

NAVIGATING THROUGH PHD PROGRAMMES: EXPERIENCES OF GHANAIAN PHD GRADUATES FROM UNIVERSITIES ACROSS THE GLOBE

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ABSTRACT: This research sought to examine the experiences of Ghanaian PhD graduates from various universities across the globe. A qualitative research model was therefore designed and used to explore factors that motivated the PhD graduates to pursue their programmes, challenges they faced in the course of their study, effects of these challenges on them and how they dealt with the challenges. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed to select twenty participants for the study. The theoretical focus of the study was on human capital theory. The data was analysed using thematic approach. It emerged from the study that job placement and security, the academic environment, family aspiration and expectation, personal desire to stand out to be visible and availability of scholarships were factors that motivated Ghanaian PhD graduates to pursue their programmes. The findings also revealed that Ghanaian PhD graduates lost most of their acquaintances deliberately, missed their families and social life, and had difficulty managing supervisor/student relationship, battling with theories, data management and analysis. It became obvious that as part of PhD students orientation they should be made to understand that uncertainty, doubt, disappointments are parts of the PhD experience and they should not be derailed by those conditions. Universities running PhD programmes should provide counselling centres and programmes that are tailored towards the reduction of stress factors accompanying PhD programmes.

KEYWORDS: Ph.D Programmes, Ghanaian Ph.D, Graduates, Education

INTRODUCTION

In the world over, education is key to national development. Education is seen to be a vital tool for self-advancement and opens up opportunity for job placement. Education helps with the development of human capital for productivity and attainment of development. A study by Khembo and Tchereni (2013) in the SADC Region revealed that growth in educational capital has positive and statistical impact on growth in terms of per capita GDP due to ripple effect provided by education. Various governments invest huge in education of its populace. Individuals, knowing the importance of education also spend their time and other resources in pursuance of education to various levels.

Higher education has been necessitated by the desire of people to aspire to higher laurels and to qualify for the demands of the present day world of work. There are other cohorts of the population that are also interested in taken advantage of the knowledge age to improve

themselves. According to Teferra and Altbach (2004), twenty-first century is recognized as knowledge era with higher education playing a major role. Generally, attainment of higher education has been linked to progress in development. Many researchers have noted that higher education is a major driver in the development and progress of countries (Bloom, 2006). Consequently, some people are enrolled to pursue postgraduate studies in the form of Masters and PhD programmes in various universities throughout the world. Such people normally have the ambition to obtain doctorate degrees. According to Krauss and Ismail (2010), failure to attain a goal of obtaining a PhD is devastating. Statistics provided by Armstrong (2004) indicate that 40% to 50% of PhD students do not complete the dissertation successfully in the Social Sciences. Smallwood (2004) reports in North America that 50% graduate students drop out before completion (see Krauss & Ismail, 2010).

Graduate students encounter challenges wherever they get their education, whether home or abroad. A study by Talebloo and Baki (2013) revealed that international students faced challenges including problems related to facilities, academic system, social environment and international office programmes. Some of these challenges are not peculiar to only international students but students offering higher education in their home countries. Besides, due to globalization so many students are pursuing higher education in various countries. There are students from developing countries pursuing higher education in other developing and developed countries whilst some students from developed countries pursue their programmes in developing countries. In this study international students are students pursuing the programmes in other countries instead of their home countries. The presence of foreign students adds vibrancy to university and provides opportunities for contact, understanding and shared experiences of diverse cultural background (Lebcir, Wells et al., 2008).

Many studies have been conducted on PhD students in countries worldwide by various scholars to understand this area of higher education. As argued by Boud and Lee (2009), PhD education, or more broadly doctoral education, is a relatively new area that emerged in the recent one to two decades, where there has been a gradual but significant shift from thinking of the PhD in terms of its research output to a greater focus on the educational dimension. This educational dimension has led to the use of the term 'PhD education' that imply an explicit focus on the educative work in the form of activities and relationships involved in preparing and developing new researchers in the course of the PhD programme. From this backdrop, the study was therefore necessitated to uncover motivational factors for pursuing PhD, challenges confronted by PhD graduates while pursuing their programmes in some selected countries across the globe, effects of the challenges and how they dealt with the challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aboagye (2002), states that the quality of teachers, the quality of education and the quality of teacher education are inseparable. Quality teacher education has been seen as a crucial factor for effective educational outcomes in moving the nation forward. This shows that the development of higher education could not be successfully done without looking at the teacher and the training to be acquired. Education helps with the development of human capital for productivity and attainment of development. A study by Khembo and Tchereni

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Teferra and Altbach (2004) assert that twenty-first century is recognized as knowledge era with higher education playing a major role. Generally, attainment of higher education has been linked to progress in development. Many researchers have noted that higher education is a major driver in the development and progress of countries (Bloom, 2006). Consequently, some people are enrolled to pursue postgraduate studies in the form of Masters and PhD programmes in various universities throughout the world. Such people normally have the ambition to obtain doctorate degrees. According to Krauss and Ismail (2010), failure to attain a goal of obtaining a PhD is devastating. Statistics provided by Armstrong (2004) indicate that 40% to 50% of PhD students do not complete the dissertation successfully in the Social Sciences. Smallwood (2004) reports in North America that 50% graduate students drop out before completion (Krauss & Ismail, 2010).

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Teowkul, Seributra, Sangkaworn, Jivasantikarn and Devilai (2009) assert that motivation to pursue PhD can be in the form of personal development variables such as desire in self-development career enhancement variables and career switching variables such as environmental factors and fulfilment of family expectations.

