

Unveiling the Essence of 'Doctorateness' in Ph.D. Mentorship: Navigating the Humanity Amidst Academic Pursuits in Academia.

ABSTRACT

The journey of achieving a doctoral degree, known as Doctorateness, is fraught with potential pitfalls that must be navigated with care to ensure a humanized process. Doctorateness is often perceived through the lens of the process leading to the award of a quality degree, measured against established best practices to determine whether the process adheres to or contradicts the structural procedures in place. This evaluation ultimately reveals whether the process promotes humanizing or dehumanizing practices. When Doctorateness fails to embrace integrity and ethics, it tends to raise concerns about humanity issues, leading to dehumanizing practices resulting from malpractices and non-compliance with research framework policies and guidelines. The individuals directly affected include supervisors, supervisees and their families, and university management teams. Given that the purpose of research in universities is to underpin high-quality science, support a robust evidence base for socio-economic improvement, provide a foundation for research careers, enhance education and training quality, and bolster public confidence and trust in the research process and its outputs, it is imperative that the process is humanized. This paper seeks to examine the quality 'Doctorateness' in light of the processes involved, focusing on standards and guidelines to promote a humanizing approach and mitigate malpractices and misconduct that could otherwise dehumanize the Doctorateness process.

Keywords: Quality Doctorateness, Malpractice, Misconducts; Integrity, Ethics, Humanizing, dehumanizing, Doctorateness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Historically, universities have been perceived primarily as centers of research, alongside their roles in training and outreach. These institutions have structured frameworks that facilitate the humanizing aspect of research, aiming to foster capacity building and bridge knowledge gaps both locally and globally. This endeavor is pivotal for meeting the demands of the economy and driving innovations. Doctoral education programs, a cornerstone of universities, are tasked with producing highly skilled individuals equipped with advanced knowledge and governed by integrity and morality to address national objectives. By upholding integrity and research ethics, universities instill human values and respect, fostering a process deemed essential for achieving quality 'doctorateness.' However, the failure to adhere to these structured processes and the neglect of humanity can lead to injustices, lack of care, diminished commitment, shortage of technical expertise, and insufficient capacity in disciplinary areas. Such lapses, viewed as malpractices and misconducts, contribute to the dehumanization of the doctorateness process.

A critical inquiry into the doctorateness process revolves on whether and how universities can address these dehumanizing gaps, and to what extent they are cognizant of such deficiencies. Scholars (Mouton et al, 2019; Aftab, 2022; Swarts, 2017; Botha, et al, 2019) argue that universities must cultivate environments grounded in integrity and sustainability to inspire and support supervisors and supervisees in developing innovative solutions to global challenges through a humanizing doctorateness process. Research being a fundamental university function, doctoral education equips individuals with the skills to transfer their technical expertise, intellectual acumen, and emotional intelligence, thereby addressing global challenges through quality supervision (Boughey, et al, 2019).

The attainment of a Ph.D. through a humanizing process arguably epitomizes the essence of quality 'doctorateness.' Such a process is envisioned to propel research, innovation, and development by generating relevant knowledge and skills transparency and accountability, embracing humanizing approaches. Consequently, quality doctoral graduates contribute to bridging the gap between postgraduate studies, the labor market, and beyond, embodying humanizing attributes, emotional intelligence, and integrity beyond mere technical proficiency (Mouton, et al, 2019; Botha et al, 2022).

While new knowledge generated through doctorateness is acknowledged as a central strategic and economic resource, contemporary society demands that it transcends mere technical prowess to embrace humanity and foster integrity, a value of paramount importance globally. Doctorateness should be capable of serving humanity in times of dire need, such as during conflicts like the Ukraine war, the COVID-19 pandemic, or in combating corruption and injustice. Hence, the crucial question arises: Are doctorateness programs cultivated through a humanizing process equipped to extend their virtues beyond academia to address humanitarian needs? What are the factors hindering doctorateness from fulfilling such a service to humanity? Society requires more than disciplinary expertise and intellect; it yearns for honesty, humanity, and empathy, qualities often lacking but urgently needed. The sustainability of knowledge systems hinges on their ability to produce new Ph.D.s at a suitable rate, necessitating a focus on quality, integrity, and humanizing approaches (Botha, 2022).

Universities must address these gaps by developing relevant programs that train postgraduates under a humanizing environment. Considering the current supply and demand dynamics of doctoral education in Africa, particularly East Africa, there's evidence of oversupply, leading to unemployment among doctoral graduates. However, the crux of the issue lies not in oversupply but in the lack of quality, integrity, and humanizing approaches embedded in doctorateness. Why do some doctoral graduates remain jobless in disciplines with shortages? The root cause lies in the absence of integrity, which undermines the

humanizing process and perpetuates dehumanizing approaches. This raises pertinent questions about the purpose, pursuit, and nature of doctorateness in the African context.

