARCH TOPIC

"Why should you have a research topic?" Research is a systematic process; for you to apply for any position, you need a research topic. In research, it is orderly, we do not jump a step. In this scholarship context, the approach is as follows:

Get a research topic → Get a Good Research Proposal → Secure a Supervisor and Scholarship →
Get your project/dissertation/thesis done → Publish research articles

"What is research?" According to online dictionary: Research is a systematic investigation in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions. According to me, Research is re-search, it is what has been done before, which you intend to re-find, refurbish or revise.

"How do you choose a research topic?" To choose a research topic, the real question borders around what your research interest is. Your Research interest should be based on a field you enjoy the most, where you have fun while doing research—an area that you profess and have expertise in. Before you can choose a research topic, there must be a gap in knowledge. The knowledge gap is also considered the missing piece(s) in the research literature, the area that has not yet been explored or is under-explored. Invariably, this gap in knowledge is necessary so as to solve a particular problem.

Download recent articles that are within the scope of your area of specialization/ interest. For B.Sc. it is recommended you get 50 research articles; M.Sc./MBA: 80 articles and for Mphil/PhD, 100 recent articles.

Please note that research topic Selection is a process, it is not subjective but is a cyclical process:

Search ----> Read ----> Learn -----> Choose a Topic

N.B: Always choose a topic that is manageable (not too large/ not too small), ask yourself If the topic is feasible, check for the time frame, cost implication. Be flexible, be prepared for change. Search for information and seek advice. In Addition, Study the articles in your area of interest., Detect gap in knowledge through ESTOL. ESTOL stands for Electronic Summary Table of Literature. ESTOL comprises Title of article, Author and Year, Journal name, Statement of Problem, Methodology, Findings, Gaps, Contribution to knowledge.

Finally, Do a Gap Analysis. Godspeed in your quest to choosing a good research topic.

Session 2: WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

A research proposal is intended to convince others that you had a worthwhile research project and that you have competence and the work plan to implement it. Every research proposal must address the following:

what you plan to accomplish; why you want to do it; and how you plan going about it.

Components of a research Proposal

- Title
- Introduction
- Literature review (sometimes optional)
- Methodology
- Plan: time frame and schedule
- Budget



Session 3: HOW TO WRITE A SCHOLARLY PUBLICATION

According to one of my Teachers, Professor Arie Iserles—AI for short—of the University of Cambridge, “Happiness is writing a good paper/publication.” AI pointed out reasons why people write paper, although the first speaker has highlighted some. There are good reasons, and then we have the bad reasons. The bad reasons mostly lie in having the notion that “everybody else does it,” or as peculiar to most of us here, the thirst for wanting to have a dissertation and eventually, a Ph.D. or perhaps saying to yourself, “I have been doing research since, everyone should know I’m working now and my name should be on google.” There is this common saying, “if you don’t publish, you perish.” If you stand by this slogan and thus publish anything you like, you are wrong.

Although the aforementioned reasons seem quite alright, they just shouldn’t be primary objectives. The ultimate reason should be that you wish to communicate your ideas to other people. With this, you will have a good publication and reap every benefit that comes alongside one such publication. To consolidate this by quoting AI. “A good text is considered first and foremost from the point of view of its target.” To use an example, there are many books written on how to prepare for the TOEFL but I know for sure Scholar Katheer and Scholar Wasiu Alimi will recommend KAPLAN. Why? Perhaps because, of all the numerous available resources, KAPLAN is unique to

them. Scholar Ajiboye knows what to recommend for IELTS because having tried many resources, he was finally able to conclude on which is best. In essence, nobody has a God-given right to be read. It is your duty to persuade them that they should give time and attention to your paper.

So, how do I write a good paper? A Rule of Thumb: Ask yourself what sort of paper you would like to read and then, pen it down.

Reasons why people read paper:

If you know this, by implication, you know how to write one.

- Good Title and abstract: Prof AI relates a good title and an abstract to your shop window. Most potential readers browse journals, whether in a library or on the Internet, like shoppers on High Street. At this stage, the purpose of the exercise is to grab their attention sufficiently to motivate them to read on. A good title uses few well-chosen words to place your paper at a highly-visible corner of the scientific universe. Good abstract states clearly what is the subject area of the paper and its main results. Avoid using technical language and Don't try to prove you are linguist by using showy words. Your abstract should be understandable, not just to a few experts, but to everybody in its wider constituency. This is particularly important if the results are relevant beyond your narrow specialism. On no account should you use in the abstract (or the title), concepts that you define later in the paper. This is important.
AI continues, like in Highstreet, a major reason to pay attention to a product is because of its branding—in our context, this means the visibility and renown of the author(s). Of course, these are early days for you and, at this stage of your career, you are at a disadvantage, but remember that your papers now shape your future “brand.”
- So as to know what to write: It is good introduction. So you have tempted unwary shoppers to enter the shop, they browse around, finger the goods, enter the measuring booth; now you want them to commit themselves—AI states. Explain very clearly what exactly the problem you are addressing in the paper is, and why. Remember, you have worked on the wretched thing for months and months, for you the motivation is clear but you are trying to persuade people who, perhaps, never thought about your problem.
Place everything into context. You aren't the first to consider this problem, neither are you the first to say something worthwhile about it. Provide continuity with relevant previous work. Not everybody remembers everything in papers underlying your argument; and sending the hapless reader to consult five different references in each paragraph is anti-social—between me and you, they will not do it.
- Good Presentation: Plan in advance the structure of the paper: sections, subsections and their content. Structure should be logical. It should never follow specific personal meanderings of your research (i.e., your personal logic) but the logic of a person trying to assimilate this information.
Remember that research is non-linear, presentation however should be linear (*I'm sorry if you are not a mathematician*). Sections should not be too long and, as necessary, might be broken into subsections: information is absorbed better in digestible chunks. New concepts should be introduced at the point where they make sense and where their relevance is clear from the context.
Remember, language is the main tool to convey information; even if your native language isn't English, avoid poor or careless linguistic presentation. Be sensitive to the language, its grammar, idiom and cadences. Also, to make your presentation good, do not use google translate. Remember it does not give 100% translation.

