

Proposal-Grant Writing Skills, A Veritable Tool for Academic Success of Graduate Students

¹Kalu, U. Okey, ²Udeala Richard C, & ³Nwobi, Augustina U

¹Department of Civil Engineering, University of Nigeria, Nsukka ulu.kalu@unn.edu.ng

²Civil Engineering Technology Department, Federal Polytechnic, Ukana. Akwa-ibom state, Nigeria

³Department of Technology & Vocational Education, Enugu State University of Science & Technology

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ABSTRACT: *The study focused on proposal grant writing as a veritable tool academic success of postgraduate students in universities. Two research questions were answered and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population for the study was 65 senior faculty members of the department of English & Literary studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) and Enugu State University of Science & Technology (ESUT). Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. Two experts validated the instrument for data collection. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined by the use of Cronbach alpha reliability method and 0.76 reliability coefficient was obtained. The data generated were analyzed using mean to answer research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed that good knowledge of proposal grant writing skills such as research skills, writing skills and analytical skills is a prerequisite for a successful postgraduate studies in universities. Acquisition of good writing skills enhances chances of research funding, increases scholar's visibility, creates collaborative research networks and fosters employment opportunities in industries and academic institutions for graduate students. It was recommended that Postgraduate studies management should regularly conduct training sessions, workshops, and seminars on proposal grant writing for graduate students. These sessions would provide valuable insights, practical tips, and guidance from experienced professionals. It was also recommended that graduate students should learn the culture of sharing their proposals for grant funding with mentors, or professionals experienced in grant writing. Soliciting their feedbacks and suggestions for improvement would enhance the quality of the proposal.*

KEYWORDS: proposal-grant, writing skills, graduate students, academic success, tools

INTRODUCTION

Postgraduate students commonly known as graduate students are group of individuals (male & female) who have completed their undergraduate studies and have chosen to pursue advanced education in a specific field in the university. Graduate studies offer students the opportunity to deepen their knowledge base, develop specialized skills, and engage in advanced research within their chosen discipline (Uzoagulu, 2011). This type of programme typically lead to the award of master's degree or a doctoral degree such as PhD. Graduate students are often involved in various academic activities which includes attending to advanced coursework, conducting independent researches, and working as teaching or research assistance. Other activities graduate students can be involved include presenting intelligent research findings in conferences, and publishing their findings in academic journals (Eze, 2015).

Graduate students works closely with faculty members who serve as advisors or mentors, guiding them through their research and academic pursuits. Nevertheless, graduate studies provide a platform for students to specialize and contribute to the existing body of knowledge through research. It prepares students for careers in academia, research, industry, or other professional fields that requires advanced expertize. Graduate students are also expected to demonstrate a high level of intellectual ability, critical thinking, and independent research skills.

Success in graduate studies according to Rao & Durga (2010) requires a combination of academic, personal, and professional skills. These skills are as discussed briefly below;

- **Research skills:** the ability to conduct thorough and relevant research is crucial for success in postgraduate studies. The research skills include the ability to design experiments, gather and analyze data, and interpret results. Others are ability to review existing empirical studies, and identifying sources that align with research objectives.
- **Analytical skills:** This refer to the ability to gather, interpret, evaluate information or data to identify patterns, solve problems, make informed decisions, and draw meaningful conclusions (Nworgu, 2015). These skills are highly valued in the academic domain. It requires critical thinking which involves objectively analyzing information, questioning assumptions, and evaluating the validity and reliability of data or evidence. It also, involves the ability to work with data, apply statistical methods, and use software tools to analyze and interpret data sets. Analytical skill plays a crucial role in making informed decisions. By providing individuals the opportunity to weigh various options, consider potential outcomes, most viable course of action is chosen. Developing and honing analytical skills would greatly enhance problem-solving abilities, contribute to evidence based decision-making, and foster success in a wide range of fields (Sim, 2010).

