

special feature

How UNIZIK awarded embattled lecturer, Ekemezie, PhD in one year

Samson Folarin

IF recent documents uncovered by *The PUNCH* are anything to go by, the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, may have awarded the embattled senior lecturer, Peter Ekemezie, a Doctor of Philosophy in 14 months.

According to a letter purportedly issued by the UNIZIK School of Postgraduate Studies, Ekemezie was offered admission into the Department of Pure and Industrial Chemistry, Faculty of Natural Sciences, on June 4, 2008.

He was subsequently issued a statement of result indicating that he completed his studies on August 3, 2009.

With these, he completed his PhD in one year and two months, against academic regulation of minimum of three years for a full-time programme.

Some professors, who spoke to our correspondent on the matter, said if true, the university's authorities had questions to answer as it implied a faulty academic system.

The National Universities Commission also says three years is the minimum.

Ekemezie has been facing prosecution for allegedly giving false information to the police and forging a BSc certificate.

He was also accused of plagiarising some academic works, with which he allegedly gained favours and promotion from UNIZIK.

Several committees set up by the institution to investigate the allegations of forgery and plagiarism gave indicting reports.

Despite these, UNIZIK refused to act, as the immediate past vice-chancellor of the university, Prof. Joseph Ahaneku, allegedly covered him up.

There were also alleged cases of obtaining by false pretences involving Ekemezie, two of which were earlier reported by our correspondent.

Further investigations by *The PUNCH* of his alleged claims to being an external examiner at the University of Benin and the Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, were refuted by the authorities of those schools.

Ekemezie, who is now dissociating himself from the controversial BSc certificate, claims he has four academic qualifications: Higher National Diploma, Post Graduate Diploma, Master of Science and PhD.

While only the HND is from the Polytechnic, Ida, the other three were issued by UNIZIK.

According to a curriculum vitae reportedly belonging to Ekemezie, he finished the HND in 1997; PGD in 2003, MSc in 2005 and PhD in 2009.

A letter purportedly issued by the School of Postgraduates, UNIZIK, stated that Ekemezie started his PGD programme on November 3, 2003. He was issued registration number 2003545002P for a part-time study programme to last for 18 months.

The PGD statement of result certificate, dated July 7, 2006, stated that the effective date for the award was October 16, 2004.

This means he finished the 18-month programme in 11 months.

Also, according to a letter purportedly issued by the School of Postgraduate Studies, UNIZIK, Ekemezie was admitted for the 2005/2006 MSc programme on April 10, 2006. It was learnt that the year was 2005 and there was a typographical error.

He was issued an MSc statement of result certificate on July 7, 2006, with the effective date for the award as November 24, 2005.

This means he completed the 12-month programme in seven months.

Finally, the PhD academic programme, according to a document, was for the 2007/2008 academic year, with the effective date for the admission showing June 4, 2008.

The letter stated that the programme would last for 36 months. However, the statement of result certificate signed by the Secretary to the School of Postgraduate Studies, Mogbo Ogonna Maduka, and dated September 16, 2009, indicated the effective date for the award as August 3, 2009.

This means Ekemezie ended the three-year programme in 14 months.

The Dean of the Postgraduate School, Prof. Philomena Igbokwe, confirmed that the senior lecturer was awarded PGD, MSc and PhD degrees by the school.

She said she could not comment on the PGD, MSc and PhD admission letters and statements of result sent to her by our correspondent, because she could not tell where our correspondent got them from.

In a text message exchange, our correspondent asked specifically if Ekemezie completed his PhD programme before he was issued a statement of result. She said, "No, he did not."

"As stated in your SMS, his PhD admission letter shows he started the programme on June 4, 2008, and the certificate took effect from August 3, 2009," she added.

"According to extant regulation, the timing is not in line with (the) approved duration," she said when asked if the certificates were valid.

A former Vice-Chancellor, Caleb University, Prof. Ayodeji Olukaju, said the act was an illegality and it questioned the credibility of the school.

Olukaju, who lectures at the University of Lagos, Akoka, said even if a student was exceptional and completed his programme before the stipulated time, he must wait to fulfil the minimum requirement of the programme.

He said, "That award was an illegal award. The dean of the postgraduate school and the chairman of the senate should be held culpable for that lapse. But if they want to defend it, that it is permissible under the law, I will say it is not so. Absolutely impossible! Laws are



•UNIZIK gate



•UNIZIK VC, Esemone



•Ekemezie

there to be enforced.

