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Original Paper

Research Liminalities and Graduation Rates of Doctoral Students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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Abstract

This paper explores research liminalities that affect graduation rate of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The study draws on the mixed methods design approach using the exploratory sequential mixed method. Nine (9) Ph.D. students are stratified and interviewed for the qualitative phase of the study. On the other hand, systematic sampling technique is employed to select ninety-seven (97) Ph.D. students as respondents to the questionnaire for the quantitative phase of the study. The thematic data analysis approach is used to analyse the qualitative data while the linear multiple regression analysis is used to test the hypothesis. Results of the study show that students and supervisors related-factors have a significantly negative effect on graduation rate of Ph.D. students of the University of Cape Coast. It is recommended that supervisors facilitate and promote active and student-centred approaches and engagements that help Ph.D. students to develop their research skills in order to maintain the continuity of work throughout their doctoral programme.

Keywords

Liminalities, doctoral education, graduation rate, scholarly community

1. Introduction

Knowledge is viewed as a critical national resource for socio-economic development. The present age is described as “knowledge society” (Nerad & Heggelund, 2008). The term “knowledge society” refers to a society where the creation of knowledge has become the axial principle of economic and social organisation (Nerad, 2010). As social theories about the relevance of knowledge society spread around the globe, universities and national governments in many places are turning to doctoral education as a means of enhancing scientific and technological innovations (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009).

Doctoral education takes place within a particular context and is influenced by social practices of supervision and mentoring of students in the scholarly community (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). The scholarly community provides a learning environment that includes various elements such as supervision, knowledge sharing and management, critical thinking as well as assessment practices (Pyalto, Toom, Stubb, & Konka, 2012). These practices have their own socio-cultural origins, nature and characteristics that reflect the values, norms and conceptions of a certain research domain (Golde, 2010). The scholarly community, however, may sometimes fail to provide doctoral students with adequate support. This may lead to continuous distractive friction between students and the learning environment (Altbach et al., 2009). According to Gardner and Mendoza (2010), the doctoral experience of Ph.D. training depends heavily on the learning environment provided by the scholarly community. This environment may either promote students' well-being and completion, or encourage dysfunctional emotions and withdrawal from the programme.

Although doctoral students are a highly selected group, some never complete their programmes (Pyalto et al., 2012). Hasrati (2015) indicates that attrition rates among doctoral candidates range from 30% to 50% depending on the discipline and the country. Similarly, empirical studies have shown that distress experienced by doctoral candidates is significantly high (Golde, 2010; Pyhalto, Stubb, & Lonka, 2009). It has been accentuated that successful studying in Ph.D. education is a complex matter (Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine, & Hubbar, 2018). Also, previous studies on the doctoral experiences suggest that Ph.D. students face a variety of difficulties during their studies (Wright, 2009). For example, Rashid, Jahan, Islam and Ratna (2015) in a study on students' enrolment, graduation rates and drop-outs at Bangladesh Open University report that personal workload, financial constraints and lack of understanding of course materials push students out of a programme. Similarly, Osei, Otchere, Banunle and Dontwi (2017) in their study on post graduate students' enrolment and completion assert that students' inability to graduate on time is as a result of household issues, financial constraints, supervision of thesis and examination-related factors. Greene (2015) in a study reports that variables such as institutional supports, financial consideration and individual characteristics of doctoral students play critical roles in ensuring successful completion of programmes.

According to Cody and Lawlor (2011), many doctoral candidates enrol on Ph.D. programmes with vague career goals, instead of following an intense passion for their research area. Such students, therefore, fizzle out when new opportunities emerge. Also, Walker (2008) in a study opines that half of doctoral students in the United States of America are lost to attrition. The high rates of attrition in doctoral programmes have been attributed to institutional and programme characteristics as key factors determining whether a particular student is likely to complete a Ph.D. programme or not. According to Gardner and Mendoza (2010), factors such as student' selection and admission policies, mentoring and advisory practices, research experience as well as administrative processes and procedures contribute to high attrition rate among Ph.D. students. Similarly, Herman (2011) explores the feasibility of expanding doctoral education in South Africa and concludes that limited supervisory and mentoring