There are challenges that confronted PhD graduates in pursuance of their degrees. Lee and Rice (2007) posit that international students face financial constraints concerning basic living expenses as well as school tuition. A study by Russell (1996) revealed that graduate students are concerned about time and time management. This implies the cumbersome nature of the PhD programme. Students were expected to work within deadlines (Phillips & Pugh, 2000).

Omeri, Malcolm, Ahern and Wellington (2003) pointed out that the challenges faced by PhD students' centre on the culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, which effectively mean that some of the students could be considered disadvantaged in their ability to achieve success in their studies.

However, the views of Vekkailia, Pyhalto and Lonka (2013) indicate that challenges doctoral studies pose are not necessarily negative. As noted, however, this challenge did not affect the progress of the participant because the mode of communication during the course work was in English language. Contrary to this, it has been argued by several researchers that language proficiency is the most important determinant of international students' academic success (Barrat & Huba, 1994).

There is an issue of strenuous nature in getting materials to facilitate PhD proposal and thesis writing. Biermann and Jordaan (2007) on research skills in South African universities found that students at graduate level experienced a large array of problems related to writing and information retrieval skills and presenting original work. According to Fischer and Zigmond (1998), students will not be able to write good dissertations unless they find the issues they are studying to be compelling. It is difficult for graduate students to do researches and prepare good dissertations without enough knowledge and skills related to the area. Krauss and Ismail (2010) are of the view that failure to obtain a PhD is devastating. It was noted by the researcher that this challenge was peculiar with the PhD students who had their PhD programmes in Ghana because they were tied to their work while pursuing their programmes.

There are effects as the results of the challenges encountered by PhD Students. A study by Vekkailia, Pyhalto and Lonka (2013) revealed that 26% (41/160) of participants indicated that balancing doctoral studies with family and professional life can create problems to doctoral students. From the study, it was observed that the demanding nature of the PhD programme affected the social ties of some of the participants. Studies conducted had revealed that international student's ability to make friends is important factor of acculturation, satisfaction, social support, contentment and success (Kudo & Simkin 2003; Ying, 2002). Maundeni (2001) and Kim (2001) found that in the absence of intimate friendships with host nationals, international students were substantially hampered in their cross-cultural adjustment process since without such interaction, they were unable to obtain insight into the minds and behaviours of local people. Other participants also indicated how they dealt with broken social ties.

Research conducted on the subject of friendship formation of international students and it has emerged that the ability to develop friendships is one of the most important factors of acculturation, satisfaction, contentment, social support and success for international students studying in foreign universities (Kudo & Simkin, 2003).

Student-supervisor relationship constitutes an important aspect of ones' success in PhD programme. According to Krauss and Ismail (2010), PhD supervisory relationship can make one successful in attaining a PhD or can mar one's success. Other studies have proven that the supervisory relationship constitute student satisfaction or distress (Ives & Rowley 2005; Jairam & Kahl, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed a qualitative approach using the case study design in order to address the research questions for the study. Case study strive to portray what it is to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up realities and thick description of participants (Cohen, Nelson & Walsh, 2002) with the focus on a single social group, entity or phenomena and its characteristics (Kwabia, 2006). Gall, Gall and Borg (2007), noted that a case study is an in-depth study of one or more instances of phenomenon, its real life context that reflects the perspectives of the participants involved in the phenomenon. Case study was used by the researcher due to its qualitative nature, the need to gain in-depth understanding and the focus on a single social group who are the PhD graduates from selected academic institutions throughout the globe. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were employed to select twenty PhD holders in the University of Education, Winneba who obtained PhD's from various institutions across the globe from the year 2012 to 2017. Data was gathered through face-to-face interview with the aid of semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were conducted in participants' offices. Each interview session lasted for about 1 hour 15minutes. Interview sessions were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. After each session, the audio recordings were played to the participants to check whether what was recorded was actually what they wanted to say. The transcribed data and the findings were also given to them to ascertain the trustworthiness of the data. The data on their profile was tabulated and presented using frequency and percentages while the data obtained from the interview was analysed using thematic procedure. Ethical consideration was paramount to the researcher. Anonymity, confidentiality and adherence of participants' rights were observed. The participants were informed that they had the right to opt out of the study any time they wish to do so and they willingly participated in the study. The data gathered is presented in two sections. The first section is the demographic data of the participants while the second section covers the themes derived from the various research questions for the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A brief profile of the participants was collected. The information sought was on gender, age, marital status, number of children, country of study and the number of years used for the PhD programme. The data is presented in frequencies and percentages.

The gender of participants shows that out of the twenty sampled, 5 (25%) were females, whilst 20 (75%) were males. This implies that, more males than females are found in academia as lecturers. With the age of the 20 participants, 2 (10%) were found within 35-39 age bracket, 9 (45%) within 40-44 age bracket, 8 (40%) within 45-49 age bracket, whilst 1 (5%) within 50-54 age bracket.

Marital status of respondents was also looked at. Out of the twenty participants, 16 (80%) were married, 3 (15%) were single, whilst 1 (5%) had divorced. Number of children of participants indicates that 1 (5%) was not having a child, 3 (15%) had a child each, 2 (10%) had two children each, 9 (45%) had three children each, 4 (20%) had four children each, whilst 1 (5%) had six children. The marital status and number of children of participants clearly indicate that majority of the participants were having family responsibilities which could be seen as a challenge for furthering of education. For the issue of diverse educational

background of participants, country of studies was also asked. It was realized that 7 (35%) studied in Ghana, 2 (10%) studied in Nigeria, 1 (5%) studied in Belgium, 2 (10%) studied in Netherlands, 5 (25%) United Kingdom, 1 (5%) studied in Austria, whilst 2 (10%) studied in Thailand.