- **Writing skills:** Writing skills encompasses the ability to effectively communicate ideas, information, and thoughts through the written word. Strong writing skill is valuable in various contexts. Good writing skills are clear and coherent. It involves structuring sentences and paragraphs effectively to convey its meaning. It involves as well, the solid understanding of grammar rules and proper punctuation usages. Writing considers the target audience needs and expectations. Development of strong writing skills is a prerequisite for successful completion of graduate studies.
- **Budgeting and Financial management skills:** Graduate students are required to possess strong knowledge of budgeting, including estimating project costs, justifying expenses, and managing funds efficiently. Basic knowledge of budget and finance enables the graduate student to make better financial decisions, and achieve both short term and long term financial goals while undergoing the course of study.
- **Organizational skills:** organizational skill is the ability to manage time, resources, and tasks in achieving set goals and maintaining order. It involves effectively managing and prioritizing tasks, setting deadlines, and allocating time for different activities required for the successful completion of the programme. A well utilized organizational skill can enhance academic productivity at a reduced stress.
- **Communication skills:** Communication skills include the ability to listen attentively, make concise and intelligent verbal expression, convey information and ideas through written words, and deliver presentations effectively (Badger & Goodith, 2016). These skills which enhances successful completion of postgraduate studies can be acquired through attendance to workshops, courses, and conferences.

It is believed that the acquisition of the mentioned skills by graduate students will guarantee academic success together with preparing the student for future career opportunities and personal growth. Such career opportunities according to Sarka & Dave (2022), include ability to secure funding for research projects through grant writing, expansion of professional networks, and strengthening of academic and research credentials.

Proposal-grant writing is the process of preparing and submitting proposals in an attempt to securing funding from grant making organizations. The grant making organizations could include; government agencies, foundations, corporations, or nonprofit entities (Odigbo & Osuagwu, 2003). Grants are typically awarded to support projects or initiatives that align with the mission and goals of the funding agency. Writing a good grant proposal as a graduate student involves careful planning, research, and effective communication. This is because grant writing follows some specified guidelines which are most times outlined by the seeding agency. The grant proposal typically includes an executive summary, project description, methodology, evaluation plan, and budget justification. Others include, supporting documents which contains the significance, impact, and feasibility of the project (Cole & Feng, 2015).

It therefore follows that writing good grant proposals have the potentials of enhancing graduate student's academic success. The identified academic success potentials are as follows:

- ***Provision of Funding for researches and projects:*** Grant writing allows graduate students the opportunity to secure funding to support their research, projects and academic initiatives. It provides financial resources for data collection, equipment procurement, travel expenses, materials, and other related costs. With this provisions, graduate students can conduct high-quality researches thereby achieving academic goals.
- ***Provision of opportunities for collaboration:*** Grant writing often presents collaboration opportunities with other researchers, institutions, and organizations (Reads, 2010). It allows academia to work in synergy with experts in the specific areas of specialization to leverage on resources and develop ideas which could lead to further discoveries.
- ***Provision of Professional development opportunities:*** Engaging in grant writing activities allows graduate students to develop and refine professional skills. These skills are valuable both in securing funds and academic writing, publishing research papers to contribute to academic knowledge, and presenting findings in conferences.
- ***Sharpens recognition and prestige:*** Securing grants and successfully completing funded projects can enhance an academic reputation and prestige of graduate students within their field of practice. Grant awards according to Onozawa (2010) serve as a recognition of an academic expertise, innovative ideas, and potentials to contribute to discipline growth. This recognition can lead to increased visibility, collaboration opportunities, invitations to speak at conferences, and other professional networking benefits.
- ***Creation of career advancement & job opportunities:*** Grant writing experience can enhance an individual's resume and therefore increases their competitiveness for academic positions & promotions. Demonstration of competency in grant writing showcases a graduate student's ability to secure funding, manage research projects, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge. Furthermore, grant writing have the tendency of opening opportunities for faculty positions, research fellowships, or any other leadership roles within the academic institutions or seeding agencies.

Since grant writing have the potentials to enhance academic success of graduate students by providing financial support, fostering collaboration, enabling publication for recognition, developing essential skills necessary to create opportunities for career advancement, its acquisition cannot be over emphasized. Streamlining the significance of proposal grant writing for successful postgraduate studies is the contribution of the study to knowledge.

Statement of the Problem

Evidences abound of the under performances of postgraduate students in proposal and research grant writing enterprise. Among the several factors accounted for this ugly state, poor writing skills and lack of experience have been attributed to be the most critical. The situation is worsened by paucity of mentorship, guidance and inadequate training opportunities on writing skills which is one of the reliable means of mastering communication competency. However, literature is replete with evidences of graduate students lack of writing skills, implying that this ugly situation may remain unchanged as the solution to the problem is not at sight. Thus, the problem of the study is: Does the acquisition of proposal grant writing skills enhance the academic success of graduate students in universities?

