

TRIẾT LÝ ĐÀO TẠO TIẾN SĨ VÀ CÁC YẾU TỐ ẢNH HƯỞNG: CÓ CẦN THIẾT PHẢI THAY ĐỔI?

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Trong một xã hội thay đổi không ngừng khi tri thức trở thành một phần không thể thiếu trong cuộc sống và công việc của con người, vai trò của trường đại học đang dần thay đổi. Trong bối cảnh đó, triết lý đào tạo tiến sĩ cũng đang thay đổi để đáp ứng nhu cầu của thị trường lao động. Nghiên cứu về các yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến việc đào tạo tiến sĩ luôn nhận được sự quan tâm sâu sắc từ xã hội. Tuy nhiên các nghiên cứu trước đây thường tập trung vào các yếu tố liên quan đến cơ sở giáo dục, nghiên cứu sinh, giáo viên hướng dẫn, mà bỏ qua yếu tố nhà tuyển dụng. Qua khảo cứu các yếu tố ảnh hưởng, bài báo chỉ ra sự cần thiết phải nghiên cứu quan điểm của nhà tuyển dụng để chương trình đào tạo tiến sĩ trang bị cho nghiên cứu sinh các kỹ năng, kiến thức cần thiết trong việc đáp ứng nhu cầu của thị trường lao động.

Từ khóa: Triết lý đào tạo tiến sĩ, nhà tuyển dụng, sự sẵn sàng làm việc sau tốt nghiệp.

In an ever-changing society where knowledge is an indispensable part of people's lives and work, the role of universities has changed to a great extent. In this context, PhD education philosophy at universities has been on the changing route to meet the demand of the employment market. Research on factors affecting PhD education has always been attracting public attention, yet most research has focused on the factors from the perspectives of university administrators, supervisors and PhD candidates. Little has been conducted on the employer's perspective. By reviewing research studies on factors affecting PhD education, this paper highlights a need for future research that takes into consideration employers' perspectives to improve the doctoral training program and help PhD candidates possess job readiness.

Keywords: PhD education philosophy, employers, job readiness.

PHD EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY AND ITS AFFECTING FACTORS: ARE UNIVERSITIES RE-INVENTING THE WHEEL?

1. Introduction

1.1. Common beliefs about the nature and purpose of a doctoral degree

Given the global context where knowledge has become an indispensable part of society, there is an increasing

number of students enrolled into PhD programs in universities around the globe (O'Connor et al., 2023; Polkinghorne et al., 2023; Sharabani et al., 2023; Tsai et al., 2022). For many PhD students, once enrolling into the program, they are expected to “develop the highest level of

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holistic and systematic understanding of scholarship and stewardship of a field of study through an original contribution that advances the frontiers of knowledge” (Burton et al., 2022, p.1). For others, the capacity to come up with “a meaningful research topic, a relevant method to solve the research problem and communication methods to reach the scholar community” (Hồ Tú Bảo, 2021, para.11) is the key to success.

Researchers often suggest that faculties should provide PhD students with opportunities to develop their “competence to succeed in academia, such as those necessary for scholarship, teaching and serving in one’s field” and include both “peers and faculty members to provide balance and opportunities for different kinds of conversation” (Renbarger et al., 2022, p. 1687). Moreover, the PhD student’s competence should include the ability “to develop the science, to steward the discipline and to educate the next generation” (Tsai et al., 2022, p. 2) pointing to the PhD student’s ability to research, lead and educate others in the related discipline upon completion of the doctoral program.

1.2. Shifting paradigm on PhD education

Recently it seems that there has been a shift in paradigm in PhD education, from purely academic to a mix of academic and non-academic elements. For example, Caliskan and Holley (2017) maintain that

in addition to providing research skills, the doctoral program must equip the student with job preparedness, basing on the fact that different career paths require certain sets of skills and knowledge. In Australia, for example, universities have recognised the need for “broader skills training withing research training degrees to maximise successful candidate transition into post-academic employment” (O’Connor et al., 2023, p. 20). As such, many Australian universities have included a professional development element in their doctoral program (for example Monash University), transferable skills and professional skills activities (the University of Queensland), or employability skills training component such as at Flinders University (O’Connor et al., 2023). Also, universities in the United States have been following the same path by integrating professional development seminars on higher education “career preparedness” (Renbarger et al., 2022, p.1689) into the PhD program. These seminars focus on such topics as making an attractive CV, a personal statement, a research statement and a five- year career plan.

In line with the shifting training philosophy in the doctoral program, many researchers have proposed the Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) model in designing the program. For example, Gardner (2009) developed a model of the doctoral degree process with three stages, namely “admission and transition into a doctoral program [] coursework and exam, ...and candidacy and the job market”

(Renbarger, 2022, p. 1688). O'Connor et al. (2023) in Australia came up with a model that includes four broad categories following the WIL model, namely “student experience, curriculum design, institutional requirement and stakeholder engagement” (p. 35). The model was then tested and received positive feedback from both the students and lecturers. Olsson and Bernhard (2023) suggest a model focusing on what they call “industrial PhD education” (p. 524) in Sweden. This model places emphasis on the ‘collaborative interplay between education and work’ (p. 524). Feedback from the doctoral students shows that in spite of some challenges and tension between academia and industry, there are certain benefits such as “access to practice and empirical data offering opportunities for validation and testing of results and models in practice” [] “knowledge sharing, knowledge creation, link to research, competence development and creating an environment for discussions and collegial support” (Olsson & Bernhard, 2023, p. 531).

In short, PhD education is attracting an increasing number of students, and universities around the globe are making changes in their educational philosophy which gears toward both academic and non-academic elements. This is to respond for the demand of the market to make PhD graduates more job-ready. This is one important factor that affects PhD education. There are more important factors established by previous research that are reviewed in the next section.

2. A review of factors affecting PhD education

Research on the factors affecting PhD education has centered around some common categories such as institutions, supervisors and PhD students. It is important to note that the factors are not single and stand-alone, but rather intertwined in complex relationships, with enablers and barriers happening simultaneously.

2.1. Institution-related factors

Institution-related factors include first and foremost an official curriculum that can equip the PhD student with all the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to become an independent researcher (Polkinghorne et al., 2023). In other words, the PhD lecturers must train students “mastery over research, management, and entrepreneurship to meet the needs of society and their own discipline” (Habibi et al., 2023, p. 18). Also, curriculum and content learning in the PhD program which “includes exposure to diverse methodological perspectives” [rather than ...] “individual research process and a research identity” is found to be desirable (Bastalich, 2015, p. 27).

Next, faculty is established in previous research as an influencing factor on doctoral students. Often, the ‘competing demand’ (Renbarger et al., 2022, p. 1699) from faculties toward the students is a barrier to their full participation in the program. For example, the faculty member approves one seminar series for the

professional development of PhD students, but schedules meetings with her/his students at the time of the seminars because those are the only slots available (Renbarger et al., 2022).

In contrast, support for doctoral students, that has been proved by previous research to be beneficial to students includes research seminars for the students. The workshop series which can take the form of a “range of theoretical and philosophical perspectives underpinning... research and scholarship at the university” (Bastalich, 2015, p. 18) have been proven effective in not only helping doctoral students in “framing research objectives” (Bastalich, 2015, p.18), but also in the appreciation of “the importance of their own and others’ theoretical perspectives in conditioning research knowledge” (Bastalich, 2015, p. 26).

Other types of research seminars can allow the students to communicate their viewpoints in front of the academic audience, so they can receive “various comments, suggestions, and advice from others [rather than their supervisors]... within the academic and disciplinary community in respect of their decision and content of the thesis” (Addoe & Kwapong, 2023, p. 4), thus they create opportunities for the students to develop academically (Steen-Utheim & Wittek, 2017) especially in relation to thesis writing, presentation skills and confidence building (Addoe & Kwapong, 2023, p.1)

In terms of financial factors, Litalien and Guay (2015) found that research grants and scholarship provision play a substantial role in maintaining the student’s commitment with the program. Likewise, Coonrod (2008, cited in Amador-Campos et al, 2023) established that the bigger the student funding, the higher likelihood of achieving academic success there will be.

On the contrary, administrative complexity is a hindering factor to a PhD student’s commitment to the program, because it makes students feel “restless & helpless to the point of thinking and wanting to drop out of doctoral studies” (Sharabani et al., p. 3).

2.2. Supervisor-related factors

Research indicates that supervisors play the most influential role in the academic success of a PhD candidate (Sverdlik et al., 2018), and of a PhD program (Beavers et al., 2022; Rice et al., 2022). In some researchers’ perspectives, supervision often encompasses ‘explicit training in research methods, ethics and procedures and active efforts aimed at ensuring that the supervised students acquire appropriate competences’ (Amador-Campos et al., 2023, p.357). Other researchers see the supervisory elements to include “commitment and involvement [in students’ study], the extent to which the supervisor defend their students’ stance [] respect for timelines, convergence of interests... “ (Sverdlik et al, 2018, p. 369) to name a few, which show PhD students’

concerns not only with “subject matter and methodology but.... productivity, partnership and commitment on the part of their supervisor” (Sverdlik et al, 2018, p.369).

Also, because of the length of time of at least 3-4 years of PhD education, the relationship between a supervisor and a PhD student could develop into a more “ideal” mentoring relationship in which the student regards his/her supervisor as “a source of motivation” and “a contributor to his/her academic success” (Gearuty & Metz, 2012, cited in Sverdlik et al., 2018, p. 371). In contrast, if there is no “supervisory fit”, or when the PhD student perceives that the supervisor does not “invest in their work or [is] unavailable in times of need”, there will be “confusion, stress and anxiety” (Sverdlik et al., 2018, p. 370).

Moreover, support in the form of appropriate guidance from supervisors is a crucial factor (Sharabani et al, 2023). Amandor-Campos et al., (2023) found that there is a positive correlation between the “mentoring of the doctoral thesis and the research self-efficacy and thesis-related work of the student” (p. 368). In the context of Vietnam, Nguyễn Đình Đức et al. (2020) confirm that of the institution-related factors, some outstanding factors often include the quality of supervisors or supervising teams. However, because of the relationship between the supervisor and the student that is developed over time, sometimes it might be difficult for the students to “challenge the advice of their supervisor due to respect, insecurity and/or

cultural values” (Polkinghorne et al., 2023, p.49).

In terms of academic aspects, supervisor feedback is essential in the thesis writing process of doctoral students because it helps them to “shape, focus and strengthen their academic writing” (Addoe & Kwapong, 2023, p.4). Vague feedback often causes confusion, unhappiness and a feeling of low efficacy in the student while constructive feedback from the supervisor boosts students’ confidence in their academic writing work (Addoe & Kwapong, 2023). Preparing students for the thesis submission and final examination also contributes to academic success, which often involves the student in a mock examination facilitated by “independent academic colleagues who have little knowledge of the thesis and who reside outside of the supervising team” (Polkinghorne et al., 2023, p.54).

The ability to integrate the student into a research culture by a supervisor is further proved to be essential in enabling the student to achieve academic success. Also, the supervisor needs to look “far beyond” the research project conducted by the student, and to care for the “holistic needs” of the student. During this process, empathy and respect must be ascertained to achieve successful supervision (Polkinghorne et al., 2023).

2.3. PhD candidate-related factors

The PhD candidate-related factors are documented at different stages in the PhD candidature, from the starting point, and

while doing to PhD program to the later stages. For example, Bui Van Ga (2016, para.5) insists that the most significant factor is the PhD candidates themselves-their motivations and goals to be achieved by taking part in a PhD program- to become a researcher to “develop and generate new knowledge”. Sverdlik et al. (2018) also confirm the importance of the PhD candidate’s motivation to undertake a PhD program, which tends to correlate with the student’s age, interests, personal goals, employability prospects and family support. Sharabani et al. (2023) detail motivations into the desire for career advancement, for professional development and for academic integration by the doctoral student. Many students feel that pursuing PhD education is a “life changing experience” (Sharabani et al., 2023, p.5) not only in terms of new knowledge and skills but also in terms of being more confident and having better skills for problem-solving. Interestingly, many students in Sharabani et al. (2023) study report the negative relationship between increasing wages and PhD studies, that is a “negligible increase in wage” (p.5) often resulting in disappointment for the PhD graduate.

During the PhD candidature, three important factors listed by Sverdlik et al. (2018) are the PhD student’s self-worth, self-efficacy and academic identity formation. According to these authors, students often have low self-worth if they have to sacrifice to attend the program. In contrast, when they graduate from the program, they will experience a high level

of self-worth level. Likewise, self-efficacy is a reliable predictor of academic success and completion of the course by the student. In other words, the higher the level of self-efficacy, the higher of “interest, achievement and persistence” (p. 380) a student will have. In contrast, the lower level of self-efficacy often results in a lack of effort in producing a quality thesis in a timely manner by the student. In addition, the process of forming academic identity is found to be an influential factor. This process involves students’ participation in formal activities such as socialisation, writing, and informal activities such as peer interaction, interactions with supervisors and other faculty members (Sverdlik et al., 2018). All of these activities are found by researchers to contribute to the PhD student’s sense of belonging to a community of practice.

When it comes to the sense of belonging to a community of practitioners, interaction first and foremost with their peers emerges as essential to the PhD candidate. This interaction can be in the form of just chatting and “knowing a group of people who are going through the same struggle and climbing the mountain together” (Rice et al., 2022, p. 716), or in the form of the “exchange of ideas, assignment support, course support and general discussion” to create a “collective brain trust” (Rice et al., 2022, p. 716). In other words, the interaction with other PhD students in the same cohort can be of help in sustaining ‘social and intellectual growth’ of a PhD student (Rice et al., 2022, p. 716).

Moreover, communicating the research results through publication to the wider public gives the PhD student a sense of belonging to a community of professionals. In this process, a factor that comes into play and is often highlighted in previous research is the research and publication capacity of the PhD student, which is reflected “in the number of ISI-indexed journal articles the student can publish” (Nguyen Tan Dai, 2019, p. 7). This is in line with what Sverdlik et al. (2018) have established in that academic writing skills are important and there should be a match in expectations in the meaning of writing between the student and supervisor in this aspect. In more detail, the PhD student and the supervisor should regard writing as part of “[the student] developing scholarly identities”, rather “a means to an end” with ‘the end being dissemination of research and contribution to the field’ (p. 377).

Together with the academic writing skills required of the PhD student, reading skills are also taken into consideration as an influencing factor. According to Kwan (2008), reading skills need to be focused and purposeful so as to allow the student to synthesise information and generate new knowledge during the writing process. However, a quota of a fixed number of journal articles made compulsory for PhD students so they can graduate can somehow put pressure on students in general and students in pedagogy in particular, such as the case of Chinese PhD students (Guan et al. 2023).

Psychological factors are also found to be influencing PhD students in completing

their education because they have to attempt to “balance social and familial responsibilities with their academic work” (Sverdlik et al., 2018, p. 371). In most cases, the students encounter difficulties in maintaining their social interaction and their family responsibilities, which is seen in the reduction in the quality time they spend with their friends and families, partly because of the shared attention to the academic matters involved in the PhD program, and also because it is difficult to share the “research interests and obligations due to others being unfamiliar with the doctoral education context” (Sverdlik et al., 2018, p. 372).

In contrast, support from the student’s family, especially the sharing of the family burden is established as a crucial factor influencing the pursuit of a PhD program (Sharabani et al., 2023). Additionally, support from peers can provide both social and academic benefits, including increased socialisation and development of a sense of belonging to a PhD community (Amados-Campos et al., 2023). Furthermore, the understanding developed by the PhD candidate that failures, regardless of being small or big, are part of the PhD journey is established as important because without failures, a PhD candidate can never receive constructive feedback from the supervisors and publishers (Firth, 2024).

Not only dealing with study-life balance, PhD students have to cope with the process of “prioritizing their own personal and professional development” (Renbarger et al, 2022, p. 1699) in the PhD

education program. During this process, doctoral students must employ their time management skills, self-discipline and self-reflection in evaluating the learning process, and request assistance from others in a timely manner, which are termed as “self-regulated learning strategies” by Johnson (2023, p. 6).

3. Conclusion and future directions

As can be seen from the review above, PhD education is a complex process whereby the student’s success is influenced by a number of factors stemming from the education-provider, the supervisor and the PhD student. In recent times, there has been a shift in paradigm that requires the PhD program to make the student ready for the job market in the everchanging society. This presents the need to take into consideration the employer’s perspectives when a university looks to design a PhD program. Also, future research on the factors affecting doctoral success should be expanded to also be concerned with the students’ capacity for job readiness upon completion of his/her doctoral study. In short, the “wheel” is just here to stay and not to be re-invented, but to be adjusted in relevant contexts at relevant times in response to the employment market.

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