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The Development of Doctoral Degree Curriculum in England: Perspectives from Professional Doctoral Degree Graduates

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Abstract This article investigates why potential doctoral students decided to enroll in a professional doctorate program instead of a traditional Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), and how it enhanced their professional development and career promotion. Twenty professional doctorate graduates were invited to participate in this study, which was guided by the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). The article reveals that the program offers the flexibility for professionals to enjoy the rigorous education at the doctoral level. Second, the curriculum allows graduates to apply both theories and practical applications directly into their current workplace. Third, the lecturers enhance the professional doctorate graduates' life experience. This study provides recommendations for university administrators, policymakers, organizational employers, and potential doctoral students in the United Kingdom and other Anglophone countries.

Keywords Career counseling; Doctoral student experience; Professional doctorate; Qualitative

Introduction

A doctor's degree is the highest academic degree awarded by universities. The term doctorate is commonly used to refer to a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree, the requirements of which vary from country to country. In the United States, a PhD requires the completion of a set of modules and a doctoral dissertation. However, these

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two components are not necessary for a PhD in the United Kingdom, where a PhD mainly requires an original doctoral thesis that could contribute to the academic field and does not involve coursework. Earning a PhD in the United States and the United Kingdom takes three years with full-time lectures. However, in the United Kingdom, four-year PhD studies are now being offered for those who lack the necessary research skills. Hong Kong and Australia employ the English system and thus require minimal coursework for PhD students. Although the American and English models have differing characteristics, they share a commonality: both require a doctoral thesis with original research.

For admission requirements, universities offering a PhD also differ, but observe a common standard. Admission requirements include a strong research proposal, recommendation letters, prior research experience, and a relevant master's degree. Universities that follow the English model allow students to pursue their doctorate studies immediately if they have earned at least an upper second-class bachelor's degree in their chosen field of study. Those without research experience have the option to complete a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) before pursuing their PhD. By contrast, universities that adopt the American model require PhD applicants to have a master's degree in a relevant subject. Students with exceptional backgrounds are sometimes exempted. A common thread between the two models is that the PhD admission requirements do not involve extensive work experience. This requirement is reasonable, because many PhD programs are full time and may not be suitable for employed professionals.

At present, professionals are granted the opportunity to earn a doctoral degree through a professional doctorate. Unlike the PhD, professional doctorates require professionals to apply their experience instead of conducting research. Therefore, many professionals have sought professional doctorate degrees to not only apply their experience but also to further develop their skills and knowledge in a particular environment.

The UK Council for Graduate Education noted a significant increase in the number of professional doctorates in recent decades, which rose from 128 in the late 1990s to nearly 400 in mid-2010. Professional doctorate degrees cover many fields, including health sciences, clinical psychology, business, education, engineering, social sciences, religious studies, computer science, and workplace learning. In the United Kingdom in the late 2000s, around 8,000 students were enrolled in one of the many professional doctorates programs.

Unlike PhD programs, professional doctorate programs are designed for working professionals. Thus, these programs are offered on a part-time basis and involve taught modules and cohort-based student groups. A professional doctorate is finally awarded to individuals who complete independent and original research in a professional field and to those who successfully finish a set of designed taught modules and a doctoral thesis.

PhD and professional doctorate programs are both offered for a wide range of subjects. For example, the professional doctorate program offered by the School of Education at Durham University centers on educational issues. Specifically, this Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD) program is designed to satisfy the require-

ments for educational professionals in performing teaching, management, or administrative roles in schools. The EdD program focuses more on the practical applications of students' knowledge than on their theoretical knowledge. The EdD program also differs from traditional PhD programs because it involves six taught modules and requires a 60,000-word thesis. Regarding admission requirements, applicants to the EdD program must have at least three years of professional experience in a position that would directly benefit from training under the EdD program.

Problem of research and research focus

The recent increase in the number of enrollees in professional doctorate programs may pique the curiosity of potential students about the learning outcomes and expectations of such programs. The extensive literature on traditional PhD programs has shown that they typically attract academic research students and potential higher-education institution lecturers. However, few research studies have focused on how professional doctorate programs influence the learning outcomes and expectations of graduates. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap in the literature.

Theoretical framework

This study employed the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) put forward by Robert Lent, Steven Brown, and Gail Hackett (1994) as its theoretical framework. SCCT, which was developed from Albert Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, summarizes people's understanding of their careers, decisions, and behaviors. SCCT has been widely applied in research (Lent, 2005; Lent & Brown, 2006; 2008; Luzzo, Hasper, Albert, Bibby, & Martinelli, 1999). Generally, SCCT suggests that career and academic interests are highly influenced by self-efficacy. It emphasizes that career and academic selection may be affected by certain environmental and behavioral factors. Despite its comprehensive application, however, SCCT has not been used to understand the psychological conditions of professional doctorate holders.

