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The making of an outstanding PhD programme

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Doctoral programmes must incorporate rigorous defence in order to combat plagiarism and pay for fake writing. FILE PHOTO | NMG

In the world of doctoral degrees, not all PhDs are created equal. In the past two weeks, Business Talk covered what to look for in choosing a business school and a doctoral supervisor. Now, let us delve into specifics to ask your desired prospective doctoral programmes.

A doctoral student desires a programme that holds the highest standards of academic rigour combined with appropriate programmatic structure. Often programmes excel in one area and flounder in the other. The worst programmes fail in both areas.

First, academic rigour must hold prominence in your PhD selection. The learner should not desire a glorified secondary school-style doctorate just to put a fake “Dr” before their name. Employers and quality universities are not fooled by dismal doctoral programmes for job applicants.

Please find the following factors that indicate whether your programme holds academic rigour. There exists a difference between academic research and journalistic investigations or novel case studies.

Too often, masters and doctoral theses fall into the latter two categories. A programme must make sure the study problem is researchable. When students choose any research problems, the hypotheses need faculty input in order to approach the topic scientifically.

Does the research underpinning the doctoral theses appear within the last five years and in the top 20 journals in the field? Check journal rankings per discipline here:

<http://www.scimagojr.com/journalrank.php>.

Can doctoral students and faculty have a debate about methodology, literature, conceptual framework or is there generally only one approved or standard way of conducting the doctoral research?

Straightjacketed single-method required doctoral research often originates from a lack of rigour or understanding of multiple research techniques.

Towards the end of any doctoral programme, rigorous programmes require their students to verbally defend their dissertation to external and internal examiners.

Low rigour programmes hold a defence that has an external examiner only reviewing the written dissertation and sending in written comments or internal faculty giving verbal comments but the student does not need to orally defend or explain anything in response to the inquisition.

Doctoral students only giving presentations on their dissertation highlights should be viewed with extreme caution. All students should especially defend why and how the quantitative and/or qualitative analysis were done.

Otherwise, many students just pay outsider third parties to do the work. Doctoral programmes must incorporate real rigorous defence in order to combat plagiarism and pay for fake writing.

READ: [What to look out for when choosing a PhD programme](#)

Next, in statistical terms, variables representing multiple constructs that load on multiple factors in an exploratory factor analysis cannot be collapsed and used as one variable.

This happens frequently in Kenyan doctoral programmes. An example entails if a student combines employee job satisfaction, company performance, and employee organisation commitment into one dependent variable.

In rigorous doctoral programmes such variables cannot be lumped together and instead must each be treated statistically different as three distinct dependent variables or as mediating variables and dependent variable combinations.

While it may sound complicated, every business-based doctoral student should easily understand the difference mentioned above.

Furthermore, quantitative doctoral theses with sole analysis done within SPSS using only the multiple regression feature without any additional plug-ins (like the MACRO free plug-in), add-ons, or additional pricey software such as AMOS or Mplus is likely to be too basic for a rigorous dissertation and is in actuality more similar to a master's project.

Additional, prospective doctoral candidates should investigate the programmatic structure that will help foster discipline throughout the research process.

Programmes with numerous intermediate deadlines prove good for students and faculty alike. A doctoral candidates can often get lost amidst the freedom in a loose structure and therefore delay in providing results on their dissertations.

Does the doctoral programme allow students to conduct live practice for their vivas or defence? Students should choose programmes that provide applied practice so as to help students instead of programmes that sit back and take pleasure in their students' suffering.

Next, good programmes allow doctoral students the ability to rate supervisors. Rating undergraduate and masters lecturers is well established in higher education.

However, allowing feedback and ratings from students on doctoral supervisors is less common. But programmes must hold supervisors accountable to meeting students and responding to inquiries within reasonable time frames.

Finally, students should also hold the ability to periodically and anonymously rate programme heads. The reviews of doctoral heads or chairs should go to an independent university department to investigate.