Generally it can be deduced from the background information of the participants that fifteen of the participants were males because comparatively there were few females who have successfully completed their PhD. The data also indicated that sixteen participants were married and they combined their PhD studies with family life. It was also revealed that seven of the participants completed their PhDs in Ghanaian universities followed by five participants who pursued their programmes in the United Kingdom. Twelve participants used three years for their programme whilst six and two used four years and five year respectively for the programme. During the interview seventeen participants revealed that they enjoyed various types of scholarships for their programmes whilst three participants indicated that they fully funded their PhD programme.

Factors that Motivated PhD Graduates to Pursue their Programmes

All the twenty participants indicated that they were motivated to do the PhD programme and assigned various primary motivating factors that propelled them to pursue PhD. These motivating factors are job security, desire to invest in oneself, the academic environment and frustration in the workplace. Ten of the participants indicated that they did the PhD because of job security. They were lecturers and required to obtain terminal degree which was the requirement for their job. This is in support of the views of Tennant (2004) that people are motivated to pursue degree due to career development and job requirement. Some of the participants expressed their views and stated:

I started the PhD because of job security. If you are taken as a lecturer without the PhD, your job security is not guaranteed and you become tensed because you have to publish and at the same time think about acquiring a PhD so I will say job security factor motivated me. (Participant 1)

I pursued further studies because of the job prospects. (Participant 5)

As a lecturer, I needed a terminal degree which is the PhD. It became a priority for me so I enrolled on the programme because of my job. (Participant 6)

I felt that if I have a PhD as compared with the Masters, I will secure a job that is more stable. The PhD was better because if you have Masters it is difficult to secure a job especially in the universities. They always say that the requirement they want is a PhD and if you don't have a PhD you will struggle in the system. (Participants 11)

Three participants indicated that they found themselves in the academic environment and that served as the motivating factor for them to pursue their programmes. These were their views:

I found myself in the academic environment which is so challenging, I had no option but to do the PhD. (Participants 16)

I have been working in academic environment so I believe I was motivated by the academic environment. I was taken as a Teaching Assistant after my first degree. (Participants 2)

One major motivation was the academic environment. If you do not pursue PhD you will be handicapped so I had to do it. I also took inspiration from the people who had progressed to become professors, senior lecturers and others. I also aspired to be in such positions one day. (Participants 4)

Two participants were of the view that they started the PhD programme because they wanted to invest in themselves in order to match up to others who are interested in titles and do not live up to expectations. Participant 10 shared his views on what motivated him to do the PhD and said:

I am the type who is not happy when people are interested in titles. I always want people to see my work, what I am able to do. There are some people who are just interested in titles such as doctor, professor etc., but when you are looking for their work, there is nothing to show. So I wanted to invest in myself to match up to such people. We live in a society where if you do not have those titles you cannot point their mistakes to them or say anything to them. Whatever they say whether it is wrong or rights is considered final. So with the PhD I will be bold to point their mistakes to them if they do anything wrong.

He further stated:

My initial workplace, the doctors were not respecting the technical staff because the doctors thought they have been to the university. If it comes to contribution, the mere fact that you have not been to the university to pursue doctorate degree, they relegate your ideas or contributions to the background so I saw the need to do the PhD.

Two participants also indicated that they did the PhD because of the frustrations they went through in their work places. For example Participants 8 had this to say:

I was taken as teaching assistant after the first degree so actually I wanted to become a lecturer, that is when the journey began. After my Masters I returned to Ghana to work and the frustration was too much so I decided to leave again for further studies. (Participant 8)

The participants were asked to indicate whether there were some people who also motivated them to pursue PhD. Responses from the participants indicated that some were intrinsically motivated and it was their self-intuition that prompted them while others were extrinsically motivated. Ten participants indicated that they were self-motivated, 4 were motivated by their friends, 2 participants were motivated by mentors while three indicated that their family members motivated them to do PhD. One participant indicated that his Masters' Degree supervisors encouraged him to do the PhD. These are some the responses participants gave.

I was much interested in that subject area and I was self-motivated to do it. I did not have anybody to motivate me. God was my motivator. (Participant 10)

It was my dream. I started teaching at a basic school with Certificate 'A' and I wanted to lecture in the university or tertiary institution and the entry requirement is Masters and PhD.

So, I had to pursue both Masters and the PhD so that I can accomplish that. This motivated me to do the PhD. (Participant 7)

I discovered about myself that I was very interested in academic activities. I got to know I spend a lot of time reading all sort of things, just thought it was fun, I never thought it was important that you can turn it into a profession or something like that. So when I was doing the Masters that was when the awareness dawned. Even before that, I was working for an NGO in Accra and there was one lecturer from University of Ghana who used to come there. At that time he used to write papers and ask me to review for him. I never thought it was important. So, I was reviewing his papers for him and he was happy with that. Later, I realized that actually people can get paid for doing that. I thought this was just a hobby or just fun, so he was the one who alerted me that this is something important so he encouraged me. He added me to his research team. So from the year 2000, I started moving with them; doing research, collecting data, writing reports. So before I got to Holland, I had that knowledge and skills. In Holland I realized that this is the same thing they are doing in the PhD, you collect data and write your report. Of course you need a lot of polishing and other things to turn it into thesis. (Participants 12)

Emm... I will say I had a colleague who also studied outside the country and returned to Ghana. I always refer to him as my spiritual father behind my academic success. He actually motivated and encouraged me to pursue the programme. I remember when I was pursuing the second masters he was always telling me that I should not return with only the Masters but PhD. He really encouraged me and motivated me. He was setting standards for me to reach. (Participants 17)

One person who motivated me was a professor in my department. He was my Head of Department at that time. I had then applied for Common Wealth scholarship and did not get so he told me to start the PhD in Ghana and should not think if I don't do it outside it will not be good. He said whether I do the PhD outside Ghana or in Ghana, it is my input that will determine whether I will be successful. It is what I will make out of it. It was motivating so I decided to do it in Ghana wherever I get the opportunity. I had then had two unsuccessful attempts to go outside to do it. (Participants 4)

My M.Phil supervisors also motivated me. I was lucky so my supervisors were always encouraging me. I happen to have that luck or blessing to have committed supervisors and they encouraged me and told me not to go to Ghana with just Masters. They saw in me as someone who can work in academia so they just encouraged me to go higher for the ultimate. (Participant 9)

The participants who indicated that their family members motivated them explained that parents and siblings especially those in the academia motivated them to pursue PhD programme.