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to determine the credibility of the knowledge of proposal grant writing skills in enhancing academic success of graduate students.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine common proposal grant writing skills needed by graduate students to succeed in postgraduate studies in universities.
2. Examine the significance of acquisition of proposal grant writing skills on graduate students in universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the common proposal grant writing skills needed by graduate students to succeed in postgraduate studies in universities?
2. What are the significance of the acquisition of proposal grant writing skills on graduate students in universities?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the ratings of male and female lecturers on the common proposal grant writing skills needed by graduate students to succeed in postgraduate studies in universities.

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the ratings of male and lecturers on the significance of the acquisition of proposal grant writing skills on graduate students in universities.

METHOD

Descriptive survey design style was adopted for the conduct of the study. The choice of the design agreed with Eze (2015) who revealed that descriptive survey design is useful in exploring people's perceptions, opinions and preferences towards problems. More so, the design ensures extensive data collection flexibility and analysis. The researchers sought the expert opinion of senior faculty

members of the departments of English & Literary Studies, university of Nigeria Nsukka, & Enugu State University of Science and Technology to determine the credibility of proposal grant writing in enhancing graduate students success.

Area of the Study

The study covered Enugu state. Enugu state is one of the states in South-Eastern Nigeria located at the foot of the Udi Plateau. The state shares boundaries with Abia and Imo states to the south, Ebonyi state to the east, Benue state to the northeast, Kogi state to the northwest and Anambra to the west. The state is located at 6°30N of Equator and 7°30E of Latitude. The major economic activities in Enugu state is coal mining and provision of services. The state is predominantly rural and agrarian.

Population for the Study

The population for the study was comprised of lecturers from the two major public universities in the state. In ensuring a representative sample was selected from the population, the researchers defined specific selection criteria used in selecting participants for the study. Lecturers from the rank of a senior lecturer and above, with proven record of competency in proposal grant writing were considered the base selection criterion for participants for the study. A total of 65 were purposefully selected.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. It consists of three sections. Section A sought personal information from respondents which included; gender & rank. Section B contained 10 items specifically aimed at determining the common proposal grant writing skills needed by graduate students to succeed in postgraduate studies. whereas, section C also contained 10 items aimed at establishing the significance of acquiring proposal grant writing skills. The questionnaire was structured along five point likert scale.

Validation of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity. This was done to ensure that the entire questions covered the range of meanings included with the concept. It further ensured that, the research instrument relates to the statement of the problem, research questions and purpose of the study. Draft copies of the instrument were given to two professors of English and Literary studies in the department, University of Nigerian Nsukka. The expert's suggestions and recommendations were incorporated into the final draft of the questionnaire instrument. Cronbach Alpha value obtained from the instruments reliability test yielded 0.76

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. The analysis was carried out using SPSS v-25. Raw data was first coded and fed into the SPSS programme. Mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics were used to analyze the data. The cut-off set for accepting or rejecting an item was set at 3.50. this implies that, items with mean values of 3.50 and above were accepted while, items below mean value of 3.50 were rejected. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05% level of significance. Anytime the t-value is equal or greater than the p-critical (0.05), the null hypothesis will be accepted. The null hypotheses will be rejected whenever the t-value becomes less than the p-critical value. Out of 65 questionnaires distributed, all were retrieved making up a 100% return rate.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean and SD ratings of male and female lecturers on common proposal grant writing skills required by graduate students to succeed in postgraduate studies. (N=65)

S/N	Item statements	Mean	SD
1.	Competent in research skills	3.66	0.48
2.	Good knowledge of analytical skills	3.67	0.47
3.	Competent reportage skills	3.88	0.80
4.	Competent writing skills	3.66	0.45
5.	Good knowledge of proposal structure	3.34	0.47
6.	Good knowledge of budget estimation	3.87	0.81
7.	Good knowledge of financial planning	3.17	0.80
8.	Competent networking skills	3.68	0.46
9.	Knowledgeable in proposal evaluation	3.35	0.48
10.	Knowledgeable in proposal organization	3.58	1.16

Table 1 shows the responses of senior faculty members of the department of English & Literary Studies on the needed skills required to write effective proposal grants. The respondents agreed to all the items shown in the table 1 except items 5 & 7. The findings based on the 3.50 baseline for agreement, revealed that the selected lecturers have a common view on the relevant proposal grant writing skills needed by graduate students to make success in graduate studies. The skills included research skills, writing skills, reporting and analytical skills amongst others.

Table 2: T-test on the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on common proposal grant writing skills needed for a successful graduate studies in universities.

