



My Ph.D. Success Story at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana [2019-2023]

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Keywords: Agricultural; Programme; University; Vice-Chancellors

Abbreviations: GTA: Graduate Teaching Assistant; RUFORUM: Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture; SGS: School of Graduate Studies.

Editorial

I am Dr. Philip J. Kamanda, a Sierra Leonean, Ghanaian-trained academic, and lecturer at Njala University in Sierra Leone. In addition, I am a proud and fine alumnus of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. As a former Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) in the Agricultural Economics and Extension Department at the University of Cape Coast, my Ph.D. journey commenced in the 2019/2020 academic year with a two-semester coursework totaling seven courses. After my coursework in my first year of study, I successfully defended my research proposal and left for Sierra Leone in early February 2021 for field data collection.

Back in Ghana in mid-April 2021, I started teaching both undergraduate and graduate students in my second year of study at varying levels at the same university. For all RUFORUM GTAs, teaching stands to be a core mandate during our study period in our respective host universities. In my second year, I actively combined teaching and inputting my research data for analysis. This was followed by writing my thesis and publishing research articles. On 20th October 2022, I submitted my completed thesis to the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) for assessment, and on 17th, April 2023, I successfully defended my thesis. This success came

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Volume 8 Issue 3

Received Date: September 21, 2023

Published Date: September 28, 2023

DOI: [10.23880/oajar-16000319](https://doi.org/10.23880/oajar-16000319)

as a combined effort of the competence and guidance of my supervisory team in the persons of Prof. Ernest Laryea Okorley (Principal supervisor) and Dr. Albert Obeng Mensah (Co-supervisor). I therefore taught up to the first semester of my fourth year.

Like many other financially challenged GTAs under the RUFORUM programme, my study was seriously constrained by the non-compliance of my sending university (Njala University) to the tripartite contract we signed following my nomination as a GTA. This was due to the sudden termination of the services of the then Vice-Chancellor and Principal who signed my contract as a legal document. This happened three months after the commencement of my study in Ghana. Thereafter, the commitment by the successive Vice-Chancellors and Principals of my sending university to pay my monthly stipend was truncated without recourse to the other two parties (Host University and myself). Nonetheless, I painstakingly managed to complete my programme in three and a half years under very severe financial situations coupled with the very many seemingly insurmountable endless family and other social issues I bore from home during my study period.

I am quite aware of the causes of the undue delays in graduating higher degree candidates in some African universities. The major ones in my view are the lack of monitoring of some supervisors and assessors/examiners of students' theses by the graduate schools for their total commitment. Secondly, the inability of the guidance and counseling units in some host universities to dialogue with the defaulting higher degree candidates also poses a key challenge.

This is why I am Particularly Grateful to RUFORUM for Changing the Narratives of the Prolonged Study Duration for Most Useful Academics

As a victim of such protracted circumstances, I have personally experienced a situation at Njala University in Sierra Leone where I barely managed to complete my MPhil. degree with fatigue in the eighth year of study (2011-2019) through the intervention of a third supervisor. In addition, I also saw that time when Ph.D. candidates spent a decade or more to complete their studies. Generally, I believe that the timely completion of higher degree programmes especially a Ph.D. is unconnected with four key factors that may be considered as recommendations for the concerned university authorities to look into. These include;

- The Supervisor factors (his/her level of professionalism, competence, responsiveness to student's submission,

- patience, and commitment to the supervision process);
- The Student factors (his/her readiness to independently learn and to meet deadlines);
- The relationship factor (a serene type between the candidate and the supervisors); and
- The prevailing socio-economic conditions of the candidate during the study.

Provided all of the aforementioned factors are favorable, it is highly likely for an MPhil/ Ph.D. candidate to complete his/her study programme on time. The slightest deviation from any of these factors will certainly delay the timely completion of a higher degree programme.

Therefore, MPhil./Ph.D degrees can be attained in two to three years respectively, or more based on the institution, the prevailing socio-economic circumstances, and the resources (human, financial, capital, etc.) that are available to the candidate.



To conclude, I hereby acknowledge God for perfecting this venture. Also, I generously thank my supervisory team for their immeasurable guidance and professionalism. The same gratitude goes to the University of Cape Coast administration for the full waiver of my fees, provision of my accommodation, office space with high speed internet connectivity, and free health care services. I also appreciate the Carnegie Corporation of New York for providing my research grant through RUFORUM, the Government of Sierra

Leone, and the Njala University administration for at least paying my salary for my survival and family.

"I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples."...Mother Theresa.