Oh yeah, assuming your parents or siblings are in academia or education sector and they are studying, you definitely want to learn or else you will feel like you are lagging behind. The family aspiration and expectations were contributing factor. (Participant 3)

It was the desire of my family so I got that push from them and was motivated. There are some intellectuals in my family: PhD holders, medical doctors, so I was also forced to do that. (Participant 14)

These views tend to revealed that some of the participants were intrinsically motivated by their desire in self-improvement while others were motivated extrinsically by people around them and the incentives they will get from career enhancement such as job security and prospects. These findings are in support of a study by Teowkul, Seributra, Sangkaworn, Jivasantikarn and Devilai (2009) which revealed that motivation to pursue PhD can be in the form of personal development variables such as desire in self-development career enhancement variables and career switching variables such as environmental factors and fulfilment of family expectations. The participants had to make investment in their knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience and intelligence by spending their time, energy and money on the programme. Some of participants had scholarships from the government and other institutions that enabled them to pursue their programmes. Investment in human capital constitutes development and enhances productivity and career advancement. Some of the participants noted they had people such as friends and family members who were interested in their progress and they encouraged them to pursue their PhD programmes.

Challenges that Confronted PhD Graduates in Pursuance of their PhD Programmes

The participants involved in the study pointed out some challenges they encountered in their bid to complete their PhD programmes. These challenges were diverse ranging from cutting off social ties, commuting from one geographical location to another, poor time management due to combining the PhD programme with work, financial constraints, delays by some supervisors, tussle between the main and co- supervisors, language difficulties, difficulty in getting resource materials such as books, and samples on the study and difficulty in analysing data gathered.

Cutting off social ties

Participants' opinions on the need for social ties differed. Social capital plays a key role in human institution serving as a means of maintaining social networks among people for society existence as well as human development. The study brought to the fore pertinent issues about how some of the participants' social lives were affected in their quest to complete their respective PhD programmes. The study further revealed how communication especially with immediate family became a problem due the pressures and demands of combining the course work and PhD thesis writing. The participants indicated that this strained the relationships between them and their friends and families.

Participant 10 said: *Leaving my country and going to another person's country was a challenge. I lost my acquaintances. I deliberately cut all my friends because I had no time to even call them. Twenty four hours and seven days in a week I was with my books. I leave my room around 7: 30, get to the library around 8:00 o'clock. Being in somebody's country, how many friends do you have there? Not many friends. The programme was demanding and you*

don't have time to talk to your acquaintance at home. So it was not an easy thing but we knew why we were there so we had to sacrifice. I missed my family so I presume they also missed me. I used to discuss with my siblings about programmes such as weddings, funerals etc. but it was not possible when I started that PhD programme.

At some point almost every week I was going to the university. Sometimes when you go you don't have to come back. It affected my family life. (Participant 4)

Sharing his experience, Participant 7 stated: *I have never been able to come or go close to my family because of this higher education. Because if I should narrate my journey from cert A, it was not easy. I taught for some time and went to university from 2003 to 2007 for the degree, 2008-2009 I was at university for the MPhil and then 2012- 2015 I did the PhD. So if it's about the family ties especially the nuclear family, as I am bettering their lots in terms of family resources, I am also disappointing them in terms of family bonding and cohesion. That is my greatest challenge. I would have wished to be close to my family but because of my education it wasn't possible. I'm now trying to patch up the differences.*

The way they have structured their PhD is so intimidating that sometimes you feel your relationship will become wired. One of my colleagues was the lousy type and so sometimes he used to knock at my door and I was not responding to him. The whole programme was intimidating because it is not that you want to be alone but the work load will force you to be alone. (Participant 17)

It's great you have your kids growing up with you. It's very great. I had that experience when I was growing up, getting close to my Dad was more difficult than getting close to my Mum. So I thought it wise that I'm not going to repeat same mistake but education has rather put me far off from the family. Sometimes, when I get home they come close but if I had gotten the opportunity to stay with them it would have been better than what I do experience. (Participant 14)

Most of the participants indicated they had difficulties spending quality time with their families due to the demands of their PhD programme. Some indicated that they could not get time to even call their family members. Contrary to the opinions of participant 4, 7, 17 and 14, the view of Participant 2 indicated that not all PhD students' cut social ties with friends and family members but rather some found solace in communicating with their family as a form of stress management to refresh themselves for their tasks. He narrated his experience and stated:

With my acquaintances in Ghana, what I was doing was that when I was stressed up I used to communicate with my friends and family. Especially any time I go for my work from my supervisor and I see all the red inks and the question marks the best thing for me was to call my friends and family to chart. (Participant 2)

Financial constraints

It emerged from the study that financial constraints was a major challenge faced by some of the participants in the study though some of them were on scholarships. To those who had financial constraints it was one of the most challenging setbacks to their programme. This

challenge affected their academic work and progress and delayed the completion of their PhD programmes. In the light of this, one participant professed:

I had to organize my time because at the PhD level I had scholarship for tuition. They paid my fees, so I had to go through the programme but had to buy books and pay for the research cost and flight charges. I had to pay for my accommodation, feeding and all other costs. I had to find some work and I was lucky because as soon as I got there, I secure a job as a lecturer in the University. I had two lecturers that I was teaching with. So I registered with them and when school is in session I was also in session teaching. I used to combine my PhD programme with that job so I was paid. When the University is on recess it means I am out of job because I was paid on hourly basis. As part of the PhD programme they had a whole range of courses like assessment of courses, teaching, tutorials etc. There were several things we were supposed to do so it wasn't easy for me. (Participant 12)

This assertion partly supports Lee and Rice (2007) views that International students face financial constraints concerning basic living expenses as well as school tuition. According to Participants 12 even though his tuition fees was paid he struggled to provide his basic needs.