capacity as well as insufficient funding of research of Ph.D. students constitute barriers to doctoral education.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinning of this study is derived from Gennep's (1960) Liminality theory in his work *Rites of passage*. Based on this theory, Turner (1967) conceptualises a model of liminality, emphasizing *separation, transition and incorporation* phases. The *separation phase* is a state where the individual is not seen as a member of the union. It means an isolation of an individual from the corporation. This is the situation whereby the individual is seen to be outside a community he or she wishes to belong. The transition *phase* is considered as a liminal state because it is a period during a rite of passage. It is this state where an identity shift occurs; thus, the person who enters the rite is no longer the same. The liminality concept, is therefore, described as a transformative time/space, featuring ambiguity and a state of being in-between the past and the future, where identity is suspended as a person advances from one state or position to another. Meyer and Land (2006) also describe a liminal space to be one in which a person becomes uncertain about the identity of self and purpose in life. The final phase, incorporation *phase* presents a situation whereby the individual crosses the liminal space and is admitted and integrated fully into the new community with enhanced and renewed status. Turner (1967) indicates that at this phase, the individual is deemed to have entered another physical and psychological space where he or she wishes to belong.

In order to aid the attainment of the study's objective, the liminality theory, therefore, provides the theoretical orientations and support upon which the present study is conducted. The doctoral studies may be likened to a rite of passage; thus, *separation phase* (prior-admission status), *transition or liminal phase* (after admission experiences) and *incorporation phase* (graduation phase). In this study, we operationalise the concept research liminalities as the barriers or challenges that inhibit the smooth conduct of doctoral research and for which any Ph.D. student at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana is not able to graduate within the stipulated duration of the programme.

The conceptual framework depicting the processes associated with a typical Ph.D. candidature at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana is presented in Figure 1 below:

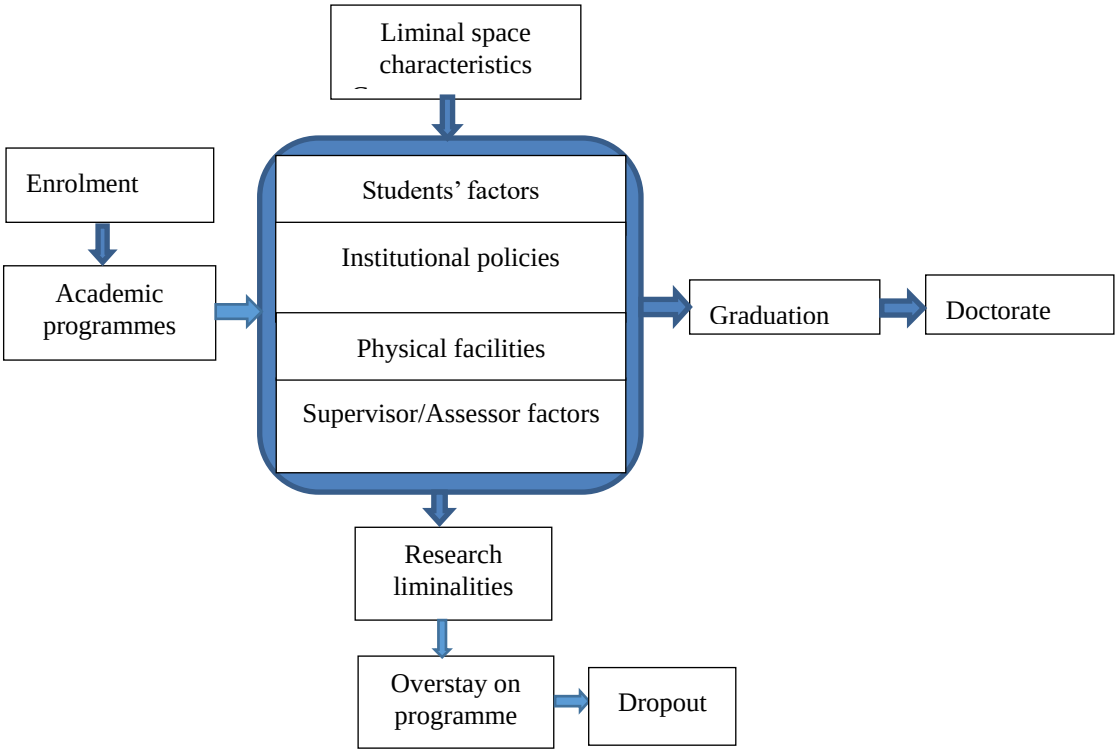

Figure 1. A Journey into Doctoral Degree in the Scholarly Community

Figure 1 provides the lens through which a doctoral journey begins and ends either with students' graduating or dropping out from the programme. A Ph.D. student begins with enrolment into a chosen academic programme, and to be able to graduate, there are a number of factors that militate against the student. This study considers four of such factors (*students' factors, institutional policies, physical facilities and supervisor/assessor factors*). These factors, therefore, constitute the liminal space challenges and conceptual thresholds that the Ph.D. student must overcome leading to graduation on schedule. Otherwise the student overstays on the programme and wallows in the research liminalities until he/she decides to dropout. In this paper, we conceptualise the liminal space characteristics as independent variables that affect doctoral degree which is the dependent variable.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

From our observation of the empirical literature, we notice that even though Ph.D. students are a highly selected group, some never graduate (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010; Hasrati, 2015). We also observe that although the literature attempts to examine factors affecting Ph.D. students' graduation rates, it fails to provide detailed insight as to how doctoral students experience research liminalities. We further notice that in spite of the plethora of studies by (Golde, 2010; Pyhalto et al., 2012; Walker, 2008; Herman, 2011) on problems that doctoral students face during their studies in relation to their engagement in the scholarly community, it appears the academic environment in Ghana with specific reference to doctoral education and how Ph.D. students experience research liminalities has not been fully explored. The purpose of the present study, therefore, is an attempt to fill this lacuna.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the profile in terms of enrolment of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana?
2. What is the graduation rate of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana?
3. What are the causes of research liminalities at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana?

1.4 Hypothesis

H_0: Research liminalities will not have any statistically significant effect on the rate of Ph.D. students' graduation at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

Mixed method research approach is adopted for the study. In mixed methods approach, researchers employ both quantitative methods to assess magnitude and frequency of construct and qualitative methods to explore meaning and understanding of constructs (Creswell, 2014). The rationale for using the mixed method research approach for the present study is to obtain a variety of information in order to achieve a higher degree of validity and reliability of data. We, therefore, use the exploratory sequential mixed method approach by collecting both qualitative data through the use of interviews and quantitative data by using questionnaire from the selected sample on research liminalities and graduation rate of Ph.D. students, and analyse the responses.

2.2 Population and Sample

The scope of this study covers empirical accounts of over-stayed Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The data on the Ph.D. students' enrolments is obtained from the office of the Students' Record Management System. It covers Ph.D. students who enrolled from 2006/2007 to 2018/2019 academic years. On the other hand, the graduation data is compiled from the graduation brochures starting from 2010/2011 to 2018/2019 academic years. The total population for this study comprises all the 1,118 Ph.D. students enrolled by the University of Cape Coast starting from 2006/2007 to 2018/2019 academic years. The targeted participants for the study, however, comprises four hundred and seventy-nine (479) Ph.D. students who have over-stayed on their respective programmes. For the qualitative data, stratified sampling technique is adopted to obtain a fair representation of all the groups (year by year). Nine participants are randomly selected from each year group for the one-on-one interview session. With regard to the quantitative data, systematic sampling technique is employed to investigate those who could not graduate within the stipulated time, starting from 2010/2011 to 2018/2019 academic years. Ninety-seven participants (97) constitute the sample size drawn from the target population. According to DelİceI (2001), in educational research that implements parametric testing, using a minimum sample size of 30 would be sufficient as it also fulfils the requirement of assumption of normality.

2.3 Research Instruments

Interviews and questionnaires are used to solicit information from the participants. To be able to achieve the objective of the qualitative phase of the study, semi-structured interview guide is/has been developed based on the following thematic areas*: students' factors, institutional policies, supervisor/assessor-related factors as well as physical facilities that affect graduation rate of Ph.D. students*. The questions are crafted with the intention of helping the participants to reflect on their liminal thresholds and how such experiences affect their doctoral graduation. Also, in order to achieve the objective of the quantitative phase of the study, structured questionnaire is used. The closed-ended items take the form of a four-point Likert scale with such responses as "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The main issues that are covered in the questionnaire (quantitative phase) are based on the themes that emerge from the qualitative phase of the study (interviews). In establishing content and construct validity of the instrument, the questionnaire is given out to five senior colleague lecturers at the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana for their assessment and comments on the items. Their inputs in terms of comments have helped to improve the quality of the items.

