Vol. 26 · October 2016
Print ISSN 2012-3981 • Online ISSN 2244-0445
doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.7719/jpair.v26i1.420
Journal Impact: H Index = 2 from Publish or Perish

JPAIR Multidisciplinary Research is produced
by PAIR, an ISO 9001:2008 QMS certified
by AJA Registrars, Inc.

Peers, Administration, and Mentor Support as Correlates of Completion/ Non-Completion of Master's and Doctoral Degrees among Muslim Educators

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ABSTRACT

Tertiary faculty members must finish their master's degree in their field of specialization. However, many tertiary faculties have not been awarded master's degrees or doctoral degrees because of non-completion of their thesis or dissertation. The study aimed to determine the relationship between the barriers in conducting thesis or dissertation and the completion/non-completion of master's and doctoral degrees among Muslim educators who have completed their academic requirements. Purposive sampling was employed in the study. There were 60 participants of which 30 have completed their academic requirements for two years or more, and 30 participants have finished master's and/or doctoral degrees for the purpose of comparison. Based on the results of the study, there is a significant relationship between the degree or course, employment status, faculty rank and number of years in service on the completion or non-completion of master's or doctoral degrees. The participants were largely undecided as to the role of support system as a whole, but there is a significant relationship between peers, administration and mentor support on the completion or non-completion of master's and doctoral degrees. The Mindanao State University system may

adopt remedial measures to expose its faculty members and other academics to more research work that will improve their research skills.

Keywords **–** Social Science, barriers, completion, masters, doctoral, Muslim, educators, descriptive-correlational research design, Marawi, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

Faculty members in higher education institutions should finish their master's and doctoral degrees in their field of specialization. However, many tertiary faculty members have not been awarded with these degrees because of non-completion of their thesis or dissertation. Bourke, Holbrook, Lovat, and Dally (2004) explained that some variables explain considerable proportions of the variation in both elapsed time (38%) and candidacy time (22%). The most important variables in both cases are those related to candidature—particularly, full/part-time enrolment, notifying a problem during candidature, and having a scholarship, with taking leave also important for candidacy time. Other studies have suggested that more than one-third leave in the first year (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000).

In addition, Colebatch, 2002) suggested that completion rates for research degrees in Australia have increased considerably since the 1980s to between 80 and 90 percent in the mid-1990s. A recent study in Canada indicated that discipline is important for completion, with completion rates varying from 45 percent in arts and humanities to 70 percent in life sciences, with science completions being generally in the high 60 percent range (Elgar & Klein, 2004). For U.K., completion rates after 10 years differed by general discipline area with arts/humanities rates being 51 percent, and sciences being 64 percent (Wright & Cochrane, 2000). For Australia, Martin et al., (2001) estimated that 60 percent of beginning doctoral candidates in 1992 would have completed successfully by 2003 (that is 11 years after initial enrolment), suggesting an attrition rate of 40 percent. The same study also reported 'considerable variation' in completion rates between institutions and disciplines. Apart from discipline differences that may exist, institutional arrangements have been found to be important for attrition, which ranged from 33 percent in one university to 68 percent in another in the United States of America (Lovitts & Nelson, 2000).

Mindanao State University (MSU) is an SUC (State University and Colleges) mandated to perform the trilogy functions of teaching, research, and extension.

The three functions were considered in the ranking of regular faculty members. However, for ranks of assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor, the requirement is that the faculty concerned must have a publication or research output (Integrated Scheme for Ranking and Promotion, 2005). Many faculty members of MSU have completed their academic requirement, but without completing their thesis/dissertation. Thus depriving them of the opportunity for promotion.

