

## **Unveiling Procrastination and Anxiety: University Administration and Supervisory Role in Addressing Post-Submission Challenges faced by Doctoral Candidates**

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### **Abstract**

*This study sheds light on a specific and stressful scenario experienced by doctoral students, characterized by increased anxiety, impatience, and frustration in the post-submission of their dissertations caused by delay. The research aims to explore doctoral candidates' multifaceted experiences as they navigate several challenges within the academic context of both public and private sector universities in Pakistan. By highlighting these complex challenges, the study seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform the development of effective strategies to address and mitigate such problems. The study collects detailed accounts from twenty doctoral students with three focus groups involving 33 participants. Their narratives provide insight into the years spent on research and dissertation writing. Common themes that emerged from the data include professional rivalry, barrier politics and collegial erosion. This study presents a deliberate delay of the doctoral dissertation defence, providing a comprehensive analysis of the various dimensions of this issue. Ultimately, the findings can potentially enhance the overall educational environment for postgraduate candidates by promoting a more supportive and efficient system.*

**Key Words:** Supervisor, University Officials, Professional Rivalry, Barrier Politics, Collegial Erosion

### **Introduction**

Most doctoral students are seriously involved in the entire research process to successfully complete their doctoral dissertation. Nevertheless, after successfully submitting their doctoral dissertation, doctoral students face various challenges while completing the procedure of sending them to the thesis evaluator. Additionally, they face several other hurdles before finalizing the viva voce date. Ensuring the competitiveness and financial stability of doctoral students is a major challenge for both universities and students themselves (Horta et al., 2018; Jung et al., 2021). Pursuing a PhD degree has traditionally been regarded as a form of

academic apprenticeship and training, which serves as an important factor in producing highly skilled academic practitioners. (Bourner et al., 2001; Ganapati & Ritchie, 2021; Gill & Hoppe, 2009; Haksever & Manisali, 2000; Hockey, 1994; Lewis et al., 2003; Mehmet & Ekrem, 2000; Park, 2005; Phillips & Johnson, 2022). Previous literature has highlighted a number of factors that influence the degree completion process, such as the attitudes of university administration and research supervisors. Furthermore, negative policies implemented by universities, especially regarding PhD scholars, can lead to feelings of anxiety and fear. (Kis et al., 2022; Lovitts, 2002; Smith et al., 2006).

Various factors have been identified for the increased rate of anxiety among doctoral students, such as academic pressure, research challenges, time constraints, financial concerns, uncertain career prospects, work-life balance, relationships with advisors, loneliness and isolation, imposter syndrome, mental health stigma and unclear expectations (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Ali, 2006; Lewis et al., 2003; Lovitts, 2002; McAlpine et al., 2022). These factors may actually contribute to increased rates of anxiety among doctoral students, making it important for universities and institutions to address these challenges and provide adequate support to ensure the well-being and success of their students. After submitting their thesis, students often face a number of challenges related to various aspects, such as selection criteria for internal and external evaluators and other procedural formalities. Lack of communication or updates from the university administration about the status of their thesis can cause significant anxiety and stress for doctoral candidates. It is important for universities and academic institutions to provide adequate support and resources to help doctoral students successfully navigate these challenges and ensure a smooth transition to the next phase of their careers.

In earlier scholarly work, various challenges and issues have been discussed before submitting the doctoral dissertation. For instance, instances include anxiety, restlessness, fatigue, and stress. inadequate research knowledge; limited funding; absence of consultation; qualifications of research supervisors; extraordinary advisor meetings; personal matters; Inconsistent university policies; limited Internet access and information technology resources; and absence of modern research literature. (Iqbal et al., 2012; Shams et al., 2020); Among these elements are the university administration, the guidance of research supervisors, university politics, and the anxiety faced by PhD scholars (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Lovitts, 2002; Mura & Wijesinghe, 2022; Smith et al., 2006). However, several challenges remain even after the submission of the thesis. Additional post-dissertation hurdles include publishing research findings in the form of research papers, navigating the job market, potential revisions, and the transition from student to professional researcher in a university setting. In the realm of challenges and hurdles after submission of the thesis, the primary responsibility falls on the university administration. Previous research has uncovered an array of barriers recognized by doctoral candidates, including institutional, personal, external and internal barriers. (Belcher et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2015; Shelton, 2021; Tull et al., 2023).