1.1 The Doctoral Context

Students pursuing doctoral degrees in African universities, especially in East Africa, have varied motivations for joining such programs. Scholarly consensus (Mouton, and Frick, 2019) suggests that the purposes of doctoral degrees in Africa are contextual, with East African programs emphasizing professional development and discipline-specific knowledge enhancement. Universities offering doctoral programs have their own objectives, ranging from meeting industrial skills demands to enhancing research output for global recognition. Similarly, students seek doctoral education for reasons such as professional advancement, financial gain, interdisciplinary exploration, and societal recognition.

These diverse purposes have fueled competition among universities, schools, and departments to tailor their programs to attract more recruits. Despite resource constraints, institutions in East Africa strive to produce as many doctoral graduates as possible, attracting questions like, who should pursue doctoral education, which institutions should offer doctoral degrees, how should quality and integrity be maintained, and how should the doctorateness process be humanized? Are Quality Management Systems (QMS) still effective in universities, and what safeguards are in place for doctorateness quality? These questions underscore the need to conceptualize doctorateness within a framework of integrity and ethics, vital for fostering a humanizing doctoral research mentorship in East African universities.

1.2 Understanding 'Doctorateness'

To grasp the essence of 'doctorateness,' it is imperative to explore existing literature, delve into the doctoral education process, consider the context of universities in East Africa, and offer insights from my experience as a supervisor and mentor of doctoral students. Numerous scholars have offered diverse perspectives on defining 'doctorateness.' Trafford, et al(2009) view it as the culmination of a journey, wherein various components coalesce, including research methodology and the steps taken throughout the process, ultimately leading to the delivery of a thesis or a collection of publications. However, this definition raises questions about how to measure qualitative parameters such as the creation of new knowledge, the depth of literature review, and the research process itself.

Furthermore, institutional expectations and regulations, along with throughput numbers, often shape the definition of 'doctorateness.' In some instances, universities prioritize quantity over quality, as evidenced by mandates to graduate a certain number of doctoral students annually. This emphasis on numbers, while disregarding challenges such as faculty shortages and inadequate facilities, can lead to a dehumanizing approach to doctoral education. For instance, in Kenya, universities were directed to graduate a specific number of doctoral students each year, alongside requirements for teaching staff to attain Ph.D. qualifications within set timeframes. However, the focus on meeting quotas overlooks the integrity of the process and raises fundamental questions about the essence of 'doctorateness.'

Globally, concerns have been raised about the oversupply of Ph.D. holders relative to job demands, resulting in many graduates being unemployed or underemployed (Cyranoski, 2011). Despite this, universities often set targets for the number of doctoral graduates, equating quantity with 'doctorateness.' However, scholars challenge this notion, emphasizing the importance of adherence to processes, principles, and high-level research in defining 'doctorateness.'

In East Africa, universities perceive 'doctorateness' as both a numerical output and adherence to prescribed processes and standards, as outlined by regulatory bodies such as the Commission of

University Education (CUE, 2013) and the Interuniversity Council for East Africa (IUCEA, 2018), (Moi University, (2019), Makerere University (2008), However, while guidelines are provided, they often fail to address critical questions raised by scholars (Mouton, et al 2019) regarding the depth of the research process and academic integrity. The issue of integrity in implementing these guidelines, along with assessing 'doctorateness,' remains a significant concern.

In essence, 'doctorateness' is a multifaceted phenomenon that cannot be solely defined by graduation numbers or regulatory guidelines. My perception of 'doctorateness' encompasses adherence to institutional rules, international standards, and ethical conduct by students, supervisors, and universities, thereby humanizing the process. Conversely, a lack of integrity in these processes perpetuates a dehumanizing approach, a point of contention addressed in this article.

1.3 Frameworks for Doctorateness

Doctoral education is more than just a process; it's a comprehensive journey with distinct phases, each requiring careful consideration and adherence to established frameworks. These frameworks serve as the scaffolding upon which the entire doctoral experience is built, encompassing program development, student recruitment, mentoring, assessment, and graduation (Cresswell, et al., 2017; Moi University, 2019; IUCEA, 2018; CUE, 2013). However, the true essence of 'doctorateness' lies not only in these structural elements but also in the underlying purpose and humanity infused into the process.

In East African universities, various frameworks are in place to safeguard the integrity and quality of doctoral programs. The Commission of University Education (CUE) provides guidelines for program design, emphasizing alignment with institutional values and goals (IUCEA, 2018, CUE, 2013; Boughey, et al 2019; 2022; Swarts, 2017, 2022). While these guidelines set the stage for programmatic excellence, they often fall short in addressing the broader aspects of integrity, ethics, and humanity.

