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International Ph.D. Students' Challenges of Funding at the University of Regina

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Abstract: Successful learning and completion of Post Graduate studies is often a challenge for postgraduate students in the institution of higher learning. However, completing Ph.D. programs, especially in humanities, is often difficult for most students. The study explored the lived experiences of a selected Ph.D. student from the University of Regina-Canada. In addition, the study focused on the student funding challenges Ph.D. students without funding face during their studies. This qualitative narrative research is vital because it exposes challenges that often lead to attrition for Ph.D. students. It also presents vital recommendations for future Ph.D. students and researchers in the field.

Keywords: Student, Funding, Canada, Research.

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INTRODUCTION

Successful learning and completion of a Ph. D. education is a complicated matter and requires the candidates to be committed to the course of action and be able to withstand challenges such as funding, supervision, comprehensive exams, research proposal, thesis, and defense. However, Ph. D. candidates are a highly select and privileged group, as a doctoral degree is generally considered the highest terminal academic degree in the world (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). The doctoral study can be rewarding personally and professionally (Maddox, 2017). Learning new concepts, making meaning out of data, creating new knowledge, and building on old theories is often exciting. However, Statistics Canada (2013) reported that completion rates among Ph.D. students range from only 50 percent in the humanities to about 80 percent in the health sciences. Students leave for many different reasons, such as grueling work, isolation, terrible job market, increasing cost of study, lack of funding, and the rigorousness of working outside the university and combining that with long hours of research. However, McBain (2019) mentions that every student's experience in a doctoral program is unique, and some intrinsic and extrinsic common factors contribute to student attrition. This proposal explored the funding challenges doctoral candidates face during their postgraduate studies and their well-being with their study engagement and survival. The study involved an international Ph.D. student pursuing his doctoral studies in education at the University of Regina without funding.

Even though there are other challenges such as stress, rigorousness of Ph.D. program, supervision, ethics approval, defense, etc., facing doctoral students, the issue of funding is often a significant hindrance. Doctoral students' financial well-being shows a clear relationship between their commitment to lengthy study hours to achieve success or failure to complete their studies. Therefore, more effective means are required to foster students' ability to overcome problems encountered during Ph. D. studies. On an important note, DeClou (2016) mentions that in most cases, attrition in Canadian graduate programs has received limited attention in higher education research, and the authorities are usually reluctant to act to find functional solutions to the problem. Unlike undergraduate degree programs that are often structured, Ph.D. programs are primarily unstructured and require students' discipline and commitment to succeed in the program. But as most Ph.D. candidates are usually adults with several responsibilities, experiencing funding challenges can become a glass ceiling between their degree attainment and attrition (break the camel's back) because it is a daunting task to combine several hours of study with part-time jobs the case of international students. As flattering as it may seem, it is essential to realize that Ph.D. students do not sit in the 'ivory tower'; most often work full time or part-time, raise a family, and work on their thesis. These can lead to high levels of stress and attrition.

With an average Tuition fee increase of 8% each year while stipends and fellowships to graduate students remained stagnant, shifting the financial

burden of postgraduate studies onto the backs of students becomes an enormous challenge (Junor & Usher, 2002; & Elgar & Klein, 2004). This scenario is even dire for international Ph.D. students whose countries or universities do not fund their studies. The international students' levy is an additional burden apart from the actual study fees. Even though variability exists between universities in terms of Ph.D. tuition, some universities (and provinces) in Canada have been able to protect students from this trend. In contrast, others do not offer any form of financial support. This makes it difficult for students who are not funded to combine gig jobs with their studies. This neoliberal way in which graduate education is financed in Canada has inevitably led more students to incur crippling debt loads and to seek employment on and off-campus to finance their studies (Litalien & Guay, 2015). Existing studies have identified challenges such as financial restraints, social isolation, problematic supervisory communication, language barriers, the experienced difference in the educational system, and culture (Harman, 2002; & Wright & Cochrane, 2000).