As mentioned previously, specific factors influence the career and academic-selection behaviors of individuals. According to SCCT, the three main elements are self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is "concerned not with the skills one has but with judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses" (p. 391). Self-efficacy affects individuals' decisions and behaviors, their commitment to their decisions, and their approach to overcoming adversity and problems (Bandura, 1997). The present study highlights a link between individuals' self-efficacy and the manner by which professional doctorate graduates handle the completion of their respective programs. As an example, it is postulated that professional doctorate candidates are likely to receive top scores if they firmly believe that they could do so.

Bandura (1986) described outcome expectations as being guided by specific behaviors, such as personal beliefs of expected rewards, achievements, goals, and personal enhancements. The current study explores the factors behind the decisions of professional doctorate graduates to enroll in their respective programs. It also seeks to determine whether their doctorate programs meet their outcome expectations,

which may be positive or negative. For example, it is postulated that professional doctorate graduates are not likely to be employed despite being qualified for a position if they believe their degrees give them a disadvantage when searching for a full-time position.

As described by Robert Lent (2005), a goal equates to the determination to achieve a particular outcome. Self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals are known to interact, and thus self-efficacy and outcome expectations would cause individuals to develop expected goals for their academic selection. For example, individuals who realize that certain modules do not match their goals would ultimately seek additional assistance to achieve their goals with strong self-efficacy.

Lent et al. (2000) strongly suggest that career counselors and researchers understand individuals' self-efficacy and outcome expectations because these factors can affect the decision-making processes related to the interests and goals of individuals. Strong self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations can lead to the development of a student's interests and personal performance.

Literature review

Nature of PhD degrees

Keith Noble (1994) explained that the first doctorate qualification was awarded in the 12th century. Therefore, the awarding of a PhD has a long, stable history. By the early 17th century, German universities began granting master's degrees. In previous years, the postgraduate degrees in Germany did not entail a research-oriented thesis with an original contribution to the academia. To promote the academic and practical development of postgraduates, German universities, especially the University of Berlin (today known as the Humboldt University of Berlin), proposed offering research-oriented degrees and began requiring research-based theses from their students. Later on, the University of Berlin received recognition as a modern research university through its PhD programs requiring original research (Ruegg, 2004). The educational reform seen in Germany completely changed the landscape of postgraduate degree programs in Europe, because a large number of continental universities began adopting the same system.

Although this educational reform in Europe affected academic diversity in the United States, universities in the United Kingdom did not follow suit. In North America, which was heavily influenced by British colonialism, the PhD was introduced only in the mid-19th century. Before the introduction of the PhD, most American students went to continental Europe to complete their postgraduate education. When it was finally introduced, postgraduate education focused mainly on vocational and practical applications. Such focus was observed in the Doctor of Divinity offered by Harvard University. During the mid-18th century, King's College, which is now known as Columbia University, and the University of Pennsylvania began awarding a Doctorate in Medicine. In 1861, Yale University awarded its first PhD, which required a research-oriented thesis with an original contribution. Less than fifty years later, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University, Columbia University, and others began awarding PhDs. These universities essentially produced competitive research-oriented graduates who could serve as university

professors in American universities. Such an achievement eliminated the need for the United States to rely on graduates from European universities (Noble, 1994).

For a research-based university to be authorized to grant research degrees to its students is viewed as a significant milestone (Stauffer, 1990). Hence, many academic institutions continue to aim for university status. However, many international scholars have criticized the traditional PhD curriculum (Burgess, 1997; Park, 2003). For example, Noble (1994) contends that graduates of traditional PhD programs lack social skills, which are favorable for successful employment. Moreover, the research skills gained by graduates from these programs are deemed inapplicable to industry practice. Similarly, Robin Usher (2002) describes the narrowness of research topics and knowledge at the PhD level and the degree's poor application in organizational settings. In essence, the high-level research skills and knowledge gained through PhD training are not likely to be applied in professional settings, regardless of their size (Neumann, 2005; Schidkraut & Stafford, 2015).

In the field of criminal justice, some scholarships indicated that, unlike professional doctoral programs, the admission requirements of PhD degrees do not usually require extensive work experience in the targeted field. In some cases, PhD learners in the area of criminal justice do not have any work or volunteer experience in the police force, military, or law court, et cetera. On the other hand, the admission requirements of professional doctorate programs usually require at least three years of full-time work experience in the field. Professional doctorate programs tend to ask the students and professional doctorate graduates to apply theoretical knowledge to their current workplaces. In comparison, PhD learners and graduates without any hands-on experience in their targeted field may decrease the applicable elements that are expected (Neumann, 2005; Schidkraut & Stafford, 2015).