Considering the Pakistani context, one of the key challenges faced by both public and private sector universities is the timely provision of external and internal evaluation reports after submission of doctoral scholarly work (Farooq et al., 2023; Waheed et al., 2021). An analysis of doctoral program policies in global universities shows that both research supervisors and university administrations have an important role to play in ensuring the prompt completion of doctoral scholarly work. As a result, research reports on doctoral scholarly work form an important element in the entire research journey (Amani et al., 2022; Bourke et al., 2005; Farooq et al., 2023; Waheed et al., 2021).

Doctoral candidates in Pakistani universities face a dual set of hurdles. Prior to submitting doctoral dissertations, these barriers include factors such as uncooperative supervisors, financial constraints, challenges in accessing literature reviews, insufficient Internet resources, and limited availability of digital libraries. After submitting their doctoral dissertation, challenges arise, including postponement of the BASAR (Board of Advanced Studies and Research) meeting, deliberate delay in the selection of an evaluator panel, getting timely feedback from the evaluators and intentionally delaying the Viva Voice defense (Farooq et al., 2023; Shams et al., 2020; ul Haq et al., 2021). The various studies mentioned earlier shed light on several aspects related to the challenges faced by PhD scholars after submitting a doctoral scholarly work. However, there is a dearth of literature specifically addressing issues that arise post-dissertation submission.

The primary objective of the present study is to deeply understand and analyze the unique situations in which doctoral students experience the highest levels of anxiety, impatience, and frustration due to long processing delays after submitting their dissertations. In this context, the research aims to explore in depth the multifaceted experiences of doctoral students as they navigate multiple methodological barriers within the academic landscape of both public and private sector universities. By highlighting these complex challenges, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights that can help formulate effective strategies to address and mitigate such problems, ultimately for doctoral candidates. It will also promote a more supportive and effective learning environment.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the role of university administration in processing doctoral students' dissertations after submission?
2. What is the role of the supervisor in advancing the evaluation process after the submission of the dissertation?

### **Research Methodology**

The present study used a qualitative approach, which promoted direct engagement between the researcher and the participants. This approach enabled participants to observe within their natural settings. The primary objective was to explore the roles and responsibilities of doctoral students, with a particular focus on the duration of their doctoral degree completion. The research used individual and focus group discussions to gain insight into participants' experiences. Emotional cues, body language, vocal nuances, and body expressions were important in understanding respondents' feelings and perspectives. The study adopted narrative and phenomenological research design, based on personal experiences and authentic life stories, as described by Creswell et al. (2007). Data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), including real-life narratives and experiences shared by participants. This analysis aimed to identify themes and potential causal links between participants' experiences. Furthermore, following Creswell's approach, this study recognized the possibility of analysts gaining insight into their own lives (p. 57).

**Participants of the Study**

The study involved 20 doctoral students from the social sciences as well as three focus groups, each involving more than four doctoral students. The participants were selected through purposive sampling from various public and private universities in the Punjab province of Pakistan. The initial selection criteria were based on the personal judgment of the researchers and the recommendations of those consulted for suggestions regarding key participants for the study. Participants were selected from among those who had experienced extensive delays in receiving their dissertation evaluation reports or had experienced long delays in defending their doctoral scholarly work. This selection approach is consistent with the principles of Creswell and Creswell (2017), who emphasize that a narrative design allows the researchers to select participants with first-hand experience and personal insight into the context under investigation. Such participants are better equipped to articulate events and stories because of their intimate familiarity with specific situations.

**Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews were used as the data collection method for this study. Within this approach, researchers engaged in collaborative exchanges with participants by posing practical and meaningful inquiries. Participants were given the freedom to answer these questions openly. This interview format allowed both participants and researchers the flexibility to express their thoughts and insights without interruption (Gibson, 2022; O'donoghue & Punch, 2003). Additionally, focus group discussions were conducted with a group of doctoral students. Insights from these conversations strengthened the credibility and reliability of the research. Lincoln and Denzin (2003) emphasized conducting research free of fabricated, fraudulent, and fraudulent data, as such practices are unethical and largely unacceptable. To ensure the integrity of the research process, the researchers used a tape recorder to carefully record the interviews with all participants. A rigorous comparison was then made between the collected data and the notes extracted from the recorded interviews. The purpose of this diligent approach is to eliminate any possible fabrication or deception within the information. Throughout the analysis phase, the researchers tried diligently to prevent any distortion or fabrication within the data.

**Instrument Validation**

Data collection focused on open-ended interviews executed individually or in focus groups and gaining rich and narrative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Denzin et al., 2023). For this purpose, a semi-structured interview guide was initially developed based on the previous studies. The interview guide was discussed with two experts in qualitative research from the University of Okara. It was further improved in the light of participants' responses to the open-ended questions after conducting initial interviews.

**Analysis of Data**

Through a systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and presenting individuals' narratives in their original form, narrative inquiry disrupts traditional and modern notions of reality, knowledge, and individuality. This approach enables the exploration of how people make sense of events, the underlying values, beliefs and experiences that shape those understandings, and even their desires, intentions and possibilities - all are encapsulated within a narrative structure. As opposed to being a discrete task performed after data collection, analysis (which involves the creation of meaning) unfolds organically throughout the research journey (Gehart & McCollum, 2007; Labaki, 2020; Pratt et al., 2022).

**Results of the Study**

Following themes appeared as a result of the analysis of the transcripts of interview and focus group discussion.

**Professional Rivalry**

Professional rivalries that arise in different professions pervade almost every aspect of life and are seen in diverse cultural landscapes around the world. There is potential for positivity in how these complexities are understood and resolved. They can serve as avenues for personal growth, provided they are not used as tools to promote negative attitudes and feelings of inferiority in others. This shift in perspective is particularly evident in fields such as education, where complex dynamics play out with greater intensity. In particular, Professors and teachers often use their energies not only to demean their colleagues, but also to increase their influence to engage the inspiring spirit of their students.

This professional rivalry is even more dangerous in the academic field. Especially at the university level, doctoral candidates rely heavily on the collaborative guidance of their peers and the unwavering support of their supervisors to navigate the complexities of their research journey with ease and impartiality. Study participants highlighted the pervasive nature of this professional rivalry, noting its prevalence among professors and their staff in particular areas of academic institutions. This event serves as a reminder that while the academic environment is brimming with knowledge and talent, it is also marked by subtle professional dynamics that significantly can affect the growth and advancement of individuals within the field.

Participant "A", aged forty years, is married and father of five children. With a constant passion for learning, he successfully cleared the competitive examination conducted by the Punjab Public Service Commission. This success led to his appointment as Senior Headmaster at the local high school. Over the past decade, he has devoted himself to his Ph.D. However, he faced challenges when trying to communicate with other research supervisors within the department. His reluctance to engage with doctoral candidates, even in their absence, hindered his access to valuable mentorship. These constraints extended to obtaining support from professors across the faculty, whose expertise could significantly contribute to their research. One of the study participants shared this experience:

*“While on route to my supervisor's office, I unexpectedly ran into a professor with whom I had shared pleasant moments during coursework. This professor was a valuable source of learning for me. Unfortunately, due to a strained relationship (Professional Rivalry) with my supervisor, our communication was limited. I exchanged greetings with the professor and engaged in a short corridor conversation regarding the current situation. Unbeknownst to me, my supervisor observed our conversation from his office, which led to an unexpected escalation of anger. Consequently, I was denied entry to his office that day, and attempts at contact were met with resistance. It took several days to overcome his resentment and a restore a sense of equilibrium.”*

Participant “B” who is the Deputy District Education Officer in his area, is also a young married man with three children. For the past eight years, he has been diligently working on his doctoral thesis. During the conversation, he touched on the issue of rivalry and jealousy among university professors. He shared that surprisingly, highly educated professors are more hostile towards each other than those who lack education. While not revealing his name, he recounted an incident where he went to his university to meet his departmental supervisors. On the department lawn, he got a chance to join some other professors for a casual tea session. During this time, they had extensive discussions on various topics like politics, economics and challenges faced in research. Unexpectedly, his supervisor walks by, gives him a disdainful look, and then walks off to his office. Furthermore, he conveys his story with a palpable sense of sadness.

