

**UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

**REMINISCING: A JOURNEY THROUGH  
THE LABYRINTHS OF LIFE IN THE  
QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE**

**Valedictory Lecture**

**By**

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## **PROGRAMME**

- 1. GUESTS ARE SEATED**
- 2. INTRODUCTION**
- 3. THE VICE-CHANCELLOR'S OPENING REMARKS**
- 4. CITATION**
- 5. THE VALEDICTORY LECTURE**

The lecturer shall remain standing during the citation. She shall step on the rostrum, and deliver her Valedictory Lecture. After the lecture, she shall step towards the Vice-Chancellor, and deliver a copy of the Valedictory Lecture and return to her seat. The Vice-Chancellor shall present the document to the Registrar.

- 6. CLOSING REMARKS BY THE VICE-CHANCELLOR**
- 7. VOTE OF THANKS**
- 8. DEPARTURE**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God for a day as today for making this presentation a reality. This year marks the 35th year I joined the University of Port Harcourt, when I transferred my services from the University of Calabar in 1990. Professor Kelsey Harrison was Vice-Chancellor and Professor E.J Alagoa was Dean of my Faculty, Humanities. I am grateful to the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Owunari Abraham Georgewill and the University of Port Harcourt for providing the enabling environment for me to achieve so much success and for making my stay in Port Harcourt memorable and fruitful. I acknowledge the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration) Professor Clifford Offurum, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Professor Kingsley Owete and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Development) Professor Iyeopu Siminialayi; the Registrar Dr Mrs Gloria Chindah, the Librarian Professor Mrs Helen Emasealu; the Bursar Dr Godpower Obah; Dean of my Faculty Professor John Yeseibo and my Head of Department Professor Esther Oweleke.

I also acknowledge and thank past Vice-Chancellors Emeritus Professor Nimi Briggs (late), Professor Don Baridam, Professor Joseph Ajienka, Professor Ndowa Lale and Ag. Vice-Chancellor Professor Steve Okorodudu.

I also appreciate members of staff, academic and non-academic with whom I have worked these past thirty-five years in the University of Port Harcourt. From my LCS Department, Professor Ozo-Mekuri Ndimele, Professor Walter Ihejirika, Professor Christie Omege, Professor Kari, Professor Baridisi Isaac, Professor Aniefiok Udoudo, Professor Roseline Alerechi, Professor Ochonogor and all the Associate Professors, Senior Lecturers, younger colleagues and admin staff. I have enjoyed

working with you all from the old staff to the young ones some of whom were my students and are now my colleagues. I remember late Professor Kay Williamson ‘Mama Kay’, Professor Shirley Yul-Ifode, Professor Virginia Onumajuru and Dr. Jenewari, all now retired.

Thank you all for the interactions and experiences shared. Indeed, LCS operated as a family. Even though we now belong to different faculties, the bond we had is very much cherished. I wish both the new Department of Linguistics and Language Arts (LLA) and the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies well in their future endeavours and admonish them to always be the best they can be. Incidentally, my Valedictory Lecture is the last to come from LCS as a department and the first from the new department of LLA.

In the same vein, I appreciate my students- undergraduate and postgraduate, whom I taught and interacted with over the years, especially my postgraduate students with whom I had stimulating and exciting classes especially in **Semantics** and **Language and Style in the Media**. I must say that I thoroughly enjoyed some of our interactions. Many of you will be glad to know that the book *The Study of Meaning: Sentence Meaning Beyond Linguistic Semantics* is finally out.

I appreciate my parents both now late but ever cherished and remembered, Mr Michael Oriane and Mrs Anna Arohu Alli; my siblings Engineer Dr. Chris Alli (late), Mr. John Alli, Dr Gabriel Alli, Dr. Thaddeus Alli and Engineer Valentine Alli. I also remember our son Mr. Imomion Ejele who went to be with God too soon.

I appreciate my children and their spouses - Engr. Akomen Ehimare and Dr. Ejemen Ejele (nee Ibhawo), Dr. Irabor Osezua

and Dr. Jennifer Ejele (nee Obeto), Mr. Vincent Damian and Dr Ilobekemen Enivie Akioyamen (nee Ejele) – My one and only son-in-law and only daughter, Mr. Ogbeide Aidenomo Ejele - our last born, and all our grandchildren.

To my husband and friend of over forty-six years, words alone cannot express my thanks and gratitude for all the wonderful love and support you gave me all through these years, getting stronger as we went through the vicissitudes of life in our marital journey.

Finally, I thank all of you who are able to be present here, despite your tight schedules. May God bless you all. Indeed, to God be the glory!

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# ***REMINISCING: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE LABYRINTHS OF LIFE IN THE QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE***

## **Preamble**

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, I am grateful to you for standing before you today to present my Valedictory Lecture so soon after my Inaugural Lecture (10th October, 2024). I never envisaged that I would end up presenting both Lectures at the end of my career. Once I went on Sabbatical Leave in 2012, followed by leave of absence from which I returned in 2016, I felt it was too late to present my Inaugural and so I looked forward to presenting my Valedictory. On making enquiries about this, I discovered that one could not present Valedictory if one did not present Inaugural. I approached the DVC Research & Development, Professor Siminialayi and he advised that I could still do my Inaugural even with my retirement early next year. Thank you, Sir, for this piece of advice. I took it as a challenge and set to work immediately. I also thank the Chairman and members of the University Inaugural Lecture Committee for the thorough and wonderful work they are doing. Kudos to them. My first write up *Expressing Affirmation through Negation: The role of Pragmatic Implications in Effective Communication* was rejected as ‘too technical’ and ‘not for non-initiates’. My second write up on *Keeping Minority Languages Alive: The Esan Example* was turned down for being ‘too narrow’ as members wanted to know how their own languages fared. My third write up was accepted and I was finally able to present my Inaugural Lecture *Keeping Indigenous Nigerian Languages Alive: The Journey so far* on 10th October 2024, nineteen good years after promotion to the Professoriate. For the Valedictory, I toyed with the idea of skipping it but for the promise I had made to one of the Inaugural Committee members who had

told me they were waiting for my Valedictory Lecture. Thank you for the push, for the challenge.

I am happy that I am formally ending my academic career giving both Lectures, for they are different. An inaugural lecture is an announcement that you have been admitted to the Professoriate, the highest peak of the academic profession to which every academic aspires. It is an opportunity for the Lecturer to display his/her knowledge in the particular sphere where he/she has demonstrated in concrete terms personal achievements and contributions to the society, working often in collaboration with other academics in the field of study. It is treated as mandatory. In contrast, a Valedictory Lecture is optional and is presented at the end of one's career as one prepares to bow out of the system in retirement. It is therefore an occasion to express farewell that exudes both sweet and bitter emotions. The Valedictorian is happy to be leaving on her own feet, having survived the pains of working in the university system in Nigeria which held so much hope when we joined as young men and women. So many colleagues were not that lucky. While being happy for 'happy survival', the Valedictorian is worried about what the system has turned into and wonders how colleagues will cope, not just with the external crises of existentialism that everyone is facing out there. The Valedictorian also worries about the various intricate internal crises in the university system in the face of perennial dwindling financial investment in education by successive governments, whose message seems to be that education is not important or not necessary in citizen's life, contrary to what obtains in the universities abroad to which the rich are quick to send their children. One wonders how long the system will hold out before it finally collapses. It's incredible how government treats the educational sector very shabbily but

expects the best. It's like planting pepper and expecting to reap yam bountifully.

A Valedictory Lecture is an opportunity for the elder with benefit of experience to share her thoughts with colleagues not only in her field of study but in the wider university community, going down memory lane, reminiscing on happy times and not so happy times at work place and pointing out areas where we have done well and areas where changes are needed. If so inclined, a Valedictory lecture is also an opportunity to comment on burning national issues and make recommendations on the way forward. In all of this, the Valedictorian chooses which areas to dwell on.