2.4 Ethical Issues

Ethical clearance to conduct the study has been obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The participants have been informed and asked to sign a consent form. Participation in the study is voluntary and confidentiality has been maintained during data collection. Names are not used and numbers are assigned to participants. The questionnaire is administered using online Google form.

3. Results

The thematic data analysis approach is employed to analyse the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), in using the thematic data analysis strategy, it is essential for researchers to identify, organise, describe and report on themes within the data set. In employing the thematic data analysis strategy, we transcribe and group all the interviews into the various themes. With regard to the quantitative data, relevant assumptions for statistical tools are tested. Descriptive statistical tools (frequencies and percentages) are used to summarise and describe the data. The Linear Multiple regression analysis is used to test the hypothesis.

Research Question One: What is the profile in terms of enrolment of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana?

Table 1 presents a documentary cohort analysis taken into consideration the enrolment data per each academic year.

Table 1. Distribution of Ph. D Students Enrolled from 2006/20017 -2018/2019 Academic Years

Year of Enrolment	Total Number Enrolled	Percentage %
2006-2007	30	2.7
2007-2008	21	1.9
2008-2009	33	3.0
2009-2010	45	4.0
2010-2011	52	4.7
2011-2012	43	3.8
2012-2013	78	7.0
2013-2014	83	7.4
2014-2015	132	11.8
2015-2016	148	13.2
2016-2017	116	10.4
2017-2018	129	11.5
2018-2019	208	18.6
Total	1,118	100.0

Source: (i) Enrolment data, UCC from 2006/2007-2018/2019 academic years.

Results in Table 1 show that from 2011/2012 to 2015/2016 academic years (five academic years), there was a significant increase in enrolment from 43 to 148 students. The percentage increase in enrolment from 2011/2012 to 2015/2016 academic years stood at 244.1%, with an average yearly (academic year) increase in enrolment of 48.8%. The results (Table 1) also show that although enrolment decreased from 148 to 116 in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 academic years respectively, there was a significant increase in enrolment in 2016/2017 academic year and 2018/2019 academic year, from 116 to 208 students respectively. This represents a percentage increase of 79.3% in the 2016/2017 academic year and 2018/2019 academic year (three academic years), with an average yearly (academic year) increase in enrolment of 26.4%. Table 1 further shows that the increment was pronounced from 2014/2015 to 2018/2019 academic years.

Research Question Two: What is the graduation rate of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana?

We further examined the graduation rate of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Graduation Rate of Ph. D. Students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana

Year of Enrolment	Total Enrolment	TNG within 5years	% of TNG within 5years	TNG after 5years	% of TNG after 5years	YG	% of YG
2006-2007	30	0	0	24	80.0	6	20.0
2007-2008	21	0	0	13	61.9	8	38.1
2008-2009	33	0	0	20	60.6	13	39.4
2009-2010	45	0	0	13	28.9	32	71.1
2010-2011	52	10	19.2	15	28.9	27	51.9
2011-2012	43	11	25.6	0	0	32	74.4
2012-2013	78	8	10.3	0	0	70	89.7
2013-2014	83	5	6.0	0	0	78	94.0
2014-2015	132	4	3.0	0	0	128	97.0
Total	517	38		85		394	

Source: Graduation brochures, UCC: from 2010/2011 to 2014/2015 academic years

Key: TNG= Total Number Graduated, YG= Yet to Graduate.

The results in Table 2 show that only 38 Ph.D. students representing 7.4% graduated on record time between 2010 /2011 to 2014/2015 academic years. Thus, the rate of graduation of Ph.D. students within three to five years was 7.4% of the total number of students enrolled over the period of nine years. This implies that 479 (92.6%) of the Ph.D. students who enrolled at the University of Cape Coast could not graduate within five years and therefore over-stayed on their respective programme of study. The results (Table 2) show that from 2006/2007 to 2009/2010 academic years, University Cape Coast did not graduate any Ph.D. candidate within the stipulated five years after enrolment. Table 2 further shows that between 2010 and 2015, 85 students out of the 479 over-stayed students representing (17.7%) spent additional three to five years after the elapse of the stipulated duration for graduation. As Table 2 shows, we notice that 394 (76.2%) of Ph.D. students who were admitted between 2006/2007 and 2014/2015 academic years are yet to graduate. The results clearly point out that, despite increase in enrolment of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast from 2006/2007 to 2014/2015 academic years, the rate of graduation does not correspond to the enrolment figures.