Under CHED Memorandum Order No. 26 series of 2009 pertaining to the Revised Implementing Guidelines of the Commission on Higher Education-Faculty Development Programs (CHED-FDPs) Phase 2 under Republic Act (RA) No. 7722, otherwise known as the "Higher Education Act of 1994", and pursuant to Commission en banc Resolution No. 213-2009. Per Revised Implementing Guidelines for the CHED Faculty Development Program, it states that faculty development is a critical factor towards building a vigorous foundation of an educational institution to ensure quality education. The nation cannot compete with its neighboring countries that are now moving towards offering cutting edge programs and technologies unless the Philippines invests in creating a pool of experts in academic institutions. Similar projects such as the Mindanao Advanced Education Programs (MAEP), College Faculty Development Fund (CFDF), Engineering-Science Education Program (ESEP), and both the on-going CHED Higher Education Development Project-Faculty Development Program (HEDP-FDP) have been implemented by the legal authority to address the issue of low-quality education through faculty upgrading. At this terminal phase of the HEDP-FDP, statistics shows that the percentage of faculty with graduate degrees had increased from 33% in 1998 (PCER) to 47% in 2006 (CHED-MIS). This figure is still below the minimum faculty requirements as indicated in the existing CHED policies and standards for the offering of academic programs that require that college faculty must have graduate degrees in the specific discipline relevant to their respective fields of specialization (Angeles, 2009).

In Delhi, India, Faridabad-based engineering and management institute, JB Knowledge Park organized a two-day Faculty development program. The program aimed at enhancing technical knowledge of faculty members on Computer Networking. According to the Dean of JBKP, Dr. Harshit Sinha said that faculty plays a great role in the success of any educational institution and building students' future by imparting quality education" (JB Knowledge Park, 2013). UNESCO (1998) stated that on the eve of a new century, there is an unprecedented demand for a great diversification in higher education, as well

as an increased awareness of its vital importance for sociocultural and economic development in building the future for which younger generations will be equipped with the new skills, knowledge, and a standard of perfection. With the aim of setting in motions a process of a comprehensive reform in higher education worldwide, UNESCO convened a World Conference on Higher Education in the 21st Century: Vision and Action. The goal of improving the quality of higher education is not a task that the country undertakes alone. To be globally competitive, the Philippines has to ensure that its institutions can provide excellent education, and will subsequently become world-class higher educational institutions.

Research Productivity of faculty members is of growing importance in higher education institutions worldwide (Green, 2008) and research scholarship, especially in reputed peer-viewed publication, seems essential to the success of a faculty member at most universities (O'Meara & Braskamp, 2005) According to the new report, The Road to Academic Excellence: The Making of World-Class Research Universities, which charts the experience of 11 leading public and private research universities in nine countries from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, the elite research universities are outpacing the smartest companies in the world with their original research.

According to Dr. Jamil Salmi, the Bank's Higher Education Coordinator and the co-author of the new report, that by looking at the elite research and grant of money cascading out of world-class universities and their new thinking in humanities and social sciences, people can certainly understand why countries think that a top-flight research institution is all that stands in their way of reducing poverty, leaps forward their national development, and establish new footholds in the global knowledge economy (World Bank 2011).

In the Philippines, graduate students for the master's and doctoral degrees in education are required to write theses or dissertations. This requirement is not only as an exercise which MA and doctoral candidates have to go through to demonstrate acquired skills in research, but most importantly, as an opportunity to contribute something to the corpus of knowledge in their specific fields of specialization (Sevilla, Ochave, Punsalan, Regala, & Uriarte, 2005).

Some of the secondary literature used in the study is pre-2008 because more recent published literature are not readily available. More importantly, the findings of the older literature are still relevant to present-day situations, especially those covered by the present study.

FRAMEWORK

The independent variables in the study include the socio-demographic profile regarding age, gender, marital status, degree or course, field of specialization, employment status, faculty rank, designation, number of teaching load, monthly income, number of family members, number of years in service and teaching efficiency; availability of support system regarding family, financial, peers, administration, employer, mentor, facilities, and colleagues, and the level of determination of the participants regarding research skills, values, and awareness. These variables may serve as barriers to the completion of master's and doctoral degrees among Muslim educators that in turn served as the dependent variable in the study.