*“Subsequently, during a later visit to his office, not only did he express his dissatisfaction, but he also refused to endorse my thesis submission page. Despite my persistent apologies, his anger remained unabated, and he chose to ignore me throughout that day. He instructed me to leave and consult the very professor who had been sitting beside me. That evening, I returned home with a heavy heart, burdened by frustration and anger. After several days, when I visited his office again, he seemed to be in better spirits. However, upon laying eyes on me, he immediately launched into complaints, demanding assurance that I would never associate with individuals opposed to his viewpoints. It was only after making this promise that his disposition improved. During our conversation, he revealed that the mentioned professor was impeding my chances of promotion and was even causing disruptions in the evaluation of my students' theses – a responsibility he held as a member of the evaluation committee. It became evident that this professor was creating considerable obstacles when it came to assessing my theses and obtaining external evaluator reports.”*

Participant “C”, a young and unmarried doctoral student who simultaneously practices law in his district, has been persistently engaged in his doctoral dissertation for over ten years. In a poignant interview, he vividly describes the presence of animosity, professional jealousy, and a

pervasive sense of animosity not only among his teachers but also among his fellow university professors. In the course of his narrative, he reveals the profoundly painful nature of his experience, describing,

*Once, I went to a classmate's wedding where many Professors and doctoral students from my university department were invited. During the event, my supervisor and other professors were gathered around a table, chatting. I found an empty chair and joined them. Even after saying hello, I got involved in their discussions. There was a professor who had taught us a course during our coursework, and all the doctoral students were happy with his teaching. I got up from my chair to let him sit, but the professors grabbed my hand and led me to another table where there were plenty of available chairs. While sitting there, we talked about current events, politics, and government policies. The professor asked about my research and gave me some advice. We had food at that table, along with the other guests, and had a light conversation about the lunch menu and the groom's future life.*

*After the wedding, we left the venue and went home in our cars. The following week, when I went to my supervisor's office, I noticed that my professor's behavior had changed. He made me leave his office abruptly, which made me feel humiliated. I walked out of his office with a sense of embarrassment, and I kept replaying the incident in my mind on my way back home. It took a while for me to overcome this feeling of humiliation. After some time had passed and I had managed to move past the situation, I gathered the courage to approach my supervisor's office once again, even if it meant putting my self-respect on the line. He looked at me strangely and reluctantly allowed me in. At that point, he expressed his anger and warned me that if I wanted to pursue my PhD, I should stay away from his competitors, or else I would not receive his support.*

Participant "D," another PhD scholar, worked as a visiting faculty member at a private sector university. He had been tirelessly working for the past six years to complete his PhD thesis. What exacerbated his situation was the lingering presence of professional rivalry among professors at the university where he was pursuing his PhD. With a heavy heart, he shared a disheartening incident involving a professor from his own department.

This PhD scholar recounted an experience when he visited the university with hopes of discussing his PhD thesis evaluation report with his supervisor. Unfortunately, upon arriving at the department, he discovered that his supervisor had travelled to another city for a meeting but was expected to return later in the day. Feeling quite tired, he sought a moment's respite and found a comfortable couch in an office. At the far end of the department was a professor's office. Thinking that he could relax a bit and engage in a brief conversation with the professor, he entered the office and requested permission to enter. Regrettably, his request was met with a harsh and unfriendly tone.