Some of the challenges addressed by researchers are Ph.D. candidate's circumstances (Pearson et al., 2011), access to and use of resources (Warburton & Macauley, 2014), or supervisory inefficiencies (Buttery et al., 2005). Possibly, these encounters provide reasons why 40-50% of Ph.D. candidates in humanities do not finish their studies (Gardner, 2008). In addition, many candidates do not fully comprehend the scope of doctoral studies and are not fully conscious of the tasks they will face in their programs (Loyd et al., 2014). Recent research on students in higher education contexts to date has focused primarily on the motivation, achievement, and well-being of undergraduates, largely overlooking topics relevant to doctoral students' mental, physiological, motivational, and social experiences (Longfield et al., 2006; Pocock et al., 2011; & Sverdlik et al., 2018). On the contrary to financial and other internal and external challenges, most Ph.D. students in humanities are mostly left to fend for themselves, feeling underprepared for the sometimes-lonely academic journey and disheartened by the probability of securing academic employment (Bourke, et al., 2004).

My personal experience with funding in education started in primary school. At that time, schools at all levels of education were fee-paying institutions. For instance, some of my course mates dropped out of school due to their inability to pay their fees. Many Ph.D. students were disenfranchised of their right to education. Therefore, the issue of the cost of education has always been a challenge for the poor and the vulnerable. Since the inception of education, especially in Africa, it has been used as a propaganda tool to serve the interest of the colonial, post-colonial, and neocolonial oppressors.

The issue of funding at all levels of education is so important to me because I have seen many intelligent and hardworking students who have to discontinue education at all levels due to a lack of funds to support them. I have seen many students whose dreams were to become professionals in society dashed because of high-cost education and inadequate support throughout my teaching career. My interest in questioning how funding has been used as a tool to prevent people from going to school to become who they dream of being in the future is of grave concern to me. However, several research studies have investigated challenges experienced by Ph.D. candidates over the years. There is a lack of in-depth detail on the methodological or research limitations that emanate because of those challenges of funding, especially for international students in the area of funding. Furthermore, it is challenging to determine articles written purposely on the financial difficulties as a cause of stress and attrition, despite several challenges facing international Ph.D. students in Canada. I plan to conduct a collaborative narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2017) focusing on the funding challenges of International Ph.D. students at the University of Regina while pursuing their doctoral studies.

Research Topic

International Ph.D. students and challenges of funding at the University of Regina- Narrative inquiry

Research Questions

- What challenges do International Doctoral students who are not funded at the University of Regina's face?
- How would funding help address the issues of long times to degree, high attrition, under-representation of demographic groups, stress, frustration, and quality of work for international doctoral students?
- In what ways are neoliberal policies in higher education affecting doctoral student funding? In addition, what are the short and long-term effects on international doctoral students who come to Canada to study, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Challenges Facing Ph.D. Students

This literature review aims to offer more in-depth insight into the issues faced by Ph.D. students by studying and critically analyzing recent literature on doctoral students (candidates) experiences. The study will focus on the importance of understanding various factors that influence doctoral students' experiences, with the current review drawing on recent conceptual and empirical literature in the field of doctoral education to examine common challenges candidates (students) face in doctoral programs. According to Sverdlik et al. (2018), the roles of demographic and structural factors such as enrollment status, discipline,

gender, and race inevitably affect the doctoral experience. However, this review will focus on literature examining the impact of inadequate funding on psychological and social impact on students in the areas of socialization, motivation, and personal/social lives that lead to attrition and higher levels of stress among international Ph.D. students. Published reviews have not thoroughly examined this area of challenges facing graduate students.

As Sverdlik et al. (2018) mention, a comprehensive understanding of the doctoral experience focusing on students' physical, psychological, and emotional well-being is warranted to provide a well-rounded perspective on the challenges faced in Ph.D. education. Much has not been done in providing direct paths and necessary logistics to students to enhance their studies. Many institutions do not offer Ph.D. candidates working spaces, enough funding, and adequate structures to undertake their studies. For instance, Ph.D. candidates still struggle with undergraduates to find study spaces on campus in places like libraries and laboratories to study. This struggle causes much discomfort and can increase the stress levels of Ph.D. candidates. The depth of the programs and the uneasiness of having access to basic amenities to enable the study becomes a struggle for many Ph.D. students. Factors such as funding and poor communication between the candidates, supervisors, and administration often pose a severe challenge to candidates' successful completion of the programs.