The UK Government, the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE), and the British Council advocated the New Route PhD in the early 2000s, and these recent industry demands have prompted the development of two new forms of New Route PhD. Unlike the traditional thesis-only PhD, the New Route PhD requires students to complete a one-year study as part of the first phase. The New Route degree can be achieved in two directions. For the first direction, students spend their first year writing and finalizing their research thesis proposal as master-level students; they conduct their formal research in their second and third year. For the second direction, students spend their first year of study attending research methodology training courses for academic enhancement; their formal research follows in their second and third years (Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch, & Sikes, 2005). However, even with the introduction of New Route degrees, research and academic-oriented PhDs still fail to meet industry demands, particularly regarding leadership.

Nature of professional doctorate degrees

As mentioned previously, Robin Usher (2002) considers traditional PhD programs to be narrow in focus. As a result, research-oriented PhD graduates who possess a limited skill set are not likely to secure a top industry position. The establishment of professional doctorate programs addresses this shortcoming of traditional PhD programs.

Professional doctorate programs obviously differ from traditional PhD programs. First, professional doctorate programs are expectation-oriented. In the United Kingdom, most professional doctorate programs require students to complete a set of modules. These compulsory modules are designed to encourage cohort-based sharing and the exchange of opinions among peers. They equip students with essential practical skills for mid- and senior-level industry positions (Bourner, Bowden, & Laing, 2001). Unlike traditional PhD programs, professional doctorate programs are aimed at training prospective researchers to become academic lecturers. The methodological skills and original knowledge contributions of graduates are considered to be the most critical elements of any PhD program (Bourner, Bowden, & Laing, 2001).

Second, the two types of programs target different sets of learners. Stuart Powell and Howard Green (2007) revealed that 57 percent and 20 percent of new full-time doctoral students for a given period were aged 21–24 years and 25–29 years; less than a quarter of doctoral students were older than 30 years. However, the report did not specify the types of programs (i.e., PhD or professional doctorate). Nevertheless, the admission requirements (e.g., at least five years of full-time professional work experience) and the nature of professional doctorate programs suggest that students enrolled in professional doctorate programs are usually over 30 years old.

Third, the outcomes and directions of professional doctorate programs are geared mainly toward practical applications and the workplace. The theses required in PhD and professional doctorate programs should involve original research with new knowledge contribution. However, PhD theses are expected to focus on new theories in the academic field, whereas professional doctorate theses are focused on the practical application of theories and concepts (Butcher & Sieminski, 2006).

According to David Scott, Andrew Brown, Ingrid Lunt, and Lucy Thorne (2004), one of the first professional doctorates has been developed in the United Kingdom. Such professional doctorates have a sole focus on providing pre-service training for certain occupations, such as the Doctorate of Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy), University of Edinburg, one of the first universities in the United Kingdom starting this degree in the late 1950s. Unlike the traditional PhD in Clinical Psychology, the Doctorate of Clinical Psychology requires a large number of internships and practicum hours and sections within mental health clinics and hospitals with supervision from licensed professionals. On the other hand, the traditional PhD in Clinical Psychology focuses on academic and lab research; clinical internships and practicums may not be a requirement. Therefore, while both traditional PhDs in Clinical Psychology and the Doctorate of Clinical Psychology require the same amount of credit hours for graduation (e.g., 90 credits or 560 credits), almost one-third of the Doctorate of Clinical Psychology credit hours can be achieved from internships and practicums. Based on this nature, it is not hard to understand that professional doctorates have a primary focus on hands-on experience.

John Butcher and Sandy Sieminski (2006) examined the features and significance of the Doctorate in Education program offered by the Open University in the United Kingdom. Their research reveals that the students in this program comprise mainly teacher educators instead of in-service teachers. Most of the students are in

their mid-40s to late-50s. The Professional Doctorate in Education program of the Open University requires students to complete written assignments with individual support, face-to-face and distance-based conferences, and a doctoral thesis of not more than 50,000 words. This word count is less than that required for a traditional PhD thesis, which is less than 80,000 words. The thesis for the Professional Doctorate in Education program requires the approval of internal and external examiners, especially about its original contributions. Although traditional PhD and professional doctorate programs differ in many aspects, they both impose high standards and require original knowledge contribution for completion.

Argument for traditional PhD and professional doctorates

According to Jonathan Scourfield (2010), in the United Kingdom, professional doctorates currently offer an alternative for prospective learners with a senior-level background or professionals with a particular purpose, such as practicing psychology as a licensed psychologist. Table 1 illustrates the outcome differences between a traditional PhD and a professional doctorate.