Difficulty in managing time

It was revealed by the study that the participants encountered difficulty with time management due to the laborious nature of their PhD programmes. Time was of essence to the PhD graduates during their programmes especially those who had sponsorship and study leave. Some participants who had their PhD programmes in Ghana were working concurrently while undertaking the programme and this proved to be daunting task per the views they shared. With this, Participant 4 intimated:

A major challenge was devoting full time to the PhD work. I had to divide my time for three things, the programme, teaching and family work. Sometimes I had to leave the work for one month before I go back to it. By the time I go back to it I had forgotten some things. In fact, my teaching load was reduced and my HOD even advised that I should be given few slots so I was teaching one or two courses per semester but it was not easy for me.

Participant 3 stated:

I think I did not do well with time management because at some point I kept the work somewhere for one month and before I come back I had forgotten certain things. I think I had divided attention, working and at the same time pursuing the PhD programme. You need full concentration for it.

Participant 7 had this to say: *I wasn't receiving strange calls so that I could have time for myself and my studies, the research and other things. That was number one. I was combining a whole lot of things; a family man, a worker, a student and other unforeseen responsibilities that came my way.*

These assertions were affirmed by one of the participants who had his PhD programme oversees though he worked on part- time basis in his department. Participant 13 indicated that time management was a major issue to her because she had to combine her studies with work.

This finding supports a study by Russell in (1996) which revealed that graduate students are concerned about time and time management.

On challenges associated with the PhD programme, participant 10 also lamented about difficulty with time management although he was on a fully funded scholarship. This was as a result of the cumbersome nature of the PhD programme. Students were expected to work within deadlines (Phillips & Pugh, 2000).

Participant 10 said: *The library has facilities for PhD students. They have rooms or cubicles so you can lock yourself in those rooms and learn. You have exams, term papers, quizzes etc. so you need to sacrifice a lot of time.*

The Participants were asked to indicate how they dealt with their challenges. They highlighted the various strategies they adopted. Concerning challenges associated with time they were of the view that good time management and avoidance of procrastination are keys to one's success when it comes to obtaining a PhD certificate. The following views were expressed by the participants.

It is all about time management and I also shelved all other irrelevant things to me. I abandoned socialization and strictly followed my time table. I used two hours for this work and then take the other and work for three hours, I had time for lunch, dinner etc. (Participant 1)

It was observed from the study that participant one was able to stick to a rigorous time table hence facilitating successful completion of his programme in time. He was on a fully funded scholarship.

Participant 8 was of the view that he did not postpone writing of assignments and proposals. He indicated that they were told never to respect a deadline. He said *"If they say 5th is the deadline, submit your work on the 3rd, never wait for it, if you wait for it then you are going to have more stress. The closer you get to the deadline the more difficulties you will face. So make sure you finish your work before a deadline."* From the study, avoiding procrastination was the best way that Participant 8 managed to get around his tasks without much difficulty.

On the contrary, some participants had to adjust their schedules because they combined their PhD programmes with work, this somehow delayed the completion of their PhD programme as noted earlier by Participants 3 and 4.

Language and cultural differences

Omeri et al. (2003) pointed out that the challenges faced by PhD students' centre on the culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, which effectively mean that some of the students could be considered disadvantaged in their ability to achieve success in their studies. The participants involved in the study expressed differing opinions on language and cultural differences. The study revealed that two participant expressed a challenge to some extent with respect to language and cultural differences because they had their PhD programme in a Non- Anglophone country. They however indicated that English language was used for their course work and thesis writing. One of them however indicated that he was not affected in any way as he harnessed that to save time.

Participant 17 expressed his views on language and indicated that even though the language was a challenge it ended up to be a blessing because he could not socialize with his colleagues and that saved him some time. He stated:

Studying in a country where English was not the mother tongue and I was also not good speaking Dutch. By the way, the challenge became blessing because I couldn't communicate in their language so it prevented me from involving myself in more socialization even with my course mates and this saved me from spending much time with them. I did not have any challenge with the language because we were taught in English."

The views expressed by Participant 17 supports the views of Vekkailia, Pyhalto and Lonka (2013) that challenges doctoral studies pose are not necessarily negative. As noted in the concluding part of the excerpt, however, this challenge did not affect the progress of the participant because the mode of communication during the course work was in English language. Contrary to this, it has been argued by several researchers that language proficiency is the most important determinant of international students' academic success (Barrat & Huba, 1994).

Difficulty in getting available materials on the study

Six participants also brought to light how they found it arduous in getting resource materials for their PhD thesis. This challenge was further aggravated by inability to critically analyse the data gathered. The following are some of the views expressed by some of the participants.