In addition, Schmidt & Hansson (2018) posit that doctoral students' well-being is an important matter that shapes them throughout their studies and enforces their motivation to succeed in the programs. Given that well-being can be closely related to candidates' productivity and efficiency, strategies associated with maintaining well-being during Ph.D. studies might be crucial for higher education. Moreover, its outcomes are just as critical for a balanced life for Ph.D. students.

Donoghue (2018) mentions the chronic problem of humanities Ph.D. academic underemployment, develops an argument for the social value of high-level humanities research and teaching, and outlines a series of measures for the reform of the Ph.D. in the humanities. The paper examined recent studies and leads. As many as 50% of those who enter Ph.D. programs in humanities do not complete the program (Main, 2014; Altbach, 2007; & Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). In humanities, it takes average students between 4-10 years (in Canada) to fulfill all the requirements for the degree, unlike the sciences, where candidates use between 4-5 years. In order words, social science Ph.D. Students spend many years in their studies, and the opportunities for finding a job after many years of study are often harder. Weisbuch & Cassuto (2016) acknowledge that almost half of humanities students will not achieve tenure-track

positions and only a fraction of them at research universities.

Moreover, half of all students in the sciences do not even wish for an academic career. On a sad note, Canadian census data reveals that while the number of university professors has doubled in the last three decades, the number of full-time positions has declined, and the number of jobs held by persons under the age of 35 has dropped dramatically (Desjardins, 2012). Such challenges call for the structure of doctoral education that assumes a faculty career rather than developing forms of expertise with versatile applications across the social sectors. The dynamism of the changing academic and the social world calls for doctoral structures that go beyond the traditional ways of acquiring the degree.

For institutions, focusing on numbers and how many students are admitted into doctoral programs do not neutralize that more students, especially in humanities, are burning out due to internal and external factors. Studies contend most of them do not receive any forms of support and structure as in undergraduate studies. As time passes, a Ph.D. study can become an increasingly unsustainable financial and personal sacrifice for students (Charbonneau, 2011). Maldonado, Wiggers & Arnold (2013) admitted that poor supervisor-student relations, the often-isolating nature of humanities research and writing, and alienation from one's home institution (students are away from campus while writing their dissertations often for economic, family, or other reasons lose momentum) are also some of the common reasons for non-completion.

Undoubtedly, the realities of the academic job market can contribute to students' decision to abandon their studies (Desjardins, 2012). As many as 86% of people entering doctoral programs in the humanities do so in pursuit of a career as a university professor. In contrast, only 20-30% of Ph.D. graduates ultimately find permanent, full-time work in the academy (Helm et al., 2012). These challenges often cause a bleak challenge and a form of demotivation to doctoral students and lead to a higher attrition rate. Hall et al. (2016), in their groundbreaking review of literature on the challenges facing doctoral students, outlined two sets of factors affecting the progression and completion of Ph.D. degrees: university factors (external) and personal factors (internal). Their research emphasizes external factors such as supervision, personal/ social lives, departmental structures and socialization, and financial opportunities. At the same time, the internal factors that can contribute to the success or attrition of doctoral students are stated as motivation, writing skills and strategies, and academic identity.

Although Shin et al. (2018) concede that doctoral education has increased during the last two decades. The share of doctoral degree holders reached 1.0% of the OECD countries in 2016 among the aged

25 and 65-year-old population. However, this does not deny the fact that many doctoral students do not finish their studies due to internal and external factors mitigating their academic success. The critical problem with much of the literature on challenges facing doctoral students has centered on general comparative challenges between sciences and humanities students. This creates a gap in looking into the students' demographic, geographical, social, and economic issues. The general perceptions of how doctoral students are affected by internal and external factors leading to attrition often overlook different challenges in various departments and individual circumstances at various universities. Saunders (2010) agonized about the impact of neoliberalism as 'united by three broad beliefs: the benevolence of the free market, minimal state intervention, and regulation of the economy, and the individual as a rational economic actor' (p. 45). The state of neoliberal university education shifts the responsibility of education from the state to the individuals and the market. This has seen a massive cut in state spending on higher education, directly affecting several funding initiatives for graduate studies.