Table 1: Outcome differences between a traditional PhD and a professional doctorate

Traditional PhD	Professional Doctorate
Designed for prospective students with junior or less work experience	Designed for prospective students with senior roles in their professional fields
Designed for students who wish to seek an academic-oriented career	Designed for prospective students who want to advance their career and apply the newest knowledge in their workplace
Degree graduates tend to achieve a career as researcher	Plan to apply theories to hands-on work to create better experiences in the field
Do not usually require credit-based internship as a partial requirement	May require credit-based internship as a partial requirement of the professional doctorate

In the field of social work in the United States, the national requirement of becoming a registered social worker is either a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) or a Master of Social Work (MSW) from the accredited Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) program(s). In other words, a doctoral-level qualification is not required for any types of registrations for social workers. Currently, in the United States, the Doctor of Social Work (DSW) degree has been developed for decades for senior and experienced social workers to advance their careers. However, in recent decades, there has been a visible development to replace the DSW with a traditional PhD program. In fact, the admission for social workers only requires either a BSW or an MSW with internship and practicum sections. The internship and practicum sections of DSW may not be useful for senior-level social workers to receive hands-on experiences from mentors Scourfield (2010). As a result, Wes Shera (2003) indicates that the University of Toronto had replaced the nation's only DSW with a PhD in the early 1980s to respond to the nature of the program. However, the essence of the professional doctorate (e.g., transfer theory knowledge to the workplace) is advocated by a large number of universities in the United Kingdom. Currently, a number of British universities continue to offer DSW degrees to respond to the demands for

senior-level professionals. For example, Cardiff University in Wales, the University of Dundee in Scotland, and Keele University in England are some of the feature universities providing professional doctorates for prospective students who are primarily interested in applicable knowledge instead of academic natures.

Methodology of research

General background of research

A general inductive approach (GIA) was employed to analyze the qualitative data information (Thomas, 2006). The general inductive approach is a methodology where researchers "primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher" (p. 238).

The professional doctorate may be considered as an alternative to the traditional PhD because it allows its graduates the opportunity to seek skills and knowledge at the doctoral level. The purpose of this study is to explore answers to the following questions:

1. Why do learners decide to enroll in a professional doctorate instead of a traditional PhD?
2. How does the professional doctorate status enhance the professional development and career promotion of its graduates?

Sample of research

The research study took place at a professional association in London, United Kingdom. Thirty active members of the association hold professional doctorate degrees from an English university. To collect data from this group, the study employed a purposive sampling strategy (Creswell, 2008). In purposive sampling, researchers selected participants based on an intended recruitment progress. The participants' demographic information, such as name, age, gender, years of experience, and educational background, was collected. However, the participants were identified only by pseudonyms to protect their privacy. The researchers emailed each member to discuss the nature and objectives of the research, research questions, protocol, agreement of confidentiality, and agreement of participation. After the recruitment process, the researchers received feedback and agreements from 20 members who agreed to participate. Table 2 indicates the demographic information of the participants.

Name*	Age	Gender	Occupation/ Industry	Years of Experience	Highest Degree Professional Doctorate
Amy	35	F	Health and medical	13	Doctorate in Health Science
Betty	45	F	Health and medical	23	Doctorate in Health Science
Chris	42	M	Health and medical	20	Doctor of Health Care
Doris	38	F	Health and medical	16	Doctor of Radiography
Edith	49	F	Health and medical	27	Doctor in Nursing Science

Table 2 (continued)

Name*	Age	Gender	Occupation/ Industry	Years of Experience	Highest Degree Professional Doctorate
Frankie	55	M	Business organization	37	Doctor of Business Administration
George	52	M	Banking	34	Doctor of Business Administration
Helen	38	F	Teaching	18	Doctor of Education
Iris	47	F	Teaching	25	Doctor of Education
Jerry	43	M	Government	21	Doctor of Education
Keith	53	M	Teaching	31	Doctorate in Educational Psychology
Lois	34	F	Non Governmental Organization (NGO)	6	Doctor of Psychology
Michael	40	M	Health and medical	6	Doctor of Clinical Psychology
Nancy	44	F	Government	14	Doctor of Forensic Psychology
Otto	45	M	NGO	20	Doctorate of Social Science
Pier	37	M	NGO	13	Doctor of Social Work
Queenie	38	F	Teaching	15	Doctor of Literature
Rachel	50	F	Teaching	25	Doctorate of Musical Art
Sandy	51	F	Government	24	Doctorate in Public Administration
Thomas	36	M	Government	6	Doctor of Engineering

Note: * All pseudonyms

Instrument and procedures

The researchers served as the primary tool for data collection and analysis. A semi-structured one-on-one, face-to-face interview was conducted with each participant. Each semi-structured interview lasted 40–70 minutes. After the researchers analyzed all the data into meaningful themes and structures, a member-checking interview was conducted in order to confirm the validity. All the interviews were held in a private room in either the participant's office or a conference room at the association. The researchers assessed the participants according to their response to the research questions.

Protection of human subjects

The protection of human subjects is important for this qualitative research study (Merriam, 2009). One main concern is the protection of participants' identities. Therefore, the research made every effort to protect the identities of all participants by assigning pseudonyms. Protecting participants' identities allowed them to remain anonymous to potential employers and policymakers.