Research Question Three: What are the causes of research liminalities of Ph.D. students of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana?

This research question was intended to provide insights into research liminalities that affected graduation rate of Ph.D. students. Qualitative data was collected from nine (9) participants. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were given pseudo names as follows: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8 and P9.

Reflecting on his experiences regarding financial constraints and availability of scholarship, a Ph.D. (Development Studies) student who enrolled in 2006/2007 academic year recounted as follows:

> *During our time, it was difficult to get local financial support for Ph.D. work. Fortunately, I got DAAD scholarship and then left for Germany to complete my studies. (P1)*

On the issue of financial constraints and work demands, P2 a Ph.D. (Geography) student who enrolled in 2007/2008 academic year indicated that she later got Get Fund Scholarship in 2012 to pursue her studies in Briton, UK. She had this to say:

> *l would have delayed finishing my Ph.D. in Ghana had it not been the Get Fund Scholarship...I was working and at the same time pursuing the studies…it was difficult to combine. (P2)*

With regard to supervision, P3 a Ph.D. (Fisheries) student who enrolled in 2008/2009 academic year shared sentiments concerning his supervisor as follows:

> *My supervisor did not show any interest in my work and did not have time to look at my work. He refused to give me feedback on my work. In fact, I am frustrated (P3)*

On the issue of change of research interest in the course of the study, P4 a Ph.D. (Ethnomusicology) student who enrolled in 2009/2010 academic year indicated as follows:

> *I refocused my career aspirations after two years of studies that affected my progression….so l stopped the programme. (P4)*

P5 a Ph.D. (Mathematics) student who enrolled in 2010/2011 academic year shared his experiences on why he dropped out of the programme as follows:

> *I spent more than five years on the programme. I still do not know when I will finish… During our time, we did not have many text books and online resources to support our study…l spent over four years on literature review and data collection alone. l am having less than two years to go on retirement. I therefore decided to stop the programme. (P5*)

P6 a Ph.D. (French) student who enrolled in 2011/2012 academic year narrated her experiences with regard to inconsistencies of suggestions from supervisors and advisors during proposal defence as follows:

> *In my department, Ph.D. is awarded only on thesis without taught courses… every stage of the presentation is defended. I decided to stop the programme because of the inconsistencies of the suggestions made by the panel during the presentations. Each time l met the panel, new suggestions were made which would contradict the previous ones. Eventually l was asked to change the topic. I felt a bit depressed and therefore decided to stop the programme and do something else. (P6)*

With regard to mismatch of research interest of supervisors and students, P7, a Ph.D. (Educational Psychology) student who enrolled in 2012/2013 academic year had this to say:

> *l am in my 7th year now and I have changed my supervisors three times already. They don't give me feedback on my work. They do not seem to be interested in my topic. I don't understand them. The last time l visited my department l was told that l overstayed on the programme. I am really*

frustrated now. (P7)

Responding to policies and channels of addressing issues at the university, P8 who enrolled into Ph.D. in 2013/2014 academic year specialising in Computer Science, dubbed 'Academic Without Borders Canada' (This is a collaborative programme between a Canadian NGO and University of Cape Coast) lamented as follows:

I was supposed to graduate in 2016/2017 academic year… My programme of study is affected heavily by both administrative challenges and accreditation issues…Administratively, there seems to be no proper channels of communication laid down to address issues affecting students. There is no accreditation for the programme. We were not told at the beginning. (P8)

P9 a Ph.D. (Agricultural Extension) student who enrolled in 2014/2015, recounted his experiences as follows:

Doing Ph.D. at the University of Cape Coast is not easy… It's very difficult to graduate…there is no policy guideline to make supervisors give prompt feedback. Some of the supervisors do other things for money at the expense of the student's graduation…Assessors are given timeline to return thesis but these deadlines are not enforced, causing unnecessary delays for students to graduate. (P9)

Based on the interview responses, four themes emerged as follows:

1. *Students' related factors:* lack of skills and knowledge in conducting research, delay in data collection, work demands, family demands, change of career path, lack of motivation and interest in the programme, off-campus isolation, and financial constraints
2. *Supervisor/Assessor related factors:* lack of time for supervision, mismatch in research interests of supervisors and students, and delay in release of results by assessors.
3. *Institutional policies:* lack of policy guideline for thesis presentation, unclear accreditation policies, absence of formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between students and supervisors with regard to timelines.
4. *Availability of physical facilities:* lack of internet facility, lack of institutional repository for research, and poor library facilities.