With respect to our rule of thumb, a good reason why people read so as to know what to write is for relevance. Many publications are not accepted in international journals because we use embellishments. There are some jargons that are not meant to be on paper. During my M.Sc. at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, when it is time to show my work to my supervisor, I used to type every steps so as to make my work bulky (*remember, that was how we were mostly taught*). Alas, my supervisor would replace those lengthy steps with like a two-page calculation. Also when I was submitting my thesis, he said I should reduce my lengthy dissertation to like 60 pages as against the 90 I wrote. To them, quality is the key and not quantity. The reverse is quite the case in most Nigerian institutions. I could remember while submitting a paper to high rated journal, Nigeria was not among the country listed, the reason is quite obvious.

Now comes the question of “whether or not to write.” Al opined that there exists natural temptation to take any half-decent piece of research and use it like soup concentrate: add huge amounts of water and publish it as several incremental papers. By the end of your PhD you’ll have a long publication list, enough to impress the bureaucrat, the careless or the unwary—but no professional will fall for it!

Unless you have something both new and substantive to say, don’t say it. “Good reputations are built on good publications, not on plentiful publications.” Al said, “If more than a third of your paper is devoted to reviewing your former work, rather than to new results, you probably don’t have enough *meat* to justify a paper, and referees will notice it.” If that is clear, you must read your draft over and over again. Correct it, give it to colleagues for their reaction, then correct it again. Even before you send the paper to a journal, it is a good idea to share it on your (or your group’s) website. You may also deposit it in one of subject-specific internet archives, e.g. ArXiv. Also as a graduate, we must have an account on websites like research gate and the likes.

Prof says “you can let interested parties (or appropriate websites) know about your draft and send them the abstract. But unless you are completely confident that they will welcome it, don’t jam their in-boxes with your source file. They will not thank you for this.”

How to Choose a Journal to Send Your Paper

Not all journals are equal. I can't say because I want people to become familiar with my town, then I send my work to *Iseyin Journal of Mathematics*. If *Foworogi Journal* is not well known, don't send there. It is surprisingly easy to publish in a mediocre journal but becomes increasingly difficult the higher you go in respectability stakes. It is a good idea to ask around and to form your own impressions: Where have you seen the best papers? Which journals are referenced more frequently? Have a look at editorial boards, both to discern quality and to identify editors with an expertise to handle your papers. So, should you submit to the best journal? Not necessarily, unless your paper is of the highest quality—and it is good to consult experts on that, not just relying on your intuition. However, unless you feel confident to submit to a good journal, you shouldn’t have probably written the paper in the first place.

Furthermore, don't be derailed with rejection—*Love Letter* as it is fondly called. A friend once sent a paper in the morning and it got rejected at night. Al equates rejection with dejection, your natural defense mechanisms will kick in: the referees were ignorant, the editor a prat, the editor-in-chief high-handed. This might or might not be the case. Yet, you should not jump into two extreme alternatives: neither should you send the paper at once to a different journal nor give up research altogether.

Read carefully the reports. Not everything in a referee report is the gospel truth, but usually referees make important points. Also, take it as an axiom: If the referee misunderstood you, this is your fault. Next time, explain better and more clearly. Write a new, revised version of the paper, taking on board all valid criticisms. This might require more research or computation—do it anyway.

AI advised to never resubmit to the same journal or argue with editors. Submit to a different journal, but only once you are confident that your paper is genuinely better; the chances of it reaching the same referee again are non-negligible.

At the Revision Stage: resist two natural temptations, either to revise and reply by return of post or to put the job to the side (after all, you are busy with something new and exciting!), where it will languish until further notice. Read very carefully the referee reports and the editorial letter. Address each issue therein and carefully prepare a revision.

Acceptance: It happens very rarely that a paper is accepted at once in a quality journal but eventually, hopefully, after a round or two of revision, you'll receive an "I am delighted to let you know" letter—the *Romance Letter*. Now, your labour is not over yet; after final acceptance, update your CV and publications' list. And then, few months later, you'll open a fresh, nice-smelling volume and there goes your paper smiling at you. Now feeling accomplished, you'll realise that "Happiness is writing paper."

Reference:

Arieh Iserles. (2014). How to Write a Paper.

Q & A

Q. "On no account should u use in the abstract (or the title!) concepts that you define later in the paper." Please can you explain this further, does this mean the keyword in the title should not be defined in the paper?

A. According to the Prof AI, Yes! Though it may not necessarily be keyword sir. It may just be a concept you will later give proper attention while writing. In essence, abstract should be so clear and easy to understand even to a lay man in your area.