In today's rapidly evolving world, there is a growing need for technocrats who not only possess specialized knowledge but also exhibit integrity, emotional intelligence, and empathy. If doctoral education fails to cultivate these essential qualities, it risks becoming disconnected from the realities of society.

Real-world examples highlight the inadequacy of current doctoral programs in addressing humanity attributes beyond traditional skills and knowledge. For instance, the rationale of many Ph.D. programs emphasizes expertise in specific areas but neglects the broader context of integrity, ethics, and values (Botha et al., 2022).

Despite frameworks such as those provided by the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) addressing various aspects of postgraduate studies, including admission and supervision, there remains a gap in ensuring the humanization of the doctoral process (IUCEA, 2018). While these frameworks aim to maintain quality assurance and enhance the overall experience, they often overlook the critical elements of integrity, ethics, and emotional intelligence.

The lack of explicit emphasis on these attributes raises questions about the true purpose of doctoral education. Is it merely to impart knowledge and skills, or should it also strive to nurture a sense of empathy, integrity, and ethical conduct among graduates?

Critical reflection on the doctoral process reveals numerous pitfalls that undermine its quality and integrity. From admissions to supervision and examination, there are instances where the human element is overlooked, leading to a dehumanized experience for both students and faculty (Botha et al., 2019; Swarts, 2017).

Ultimately, the essence of 'doctorateness' lies in its ability to transcend mere academic pursuits and embrace the humanity inherent in the pursuit of knowledge. It is incumbent upon universities to reassess their frameworks and policies to ensure that the doctoral experience remains rooted in integrity, ethics, and a deep sense of humanity. Only then can doctoral education truly fulfill its potential to positively impact society and address the complex challenges of our time.

2. Critical Reflection on 'Doctorateness' Process

This section delves into the dichotomy between the dehumanizing and humanizing aspects of the 'doctorateness' process, drawing from analytical insights as a supervisor and experiences shared by my students. The focus revolves around the admission process and the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and supervisees in evaluating 'doctorateness'.

2.1 Admission into Doctoral Programs

The journey of 'doctorateness' commences with the application and admission into the institution, guided by established postgraduate rules and regulations (Botha and Mouton et al., 2019; IUCEA, 2018; CUE, 2013; Moi University, 2019; Makerere University, 2008). However, inherent pitfalls in this process often undermine the integrity and ethics of 'doctorateness'. Unlike universities in South Africa and Europe, where potential students are required to identify a supervisor before admission, East African universities often admit students without this crucial step, leaving the allocation of supervisors to the discretion of departments and students.

This allocation process, typically overseen by department chairpersons (CoDs), aims to meet the demand for doctoral supervision but often leads to overburdened supervisors and a compromised quality of mentorship. Overloaded supervisors resort to expedient means to meet graduation targets, sacrificing the essential elements of integrity, empathy, and ethics (Mouton et al., 2019).

Such practices breed misconducts and malpractices, including delayed supervision, compromised quality of mentorship, and strained supervisor-supervisee relationships. Additionally, the absence of guidelines exacerbates these issues, resulting in prolonged timelines, financial burdens, and academic distress for students. The following two cases exemplify the reality.

Case Study 2: Ineffective Supervision Procedure

Illustrating this, a student recounts their experience of being allocated two supervisors, one of whom lacked expertise in the student's area of interest. Despite seeking assistance from another knowledgeable faculty member, the student faced resistance and undue pressure to conform to the inadequacies of their principal supervisor. This led to delayed feedback, inappropriate assessment, and financial penalties, highlighting the systemic failures in supervision and mentorship.

Case Study 3: Misconduct – Falsification of Data

Similarly, another student narrates a case of research misconduct, where falsified data led to the graduation of a student without scrutiny. This blatant disregard for integrity and ethics underscores the systemic deficiencies in monitoring and adherence to research frameworks.

In both cases, the absence of robust monitoring mechanisms and ethical oversight perpetuated a culture of misconduct and dehumanization within doctoral programs. The responsibility for addressing these issues extends to supervisors, institutions, and society at large, emphasizing the urgent need for reforms in the 'doctorateness' process.

Ultimately, the essence of 'doctorateness' lies not merely in academic pursuits but in the cultivation of integrity, empathy, and ethical conduct. It is imperative for stakeholders to collaborate in redefining doctoral mentorship paradigms to ensure a humanized and holistic approach to 'doctorateness' in academia

2.3 Supervisor-Supervisee Roles and Responsibilities

A blended model of traditional and co-supervision has informally emerged in universities, representing an improvement over the individual supervisor-individual student model. This blend offers both advantages and pitfalls, particularly in managing power dynamics within supervision relationships. While one would expect this model to balance the weaknesses of traditional supervision with the strengths of co-supervision, the reality falls short of this ideal.