*"What's the matter?" I politely replied, "No problem, sir, I just wanted to talk to you." He inquired further and asked why I made the appointment. He raised various possibilities, such as a complaint, intent to steal data or ideas, or suspicion that my supervisor was involved in some form of espionage. Hearing these accusations, I became silent because such thoughts had never crossed my mind. Finally, expressing his frustration, he angrily said, "You can't stay here. Go away now, and don't try to enter my office again." I left his office with a heavy heart and waited outside on the balcony for my supervisor. The professor's words stuck in my mind for days, causing me to reflect on the state of the world. It is unfortunate that we are divided to pull each other down instead of moving forward together.*

Finally, deeper aspects of professional rivalry among professors taint the spirit of collaboration in academia. Fierce competition for resources and recognition can impede the open flow of ideas, stifle innovation, and foster an atmosphere of mistrust. Such antagonism threatens the fundamental principles of intellectual development, inhibiting the common development of knowledge and education.

### ***Barrier Politics***

Barrier politics refers to the deliberate creation or maintenance of barriers, conflicts, and power struggles within the university's administrative hierarchy among university officials. This behaviour often involves manipulation, hidden agendas, and the strategic use of authority to hinder development, collaboration, and effective decision-making. Instead of working together for the betterment of the institution, officials engage in power games, erecting barriers that not only hamper the functioning of the university but also put the future of students at stake for personal gain. This can lead to a toxic environment, where personal agendas come before the welfare of the institution, ultimately damaging the quality of education and the overall reputation of the university.

Participant "E" was an enthusiastic PhD scholar who, while serving in the Pakistan Army, had submitted his doctoral thesis several months earlier. However, he was still waiting for external reports or a call from the university authorities to defend his thesis. His outlook on his PhD journey was pessimistic. For the past seven years, he had been working diligently to complete his PhD thesis. He stated that he has taken several leaves of absence to focus on his doctoral dissertation. Unfortunately, he had to face a disheartening reality – the absence of accurate information from university officials. Complicating matters, his supervisor had retired a year and a half ago due to health issues. His supervisor's infrequent visits to the university, owing to sickness and diabetes, and his shift to his hometown, added to the challenges. He narrated a story that highlighted "Barrier Politics" among the university officials. During a week-long leave from his military unit, he attempted to inquire about the external evaluation reports for his doctoral dissertation from the university officials. He recounted this experience:

*“I reached the administrative department of the university early in the morning. Sadly, only low-level staff members were present, busy with their usual tasks. However, some of the office assistants recognized me and greeted me with genuine respect. One of them offered to accompany me to the tea bar in the admin block for a cup of tea, which I accepted. During tea, I engaged in conversation, inquiring about the current state of the university and the whereabouts of my supervisor. In response, I was told that my supervisor rarely visited the department. It turned out that he was not much liked because of his principled nature. During his tenure he consistently stood up to those who created difficulties for doctoral students and placed obstacles in the completion of their degrees. Now, examination department officials were apparently bent on retaliating against students under the guidance of this supervisor, despite no wrongdoing on their part. Amidst our conversation, the Controller of Examinations and other officers reached their respective offices. After that, I returned to the management department, looking for an opportunity to interact with them and inquire about my doctoral dissertation reports. On being granted entry, I was asked the purpose of my visit. I replied politely, saying, “I am here to inquire about the status of my thesis evaluation reports, whether they have been received from the external reviewer or not. “What does he know? Go ask your retired professor who was so principled,” came the angry reply. “Tell him that if you have the strength, come to the university and organize a thesis defense for your doctoral students.” Faced with this reaction, I decided it was best to remain silent. I left the Controller of Examinations’ office, stood up, and left. I never mustered the courage to return to that place again.”*

Participant 'F', employed as a teacher in a public sector school, is facing a five-year delay in completing his doctoral degree. This delay is attributed to a strong sense of jealousy fostered by the university authorities. Entangled in the intricate web of strained relations between his supervisor and the controller of examinations, he finds himself ensnared in a challenging and distressing situation. Within the academic corridors of the university, a rival supervisor consistently pressures their students to complete their doctoral degrees under the guidance of the mentioned individual's supervisor. As a result, despite receiving evaluation reports and addressing observations, the path to the final defense of his doctoral thesis is tumultuous. The controller of the examination deliberately introduces obstacles into their journey, exemplifying the concept of "barrier politics." The individual recounts his challenging experience in the following terms:

*“The controller of examination has received the evaluation reports for my doctoral dissertation, and by law, he is responsible for arranging the final defense of my dissertation. However, he is actively engaging in 'barrier politics,' intentionally creating obstacles. This obstruction stems solely from his friendship with a supervising professor who holds animosity towards my supervisor. Their aim is to*

*ensure that his students complete their degrees before then us, resulting in ongoing delays even after I've submitted my dissertation. Regrettably, the situation is exacerbating with each passing day."*

Participant "G" works in the police department, which is a strong institution in the Pakistani territory. Other departments generally treat police officers well but here the situation is different. The student we are talking about had some problems with the university. University officials falsely accused his supervisor, but he helped the supervisor clean things up. However, this created problems for the student to complete his doctoral degree. He describes his difficulties as follows:

*"My supervisor is a kind person, but the university authorities filed a legal complaint against him. I was well aware that the move was a result of power struggles and personal rivalries within the university, and not any wrongdoing on his part. I supported him sincerely in clearing this blame. Despite attempts by university officials to stop me at various points, I remained steadfast and stood by my supervisor. Thankfully, the legal process eventually vindicated him, but unfortunately, the whole ordeal backfired for me. University officials have turned their hostility towards me and are deliberately withholding information about the internal and external reviews of my work. I have been trying tirelessly to secure dates for my final defense, but my efforts have been in vain. At this point, I am considering a serious step – taking the matter to court to seek justice and request the completion of my doctoral degree."*

In short, the presence of obstructionist politics among university officials serves as a cautionary tale of how internal conflicts can destroy academic harmony. This process of manipulation not only hinders effective governance and hampers progress, but also undermines the essence of academic cooperation. As the institution's reputation is tarnished by power struggles, the trust of students, faculty, and the academic community at large is eroded. Ultimately, this threatens the university's academic quality, undermining its ability to make meaningful contributions to teaching and research. It emphasizes the need to promote cooperation and transparency for the collective growth of both the institution and the wider sphere of education.

### ***Collegial Erosion***

Collective erosion among university officials refers to the gradual erosion of mutual respect, cooperation, and shared goals within the university's governing body. This phenomenon occurs when personal ambitions, power struggles, and divisive behaviours take precedence over the collective mission of the organization. As collegiality is lost, open communication breaks down, decision-making becomes contentious, and a culture of mistrust prevails. This not only affects effective management but also affects the overall functioning of the university, which reduces the morale of the faculty and staff, the quality of education and the learning environment for students. In such a situation, students get bored even in research work.

Participant "H" serves in the Directorate of Education, Labor and Human Resource Department. He stood out as a remarkable student, attracting the interest of several professors who sought to mentor him. However, he needed to choose one of them for his supervisory role. He diligently prepared his thesis and submitted it to the university. Sadly, her supervisor's success has led to a collective rift among her colleagues, who hinder her progress in the process. This situation continues to be troubling for him, as he continues the journey of a doctoral student even after a certain period of time. He describes his feelings as follows:

*"I am employed in the Directorate of Education, Labour and Human Resources Department. My academic activities are characterized by determined efforts, driven by the desire to produce specific and noteworthy results within my doctoral thesis. A phenomenon known as 'collegial erosion' has emerged, casting an ominous shadow over my educational journey. Several professors in my department expressed interest in supervising my doctoral research, a testament to my dedication. Among them, I chose a supervisor with a distinguished reputation. Although I submitted my thesis two years ago, the final defense is still pending. The undercurrent of 'collegial erosion' has fuelled professional jealousy among other professors in the department, particularly towards my chosen supervisor. This unfortunate dynamic has hindered my progress and entangled me in a web of departmental, social, and financial challenges."*

"Participants 'I, J, K, L and M' (Focus group) serve within the Federal Government Educational Institutions (C/G), where acquiring study leave poses a significant challenge, and maintaining a balance between study and work presents a pressing dilemma. In spite of these obstacles, he adeptly navigated through, meticulously prepared, and submitted his doctoral thesis within the stipulated deadline. Nevertheless, despite his diligence, he encountered a distressing ordeal. A span of eighteen months has elapsed, yet the procedure for submitting his thesis for review remains shrouded in uncertainty. This delay can be attributed solely to the pervasive departmental jealousy among university officials. The BASAR meetings, designed to facilitate this process, is hindered by the reluctance of professionals to prioritize the completion of doctoral degrees within his field over their own, which are already delayed. He articulates his challenge as follows:"