Gathering data on a foreign land was challenging. Another challenge was that my committee members said I cannot do a PhD without coming out with a theory. So I had to come out with my personal theory. That is a proposal theory. (Participant 10)

The field work was very challenging. My work involved a lot of laboratory analysis. It was mostly devoid of human elements. I was observing nature. I had to use sand and pebbles from three study sites. I had the pebbles for two of sites but with the third one I couldn't get the sample upon several visitors. So my first draft I used that as limitation but later on I got the sample. Getting literature was also a problem in that area. It was not a popular area of study and the literature on it was very old. Most people do not venture into that area of study. The laboratory analysis was also challenging. They will do the analysis for you but you have to interpret it yourself. For the sand I sent it to soil science laboratory and the pebbles I did the measurement myself. (Participant 4)

Participant 4 continued:

My greatest challenge was that initially, I had not known much about what I had to do. The way forward was not clear. After the proposal and the field work, to put the materials together was difficult for me. I had to use GIS (Geographical Informational System) and involve expert in GIS. There were some quantitative analyses too. So this went on for about five to six months. I did not know what to do with the materials. I had huge data from the laboratory analysis. Somehow, I realized that the PhD programme was a burden to me. At some point, I thought I can't I finish the work. I think initially I was keeping everything to myself until I started taking to people. Especially those in GIS I had to speak with them and they also helped me a lot. What happened was that there were some materials I had to read

and I had not read them. When I got those materials I got to know what to do. One other motivating factor was that one Professor started calling me Doctor, I was not comfortable with it. Wherever he sees me, he called me Doctor, I said eiii... if I'm not able to finish this work what will happen? He was also asking me about the progress of my work.

Participant 12 also said:

Doing a PhD is an interesting thing, you read and it gets to a certain stage then you feel bored, you don't know where you are, you are just lost. You are moving in this direction and just hanging in there hoping that you will find a way out. I experienced that, I felt I don't know anything in the world. It went on (that was the most difficult stage) until I found two books. The books really showed me what I should do. One of the books was 'Community Development: A Critical Perspective' and then the other one ... Crait and Mayo (2008), I have forgotten the title. For the work when it comes to the political part, I didn't have problems because my supervisor had been writing on political issues for a long time but the community development part. Putting all together and then finding the intersection that was the part that was missing. So, I was blind for a long time until I got those two books.

In dealing with those challenges, Participant 4 noted:

Consulting people, explaining the work to my supervisors and discussing it with them were helpful. You also had to read similar works and you get a lot of ideas.

In addition to consultation of experienced people in the subject area just as Participant 4 did, Participant 12 also read similar works for direction to overcome challenges associated with literature review, data management and analysis. From some of the participants, reading of resourceful books was the turning point that helped them to overcome their challenges. Most of the participants indicated the strenuous nature in getting materials to facilitate the PhD proposal and thesis writing. This finding confirms a study carried out by Biermann and Jordaan (2007) on research skills in South African universities and found that students at graduate level experienced a large array of problems related to writing and information retrieval skills and presenting original work. According to Fischer and Zigmond (1998), students will not be able to write good dissertations unless they find the issues they are studying to be compelling. It is difficult for graduate students to do researches and prepare good dissertations without enough knowledge and skills related to the area.

Proposal and thesis defence

Coupled with the challenges expounded, it was also revealed by the some participants that they had difficulties with the proposal and thesis defence before the completion of their PhD programmes.

Participant 10 shared his experience and lamented:

I failed my first proposal and I was in a room for one week I could not go out. A friend called me to a mall and decided to bring life back to me. While in the room I was thinking, first, I had a study leave for 3 years, second I had scholarship for 3 years so if I exceed the 3 years it means I will pay the school fees myself. If I exceed the three years, what happens to my study

leave. In that university, If you fail the proposal, you have only 60 days to redeem yourself or you have to wait for the following year. So I had only 60 days that is 2 months to come back to redeem myself or wait for the following year. In fact that was my greatest challenge.

These views expressed by Participant 10 indicate how devastating he was after his failure to pass the proposal defence. Even though this was a short term goal geared towards the main goal of attaining the PhD, it was a determining factor for continuity in the PhD programme. Krauss and Ismail (2010) are of the view that failure to obtain a PhD is devastating.

Facing the panel for the thesis defence was greatest challenge for some of the participants. To this end, Participants 2 also had this to say:

The main thesis defends I was nervous. The first one I attended there were few people but with mine when I entered the hall and it was full. I became nervous so my supervisor told me that I shouldn't look at them but should look at him alone. He said he will give me signs to slow down when I speak fast. All along I was looking at my supervisor. What actually made me very nervous was that the external examiner who was from Holland challenged the theory that I used and said I used the wrong theory and said I should have use cooperative conflict theory. That thing hit me hard because I was confused so I had to wait a little while and used the European approach and told him that I am sorry but I am not sure if he really read my work. I am not looking at the root cause of poverty of house hold. All of a sudden his face change and he took a copy of my work to check and the whole place was quit. She flipped though and came out and said he was sorry, he did not get it right. This gave me some kind of morale and confidence so with the other questions they were easy for me to address them. After the defence the doctoral board met and I was invited and congratulated by the chair person.

Sharing her experience, Participant 16 also indicated: *"If you follow some of the advice and things they (supervisors) tell you from the start concerning the defence, you will be able to get around it but it is not always that you will remember those things."*

As professed by Participant 2, he disclosed that he was able to scale over the thesis defence with the confidence reposed in him by his supervisor despite the fact that he was nervous at some point. This sentiment was also confirmed by Participant 16 who tapped into the advice given to her by her supervisors before her thesis defence.

Commuting from one place to another

Six participants highlighted that they were commuting from one geographical area to another during their PhD programme and it was problematic. These were some of the views they shared.