### **Introduction**

The title of my Valedictory Lecture *Reminiscing: A journey through the labyrinths of life in the quest for knowledge* gives me an opportunity to look back at my life and I invite you to do the same as you listen to my story. The title has four core expressions, namely, reminiscing, journey, labyrinths of life and quest for knowledge. The senses in which they are used are stated below.

**Reminiscing:** The act or process of recalling, remembering or narrating past experiences, often evoking a pleasant feeling of nostalgia if it was a good experience and a feeling of sadness if it was bad. Reminiscing has to do with looking back, thinking or talking about past events, for instance, in order to understand how we got to where we are. One may look back in anger, regret, joy, happiness, etc., with the purpose of reliving the experience or learning life lessons. The whole process of presenting this Valedictory Lecture is based on reminiscence.

**Journey:** Moving or travelling from one place to another along a path, usually with a purpose to achieve something. The person who embarks on a journey is a traveller. Life is seen as a journey, not a destination and the process of living involves learning and figuring out our purpose on earth and in this sense, the journey may be physical, spiritual or psychological, as in the imagination of the traveller.

**Labyrinths of Life:** The word *labyrinth* comes from the Greek word *labyrinthos* and was first used in the fifteenth century. It has a number of meanings which are related, as in 1-8 below.

- 1) From Merriam-Webster Dictionary, it is a place full of passageways and blind alleys that make it difficult to find one's way around; as in a maze. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com>).
- 2) From Oxford Dictionary, it is a complicated, irregular and elaborate arrangement of passages/ pathways in which it is easy to get lost and difficult to find the way out. (<https://www.oxfordreference.com>).
- 3) Collins Dictionary says in American English, labyrinth is an intricate, complicated series of paths through which it is difficult to find one's way. If used to describe a situation, process or area of knowledge, it means that situation is very difficult and complicated. (<https://www.collinsdictionary.com>).
- 4) From a psychological perspective, labyrinth is not merely a maze or puzzle to be solved but a path of meaning to be experienced, having path that is circular and convoluted with no dead ends as what looks like endpoint may be a beginning point. (<https://www.psychologytoday.com> 11 Nov. 2021) Retrieved 5/11/2024.
- 5) From anatomy, labyrinth refers to a complex structure in the inner ear that contains the organs for hearing and balancing. It consists of the bony labyrinth and the

membranous labyrinth. The physical complex structure of the ear can be said to mirror the intricacy and complexity of life.

- 6) In modern meaning, labyrinth is a place that has many confusing paths/passages, a maze; something that is extremely complicated or difficult to understand (<https://www.britannia.com>). Labyrinth is a structure with many irregular paths to navigate, and can be very confusing.
- 7) Figuratively, labyrinth as a term refers to difficult and complicated situation and can be treated as an analogy for life as in the labyrinth of life. In this sense, it is a metaphor for life's journey for whatever purpose one sets out on a journey. Still on figurative perspective, labyrinth represents a journey, the path of life, with twists and turns marked by encounters with other people who may help us through difficult times or deepen our self-knowledge and is often used as a tool for prayer and meditation.
- 8) Spiritually and symbolically, labyrinth concerns how everything in life is connected, guiding one on a pathway toward spiritual growth and healing. Biblical labyrinth experience can be seen in the desire and decision to follow God's Way, embarking in spiritual journeys, enjoying God's Presence which results in a feeling of wholeness, satisfaction and fulfillment resulting in contentment.

All the meanings are related. On the whole, the phrase 'Labyrinth of life' then refers to our life paths being viewed as complicated, irregular passageways which we have to experience and thereby guide us into deeper meaning and fulfillment in life. Walking a labyrinth takes us through twists and turns that symbolize the ebb and flow of life. What is

interesting about the labyrinth experience is that the journey may appear to be meandering aimlessly but the path has a sense of purpose, as if under the guidance of the supernatural.

**Quest for Knowledge:** Quest is a long or arduous search for something that is of great importance. It can be an exploration, crusade, pursuit, probe, adventure, pilgrimage, expedition, journey, search, research, etc, (<https://www.thesaurus.com>). Quest is often associated with personal growth and involves facing challenges. The phrase ‘quest for knowledge’ means a long search or pursuit to find or obtain knowledge. We note here that knowledge generally is beyond academics. Man has always had a deep-rooted desire to explore his environment as a way of understanding and expanding his intellectual horizons to satisfy himself in terms of his personal growth or in response to societal needs. Man has always thirsted for knowledge to improve his living conditions, satisfy his curiosity or engage in adventure. Knowledge is power and through the ages, man, *sui generis*, has always engaged in quests for knowledge as found in myths, literature and science. We remember Greek mythology replete with stories told of brave and courageous men, heroes who went in search of ‘the golden fleece’ (Jason and the Argonauts), crossing ‘seven seas.’ In our African myths, we have similar stories of heroes who went in search of knowledge in order to acquire fame, power and wealth, venturing into impenetrable dark forests, home of the spirits as in Wole Soyinka’s *Forest of a Thousand Demons* or the ‘evil forests’ in Chinua Achebe’s works. These stories act as metaphors for personal growth, transformation, the pursuit and attainment of one’s goals. It has always been the case that one who has knowledge has power hence the truism ‘knowledge is power’. Humanity has advanced in different spheres of knowledge to where we are now in the twenty-first century through the sheer curiosity, bravery, courage and adventurous

nature of man leading to discoveries in science, arts and other spheres of knowledge that have made life more meaningful. Man has a natural inclination to respond to an inner push or drive to satisfy his intellect, to look for more and more challenges. Indeed, there is no end to what man can achieve as he keeps responding to this innate disposition. At the spiritual level, recall that knowledge is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The four expressions are very significant because it is in the course of reminiscing that we look at events and situations that impact one's life as a journey and define his/her purpose. Bringing the four expressions in the title of my Valedictory Lecture together, using my life as an example, my life has been a purpose-filled journey in my search for knowledge and I am looking back at the paths with their twists and turns, sometimes difficult and complicated and seemingly meandering but ultimately achieving success in my search for knowledge.

At the higher level, one has also attained a level of spirituality 'walking with God' and finding fulfillment and contentment in life. These could only have been achieved under the guidance of God 'in whom we live and move and exist' (Acts 17:28), having bestowed on us, though unmerited, his numerous gifts including knowledge (other gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, piety and fear of God. (1 Corinthians 12: 1-31. See also Isaiah 11:2-3)). These gifts bear fruits that sustain us in our lives as pilgrims in our earthly journey. In what follows going down memory lane in reminiscence, I look back at my experience in terms of my journey, the paths I had to navigate in the process of searching for knowledge in my area of study, being the field of Language and Linguistics, the results of my quests and what lessons we can learn, sometimes presented in anecdotal comments.

## MY JOURNEY IN LIFE

### Birth and Family of Birth

My life journey started with being born on 10th January, 1955 at Ekpoma, Edo State in present day Esan West LGA to the family of Mr Michael Oriane Alli of Emaudo village and Mrs Anna Arohu Alli of Idimigun, Uhiele, both in Ekpoma. I am the third child and only daughter of the family of six children. My father was a teacher and my mum a civil servant. This background of having enlightened parents shaped my life as it provided me educational opportunities at a young age. As soon as my hand could touch my ears, I started schooling.