This study sought to explore the gaps that exist in several studies and literature regarding challenges international students who are not funded by universities or their home countries face in the course of their studies.

Challenges Facing International Ph.D. Students without Funding in Canada

The study by Calder et al. (2016) argues:

"Universities recruit international students for a number of reasons, including enhancement of global contacts and reputation, to increase enrolment, and to generate revenue from tuition. Consequently, these students face unique challenges compared to domestic students, but no published studies or reports exist on this issue" (p. 93).

The findings from their survey and interviews with international graduate students, university personnel, and service providers assist students in exposing the unreported challenges most Ph.D. students face. For example, unlike New Zealand and Australia, where international doctoral students can take up full-time jobs, international students in Canada are restricted to 20hrs a week as per the regulations of the Canadian Immigration Service. This creates a huge financial challenge for Ph.D. students whose countries or institutions do not fund them. In addition, the issues of finding affordable and suitable housing, the ability to work or find employment, integration into a new university, and a different society often contribute to the challenges faced in an unfamiliar country.

According to Pilote & Benabdeljalil (as cited in Calder et al., 2016), "many institutions offer no

pedagogical support, although international students might be unfamiliar with Canadian curriculum, teaching, and evaluation methods; technology use; and different instructor-student relationships" (p. 94). In some instances, students also suffer from professors' stereotypes about their academic background, language command, and new institutional culture (Hellstén, 2002). Other complications can arise in the academic or professional realm (Hellstén, 2002) and in specific areas, such as housing and finances, where all students might face problems (Berry, 1996). The pressure to succeed, language difficulties, cultural differences, financial issues, international students' fees, job restrictions, and coping with change often pose a challenge to international doctoral students.

The "neo-liberalization and corporatization" of the Canadian education system in higher learning institutions have shifted the framework of higher education from personal and community development to individual and organizational development and has led to a drastic decrease in funding for universities. In addition, the commercialization and commodification of higher education have resulted in an annual increase in study fees. In contrast, international doctoral students' funding, and other financial assistance opportunities in Canadian universities, especially in humanities, have dried up.

As Spooner and McNinch (2018) highlighted:

"The continual decline experienced this decade in public funding for post-secondary education, the ongoing rise in tuition rates, and an emphasis on "public-private" partnerships and business models for the entrepreneurial sale of programs to individuals and third-party institutions all have the effect of positioning faculty members as mere knowledge workers who need to be managed so the fruits of their labor can be sold for a profit" (p. xxv).

The challenges indicate that the ideals and the foundations of higher education have been shaken by the neo-capitalist interest that has led to the monetization of education where individual development has replaced holistic community or national development. Neoliberalization has been entrenched in higher education, limiting financial access to students and faculty, and emphasizing profitability rather than the creation or generation of knowledge, as were the core values of higher education. This trend has seen a decline in international students funding.

Kapusta & Roadevin (2011) observe that Canadian society and the Canadian academy are proud of their openness and diversity. As a result, there is a significant increase in international doctoral students in Canadian universities. Nevertheless, the authors acknowledge that despite this frantic effort to attract these bright and top-quality international doctoral

students, there is a significant systemic problem for those in the arts and humanities who undertake doctoral studies in Canada. A study in Canada by Elgar (2003) indicated that the completion time is between 6-10 years in arts and humanities. In addition, funding gaps pose severe financial.

Statistically, most international doctoral students are with families with an average age of 26 - 42. Furthermore, the rigorousness of the Ph.D. program in Canada and the difficulty in balancing the financial strain, part-time jobs, and family results in high-stress levels among candidates, leading to attrition. Above all, university fees for international students are approximately twice those of Canadian students. This situation is dire for international students who are unable to secure funding. The International students who cannot pay their fees cannot prove to Immigration Canada that they have sufficient funds to remain in the country. They are faced with having to leave Canada without a degree after years of hard work, with little prospect of completing a doctoral program at another institution. On a sad note, Kapusta & Roadevin (2011) opine that, in the past, many international Ph.D. candidates would apply for permanent residence in Canada to pay the much lower resident fees and be able to seek jobs. The opportunities for low-interest student loans and applying for scholarships are restricted to Canadian citizens only. However, since the summer of 2010, this is no longer possible, and international doctoral students are forced to stick to the 20hr weekly job requirement and the tasking academic work.

