



Low Persistence of Part Time PhD Students at Kenyatta University's Department of Educational Management: Reflections of a Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

The department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies has witnessed a phenomenal growth of over 1000% in PhD enrolments in the last two decades from about 30 students in 2006 to over 300 in 2026. This increased enrolment can be attributed to a convergence of both global and local dynamics shaping the demand for graduate education. This steep rise in enrolment has brought to the fore some challenges that erodes the persistence of the students and eventually reduces their completion rates in the long run affecting the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme. This paper gives a narration of the challenges facing the PhD students in the department and which impact on their progress from the lens of a supervisor. Global literature on students' persistence has been reviewed so as to contextualize the narrative. The narrative is given and compared with my experiences as a PhD student.

Key words: completion, enrolment, efficiency, effectiveness, graduation, persistence, PhD student, supervisor,

INTRODUCTION

Doctorate education stands at the apex of university education. This level of education is expected to produce graduates with research and critical thinking skills and who offer innovative solutions to the various societal challenges. Worldwide, the growth in doctorate education has been phenomenal with no signs of slowing down (Cyranoski, Gilbert, Ledford, Naya & Yahia, 2011; Sarrico, 2022). For example, in countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the number of science doctorates earned each year grew by nearly 40% between 1998 and 2008, to some 34,000 (Cyranoski et al, 2011) while the number of new doctorates almost doubled in the two decades to 2017 (Sarrico, 2022). In OECD countries,

doctoral education grew at a higher rate (25%) than tertiary education (12.7%) between 2014 and 2019 (Sarrico, 2022). This growth in doctorate education is propelled by both societal and personal factors. At the societal level, most countries are investing in their higher-education systems because they see educated workers as a key to economic growth (Cyranoski et al, 2011; Sarrico, 2022). At a personal level, demand for Ph.D. education is fuelled by credentialism and the fact that Ph.D. recipients have more tangible pay-offs when they enter the labour force marked by lower unemployment rates and higher earnings compared to people with lower levels of educational attainment (Jones, 2002; Zusman, 2017).

However, despite the critical need for doctorate graduates in Kenya and in other countries, their completion rates are usually the lowest compared to the other lower levels of higher education. In the USA for example, attrition rate in doctorate education is as high as 50 % (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010). It has been noted that that higher education systems in sub-Saharan Africa are at a crossroads due to national and global currents (ACUP, 2012). At the national level, the processes of democratisation and liberalisation of higher education institutions have placed them in a more transparent and active context while at the global level, the impact of globalisation processes and the knowledge society demand urgent reform of the higher education systems. ACUP notes that there is a shared opinion by the international community and African governments that for universities and PhD programmes to be competitive and contribute to solving of the endemic problems facing these countries, there is need to guide and position them in the knowledge economy, and global information and research networks. ACUP identifies three challenges facing PhD studies in sub-Saharan Africa: a) Challenges in the area of university management, b) Challenges in the area of teaching and research, and c) Challenges in the area of PhD students. In Kenya, a study by Motanya et al, (2023) covering four universities showed a decline in completion rate of doctorate students between 2003 and 2017.

The focus of this paper is on the doctorate programme by the department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies of the School of Education, Kenyatta University. Kenyatta University's School of Education and Lifelong learning is the biggest in Kenya and in the East African region in terms of student population and staff establishment. In Kenya, it has the oldest School of Education in the higher education sector as it has been training teachers and other educational personnel for the last fifty years. Its graduates straddle the education sector in Kenya and beyond in classrooms, academia and in management positions in the education field. The department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies is one of the five departments in the School of Education and it is the biggest in terms of postgraduate students' enrolment (<http://education.ku.ac.ke/>). The department has witnessed an upsurge in the demand for post graduate programmes in the last two decades. For example, the enrolment in the doctorate programme has recorded a growth rate of over 1000 % from about 30 PhD students in 2007 to about 300 students by 2026 (Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, 2026) This growth in enrolment could be attributed to several global and local dynamics shaping the demand for education. First, forces of globalization and ICT revolution have hastened the embracing of the concept of lifelong learning as people seek to retool so as to remain relevant in a fast changing world. Secondly, expansion in basic and higher education in the country has led to an upsurge in the number of graduates at each level thereby increasing competition for available opportunities

in the labour market which has in turn spurred on demand for higher certification. Third, the policy directive by the Commission for University Education requiring all members of faculty in universities in Kenya to be doctorate degree holders with effect from 2018 has also contributed to the increase in enrolment.