### Education- Primary, Secondary, University.

I started my **Primary** education in St. Williams, Oke-Ado, Ibadan (1961-63) and completed it in Marian Girls School, Benin City (1963-66) following my parent's relocation to Benin City after the creation of Midwest Region. I remember the foul smell associated with the city, especially in the mornings. As a child growing up in Benin City, I had thought it was because of the foul odour emanating from the content of ubiquitous 'sacrifice bowl' (*izobo*) strategically placed at 'four roads junction'. I found the smell nauseating but I had to endure it. It was years later as a young grown-up girl that I realized that the smell was from tapped rubber latex, an economic product of which Midwest was a producer. The smell is long gone, the Region (now Edo and Delta States) no longer produces rubber. Now everything is about oil, the so called 'black gold'.

For my **Secondary** education, I attended a Catholic School -St. Maria Goretti Girls Grammar School, Benin City from 1967-71 under Reverend Dr. Sister Henrietta Powers, the Irish Principal who had a great influence on my life. Everything was going on

fine with my education until my final year, when I fell ill a few months to the West African Examination Council (WAEC) Examination and was sent home. I could not read because the ailment affected my eyes. However, I returned to take it. I was strongly advised to defer taking the exams but I insisted and they allowed me. Thank God I passed, making grade Two. My Principal was very understanding during the period of my illness as she visited me at home, along with Revd. Sr. Perpetua and Mother Brenda.

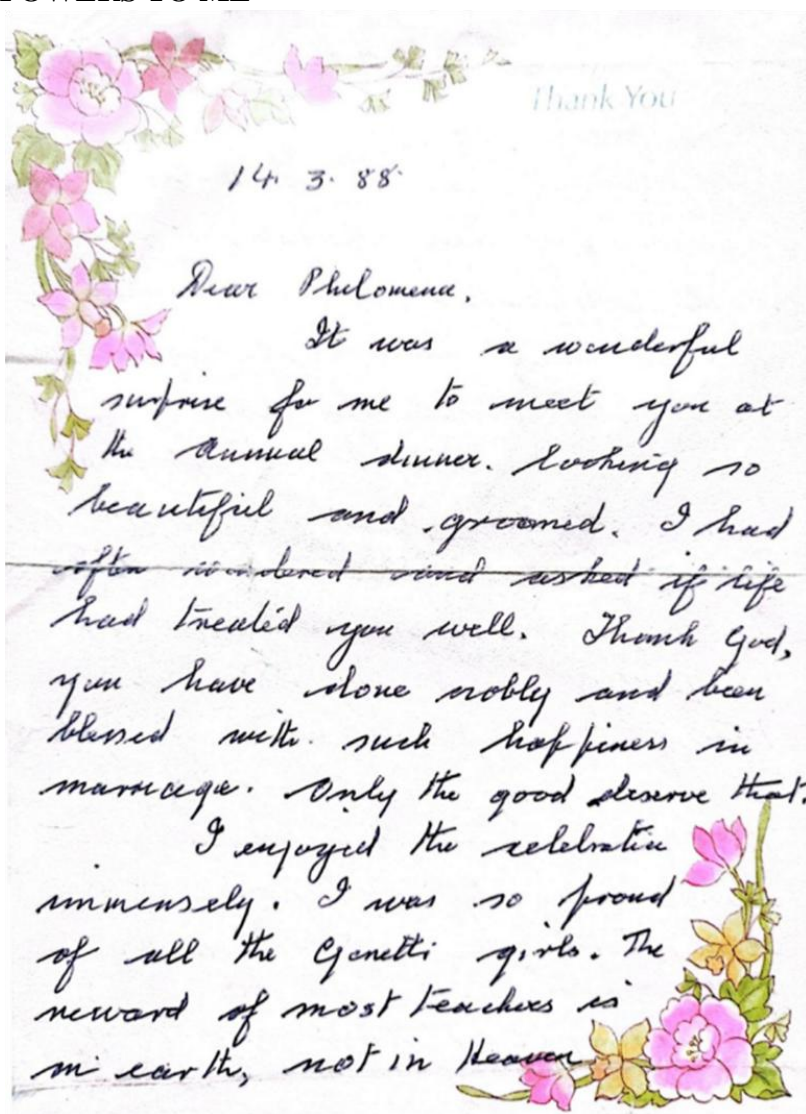
I remember my time in my secondary school days in the Boarding House when we lived a regimented structured life typical of a missionary education. Education was more than just book work. I can still remember Sister Henrietta admonishing us from time to time to ‘stop shuffling’, ‘lift your feet off the ground’ and ‘walk like a lady’. The system was so well organized that there was time for everything, right from when you woke up in the morning until you went to bed at night. From Morning Mass/Prayers to Morning duties (Employment), to breakfast to Assembly to Classes, to lunch to Siesta to Prep to Supper to Night Study to Bedtime. There was time for Sports and General Labour. The one that I found bothersome was weekend Siesta from after lunch at 12noon to 4pm during which we were expected to be on our beds quietly even if we didn’t feel like sleeping. Now with hindsight, I appreciate the need for siesta. Sister Henrietta had the habit of visiting the dormitories at night unannounced to check on her girls and she could recognize you from your back and call you by your name even in the dark. We too could recognize her smart quicksteps, distinct from that of *Lady Koikoi*, our resident ghost. I wonder how our modern secondary schools are run today.

I still have the letter she wrote to me in 1988, years after my secondary school education. I was already a Lecturer in the University of Benin. The occasion was at the twenty-fifth anniversary of our alma mater which we celebrated in Benin City and I was the Master of Ceremony. The letter gives an insight into the dedication and sacrificial lives of missionaries who spend their lives teaching and training other people's children. May God bless them specially for the high quality, selfless work they do for humanity, even today. I believe that her prayers assisted me in my life journey. She returned to God on Monday 30th November, 2022 after her earthly dwelling for 97 years. May her soul rest in perfect peace, amen.



REV. DR. SR. HENRIETTA POWERS, PRINCIPAL, ST. MARIA GORETTI GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL (1962-84).

LETTER FROM MY PRINCIPAL REV. SR. HENRIETTA  
POWERS TO ME



as the papers say! Minnie and I like  
me find their consolation and  
fulfillment in the well-being and  
success of their pupils. To see  
such dignified, well educated  
ladies and mothers living exemplary  
lives is enough for us.

I wish to congratulate  
you all for the honour you  
gave me in presenting such  
expensive earrings - souvenirs of  
Benn City and my many years  
there. I appreciate your thought-  
fulness very much. You  
performed your M.C. duties with  
great dignity and poise. Well  
done, Philomena. Greet your  
father and mother for me.

May God bless and keep  
you always.

Rose Alkumtini

The standard set and maintained by Sr. Henrietta and her team ensured that the girls turned out to be well-groomed ladies and pace-setters wherever they found themselves in life. To their credit, many are found in various professions as Doctors, Judges, Lawyers, Professors, Engineers, Directors, Permanent Secretaries, etc. It is unfortunate and sad to note that many of

the Colleges and Grammar Schools that missionaries built up and sustained by dint of hard work were taken over by State Governments only to lower the established standards and be destroyed. Even now, many Alumni associations who currently bear the burden of caring for their *alma mater* are still pleading with governments to return the schools to the missionaries. It is now obvious that education is way more than knowing how to read and write. Enough damage has been done. Government should just return the schools to the original owners to fix and run.

After my secondary school education in 1971, my journey in the labyrinths of life through twists and turns took me to Government College Ughelli (1972-73) for Higher School Certificate (HSC) studying Physics, Chemistry and Biology after which I worked as a Clerk in the Public Service Commission in Benin City (1973-75). As a worker, I attended evening classes in science courses in the College of Continuing Education, Benin City.