Since placements, research assistant positions, graduate teaching assistant positions, graduate fellowships, and funding at Canadian universities are accorded on merit (higher academic achievement based on marks), international students are stressed by financial challenges and find it challenging to meet the requirement. As a result, most of them are forced to take part-time minimum wage jobs to sustain themselves. Ironically, it will be those international students who can pay who will be academically more successful (DeClou, 2016).

I have provided a review of scholarly literature about factors that confront doctoral students in the pursuit of their studies. The review extensively investigated internal and external factors facing Ph.D. students, emphasizing international doctoral students without funding from their countries of origin and the universities. This review did not consider undergraduate or master students and any other programs in universities in Canada, but doctoral students who are often faced with years of extensive study to complete their programs. I reviewed most of the literature in Canada because, as stated in the review, international doctoral students in Australia and New Zealand are permitted to work full-time. The findings from the review indicate that despite some effort from the

institutions and sometimes organizations to assist students with other forms of funding, doctoral students are still faced with funding challenges. For example, in welfare intervention programs, gaps still exist in institutions of higher learning.

Further studies to ascertain the financial challenges of international students who are not funded to undertake a doctoral program are vital to decolonizing institutions. Hence, this study seeks to investigate and determine the problems that unfunded doctoral students go through to obtain their degrees. I did not review literature about doctoral students in Europe because my focus is to find out what is happening in Canadian universities, especially the University of Regina. Although I recommended best practices for the institutional assistance of international doctoral students, I believe that the arguments could be extended to other countries and institutions where international students travel thousands of miles to seek knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guides the research path and offers the foundation for establishing its credibility (Adom et al., 2018). The theoretical and conceptual framework explains the research pathway and grounds it firmly in theoretical constructs. The overall aim of frameworks is to make research findings more meaningful, acceptable to the research field's theoretical constructs, and ensure generalizability. As Grant & Osanloo (2014) added, it is the 'blueprint' or guide for research. According to Hollingsworth & Dybdahl (2006), researchers usually draw on constructivist or critical paradigms when conducting a narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry highlights ethical matters as well as shapes new theoretical understandings of people's experiences. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into the experience through "a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieu" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). From a constructivist point of view, knowledge is constructed through social interactions (Gadamer, 1996, as cited in Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2006). Again, according to Hollingsworth and Dybdahl, "...the narratives from a critical perspective result from a bricolage of the narrators' self-conceptions in the temporal moment, place, or historical context in which the narrative is told, the depth of the relationship between the narrators, and the purpose of their conversation" (p.151). Based on this, I approach this collaborative narrative research from both constructivist and critical perspectives.

I draw from Maxwell's (2013) suggestion that researchers can combine different paradigms. Maxwell cautions that in combining different paradigms, the researcher must be mindful of the compatibility of aspects of paradigms being combined. My ontology

behind this study is to co-construct our stories and expose critical issues that need to be addressed in our lived experiences. Some of the vital issues we hope to expose entrenched neoliberalism in education, commercialization of education, and unhinged immigration laws that make the challenges for international doctoral students without funding worse. I believe the study will generate arguments to create an opportunity for emancipation.

Appropriate Purpose Statement

My goal in this collaborative narrative inquiry is to consider issues of financial struggles of international doctoral students who are not funded in Canada, focusing on an international student at the University of Regina. My research may contribute to changes in funding practices at the university and how the Ph.D. program is structured. In addition, I hope to use my research to unpack the difficulties surrounding international students as far as funding is concerned. Funding international students' doctoral studies have many advantages for the welfare of the students, as well as the completion rate and the institution's legacy in research. However, combining menial minimum wage part-time jobs with rigorous Canadian doctoral study is often a daunting task for international students without funding. I am sure other doctoral students from different parts of the world without funding would share these experiences. To conclude, there are several unheard voices (students) in learning institutions experiencing the dire financial need to be better positioned to concentrate on their studies.