The study is anchored on the Icek Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) which is composed of various concept key variables such as behavioral belief; an individual's belief about consequences of particular behaviors. The concept was based on the subjective probability that the behavior will produce a given outcome. The level of determination was measured in terms of awareness, values, and research skills. This theory is utilized because there is an influence of the availability of the support system to the behavior of the participants in finishing a graduate/postgraduate degree.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to: 1) determine level of determination of the participants regarding research skills, values, and awareness; 2) describe the relationship between the participants' socio-demographic profile and the completion/non-completion of a master's/doctoral degree; 3) describe relationship between the participants' availability of support system and the completion/non-completion of a master's/doctoral degree; 4) discuss relationship between the participants' level of determination and the completion/non-completion of a master's/doctoral degree; and, 5) identify possible factors that may facilitate or hinder the completion of master's/doctoral degree (This was answered by the open-ended questions in the questionnaire as qualitative responses of the participants).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study uses mixed method and a combination of quantitative and qualitative research designs. The quantitative aspect of the study used a descriptive and correlational research designs. The profile, availability of support system, and level of determination of the participants in the completion of Masters and Doctoral degrees among Muslim educators. It was correlational since it attempted to determine the relationship between the variables under the study. The qualitative aspect of the study, on the other hand, focused on the investigation of other possible factors that may facilitate or hinder the completion of a post graduate degree.

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at the Mindanao State University (MSU) in Marawi City. MSU is located in the hilly part of Marawi City overlooking the city and Lake Lanao. It is conducted in the different colleges of MSU Main Campus, namely: College of King Faisal Center for Islamic and Arabic Studies, College of Forestry, College of Fisheries, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, College of Agriculture, College of Education, College of Business Management and Accountancy, College of Public Affairs, College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, College of Sports Physical Education and Recreation, College of Health Sciences, and College of Information Technology. The participants of the study were thirty faculty members teaching in collegiate level of MSU Main Campus, who have completed academic requirements (CAR) but were not able to obtain a graduate/post-graduate degree due to non-completion of thesis and dissertation and thirty faculty members who have completed their graduate/post-graduate degrees. They may be permanent, probationary or contractual in appointment.

Data Collection

The researcher utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. For the quantitative aspect of the study, frequency and percentages, and Chi-square are used in the presentation and analysis. These included personal and support system details, as well as information pertinent to the study. Their answers to each definite question were then tabulated to discern patterns or inclinations.

The qualitative aspect of the study, on the other hand, used open-ended questions that inquired about other possible facilitating factors or hindering factors that the participants could think of but are not listed already in the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

This study utilized researcher-constructed survey questionnaires that have undergone a try out and was checked using Cronbach's Alpha Analysis with the result of 0.708 (acceptable reliability before data collection. Part I is composed of the participants' socio-demographic profile such as age, gender, marital status, degree or course, the field of specialization, employment status, faculty rank, the number of family members, the number of years in service, designation, the number of teaching load, and monthly income. Part II was the level of determination regarding research skills, values, and awareness. Part III was an open-ended question that asked the participants about other possible factors that may facilitate or hinder the completion of Masters/Doctoral degree. A pilot study is implemented in ten faculty members who have their academic requirements. The data were analyzed using Statistical Software for Social Sciences. Frequency and percentage distribution were utilized to quantitatively describe the responses given by the participants; weighted mean was used to determine the average value of the answers, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to determine the degree or extent of correlation between the different variables in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study were primarily based on the responses of an equal number of faculty/academics from Mindanao State University who have completed their theses/dissertations after finishing their academic requirements and those who have yet to finish their theses/dissertations as a final requirement for their post-graduate degrees. The findings revealed that both groups of participants were largely "undecided" on the role of values in the successful pursuit of a graduate school degree. Both groups of participants overwhelmingly "disagree" that awareness has anything to do at all, with the completion or non-completion of research work and hence largely irrelevant as a factor. Overall, both groups of participants were also "undecided" on the role of determination on the completion of a graduate school degree. Determination is not static. During the

research work, the level of determination of the students/researchers may vary depending on the situation. Despite the results, both groups of participants have placed a high importance on research skills as a determinant of successful research with majority of the participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing about the importance of research skills in their endeavor to finish a thesis/dissertation; therefore, the only component of the level of determination found to have significant relationship with degree completion was research skills. It is apparent that the presence of adequate research skills was the most important factor in determining whether a student/researcher completes the degree. Since research skills were particularly identified as a barrier to the completion of higher degrees by Muslim academics in Mindanao State University (MSU), further study may be undertaken to determine the research skills of MSU academics.