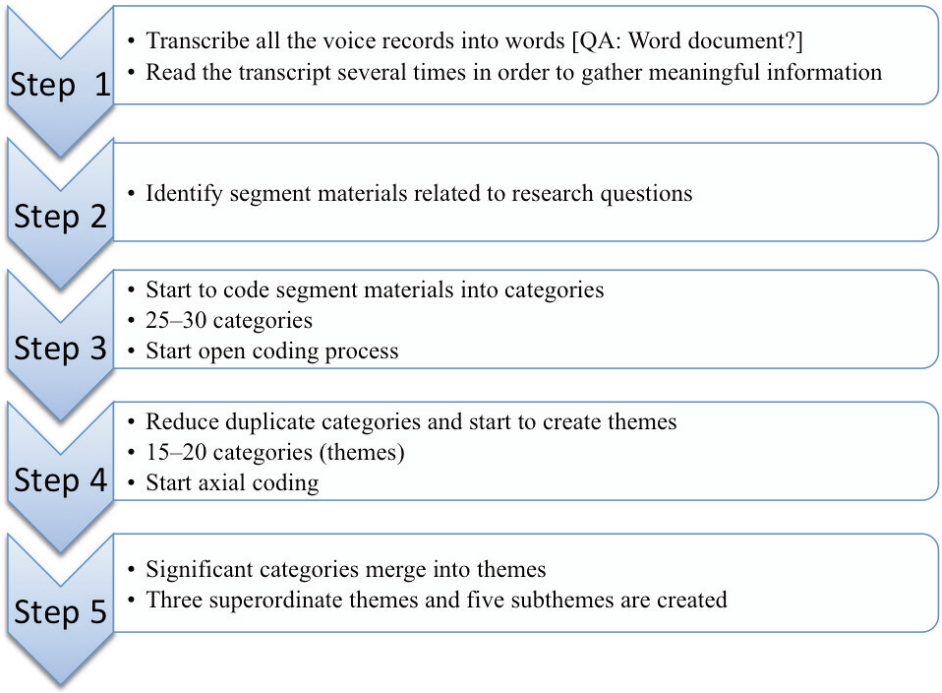
The research data information was all stored on a personal password-protected computer. All the voice records and transcripts were accessible only to the researchers. The researchers used NVIVO to assist in coding the data, and the program was installed on the same password-protected computer. The researchers were the only ones with access to the data in the software program and assigned pseudonyms to each participant to protect his or her identity.

Data analysis

The researchers first transcribed all the voice records into transcript and then thoroughly read each transcript. Following the procedure of general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006), the transcripts were reread several times as prescribed by the theoretical framework of interpretivism (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

The researchers employed open coding (Merriam, 2009) to narrow the massive size transcripts into first-level themes. David Thomas (2006) indicated that the data information should be reduced even further. Therefore, axial coding was employed to further reduce the data into a second-level theme (Merriam, 2009). As result, a total of three superordinate themes and five subthemes were created for this study.

Figure 1: Data analysis procedure



Results of research and discussion

The purpose of this study is to understand the learning outcomes and expectations of professional doctorate graduates and how professional doctorate programs in England enhance the skills and knowledge of their graduates. This study adopted a qualitative research design (Merriam, 2009; Thomas, 2006) and yielded three superordinate themes with five subthemes.

Flexibility

The admission standard of many professional doctorate programs may require at least three years of professional experience in the relevant industry, as well as a mas-

ter's degree in the same field. Unlike traditional PhD students, professional doctorate students are professionals in the industry with years of experience. Many of them are in their mid-30s to mid-50s. The participants of the current study were at least 30 years old. Professional doctorate programs are also aimed at assisting students and graduates, because they apply and transfer their knowledge to the workplace. Therefore, potential students with limited experience may not benefit from such academic programs.

Time management

As many mid- and senior-level professionals are unable to attend university as full-time students, professional doctorate programs offer flexibility. All the participants of this study except for two expressed that their professional doctorate programs allowed them to maintain a part-time status at the university. Amy said:

> The professional doctorate can be completed in a part-time status. I have searched for many PhD programs and [they] said that the PhD programs allowed part-time students. However, many of the potential supervisors only enroll full-time students. I cannot leave my current position in the hospital.

Amy believed the professional doctorate program is an alternative for working professionals, particularly those with upper-level positions who want to receive a high quality of education at the doctorate level. Doris, a senior radiologist at a hospital, expressed the same idea:

> Many of my co-workers want to receive a postgraduate research degree. But how can we leave our position? Patients are not going to wait for us. The professional-based degree is an excellent alternative for such professionals.

Edith maintained a similar thought:

> Patient and nurse ratio is extremely imbalanced. Senior nurses need to teach the junior nurses, and junior nurses need to take care of the nursing school interns. As I am the department head, I have to take care of all people with administrative responsibilities. The only time I have for myself is the weekend. I would like to take some taught modules over the weekend.