Hypothesis

H_0: Research liminalities will not have any statistically significant effect on the rate of Ph.D. students' graduation at University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

In order to determine if these themes affected the rate of graduation of Ph.D. students, the linear multiple regression analysis was performed on the independent variables which were reverse-coded. Preliminary analysis of the data indicated that there were no violations of the assumptions of normality, linearity and multicollinearity. Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis.

Table 3. Summary of Regression Analysis of Liminality Variables and Graduation Rate

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
Constant	1.751	.392		4.469	.000
Student Related Factors	.570	.284	-.425	-2.003	.048
Supervisor/Assessor Factors	.628	.249	-.565	-.2.525	.013
Institutional Policies	.270	.177	-.251	-.1.522	.131
Physical Facilities	.166	.113	.257	-1.462	.147
Multiple R	.270[a]				
R^2	.073				
Adjusted R	.033				
Standard Error	.492				
F	1.803				
Df	4.92				

a. Dependent Variable: Graduation rate of Ph.D. students

b. Predictors: (Constant), Students related factors, Supervisor/assessor related factors, Institutional policies and availability of physical facilities.

The results in Table 3 show that 7.3% of the predictor variables considered in this study predict the graduation rate of Ph.D. students. It implies that 92.7% of independent variables not considered in this study accounted for the variations in the rate of graduation of Ph.D. students. However, the results (Table 3) show that (students' related factors (β = -.425; t = -2.003, $p < 0.05$) and supervisor/assessor related factors (β = -.565; t = -2.525, $p < 0.05$) have statistically significant negative effects on the graduation rate of Ph.D. students. The implication of this finding is that if measures are not put in place to address students-and-supervisor/assessors-related factors, the graduation rate of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast will be negatively affected. That is, a decrease in the two liminal factors will increase the rate of graduation of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

4. Discussion

The enrolment figures of Ph.D. students in Table 1 show an upward trend. There is a sharp increase in enrolment between 2014 and 2019 which accounts for the period in which there was a government's policy to ensure that all teaching staff of public universities in Ghana had terminal degrees. In the literature, several factors have been attributed to this sharp increase in enrolment of Ph.D. students globally. For example, Kale-Dery (2018) underscores the critical role of highly skilled manpower in social and economic development of a nation through doctoral education which also corroborates the assertions of Nerad (2010) that doctoral education has risen to prominence in the higher education

research agenda in order to train critical human resource for the socio-economic and technological transformation of nations in both the developed and developing world. The results of the present study provide evidence to suggest that doctoral education assumes an incomparable high-assigned value and as a result, nations worldwide have been increasing doctoral students' enrolment as well as introducing initiatives to expand and reform doctoral programmes (Herman, 2011). It should be noted that the same imperative that exists globally is also present in Ghana. Therefore, universities in Ghana have also expedited measures and policies to increase their doctoral students' enrolment over the past five years. Again, it is also the period when it has become critical to increase doctoral students' enrolment in order to replace ageing lecturers or faculty members in public universities in Ghana.

With regard to the rate of graduation of Ph.D. students, the results (Table 2) show that even though there was an increase in enrolment of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast from 2006/2007 to 2014/2015 academic years, the rate of graduation did not correspond to the enrolment figures. As the results (Table 2) show, 76% of Ph.D. students who were admitted from 2006/2007 to 2014/2015 academic years could not complete their programme. This finding confirms. Pyhalto et al. (2012) assertion that even though Ph.D. students are a highly selected group, some never graduate or complete their programme. According to Wendler et al. (2012), attrition from doctoral programmes has remained consistently high in North American institutions over the past 50 years with approximately 50% of students dropping out. The foregoing finding also gives credence to what was reported by Hasrati (2015) that attrition rates among doctoral students range from 30% to 50% depending on the discipline or the country.

