

## The Relevance of Inaugural Lectures as Sources of Knowledge

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### Abstract

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An Inaugural lecture is knowledge in the living present. This work examines inaugural lectures as significant centers of knowledge. The paucity of inaugurals amongst young professors in recent times has made this effort germane. This work elucidates that, not only are inaugural lectures genuine sources of academic biographical knowledge but a primary source information from a professor with actual knowledge of the situation, or a document created by himself, in his time and in his discipline. These lectures avail newly promoted professors, the one-off occasion to articulate to the world, not only their proficiencies and experiences but their charities to scholarship, current research directions and their future research plans. Using historical, primary and secondary data sources, this work showed that this ritualistic trend has been slowed down by the fact that new professors rarely deliver inaugurals, even when they do, these lectures are never available in the library shelves or referenced. Worst-still, newly promoted professors rarely do ground-breaking researches after inaugurals because in most cases Sabbaticals have been reduced to rigorous exercises of intensive regular teaching in numerous universities as adjuncts and part-time jobs for ancillary motivations. This practice short-circuits additional research, as some young professors in most cases are not in tandem with contemporary academic trends in their turfs. They turn to become 'old-fashioned' and tend to tilt only into a particular academic mold. This work advocates that this erroneous inclination should be tamed and professors must endeavor to deliver their inaugurals, make them available, and do research after inaugurals to progress knowledge, attract grants to the university, groom your researchers in their fields and come back during the valedictory lecture to conclude on his experiences as a professor. Failure of which is a disservice to the academic community. Boundless knowledge is hidden in an inaugural lecture and suffices as a reliable source of information to the academic world, beyond the ceremonial occasions, academic robes and the after-parties.

**Keywords:** *Inaugural, Professors, Lectures, Knowledge, Source.*

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### **Background to the Study**

Inaugural lecture is one of the legacies of the global university traditions though relatively new in the Nigerian academic arena. It is generally believed that an inaugural lecture is a debt newly appointed professors owes to the University community, which should be paid before disengagement from the academic purview. This notion may not be entirely right but a necessary debt. While a valedictory lecture is a departure, an inaugural lecture is an arrival, Igbafe, (2006). This assertion seems to be the reverse in most Nigerian Universities today, as after inaugural lectures, the newly elevated Professor, goes to in 'academic siesta' and almost hands-off research. In the study of history as an academic discipline, the sources of historical knowledge are primary and secondary. Inaugural lectures are primary sources (original sources) which embrace; artifacts, documents, diary, manuscripts, autobiography, recoding and others, mostly created in the time under review. It serves as an original source of information about a topical narrative in which the individual has direct knowledge of the situation, and the document is written by such a person who is a participant or eye witness to the event. Inaugural lectures are special collections of original source-documents and are often affiliated to Universities and Colleges. These lectures are not often referenced in scholarly works of academics either because they cannot find them or because their relevance is unknown. Some academics are still to decipher the relevance of inaugural lectures within the academic firmament.

The Professorship Chair was founded in 1862 in the University of Oxford with Professor Montagu Burrows chosen as its first occupant,(Charles, 1906). In Nigeria, Professor Tekena, N. Tamuno in 1973 in the Department of History, University of Ibadan presented the first Inaugural Lecture entitled “History and History-Makers in Modern Nigeria” (Afigbo, 1975, pp. 715-720). It has become customary for newly promoted professors in universities the world-over to delivers inaugural lectures. formal ceremony and lecture of presenting the Professor to the world is expected to be given within twelve months into the Professorship aimed at showing his profile of research and expertise. The lecture is often very simple for intelligibility by those not in his discipline and to an extent to a 'layperson'. These lectures as a rule of thumb are never followed with questions, this means questions are never asked to the lecturer, no explanations, and no criticisms; just delivered like an ultimatum, *Ex Cathedra*.

Scholars are not unanimously agreed as to what an inaugural must contain. However, according to Afigbo:

*... It is still a matter for debate what an inaugural address actually is about or should be about. But it would appear that taking only content into account, an inaugural lecture can touch on one of three areas. It can, where the lecturer is also the occupant of the chair to which the headship of the department is attached, concentrate on the development of the department - its teaching and research programmes, its orientation, relevance and achievements in the past, on-going rethinking and adjustments, future trends and tendencies etc. On the other hand where the professor is not also head of department, or where he is but the assessment of the work of the department has been done recently or satisfactorily, the inaugural lecture can be a discussion of the professor's own work within the general framework of his*