*We have completed all the necessary requirements and submitted our doctoral dissertation; however, 18 months have passed, and the establishment of BASAR meetings are still pending. The reason for this delay can be termed 'collegial erosion'. This led to jealousy among professors from various departments who also serve as members of BASAR, their resistance to the development of our department and recognition of the achievements of our PhD students in front of their own department. I hesitancy has led to our long struggle. This undue delay has hindered the completion of our doctorate. degrees."*

Participant "N" serves as the Principal in the Punjab Department of School Education. He also grapples with the impact of 'collegial erosion' among university officials. Following the submission of his thesis, he underwent a lengthy wait for the evaluation reports. As a consequence of the differing opinions about his supervisor within the academic community, officials intentionally assigned his thesis to an evaluator who lacked familiarity with his subject matter. After enduring a six-month wait, the evaluator dismissed the entire paper in the evaluation report. This compelled the complete process to restart, leading to a reshuffling of the assessment panel. He expresses his concerns as follows:

*"I submitted my doctoral dissertation for evaluation, and it was assigned to an evaluator who lacked expertise in my subject area. As a result, after waiting for six months, the entire thesis was rejected. This outcome was solely due to the opposition of personnel associated with my supervisor. I escalated the matter to the Vice-Chancellor, resulting in a complete redo of the evaluation process. The doctoral thesis was subsequently sent to new reviewers. However, I am still awaiting the evaluation reports. The existence of collegial erosion among officials introduces numerous challenges and problems into students' educational journeys. This issue needs to be addressed and resolved. Waiting for such an extended period of time to complete these procedures is exceptionally difficult for students."*

*According to other participants, this erosion of collegiality and resulting hostility was not only responsible for delays in the research process but also affected the doctoral dissertation submission and external evaluation procedures. Faculty members who held influence over the final approval committee engaged in unnecessary promotion of issues surrounding the thesis and attempted to obstruct the submission process. Their goal was to prevent their colleagues from receiving credit for supervising doctoral dissertations, which are widely regarded as "jewels of research" among university faculty. One of the doctoral candidates expressed her concern that her supervisor showed disdain for the participant's supervisor and said, "I'll see how he submits his thesis for external evaluation." This unethical sentiment disturbed and surprised the participants.*

In summation, the issue of collective attrition among university officials illustrates the devastating effects of internal dissension. As collaboration gives way to power struggles and personal agendas, organizational cohesion and shared purpose disintegrates. This erosion not only creates an atmosphere of mistrust and poor communication, but also affects effective decision-making. The resulting lack of academic coherence can lead to poor academic quality, disillusioned faculty and staff, and tarnished institutional reputation. Addressing this issue becomes imperative to protect the integrity of the university and ensure an environment conducive to learning, research and development.