Betty shared the sentiment, "PhD is the first choice, but I can only do a part-time degree." Similarly, Jerry and Sandy, who are government leaders in the Department of Education, both said, "I cannot leave my position."

George, Helen, Iris, and Nancy had applied for a research-based degree but had been rejected because of their preference to study on a part-time basis. George said, "Some universities said that the programs could be completed through part-time. However, none of them accepted my application because of my part-time status. I guess none of the thesis supervisors want to take me." Iris also added, "Universities only allowed me to work full-time. But full-time students need to complete the degree within four years. I could do it for six years but not within four years. Therefore, I dropped out."

Reasonable lectures and teaching

All participants advocated that the taught modules of their professional doctorate programs provide them with relevant knowledge geared toward their workplace. Unlike a traditional research-based PhD, professional doctorate programs require students to complete several compulsory modules. Many professional doctorate students are working professionals with high-level leadership roles. Hence, the theoretical issues with practical applications are highly demanding for these particular groups. Rachel, who holds a Doctorate in Musical Art degree from a two-year taught module, described the teaching:

> The taught modules provided me the insight into performing arts. Doing individual projects with fewer lecturers is good for students directly from undergraduate. I want to understand how to manage my studio. I am glad that the doctoral program designed this core module.

Sandy received her master's under a professional doctorate program in another field. She said, "I am working in government, so I studied the DPA [Doctor of Public Administration]. But my bachelor's and master's degrees are in literature. Without the taught lecturers of the DPA, I'd be lost." Otto said, "I studied French and psychology for my bachelor's and master's degree. My Doctor in Social Science degree is related to HRM [Human Resource Management]. As I don't have much knowledge in business, the taught elements closely matched my background." Keith further added, "The Doctor in Educational Psychology program allowed applicants [who were] non-psychology graduates for admission. I don't have much experience with psychology. The core modules are an excellent preparation." Lois, who faced a similar situation, said, "My masters is in business. But I don't want to study a PhD in business as I am working in an NGO. The taught elements from the psychology program are much more suitable for NGO. Also, the psychological modules assist me in understanding my clients, families, and communities."

Some of the participants were exceptional candidates who enrolled in professional doctorate programs without master's degrees. They said that the professional doctorate programs with core research-based modules provided essential skills in doctoral thesis writing and practical-based research in their workplace. Frankie, who enrolled in a Doctor in Business Administration program without a postgraduate degree, said, "I left school for more than 30 years without any essential knowledge. I understand how to do practical skills. But academic research, no." Queenie also added, "The research modules were designed for practical scholars who want to change the world without a strong research background. A lack of research skills does not mean that they are bad; it means that they are so practical and down to earth."

Subject-oriented and tailor-made curriculum

Professional doctorate programs also offer a taught module coursework that is designed for professionals to apply to their workplace. Unlike PhD programs, professional doctorate programs are designed for experienced industry leaders to develop the critical knowledge and skills essential to undertake their practical research and improve their situation.

Transferable to the workplace

One of the strongest features of the professional doctorate is the scholar-practitioner orientation. A professional doctorate graduate is trained not only as a researcher but also as a practitioner who may transfer theoretical knowledge to the current situation. More than 10 participants expressed that the knowledge they gained from their professional doctorate training changed their situation. All participants in the health and medical industry believed that the professional doctorate is the key for reform. Amy shared, "My thesis supervisor is an expert in hospital management as well. I invited my supervisor to serve as a guest advisor for the hospital twice a year."

Betty also believed that her professional doctorate training focused on practical skills instead of theoretical knowledge, "The department of pediatrics requires a significant amount of hands-on experience with ad hoc emergency. Researchers at school don't understand." Chris added, "No theory can be absolutely applied to a changeable situation perfectly. The emergency management and crisis management compulsory modules totally changed my daily management in my hospital." Edith's situation was slightly different from the others regarding daily management. The Doctor in Nursing Science program allowed her to host workshops in her medical center:

> I was not able to teach or even host workshops in my hospital because I don't have the higher degree. I used to invite some professors to our hospital. However, the university people don't understand the daily and changeable situations. I am now qualified to design some workshops that are suitable for our hospital. Also, it cuts the cost of inviting scholars.

Pier, who works in an NGO, expressed how the Doctor in Social Work program helped him expand his NGO from the community to the regional level. He said:

> Social Work degree graduates only understand how to do frontline tasks. When we ask to do some government reports, none of them can handle it. I hired an MBA graduate to handle the administrative section. But social work is a very narrow subject. We somehow need people who understand the background. I am glad that my university offers this DSW [Doctor of Social Work] degree. I can learn how to operate the organization.

Jerry further added that the Doctor in Education program aided his management at the country level:

> My degree and thesis supervisors are all from Scotland. The Scottish and English educational systems are different. My primary responsibility is to evaluate the secondary Scottish and English students' grades and certifications. If I only have research knowledge and theories about Scotland, it is hard to apply my knowledge to England.