I was a resident at the university for the first 2 years but because I was teaching I had to come and teach within the week and go back. After the course work I was commuting occasionally. Sometimes I will be there and they will call me to come around because they need me at the workplace. The field work, was also very challenging because I had travel to various places to gather data.(Participants 4)

Participant 7 also expressed his sentiment and indicated that it was frustrating to book appointment with one's supervisors only to come around and the supervisors will postpone

the meeting. He stated: *"You may arrange with your supervisors to meet them to discuss the work, you will travel from afar coming to meet your supervisors only for them to postpone the meeting. You can go there several times and it is still the same, always postponing."*

Participant 3 said: *Yeah, the first challenge was commuting from the home to the University because I combined my work with the PhD programme.*

It was noted by the researcher that this challenge was peculiar with the PhD students who had their PhD programmes in Ghana because they were tied to their work while pursuing their programmes. These views expressed by the participants indicate that as they were investing in themselves they had to spend time, money and energy in commuting from one place to the other.

Effects of the Challenges Encountered by PhD Students

Participants came out with the effects of the challenges they encountered and these have been categorized into themes such as loss of social capital, health and life risks and delay in progress.

Loss of social capital

All the participants were of the view that during their PhD programmes they had challenges dealing with their family ties and friends and that led to the loss of some of their acquaintances.

Participant 8 narrated his experience and stated: *People around me were affected because I had a lot of work to do at the same time so I shunned most of my friends. They liked socializing a lot. They normally came out that we should go out especially at weekends. So in a way they were not happy. It was as if I was quite weird among them. I always gave an excuse.*

Participant 12 said:

Sometimes you go for supervision meeting and it didn't go well you come home and you are not even aware that you are transferring your mood to the people around you. You transfer the anger and frustrations not only to your wife but the people in the house with you. When they talk to you the way you respond is not the same when you are in a happy mood.

Participant 14 also shared similar sentiment and stated: *There were a whole lot of things that I had to relegate to the background for me to have full concentration for my studies and my research work. But it has brought a gap between me, my nuclear family, the extended family, friends and other acquaintances. So as I told you I have gotten the PhD but it seems I'm an 'island' being".*

This views expressed by the participants in the study indicated how their social relationships especially with the family members were affected in the quest for PhD certificates. This findings seem to support a study conducted by Vekkaila, Pyhalto and Lonka (2013) which revealed that 26% (41/160) of the participants indicated that balancing doctoral studies with family and professional life can create problems to doctoral students. From the study, it was

observed that the demanding nature of the PhD programme affected the social ties of some of the participants. Participant 17 shared his experience and said:

I know myself and had to be myself so I did not encourage the female's advances but I was very careful not to cause more confusion. I kept the relationship as tactful as possible. They complained that I always kept myself from them and did not want to socialize. But that was a clash of culture.

As intimated in the excerpt, Participant 17 did not maintain an open relationship with his course mates as he was very tactful not to upset anyone. This, according to some scholars, may affect the person involved and lead to cross-cultural adjustment problems. Studies conducted had revealed that international students' ability to make friends is important factor of acculturation, satisfaction, social support, contentment and success (Kudo & Simkin 2003; Ying, 2002). Maundeni (2001) and Kim (2001) found that in the absence of intimate friendships with host nationals, international students were substantially hampered in their cross-cultural adjustment process since without such interaction, they were unable to obtain insight into the minds and behaviours of local people. Other participants also indicated how they dealt with broken social ties.

Participant 14 shared his experience and said: *First of all, lets me start with the family. With my family what I was doing was that from my work place to the university was about 300 kilometres and they were staying in a city which is located midway so before I go to the university I had to go and sleep over at where they are. On my return journey from the university to my workplace I had to stay there one or two days before I get to my work place. I was using their place for transit. So I was patching up the differences. With the friends, I was patching up the differences too. I was calling them at times. So it's was a top- bottom approach. They see you at the top but you have to move from the top and socialize with them else they will never come up to you.*

Participant 14 adopted two strategies in repairing his fractured social relationships; visits to his family and initiating communication with his old folks. Despite the fact that most of the PhD graduates lost their acquaintances during their programmes others harnessed their social capital by consulting friends who were also PhD students at that time to step in to help them navigate through their challenges.

Participant 10 shared his experience and stated:

When I failed the proposal defence I called my friend and told him about the problem. That problem did not affect my family. I called other people who could help me. I called a friend from the United States, one in South Africa and another in the United Kingdom who were also PhD candidates to help.

From his assertion, it was noted that Participant 10 opted to seek assistance from experienced friends in other international universities before he overcame this challenge. Research has been conducted on the subject of friendship formation of international students and it has emerged that the ability to develop friendships is one of the most important factors of acculturation, satisfaction, contentment, social support and success for international students studying in foreign universities (Kudo & Simkin, 2003).

Health and life risks

Good life is contingent on healthy living. Though the acquisition of PhD title was prestigious for the participants involved in the study, some of them expressed either short- term or long - term health complications after navigating through the PhD programme. For example, Participant 5 stated:

There were moments of stress when you can't sleep well and I developed a habit of waking up at night to work. So now it's difficult for me to sleep from 9:00pm to 3:00am, I will wake up no matter what. So there are moments of stress when you can't sleep well and I developed a habit of waking up at night to work.

Participant 12 also stated: *Every day at between 11pm and 4am I wake up. Whether I use alarm or not I will wake up. So now it is difficult for me to sleep continuously from 8 pm to 5am, I will wake up no matter what. I can't sleep.*

It was revealed by some of the Participants that PhD programme prevented them to sleep for the required number of hours that the body needs to replenish itself and it has become part and parcel of their lives so they have been experiencing sleep loss. Sleep loss may have dire consequences on their health.

Participant 7 also shared his experience and said:

Once I booked appointment with my supervisors that I was coming to discuss my work with them; the Principal supervisor and the Co-supervisor. I was driving from my work place to the university and I burnt my car gasket at a junction as a result of overheating. I was nearly involved in an accident. I spoilt my car engine all in the name of PhD.

