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Imperatives of Doctoral Degree Pursuit in Educational Leadership and Management

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Strategies.*

This article examines the significance of pursuing a PhD in Educational Leadership and Management (ELM), emphasizing its role in developing research skills, critical analysis, and leadership capacity in education. Despite the rising demand for doctoral graduates in academia and policymaking, completion rates remain low, particularly in Africa. Existing literature predominantly focuses on Western doctoral models, leaving gaps in understanding challenges faced by PhD candidates in low-resource settings. Research on the doctorateness in ELM, supervision effectiveness, and the psychological and social dimensions of doctoral study remains underdeveloped. To address these gaps, this study employed a narrative literature synthesis of findings from peer-reviewed journals, books, institutional reports, and conference proceedings accessed through Google Scholar and institutional databases. The inclusion criteria included sourcing mainly peer-reviewed literature, institutional reports, and academic books published in English within the last 10–15 years; while non-academic sources, inaccessible full-text articles, and outdated literature were excluded. Using thematic analysis, key challenges such as doctoral supervision models, institutional barriers, financial constraints, and doctoral identity formation were identified. Constructivist Learning Theory was used to explain how doctoral students construct knowledge through self-directed learning, collaboration, and mentorship. Self-determination theory was also used to highlight the functions of intrinsic motivation and autonomy in persistence. It can be concluded that poor supervision, financial burdens, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak research networks hinder the academic progress of doctoral students. We recommend structured mentorship programs, financial support, supervisor training, and flexible supervision models to address the challenges. Future research should consider comparative studies across regions to inform global doctoral education frameworks.

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INTRODUCTION

A doctoral degree is a critical requirement in academia due to the widening gap between the supply and demand for doctoral degree graduates in the academic labour market (Horta et al., 2023). Employing a doctoral degree holder in a university upsurges creativity and originality of new ideas in the university because at the doctoral degree level candidates learn higher-order skills of writing, research, critical analysis, and time management (Duke & Denicolo, 2017) needed for studies in various areas, hence more discoveries and innovations can be realised. Additional skills also include fact-finding and administrative skills, public speaking, and accomplishing tasks under pressure.

Several studies (e.g., Atibuni et al., 2017; Darawshwa, 2018; Hill & Thabet, 2021; Pyhalto et al., 2012) have acknowledged numerous challenges encountered when pursuing a doctoral degree. These include supervisor-related challenges such as untimely feedback from the supervisor, absence of the supervisors from the university, contradictory feedback, and inexperienced supervisors; student-related challenges including low motivation, work-life imbalance, financial burden, and limited research skills; and institution-related issues such as unsupportive university policies, winding bureaucratic procedures, and insufficient

infrastructural as well as material provisions. These challenges often lead to unwarranted delays in completing doctoral studies.

A doctoral degree in educational leadership and management aspires to generate informed scholars and educational managers of high integrity with critical and practical knowledge of educational leadership and research. In addition, doctoral candidates and graduates generate new knowledge through rigorous research and publications (Bhattacharjee, 2025). Their studies inform national policies and also address pressing challenges in the education sector such as funding, inclusion, infrastructure, and curriculum reform. However, existing literature has predominantly focused on Western doctoral models, hence leaving a gap in understanding the challenges doctoral students face in low-resource settings. Besides, there has been limited exploration of doctorateness in ELM and insufficient research on PhD learning and supervision models. Therefore, this article was intended to foreground the relevance of the PhD in educational leadership and management in shaping future educational practices, policies and management strategies.

The study was purposed to obtain answers to the following research questions:

- What is the origin of a doctoral degree?

- What challenges are encountered in pursuing a doctoral degree?
- How can these challenges be mitigated to enhance access and success in the process?