Therefore, this study aims to provide lived storied experiences that show the pathways of struggles with higher tuition fees, living expenses, and heavy academic workload of a Ph.D. program in neoliberal Canada and the implication for completion/ attrition, selection, and implementation funding programs. In addition, the study will demonstrate the intricacies of the financial needs of doctoral students from the sciences and humanities. As Pyhalto et al. (2012) acknowledge:

"Several complementary elements simultaneously influence success in the Ph.D. process. The politics of science and institutional factors, the recruitment system, funding, supervision, knowledge, learning and assessment practices, and personal resources and various aspects of a doctoral candidate's lives matter" (p. 1).

I hope that this narrative inquiry will contribute to creating a space for debate and redress on fundamental issues of high attrition, underrepresentation of demographic groups, variable supervision quality, isolation, frustration, and dire financial need of international doctoral students.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study was undertaken using narrative inquiry. According to Clandinin (2007), "narrative inquiry researchers might share with participants similar experiences that they have had (p. 50). This study will be conducted using narrative inquiry with a participant who will share his lived stories with me. I have chosen to use narrative inquiry based on my ontological position that the reality of storied experiences can be well expressed when similar experiences from other people are used as the benchmark for advancing the essence of your story. My ontology is derived from a constructivist point of view, which underlies the co-construction of reality (Lincoln et al., 2011). The epistemological basis of this collaborative narrative inquiry is to examine the basis of various challenges facing international doctoral students who are not funded and the complexities of their difficulties navigating through rigorous doctoral programs.

Individuals (participants) need to share stories from different perspectives that would reveal the neoliberal underpinning of the funding of higher educational institutions in Canada. The value in telling lived stories from multiple perspectives ensures that readers can be informed about how a particular phenomenon is negotiated from diverse contexts and locations. Narrative inquiry provides an excellent opportunity for people to tell the stories of their lived experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). However, it is a wholly personal and intimate approach to educational research that requires the utmost sense of caring and sensitivity on the researcher's part (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). It is, therefore, necessary for the researcher to be mindful that trust is a critical attribute of narrative inquiry. Josselson (2006) also advises that narrative researchers have an ethical duty to protect the privacy and dignity of those whose lives are studied to contribute to our scholarly fields. She adds that "as a matter of good methodology, the researcher has to be transparent about his/her interests to make a research alliance with the participant" (p. 540). Participants would tell us what they tell us if they trust that their anonymity will be protected.

Narrative inquiry can be conducted to address issues in education (schools) and workplaces. According to Johnson & Christensen (2014), we can use narrative inquiry to address the problems in education like "adolescent drug use, cultural difference in diverse urban school settings, and the achievement gap that separates children raised in poverty from children who are less economically disadvantaged" (p. 384). In addition, narrative research can be used to create a platform to deal with issues of injustice, inequality, and emotional problems in society. This study hopes to use narrative inquiry to investigate and ascertain challenges faced by Ph.D. undergraduate students who are not funded. The perspective of the impact of neoliberalism in higher education would be discussed with the

participant to assist the researcher in understanding the underlying problems a lack of funding caused in the candidates' lives.

Methods

There are several ways by which data can be collected in narrative inquiry. According to Webster & Mertova (2007), "data gathering techniques which inform the narrative sketches or critical events may include surveys, observations, interviews, documentation, and conversation that can enhance the time, scene and plot structures of the critical event" (p. 23). Therefore, the data-gathering instrument for this study is a one-on-one semi-structured interview with my ex-course mate and a literature search from records of my past and present lives. There were eight semi-structured interview questions administered during the interview. The interview lasted for about an hour, and the dialog between the participant and me was audio recorded.

According to Lochmiller & Lester (2017), "narrative research typically involves the collection of in-depth interviews with a participant who has the phenomenon of focus" (p. 109). As indicated above, this study was designed to share personal lived stories/experiences (Lewis & Adeney, 2014) of a participant facing the challenge of funding in his Ph.D. studies. Lochmiller & Lester (2017) also hint that it is not only interviews that can be a source of data in narrative inquiry. The suggested possible sources include a written form of communication, dairies, letters, and to an extent, photo. I used semi-structured questions to find out some in-depth details about the effects of lack of funding on the participants' personal and family life. Such lived experiences can assist in recommending best practices for institutional and students' benefit.