By this expression, the participant revealed that he survived a life threatening incident which could have scuppered his desire to complete the PhD programme.

Delay in making progress

The study brought out that the participants' proposal and thesis writing progress were halted at some point due to one or two reasons including administrative setbacks, artificial delays by supervisors and others. Some participants made the following assertions in this regard.

Participant 12 shared his experience and said:

Sometimes it was time for my fees to be paid because I was on scholarship and the one to pay has forgotten. So the university used to send me an email that they have blocked me. So I can't go to the library, my card has expired and all of that. Sometimes, it took months before the problem was resolved.

Participant 12 continued:

My greatest challenge was that you register with student's visa that was issued for three years. When my visa expired I had to renew it for the rest of the duration. So my first visa expired in 2011-2012 so I had to renew, and there were some monies and fees that I had to pay. I had to couple all the money I had but it delayed because there was a change in government at that time. So the university looked at the system to see those whose visas have expired. For them, they were not interested whether the UK board had issued it or not. The delayed caused a whole lot of disruptions to my studies. The university blocked my access to library even though they knew I had to go there and study. It took two months before it was resolved.

Participant 4 narrated his experience and stated:

I had problem with my Co-supervisor. My co-supervisor was not reading the work so the third year the Principal supervisor asked me to submit the work because he was okay with it. But the co-supervisor said I shouldn't submit the work. This wrangling lasted for a year. It was between the Co-supervisor and the Principal supervisor. It was at that time that the Co-supervisor started reading the work and was making suggestions and indicated some gaps in the work. That is the reason why I had to use 5 years for the work. There was a tussle between my Principal supervisor and Co-supervisor for one year on whether I should submit the work or not. When he finally asked me to submit the work, my Principal supervisor came out openly to talk to him. So the man decided to go through the work page by page again just to satisfy the Principal supervisor. Whilst the Principal supervisor had finished with me to submit the work the Co-supervisor then asked me to send the Chapter One and Two to him. Both of them agreed finally that I should submit the work.

Participants 5 also said:

Sometimes you have to deal with the two supervisors at the same time. They travel a lot; you want to meet them and then one is there the other had travelled. If you meet them together it is to your advantage because they will have all the questions they want to ask you at the same time and you respond and deal with it. Sometimes when you meet only one, this one gives you comments about the work and you have to change some aspects, the other comes and he doesn't understand why you changed some aspects. You have to do the whole thing again. So these were some of the challenges because one says something and the other also says something different but when they are together it helps.

Participant 3 had this to say: *I quite remember my Co-supervisor and the Principal supervisors sat me down and they created some artificial delays. They said we should relax for a while within six months, they read over and over again. By then I had gotten my full thesis.*

Some of participants involved in the study also pointed out how they dealt with their supervisors who were delaying their progress.

Participant 4 stated:

I think for the Principal supervisor he was okay. So for about one year, I was dealing with the co-supervisor until the last minute that I was able to bring them together.

Participant 10 also said: *I wanted to make progress, when I'm down and I had to go for knowledge from someone, I humble myself so much and go for it. And after I have acquired the knowledge, I accumulate and share. Being ready to learn and share knowledge pushed me along, so my supervisors and other people around also saw that I'm very selfless.*

These views expressed by the participants give credence to the fact that student- supervisor relationship constitutes an important aspect of ones' success in PhD programme. According to Krauss and Ismail (2010), PhD supervisory relationship can make one successful in attaining a PhD or can mar one's success. Other studies have proven that the supervisory

relationship constitute student satisfaction or distress (Ives & Rowley 2005; Jairam & Kahl Jr. 2012).

Conclusions and Recommendations

A combination of intrinsic factors such as desire to invest in oneself and extrinsic factors namely job security, academic environment motivated the PhD graduates from selected universities to pursue their programmes.

Family members, friends and work associates with higher academic qualifications encouraged PhD graduates to opt for higher education in the form of PhD degree.

Financial constraints, difficulty in managing time and inability to obtain resource materials on a study posed greater challenges to PhD graduates when they were pursuing their programmes and hampered their progress.

PhD graduates did not have time to strengthen their family ties and friendship during their period of study and this affected their social life. PhD programme is time consuming and demanding and it prevented the Graduates from spending quality time with their close associates such as family and friends during their period of study.

The study further postulates that conflict between principals and co-supervisors victimises students and keeps them in dilemma. This negatively affects their progress of work.

An appreciation of social diversity and for that matter the potentials of people to excel in the academia are necessary to provide motivation for people to access and succeed on the PhD programmes. To this end, institutions should diversify PhD programmes to incorporate programmes that will enable students who intend to work in the various sectors of economy and are interested to pursue PhD to do so.

There is the need for institutions that offer grant and scholarship schemes to reassess their support to make these supports comprehensive to cater for vital expenditure of students to ease financial pressure on students. It has become necessary for such institutions to also put structures in place for proper regulations of their support to ensure timely settlement of their commitment in a sustainable manner to allay fears and anxiety in their beneficiaries in the course of their studies.

It became obvious that as part of PhD students' orientation they should be made to understand that uncertainty, doubt, disappointments are parts of the PhD experience and they should not be derailed by those conditions. Universities running PhD programmes should provide such orientation, counselling centres and programmes that are tailored towards the reduction of stress factors accompanying PhD programmes.

Academic institutions should adhere to best practices that are supportive to PhD students' progress and reduce stressors to guarantee safety and healthy academic environment for students. PhD students should be given opportunity to lobby and choose their own supervisors instead of imposing principal and co-supervisors on students in order to reduce tension and conflict between supervisors. Post graduate students should be allowed to lobby and select their own supervisors in the course of their study.

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