My educational journey continued with my **university education** not as a Science student but in Arts, following my admission to read English at the University of Ife, Ile Ife (1975-79). Talk of twists and turns! The four years at Ife were a test of courage, hard work trekking from the hostel to the classrooms on the undulating topography under the scorching sun. This was not funny especially when we wore the fashionable reigning ‘platform’ shoes to school. It was such that sometimes one would be worrying about the trek back to the hostel instead of concentrating on the lectures. Those days, there was no transport within the campus. Only very few students had motor bikes. Some girls had scooters. Things were always worse when lecturers returned from strike and we had to have classes up to 10pm, to enable them cover the Course

Outline (I wonder if lecturers still do so now). Part of the rigours of university education then was the task of preparing for ‘almighty June’ as the once- in- a- year examination which one had to pass because failure meant repeating the whole year. Some students then used to read while keeping their legs in cold water and drinking coffee to stay awake, burning the midnight candle and lantern. Not surprising, many students had nervous breakdown (alias *brain fag*) as the stress was just too much. Thank goodness, things are different now, with the Course and Semester System in place, thus reducing drastically the tension and stress accompanying the quest for education. Students face other worse challenges nowadays though.

### **Marriage**

I got married on 2nd September, 1978 while in my third year in the university to Dr Oseikhuemen Adebayo Ejele and the marriage is blessed with four surviving children.

### **Postgraduate Studies**

After my National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1980 teaching in the Continuing Education Centre Benin City, my educational journey at the Postgraduate level continued at the University College, London from 1981-1986 where I studied Linguistics. I was able to navigate through the complex and intricate pathways of studying, along with learning various aspects of English/British culture, for instance of time consciousness. When you fail to catch your bus and then miss classes, you will learn fast. Or when you enter the wrong bus and find yourself away from your normal route especially at night. Coping with the weather, especially in Winter, was also daunting. I now understood why my Secondary School Principal, Sr. Henrietta was a fast walker. By the time the cold wind bites your ear and pinches your nose, you won’t need anyone to tell you to walk fast. Anyway, one had to remain

focused all the time, ‘keeping the eye on the ball’. Being married and raising children was not easy to combine with studies but I had the fortune of encountering helpers both at school (especially my Supervisor Professor Neil V. Smith of blessed memory) and at home (my various *Au pairs*, *Mother’s Help* and ‘Mummy Edgal’). With their assistance, I was able to complete my Postgraduate education in record time. With the formal educational journey now completed, I was set for another kind of life journey. We must keep in mind that life itself is a journey and education never comes to an end because we continue to learn as human beings as long as we are alive.



Professor Neil Smith (1939-2023). My Supervisor

## **RESULTS OF MY QUESTS FOR KNOWLEDGE**

Having put in the required hard work in my educational pursuits and drunk from the fountain of knowledge at the various points in the labyrinths of life in my quest for knowledge, I was rewarded by success so I scaled through, collecting the degrees and qualifications necessary for future work. Thus, during my undergraduate studies at University of Ife, I got three scholarships (Federal Government Scholarship, Federal Government Bursary and Bendel State Scholarship) and won the National Merit Award at the end of year one. I was expected to choose only one (though some students somehow managed to collect all!). I chose the National Merit award because it was given to the best six results in the University and the deal was better. This saw me through the remaining three years in school and at the end of the programme, I got second class Upper in English. While at Ife, life was not only about academics. I was opportune to also get some grooming on social and religious training by joining some social clubs and religious groups, learning life lessons that have stood the test of time.

For my time in the University College London, I got Postgraduate Diploma (PGD) in 1981, Masters (M.A) in 1982 and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in 1986. I had the honour of both my MA thesis *Towards a Phonology of Esan* and Ph. D thesis *Transitivity, Tense and Aspect in Esan* being supervised by Professor N.V Smith for which I remain grateful. My research work which started with my Masters and Ph.D theses as trail blazers, set the tone for my future research. Both are now reference materials, being the first documented academic works on the Esan language.

At the home front, I had three children during my Postgraduate studies, achieving a fine, delicate balance between running a

home and studying for six years, taking care of four children and my husband – and myself. Talk of multi-tasking!

I was interviewed at the Nigerian Embassy in London and recruited for the University of Benin as Lecturer II after my postgraduate studies in 1986 and on returning, worked there for less than two years. Then moved to University of Calabar, worked for two years and finally settled in University of Port Harcourt in 1990, till date. My research over the years covers formal linguistic issues across phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics using data from the Esan language, later communication, stylistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis as aspects of meaning beyond sentence meaning.

## **MY CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE AS A REFLECTION OF THE RESULTS OF MY QUEST FOR KNOWLEDGE**

### **A. Academic (Highlights in Research, Teaching and Community Service)**

- 1) The Orthography (symbols and conventions for writing a language) of Esan, based on my MA thesis, was co-authored and published in 1987 (Okojie & Ejele).
- 2) I was Guest Speaker at a number of Workshops on Esan Orthography subsequently organized by the Esan Orthography Committee in Irrua, Edo State for teachers and language enthusiasts to introduce the orthography to them and for them to become familiar with it.
- 3) Both my M.A and Ph.D theses as well as my further works on the Esan language successfully put the language on the linguistic map of the world (Grimes 1992). What this means is that as a result of my works, Esan got listed as one of the languages of the world, as indicated permanently in the Front and Back Cover pages of the

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**No. 4**

**December 1986**

A Journal of the National Institute for Nigerian Languages

- 4) I was Consultant to and member of the Esan Orthography Committee that wrote *Esan Dictionary* (2003).
- 5) As part of research activities, I worked over the years extensively on Esan language and culture as seen in my academic publications. I was a Guest Speaker presenting commissioned papers by different Esan groups on

different occasions over the years, all such activities geared towards encouraging the speakers to prioritize their language and culture, else they lose their language because Esan, as a minority language is endangered, like many Nigerian languages (Brezinger et al 1991, Moseley 2010, Blench 2012 and UNESCO 2023). As Kay Williamson (2000) once said, ‘use it or lose it’. In my Inaugural Lecture presented recently on 10th October, 2024, I also dwelt extensively on the urgent need for Nigerians to use their languages. Using them and keeping them alive or not using them and allowing them to die is the choice of the speakers. The Lecture drew attention to the fact that almost all Nigerian languages are endangered irrespective of their demography, urging owners of the languages to take steps to arrest the situation before the languages die out.

- 6) Over the years, I also focused on gender, culture, education and other issues such as language revalorization and revitalization as regards Esan milieu, Edo State and Nigeria. Some of them are listed: -
- a. ‘Unity in Esanland: Today and Tomorrow’ as Guest Speaker, at the launch of the book *Who is Who in Esanland* on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2007.
  - b. ‘Esan People and Culture: Challenges and Prospects in the Twenty-first century’ in Irrua, Edo State on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2012 on the occasion of Esan Merit Award and Silver Jubilee Anniversary of ESAN MAGAZINE.
  - c. ‘Culture, Gender and Education in Esanland: Issues and Relevance in the Twenty-first Century in the Development of Esanland’ as part of activities marking the Re-inauguration of the Centre for Research & Development of Esanland (CERDEL), and First Convocation of Samuel Adegboyega

University (now Glorious Vision University), Ogwa, Edo State on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2015.

- d. 'The Linguistic Characteristic of Esan Language: Towards its Empowerment and Development' presented as Guest Speaker at the 12<sup>th</sup> Esan Economic Empowerment Workshop organized by the Association of Esan Professionals (AEP), Lagos at Samuel Adegboyega University (now Glorious Vision University), Ogwa, Edo State on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016.
- e. Keynote Paper/Address 'Education as a tool for the Economic Empowerment of Esan People: The Role of the Private Sector' presented on 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2022 at the Association of Esan Professionals (AEP) 2022 Education Trust Fundraising and Award Ceremony at the Civic Centre, Ozumba Mbadiwe Road, Lagos.

Most of the journeys to these occasions, especially in the early years, were self-sponsored travelling by public transport. Only God knows how many times we ran into armed robbers and had to run into the villages/bushes to wait until they finished their 'operation'. Often times, my husband would drive us to Edo State and wait for me to present my paper. Sometimes we ended up inadvertently travelling at night because the car broke down and on one occasion, we ran into armed robbers at Ndele, Rivers State on our journey back. The children were with us but slept through the ordeal as my husband and I were forced by the robbers to lie face down on the highway. Indeed, God was watching over us. On another occasion, we travelled for one of my workshops in Edo State and could not get back to Port Harcourt that day because the road had broken down at Adagbabiri in Bayelsa State. We had to go back to Asaba that night to take Asaba-Onitsha Road and got to Port Harcourt in

the early hours of the next day. We continue to give thanks to God for His mercy never fails us.

- 7) Outside commissioned works on Esan and on other areas of interest, I taught and published extensively across all the levels of General Linguistics, viz phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics, with data for the studies being drawn extensively from Esan. While each paper was interesting on its merit, two stood out as one was published by two journals. The papers  
Ejele, P.E 2000. 'Temporal Distinctions as bases for the semantic classification of verbs: Insights from Esan' *Kiabara: Journal of Humanities* Vol 6 No.2 pp 43-54 (Also in JWAL XXIX. 2 (2002). pp 65-79...' and  
Ejele, P.E 2000/2001. 'Durativity, Punctuality and the Imperfective Paradox: The Case in Esan' *Journal of West African Languages* (JWAL) XXVIII No.2 pp71-84.  
These papers were presented at LAN Conference in Legon, Ghana in 2000 and the two editors were present and one of them collected the two papers 'oven fresh' for publication even though he was aware that one of the papers had already been accepted by the other editor.
- 8) I have taught undergraduate courses in four Nigerian universities and postgraduate courses too. I can only imagine the large number of students who have passed through me in these four universities in Nigeria, viz, University of Benin (from 1987-88), University of Calabar (from 1988-90), University of Port Harcourt (from 1990 to date) and Federal University Otuoke (during my Sabbatical/Leave of Absence 2012-16).
- 9) VC Sir, in addition to working on my language, I supervised many Ph.Ds on Igbo, Ogoni and Ikwerre on topics across Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Pragmatics and Stylistics. Some of them are now Professors. It may

interest you to know Sir, that I do not speak any of these languages but I successfully supervised them all, simply by my training as a Linguist, walking and working in the steps of great Linguists such as my supervisor Professor Neil Smith, Professor A.C Gimson, Professor Deidre Wilson, Professor Richard Hudson and other lecturers in the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics, University College London (UCL), and in School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Professor Ruth Kempson, Professor Robins and Professor Geoff Horrocks. Back home in Nigeria, I recall Professor K.M Williamson ‘Mama Kay’ who worked extensively on Ijoid and Igboid languages and encouraged me as her young colleague and friend. I used to supply her *adire* wears and home-made bread. I remember my last baby Ogbe commenting that ‘Mama Kay loves the *burntest* bread’ to refer to the variety of bread she loved. She once referred to me as ‘an all-round achiever’. Currently, I am supervising Ph.D theses on Urhobo and Hausa languages. I also co-supervised Ph.D in Communication, some of whom are Professors now. All of these students have drunk from the fountain of knowledge that I brought back from my journey through the labyrinths of life in the quest for knowledge.



Professor K.M Williamson (1936-2005)

- 10) I have served as External Assessor for Professorial promotion in many universities such as University of Benin, University of Calabar, Federal University of Otuoke, Niger Delta University, National Open University, Akwa Ibom State University and Ignatius Ajuru University, Rivers State.
- 11) I have also served as External Examiner for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Universities of Benin, Calabar, Uyo and Ambrose Alli University.

- 12) During my Sabbatical leave at Federal University Otuoke (FUO), as part of my research activities, I co-presented a commissioned paper on ‘What our languages tell us about our history’ during the Colloquium on Ijaw Genesis, Culture and Inter-group Relations in the Niger-Delta’. I also served as Chairperson LOC for two colloquia organized by FUO in conjunction with Chinua Achebe Foundation/Association of Nigerian Authors and Onyoma Research, Port Harcourt, namely, International Colloquium on Literature, Leadership, and National Unity: 50 YEARS OF ARROW OF GOD and the Colloquium on Ijaw Genesis, Culture and Inter-Group, Relations in the Niger Delta.
- 13) I settled for Syntax and Semantics at some point publishing two books- Ejele 2014 (first published in 1996) *Introductory Course on Language* and Ejele 2014 (first published in 2003) *SEMANTICS: Lexical Structure and Lexical Relations* but my research interests and quest for knowledge took me into related areas of Stylistics and Communication. This culminated in my publication of a book *Language, Style and the Media* (2019) which focuses on the interface between Linguistics, Style and Communication highlighting how relevant concepts from various fields of knowledge such as Linguistics, Literature, Stylistics, Communication can be useful and how language choices can be used to achieve effective communication.
- 14) My enduring quest for knowledge this time, about meaning in general, has taken me beyond semantics (which is the study of meaning within Linguistics) into Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis and has culminated in the publication of the book *The Study of Meaning: Sentence Meaning Beyond Linguistic Semantics*. The book is published in *Amazon* (Ejele, (2024)

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/BODJ6BCRDC>) and another one in the pipeline *Perspectives in Semantics and Pragmatics* (Forthcoming).

### **Community Service**

I will list only a few of these.

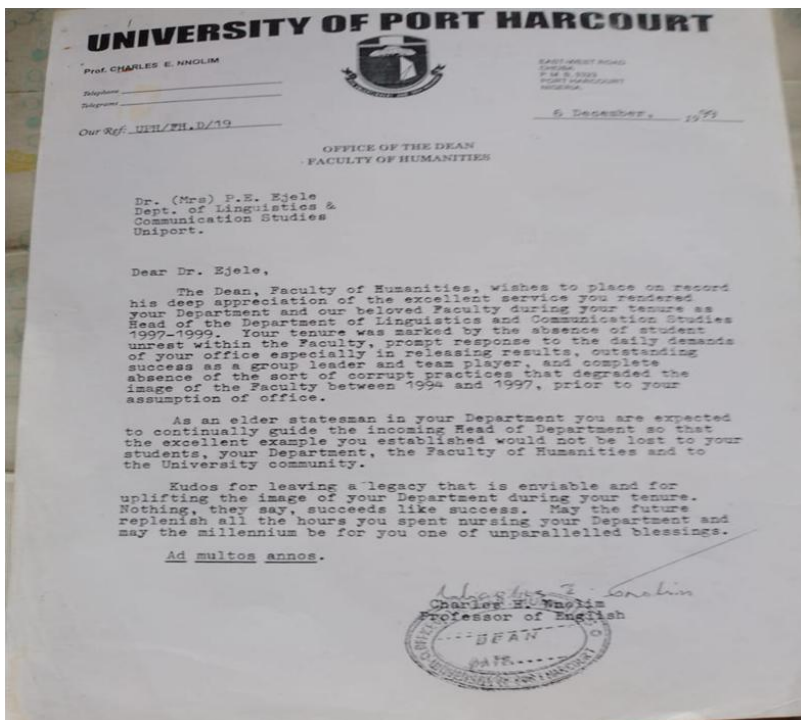
- 1) Welfare Officer, University of Port Harcourt Women Association (UPWA) 1997-2004.
- 2) Chairperson, Vice-Chancellor's Christmas Party for Children. Uniport 1998&1999.
- 3) Member, Hall Management Committee (Students Affairs), Uniport 1994-2000.
- 4) Hall Warden of King Jaja Hall 2 (female Hostel), University of Port Harcourt, 1994-2000
- 5) Motivational Speaker for Student and Staff organizations and in the Catholic Church.
- 6) Matron to many Student Organizations in the Catholic Church.
- 7) Executive Chairman of State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Edo State, October 9<sup>th</sup>-November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008.
- 8) Member, Advisory Board, American Biographical Society, USA 2004-2008.

### **B. Administrative (Highlights)**

VC Sir, let me start with UNIPORT, my academic home/base. A few examples are listed.

- 1) Director, School of General Studies, University of Port Harcourt, August 2020 to August 2022.
- 2) I recall my time as HOD 1997-1999. It was during my tenure as HOD in UNIPORT that the nomenclature 'Department of Linguistics and African Languages' (LAL) became 'Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies' (LCS) in 1997 after passing

through the Faculty Board and Senate approval. I presented the matter to both Faculty and Senate. The department as LCS started the Certificate Programme from which we were able to get intake for the degree programme which was facing rationalization as a result of not having enough students' intake. During my tenure as HOD, certificate exams were released on the same day of taking the exams. The Certificate programme became so successful that LCS rivalled Medicine in cut-off points for admission. UNIPORT made a lot of money from this programme as the department became 'the beautiful bride'. Many departments within UNIPORT and other institutions which were facing rationalization came to find out how we did it. Professor Charles Nnolim was the Dean of my Faculty and his letter of commendation attests to my performance as HOD. See letter below.



Professor Charles Nnolim's letter of Commendation

- 3) On my return from Sabbatical/Secondment at Federal University Otuoke, my department LCS, had undergone a number of changes in my absence. Some Linguistic courses had been dropped, replaced by more Communication courses. The Communication component had all these years I was away, failed to get accredited and colleagues in the Communication component of the department were unhappy because they were not in sync with their colleagues in other institutions and they feared for their future career-wise. Consequently, the move was seriously on to create a faculty from the department.
- 4) I was invited to SCAPP meetings in connection with the move to split the department. I remembered what we

went through in the 1990s to get to where we are in the department and being aware that colleagues were afraid for their future because of failure to get accreditation, there was no 'reasonable reason' to speak against it so it tacitly got my blessing there. Now we seem to have come full circle, as a part of us left and formed the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies and the remaining now belong to a new department, Linguistics and Language Arts. Now there is much work to be done in the department, given this wonderful opportunity to modify her programme to be in tune with current interests and foci in modern approaches to Linguistics study, as Linguistics continues to be of vital relevance, contributing to and raising interesting issues at national and global levels.

- 5) Over the years, I served in many committees as a member or Chairperson in the Undergraduate and Postgraduate levels, at some point I was in twelve committees during the same period. It was my then senior colleague, late Professor Emenanjo who drew my attention to this. My CV gives details of these. My children can testify to this as I always came home with the packages from entertainment. (It was then not monetized).

In Senate and university wide committees, among many committees I served as a

- 1) Member of the Search Committee for Vice-Chancellor in UNIPORT, 2010.
- 2) Member of the Interview Panel for the Professoriate (2009-11).
- 3) Member, Senate Appeals Committee on Certificate Verification, Uniport, 2010-2016.
- 4) Member, Senate Committee on Student Union Crisis, 2010.

- 5) Member, University of Port Harcourt Honorary Degree Award Committee 2010-12.
- 6) Member, University Examination Committee, Uniport (2008-2012)
- 7) Member, Senate Business Committee, University of Port Harcourt 2011-12
- 8) Member, 1998 Convocation Ceremony Committee, Uniport.

### **C. My years at Federal University Otuoke**

Let me now turn to my period of service at FUO.

- 1) As a member of the Academic Brief for the Take-Off of Federal University Otuoke, June 12-19, 2011 set up by the Federal Government under President Ebele Jonathan, I was part of the group that set up the university in a virgin land, working closely with Professor Bolaji Aluko the first Vice Chancellor and Sir David Suowari, the first Registrar, to establish its vision, mission, philosophy, curricula for the different programmes, especially those of my Faculty which covered Humanities, Social Sciences and Management Sciences.
- 2) During my Sabbatical (2012) and Secondment (2013-16) at FUO, I was appointed Pioneer Dean, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences 2012-2015 having six departments viz. English and Communication Studies, History, Sociology, Political Science, Accounting and Finance and Business and Management Studies.
- 3) Under my tenure as Dean, all the programmes in the six departments got FULL Accreditation at first attempt in November, 2015.
- 4) As a member of Interview Panels, I assisted in Senior Staff Recruitment in 2012-2015.

- 5) As Chairman, Interview Panel for Academic Staff Recruitment for the Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, 2012-2015.
- 6) As Chairman, Interview Panel for the Recruitment of Academic staff for the Faculty of Business & Management Studies 2015.  
Those were days when you did not need to know anybody to be able to get a job. How times have changed!
- 7) Many ex-Postgraduate Uniport students would have lost out in the various employment exercises because their certificates were not ready and they were competing against candidates who showed up for the interview with their original certificates. Without the original certificates, they could not be employed. Some certificates had been outstanding for over ten years. It took just a phone call to rectify this situation. Many were finally able to get employed, thanks to the then VC, Professor Ajienka who signed their certificates and made them available in record time. Ex-students who later enjoyed this benefit did not know how it turned out so easy for them.
- 8) I was appointed the first Dean of Post-Graduate Studies but could not stay on to fully establish the programmes because my university (Uniport) recalled me.

### **MEMBERSHIP OF ACADEMIC BODIES**

I belong to many academic bodies, some of which are listed below.

1. Member of Linguistics Association of Nigeria (LAN).
2. Member, West African Linguistic Society (WALS).
3. Member of Linguistics Association of Nigeria (LAN) Executive Council, Nigeria 1990-1995.
4. Member of Linguistics Association of Great Britain (LAGB) 1980-1988.

## **AWARDS WON / RECEIVED**

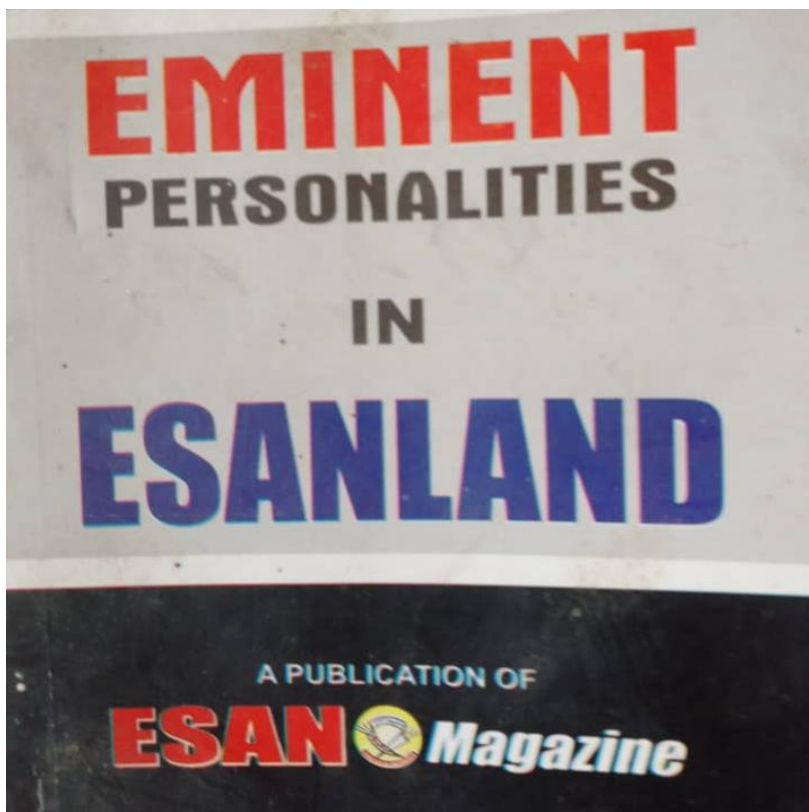
Many awards were won or received from different groups, academic, religious and cultural, over the years, in appreciation of selfless service humbly rendered. A few of them are listed below.