*discipline: that is an analysis of the ideas which have guided his work, the techniques he has applied, the results he has achieved, his plans for the future, etc - in short an attempt by the professor to locate where he stands in the mainstream of his profession. Finally, where neither of the above is attempted for whatever reason, the inaugural lecture could be anything under the sun on which the professor considers that he has something fresh and stimulating to tell his audience, (Afigbo, 1975, pp. 715-720).*

Afigbo was very apt in showing the way an inaugural lecture must go. When this way if followed, it remains a fact that the professor can only prophesy a truism of knowledge. In inaugural lectures scholars often give statements of faith in their disciplines, defining the nature, purposes and relevance for present life or how it has helped to advance society and learning practically. In other words not stating theoretical positions alone, Alagoa (1979, p.1).

According to Agbafé:

*...an inaugural lecture serves as a justification for an appointment into a chair in a particular discipline and it is therefore in the nature of a beginning...it captures the lecture's contribution to knowledge in his own field of specialization as well as the contribution of associated colleagues in their joint research efforts...an inaugural lecture is more forward looking ...on the fortunes of the discipline in the near and distant future, Agbafé, (2006).*

The scholar is also expected to give his personal contributions to scholarship over the years of practical teaching experiences, and his new research path for the future. However, most newly elevated professors do not give these lectures and some never do until retirement. This has kept the academic community, colleagues and the public wondering of their contributions, which if presented will act a source of knowledge as told by the professionals themselves, as they will outline and possibly address practical concerns and suggest means of realizing the purpose of the discipline. This lecture when delivered by the professor, this paper argued is a very relevant source of knowledge and information that cannot be discarded. The lecture is the ruder guiding academic development and sustainability in the discipline and the University. This paper further posits therefore, that failure to deliver an inaugural lecture is a disservice to the academic community as the University, will not be able to showcase to the world, what its own product (the Professor) has achieved and the sterling substance he has been forged from. Inaugural lectures at Universities have served to reaffirm and reiterate the importance of the *Corpus* of education for individuals, society and the economy.

Ogbogbo, C.B.N, opined that:

*an inaugural lecture is simply to submit the report card of my academic activities to the academia and the society. Indeed the it is a report of my intellectual engagement and activities, as they contribute to illuminating the truth which as academics, we should ultimately seek...an expose of how my research endeavors and intellectual engagements within and out the university, coalesced to defend and recalibrate tradition, (Ogbogbo, C.B.N, (2018, p.1).*

The above-mentioned scholars are right in exemplifying what an inaugural lecture is and what it aims at achieving. However, these ideal are not completely true today, as newly appointed professor busy with other matters of strictly personal concerns than research after inaugurals. This work has four sections the introduction, inaugurals as sources of knowledge, prospects and challenges, and conclusion.

### **Inaugurals as Sources of Knowledge**

A university is like the rudder of a ship: without a rudder, a ship cannot stay the course, but without a ship, a rudder is relatively useless. Universities are also their people. They are the faculty and the students that make up their lifeblood. The University is not fully worth its name without the contributions of professors who in most cases are researchers of new knowledge. Once knowledge is discovered or invented, they have to be communicated to the university community. This at times is done through publications in inaugurals and journals. Researches thus published are great sources of knowledge. The professors are path-finders, bearing the developmental pathways for universities; they are in the forefront of knowledge in the educational sector.

The professor who delivers an inaugural is a center of academic excellence in his chosen field. The inaugural is the arrival and justification of the appointment of professor into the chair of a particular discipline based on his contribution to knowledge. A valedictory lecture will look back at the pre-inaugural lectures to know what the professor had been doing after his inaugural lecture, in a check and balance scorecard. Therefore, inaugurals mark a sharp break into another world of research for the professor of which he must give account in the valediction. But very few professors today actually deliver both lectures for reasons maybe beyond their scope and control. However, both lectures look forward, assess, project and deep on the fortunes of the discipline in the near and distant future. The inaugural is likened to a report card to defend and calibrate truth in a scholar's discipline. It sums up their best thought on the subject. An address ought to be a sort of profession of faith, a solemn setting forth of the views which the newly-appointed professor holds and the programme which he intends to carry out, during the tenure of his chair.

For the new professor the lecture provides a platform to present an overview of his research career thus far, updating colleagues, student and the public on current and future research plans, and introduces his research to wider audiences. This academic community will see and take this presentation to heart as a source of knowledge. For departments, it is also a chance to recognize new Professors as an authentic product of the department and university, an event that brings the department staff together. The departments through the event engage with broader audiences inside and outside university establishing new collaborations, partnerships and strengthening existing relationships with the world outside the University and the alumni. This gives the department and university the pride of place as a citadel of learning and scholarship that is worthy and trusted. This lecture is no mean feat.