The department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies at Kenyatta University offers doctorate studies on a full time and on a part time basis. The full time programme is expected to last a minimum of three years and a maximum of four years while the part time one should take a minimum of four years and a maximum of six years. However, a key concern is the observation that despite the sharp increase in enrolment in the doctorate programme, low students' survival and completion rates remain a big challenge. The objectives of this paper therefore are to: (i) analyze the factors behind low persistence of doctorate students in the department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, Kenyatta University, (ii) compare the doctorate students' experiences and challenges with those faced by the supervisor when he was a student and, (iii) make recommendations on how to improve persistence of doctoral students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Challenges facing doctoral studies

A survey of literature on doctoral studies shows that the two most critical concerns in many countries are attrition and time to the doctorate (Wendler, Bridgeman, Cline, Millett, Rock, & McAllister, 2010, p. 27). Studies in the USA reveal that attrition rate in doctoral education is as high as 50% (Council of Graduate Schools, 2008;2010). The studies further showed that 6.6% of PhD students left their programmes in their first year while 30.6% of students left their programmes without a doctoral degree by year ten. For students who opted to persist in their doctoral studies, only 56.6% completed their degree within ten years. In the UK, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2007) found that 72% of full-time and 35% of part-time Ph.D. students completed their degrees within seven years, and 76% of full-time and 48% of part-time Ph.D. students completed their degrees within ten years.

Mouton (2011) identifies three challenges facing doctoral studies in Africa as deinstitutionalisation of research, part-time nature of PhD studies and the growing structuring of PhD education. The effects of deinstitutionalisation of research are manifested through weak research institutions and equipment, out-of-date laboratories and the increase in the production of knowledge on an individual level. Mouton notes that most PhD students in the continent join the programme by chance and study on a part-time basis with family and work commitments making it difficult to develop a solid knowledge base and complete in time. Mouton (2016) points out that 70% of SA doctoral students study part-time and that the average doctoral completion rate in South Africa over the past decade is just below 50% while many of them finish their doctorate at an advanced age (an average age of above 40 years) which impacts on scientific productivity. A study by IAU (2010) in six universities in sub-Saharan Africa identified inadequate institutional support and in-effective doctoral students' supervision as some of the key challenges facing doctoral studies. Inadequate institutional support was reflected through continuous decline in funding for doctoral research in universities and in particular to maintain and expand research infrastructures. This led

to lack of access to research data or data bases beyond what is locally available, slow and unreliable institution's internet bandwidth which became a barrier to efficient national and regional networking and integration, lack of laboratory and library resources etc. With regard to doctoral students supervision the study noted that the process was lacking in transparency. The seven universities in the study lacked a tracking mechanism on who is registered where and who supervises whom. There were also no clear records on study paths and length of study and some students would "go missing" only to reappear after several months or years. The study also established that there was lack of true synergy between supervisors (and their academic work) and the students they supervise. The study also noted that the non existence of a code of ethics for the supervision of doctoral students had a negative impact on their progress. Another study done in Namibia identified institutional as well as personal factors as contributors to attrition in higher education (Nuuyoma et al, 2025).