The roles and responsibilities of supervisors are meticulously outlined in the postgraduate rules and regulation frameworks, delineating clear timeframes for graduation, supervisor-supervisee dynamics, and the workload limit of three Ph.D. students per supervisor (Moi University, 2019; IUCEA, 2018; Makerere, 2008; Mouton, and Frick, 2019). However, the actual appointment process raises questions about the quality of 'doctorateness'. Supervisors are appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies based on departmental and programmatic recommendations, with contracts signed between supervisors and students. Additionally, supervisors must be senior lecturers or above and affiliated with departments offering the program. While the appointment process seems clear, its execution profoundly impacts the quality of doctoral mentorship (Boughey, 2019; Fourie-Malherbe, 2016).

Assigning supervisors without considering their existing workload burdens adversely affects 'doctorateness'. Many supervisors find themselves juggling numerous students alongside full teaching, administrative, and outreach responsibilities. This overload compromises the quality time dedicated to individual students, undermining the negotiated learning space essential for effective mentorship. Furthermore, the lack of supervisor training in alternative supervision models perpetuates reliance on traditional one-on-one approaches, limiting innovation and efficiency. Meetings often devolve into unproductive critique sessions, with supervisors dictating rather than nurturing independent scholarly growth. This pressure-laden environment fosters dependency on supervisors, eroding the autonomy and agency of supervisees and perpetuating a dehumanizing dynamic.

The societal and labor market demand scholars who are independent, critical thinkers, and creative problem solvers. Doctoral graduates should be enculturated into their disciplines with a strong sense of humanity, capable of contributing original knowledge beyond mere academic qualifications. The disconnect between these expectations and the reality of many unemployed doctoral graduates underscores the deficiencies in current mentorship practices.

Moreover, issues such as ego conflicts and over-dependency on senior supervisors further complicate the mentorship landscape, creating distress for all parties involved. This leads to unconstructive feedback, lack of transparency, and ethical lapses, ultimately undermining the integrity of the doctoral process.

Overall, redefining supervisor-supervisee roles and responsibilities is crucial for humanizing the 'doctorateness' journey. Embracing innovative supervision models, prioritizing mentorship training, and fostering a culture of collaboration and independence are essential steps towards nurturing competent scholars capable of meeting the evolving demands of academia and society.

3. Conclusion

The exploration of 'doctorateness' within the context of supervision processes is guided by a commitment to integrity and ethics, aiming to discern the humanizing and dehumanizing elements inherent in achieving quality doctoral education. The examination of various processes and reflections offered in this paper underscores a prevailing sense of dehumanization that compromises the essence of quality 'doctorateness' as envisioned.

Critical pitfalls emerge primarily in the realms of program approval, supervisor allocation, supervision models and training, and the clarity of certain procedures outlined in postgraduate standards and guidelines. These deficiencies are exacerbated by the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms capable of providing actionable feedback to enhance supervision practices and uphold the principles of research ethics and integrity.

In essence, the current landscape of doctoral mentorship falls short of the ideals espoused in this discourse. The imperative now lies in addressing these shortcomings and recalibrating supervision processes to foster a more humane, ethical, and ultimately transformative environment for doctoral candidates. Only through such concerted efforts can we realize the true essence of 'doctorateness'—a journey that not only equips scholars with knowledge and skills but also instills in them a profound sense of humanity and ethical responsibility amidst the rigors of academic pursuit in academia.

4. Recommendations

In light of the reflections and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are proposed to humanize the doctoral mentorship process while upholding integrity and ethics:

Incorporate components of humanity into the approval process of doctoral programs at universities, ensuring that the program design aligns with principles of ethical and humane education.

Prioritize consultation with supervisors before allocating students, aiming to maintain a manageable workload of no more than five students per supervisor at any given time. This approach fosters a more personalized and supportive supervision process.

Provide comprehensive training for novice supervisors prior to student allocation, emphasizing the importance of their roles and responsibilities. Additionally, clearly delineate the roles of first and second supervisors in appointment letters to streamline the process and enhance clarity.

Implement ongoing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms throughout the doctoral journey to uphold quality 'doctorateness' and introduce checks and balances to safeguard integrity within the mentorship process. This continuous assessment will enable timely intervention and improvement where necessary.

By adopting these recommendations, universities can take proactive steps to cultivate a doctoral mentorship environment that prioritizes both academic rigor and the holistic development of scholars, thereby navigating the humanity amidst the academic pursuits inherent in academia.

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