1. Investiture with the Queen of Saints Medal as Noble Sister, Ladies Auxiliary, Knights of Saint John International on 29<sup>th</sup> October, 2022.
2. Respected President, Ladies Auxiliary No. 710, Our Lady Tower of Ivory, Knights of Saint John International, Port Harcourt Grand LAUX, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. 2021-date.
3. Certificate of participation in the Review of National Universities Commission (NUC) Instrument for ODL Accreditation conducted from 23 to 28 February, 2019.
4. Award in recognition as Distinguished Child of MARY presented by the Benin Ecclesiastical Province Catholic Women Organization (BEPCWO) at the 24<sup>th</sup> BEPCWO Seminar in *Our Lady of the Water Cathedral*, Bomadi, Bayelsa State on 1st September, 2018.
5. Matron of Altar Knights Association, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport. 2018-date.
6. Patroness of St. Anthony of Padua Society, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport. 2018- date
7. Award (via plaque) as SOLDIER OF CHRIST by Catholic Women Organization (CWO) *Chapel of the Annunciation*, Uniport, in Celebration of Motherhood on 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2017.
8. Award of Excellence as The Foremost Esan Linguist under the Distinguished Recipients of the AWARD OF EXCELLENCE of Esan Magazine for 2016/2017.
9. Matron, Annunciation Ladies, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport. 2010-2016.

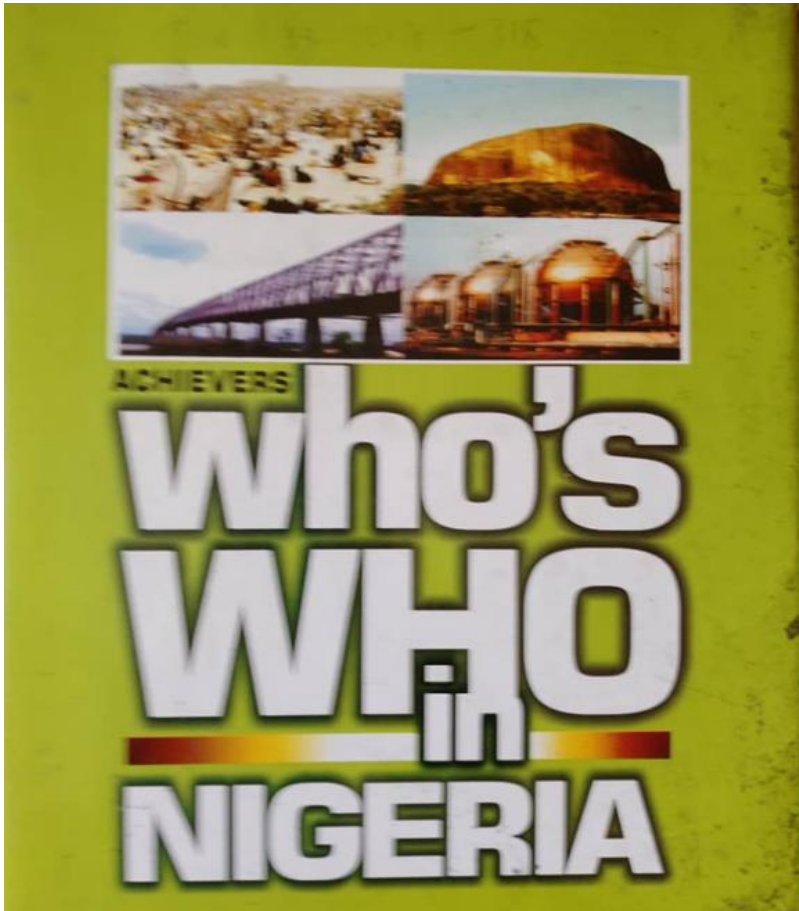
10. Certificate of Patronship awarded by St. Jerome Guild of Lectors, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport in recognition of her position as PATRONESS of the Association on 28<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2016
11. Esan Merit Award, December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012 by Publishers of Esan Magazine.
12. Plaque presented by Nigerian Federation of Catholic Students (NFCS), Uniport, for contributions as a patron. 2012.
13. Matron, Diocesan Council Catholic Women Organization, Rivers State, Chapel of the Annunciation, Uniport Chapter, 2012- date.
14. Academic Nobel International Award May 2008, given by Institute of Industrial Administration
15. Fellow of the Institute of Industrial Administration. May 2008
16. Grand Award for Productivity in Africa (GAPA) March 2008, given by People State & Resource (PSR) Magazine
17. Woman of Merit Gold Award (WMGA) December 2007, given by PSR Magazine
18. Jerusalem Pilgrim, 2007
19. Life Member, Diocesan Council Catholic Women Organization, Rivers State, Chapel of Annunciation Chapter, University of Port Harcourt, Choba 2003
20. Certificate of Service from Linguistics Student Association, Uniport, 1998/99 session.
21. Award of Excellence from Students' Union Government 1999, University of Port Harcourt, for service as Hall warden King Jaja Hall 2
22. Award of excellence from Students Union Government 1999, University of Port Harcourt for service as Head of Department.
23. Certificate of Honour from Nigerian Federation of Catholic Students (NFCS). Uniport in 1999.

24. Certificate of Appreciation from Rotract Club of University of Port Harcourt, 1996.
25. Linguistics Association of Nigeria (LAN) Representative at the 15<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Linguists in Quebec, Canada from 9<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> August, 1992. Awarding Body was CIPL (International World Congress of Linguists)
26. Federal Government Scholarship as an undergraduate student at the University of Ife 1976-79 (not utilized).
27. Federal Government Bursary as an undergraduate student at the University of Ife 1976-79. (not utilized).
28. Bendel State Scholarship Award as an undergraduate at the University of Ife- 1976-79 (not utilized).
29. National Merit Award Scholarship for three years at the University of Ife 1976-79 as an undergraduate.

Recognition of my works over the years on different spheres of life is captured in my being listed in many publications such as *Who is Who* in Esanland and *Who is Who in Nigeria* and *Eminent Personalities in Esanland*.



See pp.242-243 for information on Lady Professor Philomena Ekeikhomen Ejele.



See pp. 317-318 for information on Professor Philomena Ekeikhomen Ejele

Before concluding, it is important to take a look at life journey as a quest in which someone may continue to be in the labyrinths of life and appears to be perpetually in the quest for knowledge, good life or whatever, where the cares and worries of the world impede or appear to stop the individual from being able to achieve set goals?

## **GETTING LOST IN THE LABYRINTHS OF LIFE IN THE QUEST FOR A SUCCESSFUL LIFE**

Quest for knowledge can be for attainment of whatever will make the person to be successful in life. It is whatever the person needs to go after and obtain to be used to upgrade one's position in life. Sometimes, people seem to get lost in the labyrinth of life as they go after their quest. This may be as a result of distractions hence it is necessary to focus and 'keep the eye on the ball'. It is alright to fail sometimes as nobody is perfect to get something right all the time. What is important is to rise up after each fall and continue the race. The bad situation which we all pray against is to get lost, being perpetually in the labyrinth and never moving on to the next stage/phase in life's journey.