Predictors of Ph.D. persistence

Scholars have identified several factors as significant predictors of candidate's completion. Broadly, they include attendance status (part-time or full-time), sponsorship, age, prior completion of an honours degree, discipline (sciences or humanities), gender, research topic suitability, student-supervisor relationship, the intellectual environment of the department, and access to appropriate infrastructure (Rodwell & Neumann, 2007; Bourke, Holbrook, Lovat, & Farley, 2004; Gasson & Reyes, 2004). A further distillation of literature helps cluster the above factors that determine doctoral persistence and degree completion into two main categories: student and institutional factors. Institutional issues revolving around the difficulty of achieving work-life balance and problems with socialization due to a culture of institutional neglect impact negatively on doctorate students' progress (Castello et al., 2017). Student related factors associated with persistence include demographic variables, personal attributes, motivation and goals, responsibilities, and coping skills. The demographic variables that may influence persistence include age, gender, ethnicity, and marital status (Strayhorn, 2005; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Age is also an important predictor of persistence. Studies conducted in five Flemish universities showed that the younger the researcher, the more often the 'standard' PhD pattern of attaining a PhD within 4–6 years is followed (Hans, Karen, & Ronan, 2013).

Personal attributes such as learning style, intelligence, GPA, admission interview performance, personality, and level of intrinsic motivation positively influence persistence (Lovitts, 2001). Competence and being proactive are also associated with persistence (Grover, 2007). Conversely, student's traits of dependency, unrealistic thought processes, and procrastination are impediments to finishing the doctoral program (Terrell, 2002). Kearns, Gardiner and Marshall (2008) refer to these as self-handicapping behaviour, for instance, over committing, busyness, perfectionism, procrastination, disorganization, not putting in effort, and choosing performance-debilitating circumstances that make PhD such a difficult process and prevents candidates from completing on time.

Motivation and goal setting are key to doctoral persistence (Grover, 2007). Studies shows that candidates who are both personally and professionally motivated are more likely to persist (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). With regard to responsibilities, studies also indicate that many doctoral students across disciplines find it challenging to balance doctoral studies with family and work

relationships leading to feelings of guilt, worry, anxiety leading to high levels of stress (Wasburn-Moses, 2008; Smith et al., 2006). Problems related to finances, health, academics, and family have also contributed to doctoral students' decisions to leave their programs. In a survey of departed students, Lovitts (2001) found that 70% cited personal reasons. The ability to manage and cope with stress is also closely related with doctoral persistence.

On the other hand, Institutional factors, for example programme type, structure, and curriculum and student expectations about the relationship among these factors and their own personal and professional goals play a key role in doctoral student persistence. The Programme type and structure significantly influence doctoral students' persistence. For example, attrition rates are higher for part-time programmes than for full time ones (Rodwell & Neumann, 2005). Similarly, attrition rates in distance programs are consistently 10%- 20% higher than in traditional, residential programs (Rovai, 2002). This could be due to the fact that students in part time and distance programs often experience feelings of isolation as a result of low levels of socialization and interaction with peers and faculty (Terrell, Snyder, & Dringus, 2009).

Strategies for enhancing persistence

Most doctoral programs have two distinct stages, the coursework and the dissertation. While the former is generally structured and familiar for students, the latter is usually unstructured and unfamiliar (West, Gokalp, Edlyn, Fischer, & Gupton, 2011). While many students complete the course work within the stipulated time, the same rarely happens with the dissertation. Therefore, if doctoral persistence is to be increased in a given programme, the students should be equipped with the required skills and disposition to enable them tackle the challenges associated with transitioning from structured coursework to unstructured dissertation writing (de Valero, 2001; Jimenez, 2011).

Faculty support is also critical in fostering doctoral students' persistence. Academic supervisors play multiple roles that include giving instrumental help (e.g., coaching, challenging assignments, encouraging student productivity in terms of publishing and presenting), psychosocial help (e.g., counseling, role modeling, empathizing), and networking assistance, e.g., helping students make connections in the field, serving as a professional reference (Tenenbaum, Crosby, & Gliner, 2001). The relationship between the student and the supervisor should be well guarded as it has the potential to be an enriching and productive one or a difficult and personally devastating one (Dinham & Scott, 1999). Sometimes, problems may arise between the student and the supervisor which may erode the student's persistence. Edwards (2002) cites four major problems that may arise in the postgraduate experience: being at cross purposes with supervisors, finding few supporting structures, isolation and confusion over resources. The frequency and quality of supervision are positively associated with successful and timely completion of a PhD (Seagram, Gould, & Pyke, 1998; Dinham & Scott, 1998; Knowles, 1999; Woodward, 1993).

