

Role of Examiners in Research based Degrees

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Outline of Session

- Role and Responsibilities of Examiner
- Process for Examination of Thesis - 2 stage process
 1. Report after examine thesis
 2. Viva voce – Oral examination on the research
- Academic standards – PhD
- Report Preparation
- Tips for Viva Voce
- Guidelines for Recommendations

Question?

What is a thesis?

1. A statement or theory that is put forward as a premise to be maintained or proved - “his central thesis is that psychological life is not part of the material world”

Synonyms: theory, contention, argument, line of argument, proposal, proposition, premise, assumption, presumption, hypothesis, postulation, surmise, supposition

2. A long essay or dissertation involving personal research, written by a candidate for a university degree. “ a doctoral thesis”

Synonyms: dissertation, essay, paper, treaties, disquisition, composition, monograph, study, piece of writing

PhD thesis

- Opens a new area
- Provides unifying framework
- Resolves long-standing question
- Thoroughly explores area
- Contradicts existing knowledge
- Experimentally validates theory
- Produces ambitious system
- Provides empirical data
- Derives superior algorithms
- Develops new methodology
- Develops new tool
- Produces negative result

Due to Alan Newell?

Examiners' Job - What it entails?

- Examiner job is to consider whether the information, arguments and results presented in the thesis (the research work) meet academic standards relevant to the degree
- Examiner is required to produce an independent report without any consultation to the department/university of the candidate
- Examiner may be required to attend the viva voce of the candidate through suitable platforms (face to face in-situ, via electronic means, etc)

Examination and Viva

- Typical doctoral examination process - a thesis is usually examined by **internal** and **external** examiners
- Nominated based on four criteria:
 - **Experience** in examining
 - **Expertise**
 - **Reputation**
 - **Publications**
- In general, three examiners are invited to respond so that the university will have the benefit of a range of examiners' reports.

Being an Examiner

- When asked to be examiner – good to accept
- Indication of peer esteem – peers in your field recognize you as expert
- Helps enhance your supervisory skills – gives insights into doctoral process and expected standards in a thesis
- Can compare reports and enhances our experience as supervisors
- If feel not comfortable, insufficient expertise, cannot examine within time frame , don't jeopardise candidate's journey – **Reject the offer!**

Examining A Thesis

- **First impression** of a thesis counts!
- Examiners - overview of the entire thesis - quick scan of abstract and table of contents, introduction, and conclusion
- Argument of the thesis ideally should be clear from the abstract, introduction and conclusion
- **Experienced examiners** - read the introduction and the concluding chapters first
- Have some judgment by the end of the second chapter

Examiner's Report

- Comprehensive evaluation report produced to evaluate quality of work that student has demonstrated
- Examiner expected to examine the evidences relating to the training and actual research process undergone relevant to area of study
- Examiner should consider original evidences and critical judgment of the work
- Thesis should contribute to advancement of knowledge, contain original work, worthy of publication
- Examiner convinced it is candidate's own work and mastered the body of knowledge from clear concise writing

Examining A Thesis

- Summative assessment - make a judgment whether thesis has met the standards established by the discipline and the university for the award of the degree :
 - **accept the thesis as it stands**
 - **accept with minor revisions**
 - **accept with major revisions,**
 - **resubmission or fail**
- Developmental/formative component - examiners provide feedback to assist the candidate to revise the thesis so that it meets the expected standard.

Examining a Thesis

- Feedback in the assessment is important
- Candidate will only be awarded the degree if she or he succeeds in closing the gap between actual and desired performance, between submitted draft of the thesis and the final one
- Need to emphasize the role of feedback in the postgraduate thesis examination process
- Has implications for all parties involved in the examination process, examiners, university, supervisors and candidates alike.

Examining a Thesis

- Keep in mind the following points:-
- If the student has achieved a goal, for example written a critical literature review, praise the student for a job well done.
- If the student has not achieved a goal, i.e. not written a critical literature review, make suggestions as to how this can be done.
- Making a statement like – the literature review is not critical, is not going to help the candidate or the supervisor.
- Must give clear feedback always

What is meaning of viva voce?

- Origin of VIVA VOCE
- Medieval Latin, **“with the living voice”** First Known Use: 1563

- Definition of VIVA VOCE

: by word of mouth : orally

An oral examination, typically for an academic qualification: candidates may be called for a viva voce [MASS NOUN]: assessment of the PhD is by thesis and viva voce

The Viva

- Viva voce or normally called the viva refers to examination conducted by speech - other terms oral, oral test, oral interview or oral examination.
- Viva serves 3 (three) main purposes:
 1. Examination
 2. Developmental
 3. Tradition

Viva as Examination

- Examine thesis for originality, contribution to knowledge
- Ability of student to demonstrate mastery of materials and has command of oral medium and content
- Viva aims to locate the research in a broader context
- Check the understanding of the student, ability to present research, defend the thesis, respond to criticism and to enable the student to clarify areas of weakness