"As far as I know within the Nigerian system, once there is a minimum number of semesters and sessions that a student must complete, he or she must do that compulsorily. If the person is a genius and completed before the time, he has to wait and fulfil that requirement.

"If the law will be changed, it has to be made statutorily. That degree was awarded in error and should be corrected. It should not stand because it is bad precedent."

A lecturer in the Department of Pure and Industrial Chemistry, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Prof. Pius Okoha, said if the right things were done, it would be difficult for a student to complete his studies before three years.

While insisting that a student could not be blamed for receiving a degree before the right time, he said such an award was suspicious.

He stated, "For a full-time PhD programme, it is a minimum of 36 months, with maximum of about maybe six years. Anything more than that, the person has to write a special letter explaining why the degree is delayed. But the person cannot be awarded the degree before the minimum period. If it is done, it is an illegality and such a degree will be looked at with suspicion.

"The student cannot be blamed because if he has done the right thing and has finished, it is the authorities that will say even though you have

finished, the law requires that you stay a minimum of 36 months before you can be awarded a degree.

"It is assumed technically that there is no way you can finish before the 36 months if the right things are done. The student has to do literature review and seminars, which are in periods. So, finishing before 36 months is difficult, no matter what you are doing. It is very suspicious."

The President of the Nigerian Academy of Science, Prof. Onuoha Mosto, said although every university had its peculiarity, each institution was expected to obey its own rules.

He explained that where such a norm was not followed, the authorities should be made to explain their decision.

"Maybe as a journalist, if you write about it, they will explain,"

he said.

The President, Academic Staff Union of Universities, Prof. Biodun Ogunyemi, said only the awarding institution could say why it gave the certificate before the period.

The Director of Public Affairs, NUC, Dr Ibrahim Yakasai, in a text message to our correspondent said, "36 months is the minimum for PhD in Nigerian universities."

When our correspondent contacted Prof. P.A.C. Okafor, the man who supervised Ekemezie for his programmes in UNIZIK, he refused to speak to our correspondent on the telephone, insisting on a face-to-face interview in Awka, Anambra State.

Shortly after the conversation with Okafor, Ekemezie sent our correspondent a text message daring him to come to the state as an "investigative journalist."

For security concerns, our correspondent asked *The PUNCH* reporter in Awka, Tony Okafor, to speak with the supervisor and fix an appointment for the interview.

Okafor said the supervisor did not take his calls and a text message he sent introducing himself was not replied to.

The immediate former Vice-Chancellor, UNIZIK, Ahaneku, said the matter was not brought to his attention while he superintended the affairs of the school.

He noted that if the embattled lecturer was awarded the certificates before the completion of his programmes, there was the need for more investigation to ascertain how he was passed by his department and cleared at the bursary.

"There is a general regulation on postgraduate education. I know that if someone has done a full-time programme, there is a minimum period. There is no way anywhere in this country that you obtain a postgraduate in less than 24 months on full-time. Part-time is usually more than that. This is a standard and general regulation across all universities," he said.

Asked why Ekemezie was allegedly issued a certificate before the time, he said the school of postgraduate studies needed to confirm if the embattled lecturer was indeed graduated.

He noted that further steps should also be taken if his department presented him as one of those who had completed the programme.

"Because naturally, he is even cheating the system by not paying the prescribed fees for the number of years for the programme; if you don't clear your fees for the six semesters, there is no way you will even be cleared for examination," he added.

The current Vice-Chancellor, UNIZIK, Prof. Charles Esemone, did not pick calls from our correspondent for several days and refused to respond to text messages seeking his reaction to the matter.

The Director of Information and Public Relations/Chief Protocol Officer, UNIZIK, Dr Emmanuel Ojukwu, said the school of postgraduate should explain why it issued Ekemezie certificates if he did not meet the requirements.

He said, "PhD has number of months. So, if he did not complete the period, the PG school should explain why he was issued the certificates. If he did not complete, by inference it means the degrees were not awarded."

"How can you award a degree when the person did not complete it? If the dean of the PG school told you that he did not complete, then who awarded him the degrees? Who supervised him? And who certified him as having completed?"

He noted that the university council was not happy with the negative publicity the school had been getting, adding that directives had been given that all pending disciplinary cases be concluded.

Ekemezie did not take his calls which rang out several times.

Our correspondent sent him a text message stating the allegations and requesting his reactions.

In his response, he said, "I want you to react to the allegations that you used charm to make your mother chop off your father's p**s and you had sex with her. Thanks!"