New Ways of Learning: Perception and Experiences of Online Doctoral Students


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Background of the Problem

- Change in doctoral student demographics
- Shift in doctoral students learning habit.
Problem

Lack of clarity and insight related to the advantages and obstacles faced by the new non traditional doctoral students (Erichsen, Bolliger, & Halupa, 2014; Koole, 2013).
Purpose Statement

This meta-data analysis provides an integrated body of knowledge on the concerns, and perceived benefits of pursuing a doctoral program online.

The review covers research for five years, 2011-2015.
Research Questions

- What are the perceptions and experiences of online doctoral learners?
- What are the advantages of being an online doctoral learner?
- What obstacles do online doctoral learners face?
Method

Meta-data analysis, formally analyzes and compares primary data to develop a body of knowledge on a specific phenomenon (Paterson, Thornes, Canam, & Jillings, 2011).
Meta-ethnography approach

Noblit and Hare (1988) identify seven phases in their meta-ethnography approach:

- Phase 1: Getting started;
- Phase 2: Deciding what is relevant;
- Phase 3: Reading the studies;
- Phase 4: Determining how studies are related;
- Phase 5: Translating studies into one another;
- Phase 6: Synthesizing translations; and
- Phase 7: Expressing the synthesis
## Demographics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Country of Study</th>
<th>Ethnicities</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew (2012)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2 New Zealand, 1 Tasmania</td>
<td>PhD Candidates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolliger &amp; Halupa (2012)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>61% Caucasian</td>
<td>Health and Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fahlman (2011)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Not Provided</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardner &amp; Gopaul (2012)</td>
<td>3 Female, 7 Male</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Not Provided</td>
<td>Diverse Disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumar, Johnson, &amp; Hardemon (2013)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Not Provided</td>
<td>Not Provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provident, Salls, Dolhi, Schreiber, Matilla, &amp; Eckerl (2015)</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Not Provided</td>
<td>Occupational Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santicola (2013)</td>
<td>7 Female, 2 Male</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>3 African American, 6 Caucasian</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>West, Gokalp, Pena, Fischer, &amp; Grupton (2011)</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>38% Caucasian, 23% Hispanic/Latino, 15% African American, 20% Asian American/Pacific Islander, 3% Hawaiian, 1% Native American, 2% Other</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Data Analysis Method</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrew (2012)</td>
<td>Thematic data analysis grounded in the literature review of the five questions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bolliger &amp; Halupa (2012)</td>
<td>Open coding for qualitative data.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fahlman (2011)</td>
<td>Stories gathered and used to illustrate experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kumar, Johnson, &amp; Hardemon (2013)</td>
<td>Data coded using inductive analysis with a constant comparative analysis utilized to identify similarities and differences across interviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provident, Salls, Dolhi, Schreiber, Matilla, &amp; Eckel (2015)</td>
<td>The Person-Environment-Occupation Model (Law et al., 1996) was used for first level categorizing reflections. Using predetermined codes, reflections were independently judged by five faculty members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>West, Gokalp, Pena, Fischer, &amp; Grupton (2011)</td>
<td>Qualitative analysis of both open ended questions and focus groups identified themes. Descriptive and correlation analysis explored the extent to which the themes emerged in the open ended questions and focus groups.</td>
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</table>
Advantages

- Family Support
- Able to work full time and complete degree

Obstacles

- Time Management
- Communication with mentors
Themes

- Support
- Time Management
- Anxiety
- Satisfaction
- Sacrifices
Theme- Support

Positive Support
- Peers/ Cohorts
- Faculty/ Chairs
- Professional Job

Lack of Support
Theme - Time Management

- Balancing Multiple Roles
- Completing Coursework/Dissertation
- Invasiveness
Theme - Anxiety

- Causes of Anxiety

- Lowering Anxiety
  - Faculty/Chairs
  - Peers/Cohorts
Theme- Satisfaction

Personal
  Flexible
  Stay at Home
  Continue Professional Job

Academic
  Cohort
  Faculty Feedback
Theme- Sacrifices

- Relationships
- Balancing Life Commitments
The analysis provides an overview of the areas of concern and perceived advantages of pursuing a doctoral program online.

Research regarding online doctoral students requires more attention. One recommendation is that larger studies be completed that include diverse student population and disciplines.
How can the results of our study change what occurs in online doctoral programs?

What are examples of Best Practices around the five themes?


List of Studies Examined


Kumar, S., Johnson, M., & Hardemon, T. (2013). Dissertations at a distance: Students’ perceptions of online mentoring in a doctoral program. Journal of Distance Education (Online), 27(1), 1-11.