Networking and professional connections

Unlike traditional research-based PhD programs, professional doctorate programs usually employ the cohort-based learning method. Helen and Iris were cohort classmates who completed the same Professional Doctor in Education program at the same university. They both believed professional connections have a greater bearing

than a professional doctorate. Helen said, "Studying in a Doctor in Education is very useful. But beyond the standard of the degree itself, I believe the program allowed me to meet a large group of teachers, educators, government leaders, and principals as classmates." Iris further added, "I was the vice principal of a private secondary school in central England. One of my expectations was to gain some good connections and build a network that could help my school."

Helen and Iris both advocated for the significance of networking and professional connections over the knowledge gained from one's degree. As most professional doctorate programs follow the cohort-based learning model, an active engagement certainly helps students to exchange ideas. Two of the participants who hold Doctor in Business Administration degrees shared how their training helped them to switch careers. Frankie originally worked as a senior stock market manager in a German investment bank. When he moved from Germany to England a decade ago, he pursued his Doctor in Business Administration degree in London. He believed that the professional doctorate program provided him with professional connections:

> Before I enrolled in the doctorate program, I worked in the banking industry. But I am glad that my classmate Jimmy referred me to my current workplace as an organizational consultant. As a foreigner and a newcomer with a kid, I believe this program provided me with good networking.

George had a similar experience, "I was rejected by four programs. But I never felt bad. It was a milestone. Starting with the Doctor in Business Administration program was more useful regarding finding good bankers in Canary Wharf." In addition to the connections and networks built through professional doctorate programs, the instructors under such programs are often strong references. Thomas was able to secure a postdoctorate position in an international organization as a senior technician because of the reference of his thesis supervisor, "My thesis supervisor is an expert in the chemical field all over Europe. He has experiences in Germany, France, United Kingdom, Italy, and China. At least I think his name is worth 100,000 EUR when used as a career reference." Nancy echoed the idea about supervisors serving as references, "Two of my instructors were retired government leaders at the top level. I sent my applications along with their names and letters as my referees. I received a phone call within two weeks." Queenie shared her experience about moving to Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England as a result of her strong reference from her thesis supervisor, "During the first week of the taught module in the Doctor in Literature program, I was able to seek a teaching position at a private boarding school."

Knowledge advancement

All participants stated that the professional doctorate programs elevated their current knowledge and skills. Otto and Keith started in MPhil/PhD programs but switched to professional doctorate programs before entering the PhD stage. Both participants stated that their professional doctorate programs provided them with intellectual growth that no MPhil/PhD could offer. Otto believed that a professional doctorate program is reasonable for mid- and senior-level professionals to advance their career:

> I started under the MPhil/PhD program in HRM. However, no lectures and further training are provided. I never needed to attend a lecture. I was asked to provide a theory. The supervisors assigned several textbooks for me to read. After I read it, there were no furthers [*sic*]. Even if I finished the PhD, I would only know one theory.

Keith also contended that traditional PhD programs might not be entirely beneficial for mid- and senior-level professionals, "[there were] no exchanges with other classmates. … So eventually, I switched to the cohort-based professional doctorate program. At the professional doctorate program, I could exchange ideas with my classmates." Keith and Otto switched from MPhil/PhD programs to professional doctorate programs because of the practical focus on participants' workplaces. Both of them emphasized that the opportunity to exchange and share ideas is attractive for mid- and senior-level professionals who aim to enhance their knowledge and skills at the doctoral level. Moreover, they viewed PhD programs as having narrowed focuses that fail to satisfy the demands of upper-level professionals with multiple responsibilities and practical difficulties. As both participants desired to solve the challenges in the workplace, the narrow and single focus of PhD programs did not meet their expectations. By contrast, professional doctorate programs provide practical and multi-layered solutions that attract these groups of learners.

Support and guest speaking from faculty members

More than half of the participants, especially those from the health and medical industry, advocated for the faculty-student interactions that support their practice. The nature of professional doctorate programs is to offer critical knowledge and skills, with evidence based on the teaching, learning, and assessment of their current workplace. Unlike traditional PhD programs that have a primary focus on grounded theories, professional doctorate programs allow students to engage with their supervisors and module instructors for practical applications. Amy, Betty, Chris, Doris, Edith, Michael, Keith, and Iris invited their module instructors and thesis supervisors to serve as "guest speakers" in their workplaces. Edith said that inviting her thesis supervisor to her workplace enhanced her co-workers' performance quality, "My thesis supervisor is an expert with more than 30 years of experience. She can share some ideas for daily practice." Chris also invited his module leader from one of the core modules to exchange ideas in his workplace, "Dr. W's ideas are so innovative. My teammates and I learned more than expected." Betty echoed the other participants' ideas about inviting their supervisors, "Exchanging ideas with me is not enough. I want to change the difficulties at my workplace. My thesis supervisor is the best option." Michael also invited his instructor to guide one of his postgraduate interns in the hospital, "Transferring knowledge is not only progress but also a generational progress."