Table 1. Level of Determination in terms of Research Skills, Values, and Awareness

Level of Determination	Completed		Not Completed	
	Mean (Descriptive Equivalent)	SD	Mean (Descriptive Equivalent)	SD
A.Research Skills	3.93 (Agree)	1.043	3.30 (Undecided)	1.257
B.Values	3.05 (Undecided)	1.478	2.75 (Undecided)	1.205
C. Awareness	2.25 (Disagree)	1.443	2.21 (Disagree)	1.439

Those who completed their graduate school degrees and those who did not appear to have similar responses to values and awareness. This indicates that these components of determination have no significant values on whether a student/researcher will in fact finish his/her degree based on these factors. What is significant is that those who completed their graduate school degrees 'agree' that the research skills are an important determinant of success while those who did not complete their graduate school degrees seem 'undecided' on the value of research skills. As the pursuit of master's or doctoral degree largely involves research work, and the value of research skills in future completion cannot be over emphasized. It would seem that those who completed their graduate school degrees already have research skills or were predisposed to acquiring such skills. According to Aaserud *et al.* (2005), the quality of research is affected by lack of expertise in research skills.

Table 2. Relationship between the socio-demographic profile and the completion/ non-completion of Masters' and Doctoral Degrees

Predictor	Coefficient	SE Coefficient	z-value	p-value	Interpretation
Degree or Course	2.675	1.199	2.23	0.026	Significant
Employment Status	-2.453	0.831	-2.95	0.003	Significant
Faculty Rank	-1.795	0.917	-1.96	0.050	Significant
Members					
Number of Years in Service	0.981	0.358	2.74	0.006	Significant

The results indicate that among the 13 predictors of completion or non-completion of the degree, only four are significant, namely; degree or course, employment status, faculty rank, and number of years in service. Thus, the completion or non-completion of the graduate school degrees of the participants are significantly related only to these four predictors. This can be attributed to the fact that different fields of research would offer different quantity and quality of data. For example, a student/researcher is pursuing a PhD in physics or chemistry, more effort may be required to access needed data, select respondents, and find academic advisers than if the degree was a PhD in general education.

A recent study in Canada indicated that discipline is important for completion of graduate degrees, with completion rates varying from 45% in arts & humanities to 70% in life sciences, with science completions being generally in the high 60% range (Elgar, Frank, and Klein, 2004).

For the UK, completion rates after 10 years differed by general discipline area with arts/humanities rates being 51 percent, & science being 64 percent (Wright & Cochrane, 2000).

As for employment status, those who have permanent tenure may be motivated to finish their post graduate degrees in the hope of being promoted and thus granted a higher salary grade while those who do not have permanent items may have more incentive to finish a higher degree in the hope of getting a permanent tenure. This is supported by a study conducted by (Myers, 1999) on the barriers to completion of the doctoral degree in educational administration where he identified key variables and organized them under seven underlying dimensions that emerged from the literature, one of which is former and current employment status.

Faculty rank may also be a motivation since a higher degree guarantees certain levels of faculty rank. In the case of years in service, there could be a positive motivation to eventually retire with higher pay due to higher rank. Somebody who has rendered more years in service would also be presumably relatively older and feel that the window of opportunity to finish the thesis or dissertation is rather narrow; hence, a renewed effort will be expended on the preparation and defense of the thesis or dissertation to ensure that the academic degree is earned and awarded.

Table 3. Relationship between the availability of support system and the completion/non-completion of a Masters/Doctoral Degrees

Completed/Not Completed	Chi-square Value	Degree of Value	p-value	Interpretation
Peers	6.396	2	0.041	Significant
Administration	6.211	2	0.045	Significant
Mentor	6.565	2	0.038	Significant
Availability of Support System (Overall)	9.164	2	0.010	Significant

Based on the above results, the factors that are significantly related to the completion/non-completion of degrees are peers, administration, and mentor. This means that the participants' completion/non-completion of their degrees is dependent on these three indicators.