The article therefore explores the history, conceptual model and theoretical underpinnings of doctoral degree pursuit. It further provides justification for the doctoral degree in education leadership and management, the “doctorateness” of the doctoral degree holder of educational leadership and management, and highlights the challenges encountered by doctoral degree scholars and subsequent strategies that can be employed to enhance the completion of the doctoral programme.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a desk-based research approach with a narrative review to synthesize existing knowledge on the pursuit of PhD in Education Leadership and Management (ELM). This method allowed for a structured, comprehensive analysis while maintaining flexibility in exploring broader themes and contextual factors. The literature search was conducted using Google Scholar and institutional databases. The searches were comprised of titles, abstracts, and full articles. The search terms included; “doctoral degree,” “educational leadership and management,” “doctorateness,” “origin of PhD,” “PhD supervision model,” “challenges of PhD pursuit,” and “strategies to enhance PhD completion.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine search results and enhance relevance to the study objectives. To ensure the credibility and relevance of sources, peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, conference proceedings and books published in English addressing doctoral education, supervision model and completion strategies were included while duplicates, inaccessible documents and non-academic search results such as blogs and opinion pieces were excluded. Assessment of quality and credibility was maintained by giving priority to

peer-reviewed articles, reputable academic books and institutional reports. In addition, studies with clear objectives, systematic data collection and strong empirical grounding were prioritized.

Validity and reliability were ensured through source triangulation where multiple sources were cross-referenced to ensure consistency. Besides, constructivist theory and self-determination theory guided the interpretation. Thus, priority was given to literature relevant to doctoral education in Africa while considering a global perspective. The literature was analyzed in themes which included; the origins of doctoral degree, the concept of doctorateness, challenges in doctoral education and strategies to enhance PhD completion. The combination of narrative review, supported by thematic analysis and constructivism theory plus self-determination theory, provided a structured yet flexible approach to analyzing and synthesizing literature. This led to a comprehensive understanding of doctoral education, challenges and solutions, and better interpretations of findings.

Origins of the Doctoral Degree

It is unclear when the first doctorates were awarded. However, when the 'Masters' banded together to form a legal corporation and were recognized by the pope or emperor in the twelfth century, universities were born (Bogle, 2018). Initial feudal universities, such as the University of Paris, bestowed the title of 'Master' on those who completed their preparation and were qualified to teach, but in Bologna, they were referred to as 'Doctor' (Rospigliosi & Bourner, 2019). In his study, Bogle further discovered that in some countries, a doctorate was required for specialists to teach at a university in particular fields such as law, theology, and medicine. However, Simpson (1983) claims that the University of Paris appears to have been the first to award PhD in the early thirteenth century, followed by Germanic states such as Munich in 1473, Leiden in 1580, and Utrecht in 1644. The German nations considered universities as a symbol of prestige, and this fueled their rise from the 16th through the 18th centuries

(Perry, 2012). In England, however, until the establishment of the University of London in 1823, the Church of England strictly regulated the establishment of Universities (Rospigliosi & Bourner 2019) except for two old Universities—Oxford and Cambridge, while Scotland had four including St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh.

According to Rospigliosi and Bourner (2019), German universities started awarding doctorates in philosophy in the 16th century, which were not formally recognized by the various state authorities until 1771 in Prussia. Nevertheless, the doctoral degree was not a research-based degree but rather signified mastery of a subject's knowledge and erudition. In fact, it involved excessive reading since there was no specialization. Hence, a new suggestion was introduced to focus on research and teaching, proposing the concept of 'Lernfreiheit'--the freedom of academics to specialize. According to Perry (2012), the concept of a written thesis to be delivered alongside a disputation first occurred in the 17th century. This would ensure that the scholars got a deeper understanding of knowledge in the various areas that they researched. By the 18th century, the concept of a 'Master' as understood in the German-speaking world had become degraded, and hence the demand for a higher certification with specific rights like a qualification to teach at a university. In 1810, the University of Berlin (now Humboldt University) was founded and introduced a doctor of philosophy (PhD) that was based on research and this transformed teaching from mere mastery of subject content to a research-based degree (Simpson, 1983). Other German-speaking universities quickly followed and started offering research-based doctoral degrees. Thereafter, the Napoleonic reform of higher education in France followed in 1810, the Netherlands also followed in 1815, and then the University of Zurich in 1833, and Yale University in the US in 1861 (Geiger, 2014).

Currently, the doctoral degree is either an academic doctorate – PhD – or a professional doctorate such

as a Doctor of Chemistry meant for industry. Attaining one is as demanding as attaining the other, whether through research-only or coursework and dissertation; on full-time or part-time. Therefore, undertaking the doctoral programme one should be well conversant with the conceptual models.

Conceptual Models of Doctoral Pursuit

As doctoral awards gained ground across the globe, various models were developed by different scholars. These include the PhD learning journey model and the PhD supervision model.

The PhD Learning Journey Model

According to Fadliadi et al. (2012), the PhD learning journey involves three stages. The first stage is when the candidate begins doctoral studies. At this stage, students experience challenges in identifying the research problem, academic writing skills and adjusting to more responsibilities such as attending academic conferences, making academic presentations, and publishing (Gao, 2021).

The second stage involves research development and completion of the research project, characterized by various interactions between the scholar and their supervisors (Van Rooij, et. al., 2021). At this stage, the doctoral student requires a lot of support from the supervisor due to the fact that completing a PhD is time-consuming, difficult, and stressful for students (Atibuni, 2017; Ndaguza & Mutarutinya, 2017). Besides doctoral candidates need supervisory support since they live in isolation, hence varied experiences, talents, and capabilities have to be combined from the start, such that successful doctoral completion is attained (Gao, 2021). Furthermore, large research projects necessitate familiarity with academic writing in research work (Darawsha, 2018), more concentration, setting personal goals, and using appropriate literature.

The third stage is the transition to a successful doctoral graduate which entails more than just writing a thesis (Yazdani & Shokooh, 2018).

According to Talebloo and Baki (2013), a successful PhD graduate should not only complete a thesis, but also become a creator of knowledge, share work with others, and be ready to be an effective researcher. This implies that attaining a PhD is not only acquiring a paper but also contributing to society in terms of generating new knowledge. However, new knowledge cannot be generated alone; it often requires a more experienced person to guide the student. Therefore, PhD supervision model was designed to address the supervision gap in the PhD learning journey model.

PhD Supervision Model

Yousuf et al. (2019) define supervision in research as a professional process in which a more knowledgeable researcher has a specific affiliation with a less knowledgeable researcher. During this affiliation, the supervisor provides academic support through timely feedback and frequent virtual or physical meetings with the student. The primary goal is to facilitate/guide the scholar in the knowledge creation of research theories and methods as they get shaped into independent, critical researchers (Ndaguza & Mutarutinya, 2017). By and large, the knowledge they develop becomes beneficial to society.

Practices by supervisors such as failing to read students' works and failing to attend supervisory meetings, among others, may affect the student's career and doctoral completion (Sverdlik et.al. 2018). Hence, if a student solely depends on their supervisor's availability and support, it may hinder their progress towards obtaining a PhD. Some supervisors may mediate, facilitate, and mentor students, but this can create a dependency that prevents students from becoming independent. Thus, students must take the initiative and not rely solely on their supervisors' decisions in order to succeed.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Doctoral Degree Pursuit

PhD pursuit can be explained using a number of theories. However, this study was guided by the Constructivist Theory and Self-Determination Theory as detailed below.

Constructivist Theory

Doctoral studies involve scholars building their own ideas and incorporating new information into pre-existing knowledge. It is upon this premise that constructivism is considered a major theory guiding this study. According to Mayes and De Freitas (2004), constructivism was founded on the assumption that individuals construct new ideas based on existing knowledge and experiences. Therefore, since learners have varied experiences, each learner's understanding is unique. Learners adjust their modes of understanding by reflecting on earlier theories or correcting misunderstandings. In other words, students learn by combining new information with what they already know.

Furthermore, constructivists assume that the milieu in which an idea is taught, combined with students' ideas and attitudes, influences learning (Baume, 2017). The constructivist view of learning perceives the learner as a dynamic agent in the process of acquiring knowledge. For instructional designers, constructivist theory emphasizes that outcomes of learning should focus on the knowledge production process and that learning targets the need to be derived from realistic tasks with demarcated aims. According to constructivist philosophy, people gain knowledge through active participation during learning. Hence, doctoral students are expected to actively take part in learning, drawing from their previous experience at the Master's degree level, and then develop new concepts.

According to Waseem and Aslam (2021), constructivism is the contemporary face of scholarship paradigms serving as the basis for numerous theories presented for adult self-regulated and self-directed learning. Vygotsky and Piaget were pivotal figures of this philosophy. Piaget felt that individuals can automatically grasp and apply

information because they must construct their facts through previous personal experiences such that mental images can be created. Vygotsky, on the other hand, emphasized the social environment of learning, active participation, pragmatic learning, inquiry-based, problem-based learning, and collaboration with others as characteristics of constructivist learning activities (Baume, 2017).

Waseem and Aslam (2021) proposed four essential constructivist learning environment features that must be well thought out while applying constructivist instructional approaches in doctoral degree pursuit. These include (a) supervisors and students exchanging knowledge, (b) expertise being collectively possessed by the PhD advisors and students, (c) the advisors being obliged to be an architect or guide, and (d) learning groups being made up of a diverse set of students. This implies that the Constructivist Theory implores students to actively contribute to the learning process within a democratic atmosphere, the events are collaborative and student-centred, the supervisor fosters the learning process, and students are answerable and yet independent. Therefore, this theory focuses on student-centered approaches and the supervisor is more of a facilitator. So, in doctoral degree pursuit, students contribute the largest percentage, the supervisor interacts with the supervisee freely, and the student is independent and answerable for all research findings.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

This is another important theory in pursuit of PhD developed by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci. This theory lays emphasis on the role of intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020) during the pursuit of activities. According to Salikhova et al. (2020), intrinsic motivation produces more results than extrinsic motivation because an individual increases personal commitment, becomes psychologically satisfied, stimulates a deeper approach to learning and this increases persistence, creativity and hence academic achievement. Van Rooij et.al. (2021) add

that self-determination leads to positive psychological and behavioural outcomes. Therefore, PhD pursuit requires a student to have intrinsic motivation in order to understand the value and importance of the studies and hence enjoy them.

Justification of the Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership and Management

According to Kamonges (2021), the Government of Uganda shifted a lot of administrative powers from the national level to school heads, meaning that administrators have a vital role to play in making crucial decisions. The same author further elaborates that several educational decisions are being delegated to school administrators and principals. This necessitates the use of judgment in specific situations rather than just obeying norms. As a result, persons vying for educational leadership and management positions need to build professional skills. Graduates of a doctoral programme in educational leadership and management are poised to be equipped with competencies (knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and values) to serve in their administrative positions in educational institutions, whether public or private; primary school, secondary school, department of education, tertiary institution, university, or other educational organizations (Bush, 2008). Thus, a doctorate in educational leadership and management is required in order to form leaders who can research current trends in educational leadership and educational policies hence making sound judgments.

Bush (2011) explains that effective leadership preparation makes a difference in service delivery. According to the author, principals in the US discovered that they were not well equipped with skills for their jobs in relation to the amount of time it took to complete responsibilities and the number of tasks required. They also felt not ready for the isolation of the position. Without proper preparation, many school heads mess up as they try to juggle the challenging stresses of the post. Leaders need to be prepared and given knowledge

and confidence in educational leadership so as to cope with ‘people’ pressures and be able to influence others. Therefore, if school administrators are to operate decently, there is a similar strong moral case for them to receive specific preparation for their leadership and management roles through the acquisition of the highest academic achievement—the doctoral degree.

Learner-centered leaders are role models to others (Bush, 2011) because they are concerned about learning, teaching and classrooms, and want to know more. PhD in educational leadership and management involves learning through research and publishing as well as sharing the acquired information. This helps to discover more about the education system for example policies, challenges and other management issues. Besides, research creates opportunities to interact with more people in an education setting and get more information about education, at the same time stay focused on other aspects of life that facilitate education to take place.

The “Doctorateness” of Educational Leadership and Management

The term "doctorate" is derived from the Latin verb *docere*, which means "to teach." Historically, the degree was granted on the basis that teaching was both an honour and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity (Bullin, 2018). Regardless of derivation, doctoral programs in most areas are intended to give a research-intensive training experience. Doctoral education is designed to develop scholars who will advance the field through research and publication. Doctoral students are given the opportunity to hone their skills in order to conduct original research and intellectual inquiry that results in new discipline-specific knowledge.

According to Yazdani and Shokooh (2018), Doctoral rank is a personal quality that follows a progressive transformation and training process, leading to the formation of an independent researcher with a certain uniqueness and level of

capability and the formation of a unique contribution. This extends information through scholarship and attainment of the highest academic degree and culminates in stewardship of the discipline. The same authors identified five characteristics of doctorates: independent researcher, progressive and transformative training process, unique theoretical input, highest academic degree, and discipline stewardship. Yazdani and Shokooh (2018) added that doctorateness begins with the input stage and continues through the process, product, output, and impact. The doctoral student needs a lot of personal commitment and prior study at the start. Doctoral programs are formal and time-consuming, with little socialization. This results in outputs such as earning a doctorate, writing a dissertation, making an original contribution, mastery of knowledge, research competence, doctoral identity, and high-order thinking skills. The end result is personal development, discipline stewardship, societal influence and contributes to human capital development. Therefore, doctoral status entails not just the completion of a dissertation but also a change in personal character, knowledge transfer and knowledge creation (Lee, 2019).

Challenges in Pursuit of a Doctoral Degree

The challenges in pursuit of a doctoral degree are divided into three categories, that is, supervision-, student-, and institution-related factors (Sverdluk, et. al., 2018). Supervision and institutional factors are mainly based on prospects and guidelines. Similarly, student factors comprise cognitive characteristics, disciplinary background and ability as well as students’ personal life structures such as finances and way of life. Each of these is discussed below.

Supervision Related Challenges

According to Duke and Denicolo (2017), supervising a PhD student is one of the most challenging duties. An experienced supervisor should be committed to this work, defend

contentious arguments, have a good reputation, manage time, show interest in students' research, alert students about job opportunities, apply diverse scholarly methods, associate well with supervisees, interact well with other academics in the university and outside the university; and should have supervised several theses (Sverdlik et al., 2018). These characteristics imply that doctoral students should exhibit good output, cooperation, and commitment to their supervisor, and likewise receive more knowledge and methodological support. In addition, Van Rensburg et al. (2016) and Lee (2019) stress that supervisors need to provide timely feedback, meet regularly with the student, hold open discussions about roles and responsibilities, be supportive and maintain a collegial relationship, and continue to encourage the student to keep the flow of work going throughout the program. However, such expectations are in most cases not met because of the busy work schedules of supervisors and other related challenges. Therefore, the student and the supervisor have to concur on how to handle the research progress.

In a study by King (2018), it was discovered that supervisors are not thoroughly equipped with tactics for handling research projects. The supervisors never finish the reading of the concept note, proposal, and the entire research work. Furthermore, supervisors are uncertain whether various stages of research have been handled correctly, for example, research proposal writing and its defence, giving students feedback about the corrections on the proposal, data collection, cleaning of data, report writing, which includes data analysis, connecting the parts of research and defending the research thesis (Sverdlik et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a delay in reading students' work which delays the completion of the doctoral study.

In relation to the above, other research commitments may make the supervisor frequently unavailable (Atibuni, 2019). If the second supervisor's degree of support does not rise, there

could be a need to interact either virtually or face-to-face. Furthermore, in rare circumstances, supervisors may retire, move to another university, or take a sabbatical leave without alerting a student (Van Rooij, 2021). Further discussions may be necessary with the department about what happens next in such a case. In other words, late response demotivates the learner as work cannot be finished within the stipulated time. This discourages students as they are waiting for responses from the supervisors, hence some may end up withdrawing from the program (Pyhalto et al., 2012)

In case a student is allocated two leading supervisors, they may give contradictory advice or even not work comfortably with each other (Ali et al, 2016; Mbogo et al. 2020). This implies that a student should meet each supervisor separately but make independent decisions. In addition, King (2018) discovered that there is inadequate formal training for supervisors on research supervision. Different supervisors in universities have diverse experience and exposure thus giving different advice. The same author notes that supervisors sometimes are inconsistent in the work they guide. They sometimes forget the last opinion they gave to students. For example, the chapter on methodology can be corrected by the supervisor and a student is told to proceed to another chapter. However, when a student submits the fourth chapter, the same supervisor goes back to correct the already marked work thus delaying the accomplishment of the task.

A study conducted by Mbogo et al. (2020) among Kenyan universities revealed several supervisor-related challenges. Among them are heavy supervision load due to a lack of qualified supervisors; other duties outside supervision of PhD students; inadequate knowledge of the student's research topic; and poor interpersonal relationships with supervisees. The authors report that these and other student-related challenges have delayed the completion of most PhD students in Kenyan universities.

Student Related Challenges

Students' incapacity to comprehend their areas of interest or a lack of expertise on the chosen theme compromises the doctoral progress. A study by Lubbe et al. (2005) indicates that students, during their undertaking of doctoral studies, may not comprehend appropriately the research they are undertaking. This results in the use of inappropriate research methods and inadequate publications thus focusing on theoretical aspects only. Besides, some students are incapable of defining their areas of study accurately and are not able to validate the methodology. Several students lack a foundation for research (Talebloo & Baki, 2013). Hence, they hinge on knowledge acquired previously at the institutions where they were studying at the master's degree level. Therefore, it is necessary that universities provide some knowledge of basic research methods to students as they start their PhD program. This is essential since an inaccurate understanding of the theme may delay in accomplishment of the program. Similarly, it enables supervisors to get a thorough understanding of the theme students are undertaking before beginning to supervise. Thus, it is crucial for students to select areas of study that they are more knowledgeable and interested in.

In addition, the doctoral programme is a lengthy pursuit and requires a lot of concentration which sometimes leads to low motivation, lack of confidence, and low morale (Evans et al., 1999). Many students who often start eagerly never complete their doctoral studies because they lose motivation. This is common once the original eagerness to be a PhD student has gone down and is what is referred to as the 'second-year blues' (McBurniea et al., 2011). The reasons to undertake doctoral studies in the first place have a great influence on a student's motivation. Culhane (2018) explains that doctoral studies require profound commitment and when a student's reasons for undertaking it are shallow and based on extrinsic motivation, they are likely to lose interest.

Therefore, this calls for continuous discussion about your feelings with other PhD students and supervisors in order to remain optimistic. Second-year blues can be abridged through strong support, inspiration, and positive feedback. Confidence can be boosted through presenting at research conferences and online seminars, hence becoming more motivated and interested in the doctoral programme (Shariff et al., 2015). Also setting realistic and achievable goals lessens second-year blues, so students need to control their prospects in order to do something thoroughly with great vigour.

Students' psychological maturity and general well-being (Sverdlik et al., 2018) play a big role in research. This involves preparing themselves mentally for the repetitive work, constructive criticism and seemingly endless research and writing. They are required to maintain a respectful, approachable, and valuable rapport with their supervisors (King, 2018). Supervisors' core objective is to make sure that the student turns out to be an independent researcher therefore, students who constantly observe timelines, consult, exhibit sincerity and do corrections as guided, then demonstrate their competencies in their work, are likely to maintain good rapport with their supervisors and complete in time (Pyhalto et al., 2012). This implies that students develop poor relationships with their supervisors the moment they fail to fulfil their responsibility as they are being guided. Thus, the supervisor-student relationship is within the students' direct control.

Getting started on a thesis is a challenging task which may necessitate examining great volumes of previous works of other scholars and finding a comprehensive, interconnected description (Gao, 2021). The same author adds that writing a PhD involves scholarly writing which is not familiar to most PhD students. Thus, it is prudent to begin from the simpler aspects and do plenty of advance planning, then learn to critique research work which is intricate to comprehend (Lube et al., 2005). Becoming aware of what is being described or the

missing link is a vital but challenging skill to master. It is imperative to appreciate without getting demoralized that not everything written makes meaning. Hill and Thabet (2021) further add that student researchers who do not understand the research process are often disorganized as they find it tough to circumnavigate the process. Inadequate experience, being unfamiliar with the research process, fear of rejection, and doubt about the essential value of their work all generate substantial barricades to publication (Sverdlik et al., 2018).

In relation to the above, many doctoral students try to balance social and family errands with academic work, which requires tough decision-making and having a scale of preference as far as making priorities and resource allocation is concerned. Subsequently, individual goals such as personal health and marriage relations are often neglected (Sverdlik et al., 2018), causing perceptions of imbalance and distraction. In addition, doctoral students tend to decline in social interactions and find complications in sustaining family responsibilities due to the demands of the graduate program. Lack of relaxation and social connections by doctoral students has been found by the same authors to be increasing levels of fatigue and depression as well as lower well-being. In the same way, inadequate social backing and work-life conflict have also been found to correspond with unhappiness and a higher occurrence of mental illness in doctoral students.

Financial burden impacts graduate students in general (Gao, 2021). Graduate studies necessitate a lot of funds for tuition, data collection, publication, conference travels for research dissemination and personal administration among others. Financial constraints may lead to delay in completion of the program or dropout. Hence, leading to the loss of researchers, leaders and lecturers (Kibaliwandu et al., 2020). Student loans and scholarships are given to very few students. Some students write the thesis and fail to submit it because of financial challenges. A study by Sverdlik et al. (2018) shows that students

in natural science disciplines have greater opportunities to access financial resources such as scholarships through departmental programs than those in social sciences, arts, and humanities.

A study by Hill and Thabet (2021) discovered two main driving motivations behind pursuing a doctoral degree: personal interest and professional growth. The value of a doctorate can be connected to elevation and career development and does not necessarily have a direct association with a research thesis. A researcher at PhD level will often work alone or with limited collaboration, hence feeling isolated and demotivated. In this case, support may be needed such that you keep in touch with as many doctoral students as possible.

Institutional Factors

University policies and procedures also pose hindrances to postgraduate study progress. According to King (2018), some universities ask students to submit a doctoral proposal at the end of the first year after admission to the programme. This may delay an experienced student who finalizes the proposal within five months from the date of admission because the rules say this student must wait for more than seven months. Policies need to cater for both experienced and inexperienced researchers. The policy might say that students should hand in proposals within the first year from the time of admission in order to allow experienced students to hand in and defend suggestions in a short time. Shariff et al. (2015) added that some universities lack a study plan for defending proposals, dissertations, and theses. Students' defence appears to be founded on the charity and grace of those who organize the defence. It is possible to submit the final paper and be invited to defend a year from the date of submission, hence fast learners may delay to graduate.

Strategies to Enhance Completion of a Doctoral Degree Programme

Hill and Conceicao (2020) assert that thinking optimistically should be put at the forefront in case

one is to attain his or her objectives since it guides in knowing the challenges most researchers have encountered and gone through at some point in their research journeys. Positive thinking should be supplemented with time management discipline; creating and meeting deadlines, adhering to fixed dates and times when meeting with superiors, and adhering to guidelines (Hill & Conceicao, 2020). It is important to plan ahead of time to ensure that enough time is committed to the activities at hand, then evaluate how programs are proceeding. In case the expected target cannot be attained, then adjustments can be made to use another method of work.

Furthermore, it is crucial to grasp research abilities such as academic writing, computer skills, and data analysis. Building a network for the exchange of ideas, talents, and research groups can help you improve your research skills. Students might become active members of professional organizations in their areas. In addition, attending research conferences, writing manuscripts and attending journal clubs (Conn et al., 2014) is another strategy to satisfy professional development needs because it allows students to deliver papers (Sumari, 2005), connect with and learn from well-known scholars and researchers in many fields. There is also a need for publication training because a lack of publication experience causes a student to focus solely on theoretical topics.

King (2018) suggests that several trainings may be required for university senior lecturers to gain supervision skills. In most circumstances, each supervisor in most institutions has a diverse range of expertise and exposure that is comparable to his or her own. This leads to a conflict of loyalties on the part of the student. Supervisory skills training allows them to speak the same language without disagreement. On the other side, working collaboratively with supervisors is a must for doctoral students even though they may not always agree with their advice, and may choose to go their own way at times as they train to become

independent researchers. It is, however, important to remember that the goal of working with a supervisor is to benefit from their experience. Students need to allow themselves to be mentored by their supervisors, even if disagreements emerge on the best approach to proceed with the doctoral program. The supervisor's assistance should be sought in identifying deficiencies and broadening the competencies of the student.

Time management is a critical requirement for doctoral progress. At the doctoral level, there is so much work to cover within very little time, meaning therefore, that doctoral students should learn when to seize fresh possibilities and when to decline more obligations. This is possible if one learns to prioritize what must be completed immediately against what can be pushed to another day. Furthermore, having a work plan for how to complete activities is essential because it will help in deciding whether or not to do something. It is also critical to be organized, plan appointments carefully and set deadlines (Lubbe et al., 2005). It should be remembered that doing a few things well is preferable to doing a lot of things poorly.

Financial assistance lubricates the doctoral pursuit. The goal of financial aid is to help poor students pay for their education (Sumari, 2005). Financial aid assists students in reducing needless responsibilities so that they can achieve their academic goals. Depending on their fields of interest, financial assistance may be provided in the form of scholarships, fellowships, grants, and assistantships. Students may also apply for loans with variable repayment rates and terms; however, a financial plan is required.

Due to the long period doctoral programs take, effort and motivation fluctuate. This calls for short-term goals to be set such that in case inspiration is low, it can be got back on track. It is also imperative to discover what increases morale and do it on a regular basis. Having research groups and a developing link of doctoral students can enable the improvement of the thesis, especially if the new

peers are working at a more advanced stage (Ssenyonga & Nakiganda, 2020). One avenue of such peer engagement is through blogging the research.

Self-esteem is essential for the process of doctoral research pursuit. Pursuing a doctorate can be extremely risky. Thus, one has to be conscious of the level of confidence and belief in oneself. In case of low self-confidence, it is important to try to boost it by receiving good advice, identifying achievements, discovering own capabilities, and stimulating oneself to try new methods of work. Also, constructivism theory helps in boosting confidence because an individual who has developed his or her idea will be in a better position to explain or implement it. Lack of confidence can substantially impair the capacity to perform and even fail to carry out data collection. In such a case, it is important to seek counsel and professional assistance (Trujillo, 2007).

In case the research is veering off course, there is a need to refocus on the major goals. This can be accomplished by having a discussion with supervisors about where the research project is heading, rewriting the research proposal to enable an elaboration of what the proposal is supposed to be about, redesigning the project strategy in order to get a clear idea of the next step to carry out the study, and how it fits into the big picture, or pause for some time because it may be generating a lot of stress.

A PhD can be isolating and lonely (Lubbe et al., 2005). Therefore, it is vital to increase the support network so that there is more assistance. This can be performed by making use of all of one's important relationships and research contacts. Whether the department offers a mentorship program or not, it is good that candidates ask experienced academicians to assist and advise them as they carry out their studies. In addition, working in groups enhances working relationships with the supervisors and fastens the work.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article highlights the critical role of doctoral education in educational leadership and management in shaping researchers, institutional leaders, and policy influencers. However, multiple challenges like ineffective supervision, financial constraints, institutional bureaucracies, and psychological struggles continue to hinder PhD completion rates, particularly in low-resource settings. Using a constructivist learning theory, the article emphasizes that doctoral education is a self-directed knowledge-construction process, requiring active engagement, mentorship and collaboration. In addition to the constructivist approach, self-determination theory (SDT) underscores the significance of intrinsic motivation and autonomy. The article also indicates major research gaps including limited exploration of doctorateness in educational leadership and management, insufficient research on PhD supervision models, and the underrepresentation of psychological and social factors in doctoral studies. These gaps call for further empirical investigation to refine PhD completion strategies and inform institutional policy interventions. While this study provides a comprehensive conceptual analysis, certain limitations were intentional methodological choices aimed at enhancing focus, depth, and applicability. The study relied on peer-reviewed sources, institutional reports and policy documents allowing for a broad synthesis of existing knowledge. While empirical data such as interviews and surveys would provide direct participant insight, the desk-based approach facilitated a more extensive and multi-perspective analysis. Therefore, future studies should conduct empirical research with doctoral students and supervisors to validate and expand upon these findings. Further still, the study employed a thematic analysis rather than a meta-analysis as quantitative synthesis was beyond its scope. Future research could conduct a quantitative meta-analysis to determine the significance of key PhD completion factors.

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