The results of the multiple regression analysis (Table 3) show that students' related factors have a significantly negative effect on the graduation rate of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast. The results suggest that Ph.D. students encounter difficulties at the thesis or dissertation process with specific reference to defining research problem in order to employ accurate methods of investigation due to their inadequate research skills and knowledge. This corroborates the works of Rashid et al. (2015) that Ph.D. students' lack of understanding of research methods as well as course materials push them out of the programme. It should be noted that students' adequate knowledge and skills in research and in-depth understanding of relevant theoretical and conceptual issues are key determinants in the completion of thesis or dissertation on record time.

Our findings further point to the fact that the development of doctoral students' scholarly identity and thesis or dissertation work is a significant element in obtaining a Ph.D. degree. The Ph.D. process, it should be noted, is a great investment and students need to be fully committed in order to avoid the many untold challenges. This is consistent with the views of Pyhalto et al. (2012) that it is challenging to stand alone and learn to be independent in Ph.D. research work which requires that Ph.D. students take initiative and responsibility. The thesis or dissertation process offers an opportunity to develop critical thinking as well as positive attitudes and behaviours needed as professionals. According to Can and Walker (2011), this challenging period of growth from a student to a professional may have barriers

that need to be overcome. Unfortunately, as our findings show, some Ph.D. students are unable to overcome these barriers during their engagement in the scholarly community.

The results (Table 3) further show that supervisor/assessor-related factors have a significant negative effect on graduation rate of Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast. One key factor in the Ph.D. student's success (i.e. attaining a degree) is the issue of supervision and mentoring. Herman (2011) notes that limited supervision and mentoring capacity in the scholarly community constitute barriers to doctoral education. Our findings point to the fact that Ph.D. students at the University of Cape Coast consider issues relating to supervision and social interaction within the scholarly community to be problematic. As the results indicate, there is a problem with regard to the relationships between Ph.D. students and their supervisors at the University of Cape Coast which also corroborates the assertions of Halse (2011) that there is a power relationship between a Ph.D. student and the supervisor in the scholarly community.

It is important to point out that an ideal learning environment for gaining expertise in research should provide shared control, where the Ph.D. students would develop meaningful interactions with their supervisors and thus, experience engagement in the scholarly community. Unfortunately, there appears to be lack of emphasis on doctoral counselling, mentoring and supervision among faculty members (Gardner, 2010). Doctoral supervision, it should be noted, includes tacit knowledge that is difficult to explain. According to Wright (2009), goals and practices of supervision may remain tacit thereby making it difficult to identify the means to promoting these goals of supervision. In view of the findings of the present study, supervisor-related issues, if not explicitly guided, could pose a lot of challenges for Ph.D. students with regard to their experiences as well as their academic engagement in the scholarly community.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In order to contextualise and situate our findings within the framework of the liminality theory which underpins this study, it is important to state that doctoral education in the scholarly community across the globe is a journey with barriers and roadblocks that should be removed for students to be able to graduate. Again, the lack of structure in doctoral programme relative to undergraduate programme requires Ph.D. students to be self-motivated throughout this journey; particularly during the final phase (thesis/dissertation phase) which involves increased independence and knowledge creation. The findings of our study, therefore, provide evidence to conclude that research or thesis and dissertation tasks at the doctoral level are ill-defined and this can lead to anxiety and disorientation of doctoral students. It is, therefore, the supervisors' responsibility to guide, redirect and monitor the progress of Ph.D. students to ensure their timely completion and reduce failure experiences on their Ph.D. journeys.

In view of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made. Firstly, there is the need for regular meetings between students and supervisors including time line planning for degree

completion. Quality supervision, it should be noted, involves frequent meetings and timely feedback that include open discussion of roles and responsibilities as well as a supportive and collegial relationships. Doctoral students should consistently respect timelines, exhibit openness and demonstrate their capabilities to work. Secondly, supervisors should facilitate and promote learning through active and student-centred approaches and engagements that would help Ph.D. students to develop their research skills in order to maintain the continuity of work throughout their programme. Lastly, there is the need to design and implement evaluation policies to continuously monitor performance of both Ph.D. students and supervisors in order to identify barriers or roadblocks and plan actions to improve graduation rate of doctoral students.

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