Given the length and complexity of finishing and obtaining a post graduate degree, it is understandable that various difficulties arise in the process of thesis/dissertation undertaking due to organizational or professional factors such as administrative support which could include policies and procedures for graduate school that may or may not be supportive to a student/researcher's undertaking. According to participant #8C *"Agency/Institutional support through rapid promotion can encourage completion of masters' or doctoral degrees"; participant # 10C "Being on study leave and away from family is a great factor for completion of graduate degrees".* The barrier at the unit level includes obtaining help from administrators and other staff in starting a project/research (Chan, Barnason, Dakin, and Gillespie, 2011).

The graduate students lack peers with whom they can discuss problems arising from the course of making a thesis or dissertation. Students may receive valuable mentoring from their peers in the program as well as from other persons

(Council of Graduate Schools, 2004). The factors facilitating thesis completions that scored higher include student's personal positive qualities and relationship with peers and professors (Ho, P.T. Wong & L. C. Wong, 2011).

Some students may have an advisor who effectively doubles as a good mentor, while others may have an advisor who can provide additional guidance on research career and other topics. Misinformed or inadequately prepared mentor/supervisor or a mentor whose research interests are different from those of the student/researcher could hinder thesis completion. Success in achieving a master's or PhD degree depends upon a close and effective working relationship with one's advisor and mentor (Council of Graduate Schools, 2004). In the study conducted by Doozgy and Najib (2010), the faculty members in the two (2) nursing colleges in Kurdistan Region in Iraq have barriers in conducting research which includes lack of administrative support, insufficient time to implement new ideas, and lack of knowledgeable mentors. According to *participant #30C "Moral support/spiritual support from peers and supervisors is a factor for completion of a graduate degree.*

Lovitts & Nelson (2000), reported that the most important factor for completion of a graduate degree was relationship with a faculty adviser. Students who completed twice were likely to express satisfaction with faculty adviser.

Table 4. Relationship between the participants' level of determination and the completion/non-completion of a Masters/Doctoral degree

Completed/Not Completed	Chi-square Value	Degree of Value	p-value	Interpretation
Research Skills	6.528	2	0.038	Significant

The chi-square test for independence results, at 5% level of significance, above reveal that the only indicator significantly related to completion/non-completion of graduate school degrees is research skills. The completion/non-completion of a thesis/dissertation is independent of the participants' values and awareness. This implies that adequate or inadequate research skills could affect the completion/non-completion of a graduate school degree. The development of research skills can be affected by the school a student graduated from and the mentors that have taught them the research skills.

According to Ngozi and Kayode (2013), student factors attributed to thesis completion delay is the student's skill in conducting research and students' lack of capacity and preparedness for research and postgraduate study.

Other facilitating and hindering factors for completion/non-completion of Masters/Doctoral Degrees

The initial findings of the qualitative aspect of the questionnaire showed that more of those who did not complete their post-graduate school degrees had more factors to include (barriers) compared to those who completed their post-graduate school degrees who were more or less content with the facilitating factors already in the questionnaire. Though there were still those who listed additional facilitating factors.

Through the qualitative aspect of the study, the participants were able to give more insight to the researcher. The participants were allowed the freedom to explain in depth because of the anonymity provided.

The additional facilitating factors provided by those who completed their post-graduate school degrees may be categorized into two: "Personal Factors" and "External Factors". Support is the common a common theme and from the comments given, the external factors can be subdivided into financial support, institution/administration support, or moral support from loved ones.

The additional hindering factors provided by those who did not complete their post-graduate school degrees may be subdivided into "Personal Factors" were subdivided into factors that are related to the research process and those completely unrelated, example of which would include outside commitments or uncontrollable events like family emergencies. Those factors related to research may be categorized either under committee problems (i.e. problems with advisers, and /or panel), or accessibility problems (i.e. inability to access resources or to find the necessary number of respondents, and others).