**Discussion**

The way doctoral students integrate and engage socially plays an important role in achieving success in their respective fields, whether through formal or informal means (De Welde et al., 2011; Gardner, 2008a, 2010; Golde, 2005; Herzig, 2002; Nelson & Lovitts, 2001; Solem et al., 2011; Sverdlik et al., 2018; Tinto, 2012; Welde & Laursen, 2008). The participant, a doctoral student, noted that instead of being cooperative, both the university officials and their respective staff created barriers that deliberately prolonged the submission process of his doctoral dissertation. It is worth highlighting that a significant body of literature elucidates the relationship between dissatisfaction, supervision, and student engagement in doctoral programs, in Gardner's (2009) study, it is suggested that faculty members are often not aware of their potential roles and responsibilities in contributing to student dropouts. The study involved semi-structured interviews with 60 students enrolled in doctoral degree programs and 34 faculty members of US doctoral programs. Findings emphasized that faculty must recognize program deficits as a major factor that leads to students' lack of essential skills and motivational goals, as highlighted by Gardner (2009b). Moreover, the study also emphasized the importance of addressing additional challenges arising from students' personal lives that are connected to their doctoral training experiences. Additionally, several studies show that attrition rates and timely completion of doctoral programs are closely related to the influence of various departmental structures in shaping the doctoral student experience. According to Lovitts (2001), attrition is often considered as a matter of individual decisions of department members. These judgments are believed to be caused by the students' personal shortcomings, which may encompass a failure to accurately assess their mental abilities. This finding is consistent with findings suggesting that supervisors view students' personal characteristics as an important factor contributing to their academic challenges e.g., (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2009a; Herzig, 2002). According to Lovitts (2001) one possible explanation for these observations is that students often withdraw from their graduate degree programs without providing underlying reasons to their respective departments. This trend contributes to the perception that inattention is primarily due to personal factors rather than departmental influences. Research scholars have also found a relationship between departmental factors and the level of satisfaction and progress of doctoral students (Austin, 2002; Cotterall, 2013; Herzig, 2002; Welde & Laursen, 2008). Previous research studies have shown that departmental cultures and the practices they adopt play an important role in attracting doctoral students, especially those related to the student's interest in a particular field (Barnes & Randall, 2012; Gardner, 2008b; Golde, 2005). A recurring problem that emerges is the misalignment of values (Sweitzer, 2009) and expected outcomes between students and their respective departments (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Gardner, 2010, 2013; Golde, 2005; Hoskins & Goldberg, 2005; Lin, 2015; Lovitts, 2001). This situation can lead to a sad scenario where departments fail to provide adequate information about the duties and responsibilities of students during the initial stages of admission (Gardner, 2010; Nelson & Lovitts, 2001). As a result, these expectations are often hidden and informally left to unravel as students integrate into the culture of their department (Lovitts, 2001). The process of

integration and socialization among doctoral students is essential to success in their respective fields, whether through formal or informal means (Gardner, 2008a, 2010; Golde, 2005; Herzig, 2002; Lovitts, 2001; Solem et al., 2011; Tinto, 1993; Welde & Laursen, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

The responses gathered through the interview process illuminated the profound nature of the challenges faced by the participants. These challenges often left them struggling for words as they tried to articulate their struggles once again. A glimpse of the problems and dilemmas highlighted within this study prompts urgent and extensive consideration. Every problem calls for proactive measures without delay. A particularly troubling scenario emerges when doctoral students find themselves in long waits for BASR (Board of Advanced Studies and Research) meetings and approvals from evaluator panels, which submit their final doctoral thesis. There are more than 24 months after the procedure. Such a problem indicates a clear failure within the framework of these universities' systems. It emphasizes the imperative need for reforms and revisions in administrative processes that directly affect the academic progress of students.

The importance of this research resonates in the wider academic landscape. By highlighting the critical junctures where obstacles occur in the student journey, this study contributes to the existing body of literature. It serves as an important foundation, providing a theoretical foundation upon which future inquiries in this area can build and expand. Her insights are expected to stimulate conversations and inform policy changes that prioritize the overall development and success of doctoral students.

Although the potential for a more comprehensive exploration of these issues was apparent, time and resource constraints presented limitations. Still, these constraints should not overshadow the value of the current investigation, which provides a foundation for subsequent investigations to further explore the complexities of these challenges. The door remains open for more extensive research, and it is expected that future efforts will delve deeper into the multidimensional landscape of doctoral students' experiences in academia.

### **Recommendations**

This study highlights the vital need to reform the university's administrative processes to address long waits for BASR meetings and evaluator panel approvals, which can extend beyond 24 months, leading to delays in doctoral students. Academic progress is significantly affected. Communication, transparency, and support programs for students must be enhanced. Resource allocation, regular policy reviews, and fostering a research culture are also critical. Encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration, advocating for policy changes, and facilitating the continuation of research beyond doctoral programs are key initiatives. Despite this study's time and resource constraints, it serves as a foundation for future research to examine in depth the multifaceted challenges faced by doctoral students in academia, which focuses on proactive solutions and policy improvements.

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