## **SOME RESULTS OF PURSUING OUR DREAMS ATTAINABLE IN THE LABYRINTHS OF LIFE**

Sometimes too, we may attain our quest but continue to pursue our dreams. This is seen in situations for instance where one has completed and acquired all the relevant qualifications and even has a good job. We know that 'good' is a relative term as it means different things to different people. Right now, we have a situation in our country Nigeria where so many people are emigrating to different parts of the world. Many of such people have 'good' paying jobs but still choose to leave the country because of insecurity, poor working conditions, poor infrastructure and skyrocketing inflation, amongst others. They *japa* and settle abroad, visiting home occasionally. The parents visit and everybody seems to be happy at this 'blessing' of living and working abroad.

However, with time, they stop visiting and parents now too old to withstand the stress of travelling also stop going and with time, the bond weakens. Even siblings who live in different

parts of the world find it difficult to keep in touch with each other, only occasionally ‘twittering’. It’s so sad that parents who have children now seem to have none as they seem to have been abandoned in Nigeria. I recall the case of a very close friend of mine who died in Nigeria. She was not that ill. She went to the hospital by herself just for checkup and was kept overnight for ‘observation’. She chatted with her children abroad and reassured them that she was fine. She was on drip and was very chatty. The senior sister visited and wanted to stay overnight with her but she discouraged her, saying there was no cause for alarm. Long story short. By the time the sister came in the morning, she had passed on in the night. No one is sure what happened as the family had to rely on what the nurses told them. Many families are facing this kind of situation where all the children have left home, leaving no one to care for the aged who are finding it increasingly more difficult to cope with the basics of life. The alternative out of this dilemma is for the parents to go live with their children abroad. Even this step has its challenges such as the weather and having to cope with loneliness when children and grandchildren are away to work and school. Looking back now with hindsight, has this *japa* syndrome turned out to be a blessing - or a curse?

### **LIFE LESSONS TO LEARN/SHARE**

- Make sure not all the children move abroad. Encourage at least one to remain.
- Parents can find something doing to keep busy and active for as long as they can.
- Build houses where you will not be alone. You have your own building in the compound. People can live in the same compound with you but you can maintain your privacy when you want.

- Invest well when young so that you can live on your investments in your old age.
- While young, train all your children to come home for holidays at the same time.
- Encourage your children to visit home with their children.
- Teach your children your language and speak it to them. It is never too late to start because your language is you.
- Pass on to your children the good aspects of your culture.

## CONCLUSION

In the quest for knowledge or whatever else we are in pursuit of in the labyrinths of life, the journey is hardly ever easy or smooth sailing. We face many ups and downs in the vicissitudes of life but triumph at the end. It is this possibility of attaining success that gingers us to keep striving. Life itself is a journey of sorts. Taking a spiritual perspective, life as we know it is a spiritual journey; we are in this world for a purpose. It is for each person to find that purpose and pursue its attainment. From this perspective, we are in this world to work out our salvation. The journey is seen as the journey back home to Heaven. We Christians believe we are not alone because God is ever present in all circumstances hence, we cry to Him for assistance. We also believe that in our earthly journey as in John Bunyan's novel *The Pilgrim's Progress*, God positions helpers who assist us. Some of us Christians believe in angels and heavenly beings that assist us. Some others especially in the Pentecostal strand call such 'destiny helpers.' Whatever one's belief, it is consoling and reassuring to know that we are not alone in this world and after all our earthly struggles, trials and tribulations, we shall return to our Maker in Heaven at the appropriate time known only to God our Maker. Hence while we are here, let us walk with Him and learn to key into the promptings of the Holy Spirit so that at the

end, we will reunite with our God because we came from Him and to Him, we shall return.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

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6 Oct. 2023

Wole Soyinka's *Forest of a Thousand Demons*

## CITATION



### **PROFESSOR PHILOMENA EKEIKHOMEN EJELE**

*B.A ENG. (IFE), PGD, M.A, Ph.D LINGS. (UC, LONDON)*

*Department of Linguistics and Language Arts,  
Faculty of Humanities*

Professor Philomena Ekeikhomen Ejele's career path has certainly been a journey of sorts, given the unexpected trajectory it took when she switched from being a Science student to Arts. Indeed, life can be unpredictable as we go through the labyrinths of life in the quest for knowledge. Her deep interest in words, expressions and their meaning found realization in the sphere of knowledge she chose.

Professor Philomena Ekeikhomen was born on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 1955 in Ekpoma, Esan West LGA, Edo State to the family of late Mr. Michael Oriane Alli of Emaudo village and late Mrs

Anna Arohu Alli of Idimigun village in Uhiele, both in Ekpoma.

She started her primary education in 1961 in St. Williams, Oke-Ado, Ibadan and completed it in 1966 in Marian Girls School, Benin City. She had her secondary education in the prestigious St. Maria Goretti Girls Grammar School, Benin City which she completed in 1971, passing out with Grade 2. She proceeded to Government College Ughelli for HSC in 1972 where she read core science subjects. After school, she worked from 1973-75 as a Clerk in the Public Service Commission. She gained admission to the University of Ife, Ile-Ife in 1975 to read English. As an undergraduate, she won scholarships (from Federal Government and Bendel State) and Bursary Award (from Bendel State) but chose the more prestigious National Merit Award which was given to six students with the best Year One result. This saw her through the rest of her university education from which she graduated in 1979 with Second Class Upper Division.

For National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) from 1979-80, she as a married woman served in her home State, teaching at the Continuing Education Centre in Benin City. She left in September 1980 for her Postgraduate Studies in the UK, studying Linguistics at the University College, London. Between 1980-86, she bagged Postgraduate Diploma (PGD), Master of Arts (M.A) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D), returning to Nigeria in December 1986 to lecture in the University of Benin (Uniben) as Lecturer 2.

Professor Ejele resigned her appointment in Uniben and moved to the University of Calabar to join her husband in 1988 and after two years, she transferred her services to the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) in October 1990 as Lecturer 1,

where she remained to date, breaking her period of continuous service only during her time on Sabbatical and Leave of Absence between 2012-2016.

Professor Ejele rose through the ranks to become a Professor of Linguistics in 2005. She has held several academic and administrative positions over the years. She was Head of Department (HOD) from 1997-99, Coordinator of PG Programme, Faculty Welfare Officer among others, and recently, Director of General Studies from 2020-22 during which she made positive changes that facilitated early release of results, transparency and accountability.

She served the University either as Chairman or member in various committees in the Department, Faculty and Senate, making impactful contributions to the lives of students and the workings of the university system. At some point, she was in twelve committees during the same period and she had to juggle between the meetings and her lectures. A few of these include Chairman of NUC Accreditation Committee, Chairman of Female Sexual Harassment Committee, Chairman of many Graduate School Committees and member of so many Committees of Senate, Faculty and Department.

Professor Ejele was an external examiner to many institutions for both undergraduate and postgraduate examinations. She has also served as External Assessor for Professorial Promotion in many Nigerian universities.

Professor Ejele's works on the Esan language has made her to stand out as the foremost Esan Linguist and the numerous awards she received are testaments.

Her work as a devout Christian in the Catholic Church is also attested to by the numerous awards she received from different bodies and groups in the Church, having served meritoriously and consistently over the years. She is Matron/Patron to many Church groups. She is a Noble Sister of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Knights of St. John International, having been a member for over twenty-five years and currently the Respected President of Our Lady Tower of Ivory, Ladies Auxiliary number 710, based in the Catholic Chapel of the Anunciation, UNIPORT.

Professor Ejele is happily married to Noble Brother, Sir Professor Oseikhuemen Adebayo Ejele, retired Professor of Haematology and Immunology. Their marriage is blessed with four children and many grandchildren.

**Professor Owunari Abraham Georgewill**  
**Vice-Chancellor**