Viva as Developmental

- Second purpose of the viva is to provide 2 (two) types of development to candidate
- First type is basic development. This means that the aim of the viva is to raise the standard of the thesis to an acceptable level - could include rewriting certain sections for clarity or adding in current references.
- Second type of development is advanced development - means that the examiners are satisfied with the quality of the thesis
- Viva seen as a platform to provide guidance on publication, future research and collaborative research (perhaps with the examiners)

Viva as Tradition

- Third purpose of the viva is to adhere to a ritual or a tradition
- All universities in Malaysia require a viva. It is considered a formal gate keeping process and it varies among institutions
- In Malaysia –candidates or the supervisors are not provided copies of the examination reports prior to the viva
- Some countries (e.g. New Zealand), both supervisors and candidates are given the reports few weeks before viva to enable them to prepare for the viva - not seen as an examination but more of development

Questions During Viva

- Research on the patterns of questions asked during viva - examiners focus on five key areas:
 - conceptualization of the thesis (conceptual framework, theoretical framework)
 - doctorate level achievement (filling the gap in knowledge)
 - professional relevance (link between professional knowledge and thesis)
 - content (relation between previous study and current study)
 - methodology (choice of methodology)



Questions During Viva

- Experienced examiners focus on doctorate level achievement by asking questions on the contribution to knowledge and critique of research
- Inexperienced examiners, however, focus more on trivial things such as focusing only on minor errors and being confrontational with the candidate and other examiners.

Tips to be Oral Examiner

- Adopt a friendly “developmental” approach to questioning
- Restate questions if a candidate misunderstood the meaning
- Rephrase questions to ensure the candidate understands
- Start with questions that the candidate can answer
- Could include praise on achievements e.g. I like what you did here as it provides a clear understanding of the concept, however, I am a little confused in this section. Can you help me understand this part?
- Do not make fun of the supervisors

Tips to be Oral Examiner

- Allow student to take a break if necessary
- do not engage in an argument with other examiners in front of the candidate
- Research indicates that examiners do differ in opinions. Be willing to change your views if necessary
- Provide developmental advice to the candidate
- Consider that the viva constitutes both assessment and feedback
- Do not just pass judgment but also provide clear guidance to assist the candidate to achieve the standards you are expecting.

PhD Assessment

PhD Graduate Attributes ([link to MQF Level 8 – Doctoral Degree](#))

A Doctoral Degree provides for the further enhancement of knowledge, skills and abilities obtained at the masters level. It generally provides the graduate with the abilities to conduct independent research and is conferred on students who are able to:

- i. Show a systematic comprehension and in depth understanding of a discipline and mastery of skills and research methods related to the field of study;
- ii. Show capabilities to generate, design, implement and adopt the integral part of research process with scholarly strength;

PhD Assessment

- iii. contribute to the original research that has broadened the boundary of knowledge through an in-depth dissertation, which has been presented and defended according to the international standards including writing in internationally refereed publications;
- iv. make critical analysis evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas;
- v. communicate with peers, scholarly communities and society at large concerning the field of expertise; and
- vi. promote the technological, social and cultural progress in a knowledge based society in the academic and professional contexts.

Industrial PhD Assessment

Industrial PhD Research Output

- Thesis
- Dissertation
- Innovative Products and Services
- Innovative Processes
- Publications and Research Reports
- Patent
- Copy-rights
- Drawings, blue-prints
- Potentially Commercialized Products and Services
- Etc.



Intellectual
Properties
Rights

Industrial PhD Assessment

Originality

(“contribution to knowledge” or “innovation to the body of knowledge”)

- **A new product or process (but need to show research process that led to it)**
- **New data (again need to show research process)**
- **New Theory**
- **Applying existing theory to a new field**
- **A new model or perspective**
- **A new research tool or method**
- **An original critique**
- **Developing new generalisable conclusions from existing data**
- **Original work within a larger predetermined programme**

Personal Statistics

PhD 2000 University of Birmingham
Till end 2017 (18 years post PhD)

21 PhD Graduates 18 Main + 3 Co-Supervisor

Currently **14 PhD Students** (Main) + 2 Co-Supervisor (1 in UTHM)

Master (Research) – 8 Completed

Internal Examiner – 19 PhD
Candidates

External Examiner – 20 PhD
External Examiner – 24 Masters

Chairman PhD Viva – 20 Candidates

Local Universities

USM

UKM

UM

UPM

UTHM

UTeM

UUM

MMU

UTP

Asia e-University

Foreign Universities

University of Grenoble France

Sant Langowal Institute of Engineering and Tech, Longowal, Punjab, India

Thank
you



WORK
SMART
AND NOT
HARD

Success is the result of perfection, hard
work, learning from failure, loyalty, and
persistence



- Colin Powell