Lecturers	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-test	df	Sig.	Dec.
Male	40	3.68	0.20	2.50	63	0.120	Do not reject H ₀₁
Female	25	3.36	0.25				

The t-value for the difference in mean ratings of male and female lecturers on common proposal grant writing skills needed for successful graduate studies in universities was 2.50 significant at 0.120 level of significance. This value is higher than the set level of significance of 0.05 for the study. The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected. This suggests that lecturers hold same opinion on the common proposal grant writing skills needed by graduate students.

Table 3: Mean and SD ratings of male and female lecturers on the significance of acquisition of proposal grant writing skills to graduate students in the universities. (N=65)

S/N	Item statements	Mean	SD
11.	Assurance of research funding	4.97	0.24
12.	Guarantee production of high quality research work	3.64	0.47
13.	Assures increased research opportunities	3.66	0.46
14.	Enables writing skill development	3.54	0.43
15.	Fosters networking opportunities	3.67	0.48
16.	Provides opportunities for research collaboration	3.66	0.46
17.	Provides recognition	3.67	0.45
18.	Assurance of increased scholarly profile through publications	3.88	0.81
19.	Strengthens graduate student curriculum vitae	4.97	0.25
20.	Increases competitiveness for academic positions	3.87	0.81

Table 3 shows respondents mean ratings on the significance of proposal grant writing skill acquisition to graduate student's success in universities, using the 3.50 cut-off point as basis for agreement on the skills. From the mean responses observed above, the respondents agreed on all the items as being significance to graduate students to make success in postgraduate studies.

Table 4: T-test on the mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the significance of the acquisition of proposal grant writing skills to graduate student's postgraduate success

Lecturers	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-test	df	Sig.	Dec.
Male	40	4.05	0.18	0.93	63	0.762	Do not reject H ₀₂
Female	25	3.68	0.19				

The t-value for the difference in mean ratings of male and female lecturers on the significance of acquisition of proposal grant writing skills in enhancing graduate student success was 0.930 significant at 0.762 level of significance. This value is higher than 0.05 level of significance set for the study. The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected. This indicates that lecturers agreed on the itemized significance of proposal grant writing in enhancing graduate students success in postgraduate studies.

DISCUSSION

Graduate students progress in the pursuance of postgraduate studies solely depends on the degree of research skills available to them. These skills encompass analytical, writing, reportage, networking skills and many more as evidence Table 1. Null hypothesis one in Table 2 was accepted in the test of skill significance, this suggested that proposal grant writing skills acquisition is the gateway for a successful graduate studies of graduate students. The study revealed that graduate student inability to learn the mastery of proposal grant writing was attributed to the paucity of mentorship by supervisors and scarce writing skill training opportunities. This finding is congruent with Odigbo & Osuagwu (2003) that reported that basic knowledge of research skills, analytical skills and writing skills are prerequisites for a successful graduate studies by university graduate students.

The findings on the significance of acquisition of proposal grant writing in enhancing graduate studies of students in Table 3 revealed that, good knowledge of proposal grant writing skills ensures students research funding, strengthens student's visibility and resume, and provides opportunities for research collaboration and employment amongst others. The null hypothesis two on Table 4 was equally accepted by the respondents. This indicates that acquisition of proposal grant writing leads to the promotion of professional skill development. These findings are in agreement with Kreiser (2019) and Sim (2010) that competency in writing skills guarantee the production of high quality research works which thereby, increases opportunities for collaborative researches.

CONCLUSION

The study validated the significance of proposal grant writing skills as a panacea for graduate student's success in the universities. The study highlighted common proposal grant writing skills whose acquisition through mentorship and training opportunities enhances graduate student's good performance in postgraduate studies. The findings of the study suggested that proposal grant writing training should be encouraged in the universities as its significance is immeasurable. It is the believe of the researcher that, by strengthening proposal grant writing skills among graduate students, timely completion of graduate studies would be actualized.

Recommendations

Since improving acquisition of proposal grant writing requires the combination of knowledge, practice, and ongoing learning, the following recommendations are therefore made based on the findings of the study;

1. Postgraduate studies management should regularly conduct training sessions, workshops, and seminars on proposal grant writing for graduate students. These sessions would provide valuable insights, practical tips, and guidance from experienced professionals.
2. Graduate students should learn the culture of sharing their proposals for grant funding with mentors, or professionals experienced in grant writing. Soliciting their feedbacks and suggestions for improvement would enhance the quality of the proposal.
3. Graduate students should also learn to review successful grant proposals in terms of its structure, writing style, and strategies employed. Identifying what made the proposal effective, would enhance writing a fundable proposal.

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