Pearson and Kayrooz (2005) note that the development of academic supervisors has been constrained by a "lack of robust conceptual understanding of what supervision involves". Ferman (2000) and Taylor (2006) observe that a prevalent view of supervision is that it constitutes a sophisticated form of teaching. This view is shared by Knowles (1999) who describes postgraduate supervision as "critical conversations", while Taylor (1995) suggests that supervision is 'mentorship [more than]

instruction'. Similarly, Connell (1985) describes PhD supervision as "the most advanced level of teaching...a genuinely complex teaching task".

Gurr (2001) tested the efficacy of the Supervisor/Student Alignment Model as a supervisory tool. An updated and simplified version of the model reworks the primary dimensions as internal-external focus and people-task focus and reduces the number of operational roles of the supervisor to five: innovator, broker, monitor, deliverer, and developer with the integrator as the central role (Vilikas & Cartan, 2001). These roles of the supervisor, are however, paradoxical in nature in that supervisors need to be able to act in ways that are inherently contradictory, e.g., caring for the student and dealing with their personal issues (developer role) while simultaneously demanding that the student is productive (deliverer role). This approach makes a key assumption that an accomplished supervisor/manager must be able to adaptively switch between the various roles as the situation demands.

Student Integration into the University is also a critical determinant of their degree of persistence. Social integration, described as feeling a sense of connection and community with faculty and peers, is an important factor in doctoral persistence. Connection is defined as "the establishment of a relationship or the failure to do so, with faculty or fellow students and a judgment of the quality of that relationship" (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005, p. 183). Opportunities for students to participate in learning communities and the construction of shared knowledge results in greater social integration while also fostering the acquisition of knowledge and skills, thereby bridging the "academic-social divide" (Tinto, 1997, p. 610). Additionally, through fostering socialization and integration with peers, cohorts serve to counter isolation (Jimenez, 2011). Social integration is particularly important during the dissertation phase, which tends to be a solitary and socially isolating process (de Valero, 2001). While positive relationships with peers are valued, doctoral students view relationships with faculty as essential (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; West et al., 2011). Economic integration for students which refers to the degree to which student's financial needs are met while pursuing the doctorate is another critical element that determines persistence (Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011 p. 117). Economic integration is essential given research suggesting that irrespective of program, students who self-finance their studies are less likely to persist (Earl-Novell, 2006). University sponsored fellowships and assistantships influence economic integration and increase persistence and decrease time-to-degree rates (Earl-Novell, 2006; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). Lovitts (2001) found that 20% of students in her study cited financial reasons for their program departure.

Review of the literature reveals that persistence in doctoral candidates is the result of the individual and his or her interaction with the social and institutional environment. This paper addresses the persistence challenges faced by doctoral students in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at Kenyatta University through the eyes of a supervisor. Most of the studies reviewed have not looked at the persistence challenges faced by doctorate students from the lens of a supervisor and in a comparative manner as done in this paper.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This paper is anchored on Resilience Theory whose roots can be traced to Norman Garmezy, Lois Murphy, Michael Rutter, and Emmy Werner, who sought to inform psychological practice by understanding the processes that explained how some individuals fared well in the face of adversity while others failed (Masten, 2013). Thus, resilience is defined as success despite adversity (Cefai, 2004; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000) and is now viewed as the interaction between the individual and resources and stressors in the larger socio-cultural context (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Luthar et al., 2000). Thus, resilience research is hinged on an ecological model that emphasizes contextual factors and interactions between individuals and their environment and the attendant risks. The available attrition statistics suggest that beginning a doctoral degree involves risk. Brailsford (2010) observed, "There is a body of quantitative and qualitative research proving that deciding to do a Ph.D. is a high-risk strategy" (p. 15). The Resilience Theory with its focus on the interaction between individuals and their environment resonates with Tinto's (1993) Integration Theory which argues that graduate persistence is "shaped by the personal and intellectual interactions that occur within and between students and faculty and the various communities that make academic and social systems of the institution" (p. 231). Thus failure by students to become integrated into their university's academic and social contexts will most likely lead to their withdrawal. When I reflect on my success as a doctorate student and evaluate the progress of current doctorate students in the department, I am persuaded that resilience plays a key role in the journey towards attainment of the doctorate. Those students who succeed have intrinsic motivation that makes them fight on despite the odds as well as the social skills that enable them have meaningful academic and social interactions with their peers as well as their lecturers.

METHODOLOGY

The paper will adopt phenomenological approach. The writer shares his personal experiences as a doctorate student and as a supervisor of doctorate students and gives an interpretation of those experiences. This will be presented in a narrative style given through the lens of a supervisor which will look at both student and institutional related factors that determine the persistence of doctorate students in the department of Education Management, Policy & Curriculum Studies at Kenyatta University. The writer starts by reminiscing on his doctorate journey and then compares his experiences with those of students pursuing a doctorate in his department.

My experience as a doctorate student

My journey towards the attainment of a doctorate degree started in 2007 when I enrolled for one in the department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, School of Education & Lifelong Learning, Kenyatta University. I had been hired as a tutorial fellow in the department in 2006 and pursuing a doctorate was part of my contractual requirement. I was grateful to the university for appointing me to the position of a tutorial fellow as it gave me an opportunity to pursue my doctorate without the burden of paying fees. As a tutorial fellow, my teaching load was quite light as I was required to teach only one course unit in a semester which amounted to about 3 hours in a week. Furthermore, I had very few administrative duties which would take around 7 hours in a week. This means that in a typical five days working week of 40 hours, university work took about 10 hours (25%) leaving me with about 30 hours (75%) to focus on my doctorate studies. My

doctorate journey lasted five years as I graduated in December 2011. My experience taught me that completion of a doctorate degree is a factor of both personal and institutional attributes. I learnt that as a doctorate student personal attributes play a key role, as you are to a great extent the driver to your doctorate destination. Thus, your focus, motivation, personality, goals, etc determine your degree of resilience in the long and often difficult doctorate journey and to a large extent determine the level of success. On the other hand, institutional factors, which in most cases are beyond the control of the students, also have an impact on ones progress. For example, how long a department takes to plan for defences, send documents for internal and external examination, etc., will have an impact on the duration of the study. Availability of adequate financial resources is also important. As a doctorate student, investment in a good computer and internet facilities is paramount. Data collection, analysis and report writing also require to be properly budgeted for. Instructional factors also play a key role in determining your progress. As a doctorate student, you are most likely to have two academic mentors (supervisors) who guide you especially in the research process. I learnt that how you relate with the supervisors has an impact on the progress. A good healthy relationship between the student and the supervisors as well as with other academic staff and students often yields good progress. This observation is in tandem with Tinto's (1993) Integration Theory which addresses the contribution of graduate students' personal and intellectual interactions to their persistence. Thus failure by students to become integrated into their university's academic and social contexts will most likely lead to their withdrawal.

After my graduation in December 2011, I was appointed to the position of a lecturer in 2012 and transitioned from being a supervisee to a supervisor. The university conducted an in-service training programme in which all the lecturers who were fresh PhD graduates were inducted on supervision of students. I have been supervising students at both Masters and PhD level since then. I have been involved in the doctorate programme in the department at three levels: teaching of the course units, supervision of students' research and as an examiner of students' research proposals and theses. Therefore, apart from directly supervising doctorate students since 2013, I have interacted with many doctorate students in the department either as a course facilitator or as a member of the examination board during their proposal and thesis defences. As a supervisor, I am seriously perturbed by the slow progress being made by a majority of the doctorate students in my department. Ideally, a full time doctorate student is supposed to take a minimum of 3 years and a maximum of 4 years to complete the programme. Similarly, a part-time student is expected to take a minimum of 4 years and a maximum of 6 years to complete the programme. In 2010, the department introduced compulsory course work where each student is supposed to enrol for 10 academic units. The fulltime students are supposed to do their course work within their 1st year of study while part-time students are expected to do theirs within two years. After the students are through with their course work, they are expected to embark on the research phase of their study. My observation is that most of the students finish their course work within the stipulated period. However, a majority of them get stuck when they move to the research stage of their work. This is consistent with findings reported in literature from other countries (West et al., 2011).

The slow progress of the doctorate students in my department has triggered some soul searching and reflection on my part as to the causes of this slow progress. I have also held discussions with these students as well as with fellow supervisors in an attempt to understand the challenges hampering

their progress. In my personal reflections, I have been making a comparison of my doctorate journey and the one being made by my students.

Assessment of challenges facing doctorate students

In my assessment, the challenges being faced by doctorate students in the department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum studies are both institutional and personal. A majority of these students are enrolled in the part time doctorate programme which confronts them with a myriad of institutional challenges and personal challenges which when combined puts a huge clamp on their progress. A demographic profile of a majority of the students enrolled for the doctorate part time programme reveals the following:

- Most of them are above 35 years of age
- Most are parents to school age children
- Most of them have no scholarship and are directly meeting the cost of their studies
- Most are full-time employees

As pointed out earlier, the younger the age of the student, the higher is the persistence (Hans et al, 2013; Strayhorn, 2005; Wao & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

My observation from a supervisor's perspective is that a combination of both institutional and student related factors have a serious impact on the progress of these students in their doctorate journey. One of the biggest constraints that these students face is time. Since many of them are in full-time employment and are also parents, getting big chunks of time to concentrate on their doctorate work becomes a challenge. This observation is consistent with literature which shows that part time doctorate programmes have a higher attrition rate compared to full time programmes (Rodwell & Neumann, 2005). In my view and based on my experience when I was a doctorate student, the pursuit of a doctorate degree and especially the research stage is a fulltime occupation whether one is enrolled in the part time mode or full time mode. Conceptualising a research problem, developing the research proposal, data collection, analysis and thesis writing requires an immersion of your total being in all dimensions (physically, emotionally, intellectually) at all stages. It requires constant meditation on the critical issues at each stage of the process. This stage of the doctorate journey requires a very clear mind to enable the development of the various trains of thought. For this to be realised, adequate time to focus and meditate on the study is a prerequisite. Unfortunately, the part time doctorate students do not have the luxury of such an opportunity. Many of the doctorate students in the department are teachers and head teachers in private and public schools while others are senior Education Officers working for both the County and National governments. The government policy does not favour study leaves for post graduate studies at PhD level. This means that these students have to combine their doctorate studies with a full time work load in their work stations. Furthermore, most of the part time doctorate students are in senior management levels where they are employed which mean that they work for very long hours and they cannot afford to be away from their stations for long. For example, I have waited for a concept paper from one of my supervisees who is a senior secondary school principal for over two years. This student honestly confesses that due to changes in government policies on management of schools, he finds himself attending to his work related issues day in day out leaving no time to conceptualise a research problem. Another supervisee who works as a senior Education

Officer with the Ministry of Education is involved in the monitoring and evaluation of various programs run by the ministry throughout the country. Her work entails constant travel to various parts of the country far away from her workstation in the capital city, Nairobi. Consequently, it takes her several months to fix a consultative meeting with the supervisor. The effect of this is that the department has many students who have stagnated and are clogging the system. Since the university is admitting new students every year, non-progressing students increase the burden of the supervisor. Every year, a supervisor is allocated new students to supervise and when the old ones are still stuck in the pipeline he/she feels overwhelmed and stressed. The heavy supervision workload also complicates the already bad situation.