Other hindering factors not yet categorized included problems with the working environment or even problems with the country itself. Abiddin and Ismail (2011) revealed the influences that affect graduation completion rate as follows: student-friendly, accessible administrative procedures, understanding academic and scientific requirements, ability to judge workload related to different components of the research process, retaining supervisor contact, overcoming isolation, conflict management, and ability to defend the results of the study. In addition, a study by Hong, P. T. Wong and L. C. Wong (2011) entitled, "What Helps and What Hinders Thesis Completion", showed that 25% of the participants indicated financial support as a necessary factor in facilitating thesis completion and 15% indicated financial needs as a factor that hinders thesis completion.

It is worth noting that even among the factors facilitating thesis completion; financial support was only in the middle with qualitative factors like student's personal positive qualities and relationships with peers and professors, scoring higher. In the same study, among the factors hindering thesis completion, financial needs can be found in the bottom quarter, with other problems, such as external pressure scoring higher. Most of the factors commonly identified dealt with qualitative factors dealing with relationship, the researcher's personal weakness, or external factors (Hong, P. T. Wong & L. C. Wong 2011). Further, according to Adiddin and Ismail (2011), financial support along with adequate facilities, interaction in the department and university, logistical arrangements, and demographic factors play important roles in a graduate students' success. Finally, consistent with the previous study of Shariatmadari and Mahdi (2012), sufficient financial supports and adequate reward system can be a leading factor to motivate and encourage graduate school students in finishing their thesis or dissertation.

The validity of the findings of this study must be viewed based on the research methodology, sample size, and locale. While the analysis of the responses of the study group used both quantitative and qualitative approaches, including statistical interpretations, the responses were nevertheless, based on opinions that were not independently validated and may require another study. As a result, those who have completed their post-graduate degrees may have the tendency to give less importance to barriers. Those who have not completed their degrees, on the other hand, may emphasize barriers as a way of justifying their inability to complete their post-graduate degrees.

Another limitation of this study is the sample size. There is no previous statistical correlation of the sample size to any similar study that could have validated the acceptability of the number of participants. This could have been dictated by the availability of willing participants and the time constraints of completing the study.

Finally, the locale of the study is MSU, Marawi City. While the conclusions may apply to this particular milieu, it would require further study to extend similar conclusions to other academic institutions.

CONCLUSIONS

This study found out that degree/course, employment status, faculty rank, and number of years in service, peers, administration, mentor support, and research skills have significant relationship in the completion/non-completion

of graduate/postgraduate degrees. This means that the mentioned variables can affect the completion of masters and doctoral degrees among Muslim educators. Furthermore, possible factors that may facilitate or hinder the completion of Masters/Doctoral degrees were identified as family support and determination of the participant to complete the program. Other socio-demographic factors like the raising of children, marital problems and lack of adequate finances could also be contributory factors to the inability to finish a higher degree, but like most other reasons, these can only delay the completion of a higher degree but not make it impossible. The critical factor is the determination of the student/researcher to earn a higher academic degree by finishing the thesis/dissertation. The rewards for thesis/dissertation completion are numerous. The researcher may gain academic prestige through designations of academic positions, chance of promotion through new credentials in terms of academics, increase in salary commensurate to the new rank/promotion, and additional incentives.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

Learning is a continuous process. Faculty members in all institutions of higher learning must be required to have masters and or doctoral degrees. Achieving higher degree entails the making of a research paper. Some faculty do not finish the program in a given time due to problem in research skills. The institution should come up with a research plan to cater to the needs of the faculty. It should include training, mentoring, financial support from the institution and a provision of an ideal environment conducive to research. Training and mentoring may hone the skills of the faculty in research. Financial support from the institution and the provision of an ideal environment conducive to research will encourage the faculty to be engaged in research activities. This is also in compliance with the mandate of the Commission of Higher Education which is to strengthen research in all universities. There are often other considerations that need to be addressed like faculty members should be awarded with items to enjoy the privileges due to them. Regular faculty evaluation should be done for the faculty to receive appropriate ranks and with the corresponding salary. Tenure should be given to faculty to inspire them to work harder and do research works. Faculty members should be encouraged to make proposals and to be submitted to funding agencies to support their work financially. Faculty members who intend to proceed to a graduate program should have already a research problem in mind for her/him and her/his adviser to work on it from the beginning of her/his program up to the end.

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