Sampling / Participants' Selection

According to Lewis & Adeney (2014), the recruitment of participants for a narrative inquiry requires that a preliminary relationship be established. Two participants were involved in this study: the researcher and another international student pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Regina. The co-participant is my personal friend, so the fear of power imbalance (power play) is unanswered. The participant was selected through purposive sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam & Tisdell (2015) assert that "purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 77).

I conducted this narrative inquiry with one participant because I believe his lived experience as an international student without funding and stories to share enriched the study. Since this study involves human participants, steps were taken to get ethics approval from the Research and Ethics Board of the

University of Regina and the course instructor. This was to ensure that my study was consistent with ethical standards. Lewis & Adeney (2014) advise that narrative inquirers should be respectful of the stories participants share. Johnson & Christensen (2014) also caution that narrative inquirers should "leave any judgmental baggage home" (p. 385) throughout the research process. I was, therefore, aware of my responsibilities and my role as a researcher.

Data Collection Techniques

As part of the research design, researchers need to decide how data will be collected and design the actual data collection instrument (Marlow & Boone, 2010; & Monette et al., 2011). For example, data may be collected by human observers or interviewers or recorded by electronic gadgets, as in the case of scanner data. Axinn & Pearce (2006) identify surveys, semi-structured or structured interviews, focus groups, observations, and historical or archival research, as some of the more common methods available for collecting data. In this study, the interview method was used to collect data. The researcher had constructive and critical intentions to determine the effects of funding on international Ph.D. students at the University of Regina.

Following these lines of thinking, a qualitative study that critically examines the impact of neoliberal education and its longtime implications for the students, institutions, and the country was investigated, using semi-structured interviews as the primary research approach. Semi-structured interviews give the researcher room to prepare a topic guide or a certain number of questions to be covered with the participant (Polit & Beck, 2008). The interview was undertaken on November 6, 2019. This began with unstructured questions: "Why did you choose to study Ph.D. at the University of Regina?" It was expected that adult students would talk about various topics throughout an extended interview. A face-to-face interview was used to afford the researcher time and space to observe any non-verbal communication (body language and gestures). In addition, it accorded the respondent the opportunity to seek clarification.

One interview was conducted, and provisions were made for any other necessary follow-up interviews to be conducted for this academic research. Due to the availability of the participant and the time frame of this study, I made sure that the interview responses and any non-verbal interactions that took place during the interview were recorded or noted down. The interview consisted of eight (8) open-ended questions, precisely developed for the purpose of the study. The interview was tape-recorded with the permission of the participants to ascertain an accurate account of the interview, which was replayed to the participants for analytic and accuracy purposes. The expected length of the interview was about an hour. The interview was like an informal, friendly academic discussion, and open-

ended questions formulated were used in the process at the research participant's working space (office). Notes were written in conjunction with the audio recording, observation, and casual encounters with the participant. The participant was reminded of his right to withdraw from the study at any given time or terminate the interview before the commencement of the session. A special room graduate lounge was reserved for the interview to ensure participant confidentiality during the interview. The researcher allowed ample time for the participant to reflect and make adjustments where necessary before answering the questions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis of this study can be viewed from two perspectives – my storied life and that of my research participant. Webster & Mertova (2007) suggest that "findings from narrative studies are presented through the narrative in the forms of a scene, plot, character and event sketches related to critical events" (p. 23). Webster and Mertova add that narrative analysis aims to extract the common themes or plots in the data. In analyzing this study, I looked at pieces of information that made the story meaningful, coherent, and acceptable to the audience. Pieces of valuable information in the lived account of the participant were obtained. I also searched the literature and other sources to help develop a holistic view of the problem to inform my findings and recommendations at the end of the study. As James (2017) mentions, the rationale behind analyzing narrative inquiry research is fundamentally about searching for the meaning(s) and making sense of an experience or experiences that we and in a narrative inquiry that includes the researcher have had.

Data from my participant was analyzed through re-storying or retelling (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Lochmiller and Lester state that "re-storying or retelling is the analytical process of gathering the stories told and restructuring them in relation to time, place, plot, and so on" (p. 109). