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**L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
A África e os desafios do Século XXI**

إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

**“Interrogating the Quality of Postgraduate Research in
African Universities Today: Some Reflections from an Examiner”**

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Abstract

Transitions in higher education constitute a major challenge facing the Africa continent today. As the number of entrants at the tertiary level of education has continued to grow without a corresponding growth in infrastructural facilities (e.g. lecture theaters, laboratories, libraries, and faculty offices) and other important resources (such as finance and qualified human resources) that are central to quality learning and training, the quality of higher education in most African countries has been on the decline. Of major concern is the quality of postgraduate training which is pertinent to the attainment of quality higher education and training. Quality postgraduate training programs are the seedbeds for future knowledge growers (scholars, and/or researchers) policy shapers, and academics.

An important feature of postgraduate training is postgraduate research, in the forms of projects, dissertations and theses. For such research to perform its role effectively, its quality must remain under constant monitoring (or surveillance). This study is designed to analyze the quality of postgraduate research produced by institutions of higher learning in Africa today utilizing examiner's reports emanating from the external moderation of 93 masters and 10 doctoral dissertations and/or theses over a period of 10 years. The objective will be as to identify the major challenges facing postgraduate research as well as to recommend possible interventions. Of the master's level research reports, 55 had been submitted as partial fulfillment for the Master of Arts (MA) degree in Sociology while the remaining 38 were in fulfillment of the Master of Philosophy (M-Phil) degree in Sociology. On the other hand, eight (8) of the doctoral dissertations were in the discipline of Sociology, one (1) in Education and one (1) in Peace Studies. The dissertations and theses are drawn from 10 universities spread across the Eastern, Western and Southern African regions. Most of the universities are well established institutions that at one time or another were of reputable standing in the African continent.

A content analysis of the various reports will be undertaken to assess the overall quality of postgraduate dissertations and theses and the factors influencing that quality. Because the study will mainly involve the content analysis of reports, the results to be presented will mainly be of a qualitative nature. To provide a summative measure of quality, the study will rely on the recommendation made by the examiner with respect to each dissertation or thesis. Specifically, the following five categories of recommendations which were at the

examiner's disposal will be utilized: 'Accept as submitted', 'accept with minor corrections', 'accept (award degree) after major corrections and/or revisions', 'revise and resubmit for further examination', and 'not to be accepted for the degree'. Whereas dissertations and/or theses receiving the first recommendation will be rated excellent, those receiving the second, third, and fourth recommendations will be rated good, satisfactory and poor, respectively. On the other hand, dissertations receiving the fifth (final) recommendation will be rated as very poor.