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to comprehend the learning outcomes and expectations of professional doctorate graduates and to assess how professional doctorate programs in England enhance the skills and knowledge of their graduates.

For research question number one, most participants explained that professional doctorate programs are flexible and offer reasonable lectures and teaching from instructors. More importantly, the participants appreciated how professional doctorate programs allow part-time students. One participant said that her enrollment in a professional doctorate program was not to fulfill a requirement in her workplace but part of her quest for personal enhancement. Several participants mentioned applying for traditional PhD programs and then getting rejected because of their part-time status. Professional doctorate programs are designed in such a way that they bridge theory and practical applications for mid- and senior-level professionals. Moreover, the flexibility of completion duration of professional doctorate programs matches the demands of learners with high levels of responsibilities in the workplace.

Students in professional doctorate programs do not always intend to become academic and teaching staff in research-based institutions. Typically, such learners aim to apply their textbook knowledge and theories to their current workplace. Therefore, the learning expectations and outcomes for professional doctorate programs are different from traditional PhD programs. Almost all participants believe that the teaching lectures and tailor-made curriculum address the current social problems and the potential problems within the professional industry while equipping graduates with the skills to prevent potential difficulties. Several participants recounted hosting high-level workshops and seminars for future senior managers.

Several participants also described how their professional doctorate programs allowed them to change their academic fields (e.g., from business to education). PhD programs require learners to have a solid research proposal, theory, and methodology. By contrast, professional doctorate programs also allow learners, especially mid and senior-level professionals with rich industry experience, to develop and combine their current knowledge and experience with new research knowledge. Therefore, graduates of professional doctorate programs are equipped with deep insights into industry problems.

Regarding research question number two, the participants described professional doctorate programs and traditional PhD programs as being equally rigorous. However, the former differs in its focus on combining and transferring academic theory and knowledge to an actual workplace. More than half of the participants suggested that discussions and networking are keys to knowledge and the exchange of ideas. In a professional doctorate classroom, learners contribute their rich experience and share their problems with faculty members and their peers through a cohort-based learning model.

For one participant, building a professional network was her immediate goal upon enrollment in her professional doctorate program, "One of my expectations was to gain some good connections and build a network that could help my secondary school and myself." The cohort-based learning model adopted in professional doctorate programs provides the participants with opportunities to build professional networks within different disciplines. Professional doctorate programs differ from traditional PhD programs, which are known for their narrow research topics and one-on-one teaching and learning with supervisors, because such programs encourage learners to share their understanding within the cohort group. Under this setup, faculty members merely serve as coordinators of a group of experienced learners.

Almost all participants in the health and medical field invited their instructors, some of whom are retired leaders, to their hospitals and clinics as guest speakers and advisers. According to one participant, "as an experienced professional in the health industry, I do not only want to conduct the research by myself. I would like to share my knowledge with other junior professionals. Therefore, I can transfer my knowledge to the next generation." In sum, the knowledge and industry application requirements of students are fully satisfied by professional doctorate programs through the cohort-learning model, the exchange of ideas, and support from instructors and faculty members.

Conclusion

The present study focused mainly on the understanding and behaviors of professional doctorate graduates in London. In the United Kingdom and other Anglophone countries, traditional research-based PhD programs and professional doctorate programs are highly differentiated. However, professional doctorate programs also require academic theses with original knowledge contributions. Hence, the two types of programs have a high portion of similarly in every way, especially in European countries and the United States. In this case, the current work is limited because it did not explore the views of professional doctorate graduates outside the United Kingdom and other Anglophone countries.

Another limitation is the lack of assessment of professional doctorate graduates currently working as university professors. This limitation is significant because professional doctorate programs prepare graduates not only for industrial and practical positions but also for academic and research-based careers. Therefore, the viewpoints of this group of professionals are worth exploring.

This study provides substantial evidence and recommendations for university administrators, policymakers in the educational field, organizational employers, and potential doctoral students in the United Kingdom and other Anglophone countries to understand the learning outcomes and gained skills of professional doctorate graduates. The rich practical and applicable skills of professional doctorate graduates are entirely unusual. These groups of professionals may not only benefit the prosperity of an organization but also change the overall environment of society.

This study extends the literature on the examination of doctorate degrees in the United Kingdom through an inductive analysis of in-depth interviews and focus group activities. Based on the results, this study outlines the individual perceptions of professional doctorate graduates for use by policymakers, university leaders, potential students, human resource professionals, and employers. Future research could include the viewpoints of professional doctorate graduates from other European countries, including those currently serving as professors in research-based universities. The current work could be applied to the international level. In the United States and Australia, professional doctorate programs are popular among working professionals. Thus, the results of this study may reflect the current situations in these countries.

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