Haven listened to so many inaugural lectures; most of them very interesting, some pronouncements of much importance and high literary merit with reputation gained as a

veteran tutor for some years, their relevance cannot be underestimated. Their pride of place in the body of knowledge should be accorded accordingly and by so doing the academic immortality of the professor. Professors must not shy away from presenting inaugural and valedictory lectures because of the knowledge society will lose if they do not.

One will be right therefore to say that any professor who has not presented his inaugural lecture is indebted to the academic community and to the university system, on this lies the fabric professors are made of, in terms of research, reach and service to humanity.

### **Challenges and Prospects**

Writing an inaugural lectures is not an easy task to some newly appointed professors. Inaugurals "are not easy"— trust" me!, said Professor Emeritus of History E. J. Alagoa, (personal interview, March, 2020). He furthermore, said there is an expectation that, as a Professor, you will present something appropriately professorial and erudite. That you will entertain or at least stimulate the audience involving a multiplicity of people that you are never probable to have to lecture again...present on something representative of your area of expertise. This, for most, is too daunting a prospect. These are real challenges as the inaugural lecturer gets stuck not knowing what to present especially if one has not been preparing for it. In most cases, the audience seats, listen without understanding anything about the entire lecture. This creates the problem of understanding the lecture especially if one I'd not of that discipline or not being literate enough. This also raises the questions of almost simplicity and a way to breaking down this lecture so as to be digestible to the layman in the audience to enable him appreciate the achievements of the lecturer, the department and the university. In this lectures no questions are asked, no criticisms and no explanations. This is the nature of this special type of academic ritual.

Economic hardship of lectures, poor funding for researches and development, inability for the university to raise funds to tract the research trajectory of the professor after his inaugural lectures are some of the challenges also militating against thorough researches after inaugural lectures. The consequences are that the purposes of Sabbaticals are defeated on the altar of active lecturing, consultancy jobs, adjunct jobs in multiple universities and colleges and these limits the research ability and the breaking of new grounds by new professors. It's like after inaugural lecture the professors has reached his peak from which he starts to stumble and gently retires. Governments, companies and private-spirited individuals do not effectively sponsor researches through grants and partnership with Professors. Most researches are cost-entailing, which the Professor cannot fund alone. Some Professor finds it difficult to learn new things in their fields after they have been made professors neither do they read new areas in their disciplines. Some further find it difficult to have functional e-mails, or learn to operate the computer simply because they feel they have 'arrived'. These are also challenges to the newly appointed Professor. Alot of research works are staring researchers in the Global South to the face. However, financial support remains a major impediment hence the need for Governments to come in, to assist as such researches if gotten right is for the common good of mankind.

**Prospects**

Each lecture provides an opportunity for academics to share their achievements in research, innovation, engagement and teaching activities before an audience of members of the University community and the general public. Some of the benefits of giving an inaugural lecture are that the new professor can celebrate an important personal milestone with family, friends and colleagues, old and new within the immediate academic community and the world. Furthermore avails an opportunity for the University to recognize and showcase the academic achievements which go a long way to represent the quality of academic standards the University has. Colleagues, both within the faculty and outside, can hear and be conversant with research that is going on around the University and the department. The lecture further encourages younger scholars to aspire for such glory thereby continuing the drive for academic excellence within the academic community.

Inaugural lectures represent an essential component of the University's public events programme, helping to create a wider awareness of the latest developments in science, engineering, arts and humanities, medicine, law and social sciences. All new professors, both internal promotions and external appointments, are welcome to give an inaugural lecture to contribute to the body of knowledge. Governments, Companies and public-spirited individuals should support and partner with Universities and Professors to sponsor researches that will benefit society.

**Conclusion**

In summary, it is the candid opinion of this work that Inaugural Lectures are paramount in the academic life of a newly appointed professor and to the growth of the body of knowledge in the University and the world. Professor must nor renege from delivering their lectures to the academic community as they are bastions of knowledge to society. Government must create the enabling environment for professorial researches to thrive and the professors most disengage from multiple engagements that divert their research time and attention for personal gains irrespective of their challenges. This will create room for ground-breading researches and discoveries on which humanity depends on to resolve its numerous challenges. Then will the academic community really appreciate the works of the Professor after his valedictory lecture and thus he will be remembered forever.

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