Another setback for the part time doctorate students is failure to make use of resources in the university library. Again, this can be attributed to lack of time due to the nature of their programme. For one to identify a research problem and conceptualise it well, a critical review of similar studies is a prerequisite as it helps in the identification of the gap in literature. The part time doctorate students rarely get time out of their work stations to even consult their supervisors leave alone reviewing previous studies in the library. The import of this is that many of them move to the research stage without having the benefit of contextualising their studies in relation to related studies as well as benchmarking on best practices on the form and content of a research proposal/thesis. In my view, it is very difficult to conceptualise and execute a research project without extensive use of library services. Scholars have pointed out that library services are important to enhance PhD student's experience. This includes computer access, ease of access to the library when needed, access to electronic library resources, remote access to the library catalogues, intercampus books and materials' delivery services, library staff assistance and interlibrary loan services (Grebennikov & Shah, 2007; Pitchforth, Beames, Thomas, Falk, Farr, Gasson, Thamrin, & Mengersen, 2012). Unfortunately, due to the part time nature of their programmes and the other personal issues that bog them down, these students are unable to make proper use of the library. The net effect of this is that they come up with poorly written concept papers and research proposals leading to very high failure rates during the oral defences before the departmental examination boards. Over the years, the department has witnessed a very high failure rate by students in the proposal defences. Indeed, some students have failed for three consecutive times and mostly due to poorly conceptualised research proposals. Bearing in mind that it takes close to an year to conceptualise a research problem and develop a proposal, a student failing in his/her proposal defence for about three times translates to spending about three years on the proposal. High failure rates more often than not lead to attrition.

The part time doctorate students also miss out on the peer support structure that is critical in a PhD journey. Since they are scattered in different corners of the country, they do not have strong bonds and support networks with their colleagues. This leads to isolation which gets worse at the research stage. As noted in the theoretical framework, integration is an important ingredient for persistence of postgraduate students (Tinto's, 1993; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Full time doctorate students interact with their colleagues in campus almost on a daily basis and this helps them develop strong peer support mechanisms which promote academic as well as social support amongst themselves. Literature shows that strong peer support mechanisms play a key role in enhancing persistence in doctoral studies (Terrell et al., 2009). The full time students have an opportunity to discuss thorny academic issues with their colleagues even before they consult their supervisors. The part

time doctorate students, on the other hand, often work in isolation and in most cases they have no peer to consult when they come across academic bottlenecks which may lower their persistence (Terrell et al., 2009). The collegiate environment that full time students enjoy contributes positively to progress as students work hard so as not to be left behind by the others. If I reminisce on my days as a fulltime doctorate student, I was in a cohort of five students and we would often meet to check on each other's progress, give advice and motivate each other where necessary. We would agree on common timelines for our research work which would make each member feel obliged to work hard so as not to fail the group. This helped accelerate our progress and completion rate. Unfortunately, a majority of the current part time doctorate students do not have this advantage. They work in isolation which robs them off the positive pressure that is exerted by the group and as the adage goes, he who runs alone may think that he is the fastest.

Another observation is about the personal dispositions of the students. The key question here is what motivated the students to enrol for a doctorate programme since it is a key determinant of persistence (Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005). Some students were propelled by intrinsic factors while others were pushed by extrinsic factors. Studies show that persistence is high for doctorate students who are motivated by intrinsic factors rather than extrinsic factors. As captured earlier, there has been a surge in enrolment for post graduate studies in Kenya due to a combination of factors, for example, globalization, competitive labour market, unemployment of graduates etc. My observation is that quite a number of the PhD students enrolled in the programme due to external stimuli rather than an inner drive. Consequently, when they face challenges in their doctorate journey, they give up easily or when their material circumstances change they lose interest in their studies.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has shown that both personal and institutional related factors have an influence on persistence of PhD students in the department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies, Kenyatta University. A combination of these two has a bearing on completion rate and the time taken to graduate. One of the key institutional factors that impact greatly on persistence is the structure of the programme. A majority of the students are enrolled as part time students which exposes them to severe challenges especially when they transition from course work to the research stage. As part time students, access to university academic resources and interaction with members of faculty is limited. On the other hand, the biggest personal challenge that these part time students face is lack of time to develop their research project, consult their supervisors and utilise library resources as most are in full time employment. The students also face the challenge of isolation as they lack a peer support mechanism.

To address these challenges, the department should create a strong and vibrant on-line network to facilitate interaction among students and also between them and lecturers. The department should also provide academic counselling services for applicants to the doctorate programme as well as continuing students. New applicants need to be guided to do some soul searching on their source of motivation before they enrol for the programme. The continuing students need to be equipped with coping skills to enable them navigate the numerous challenges. The department also needs to rationalize the supervision workload so as not to overload the lecturers.

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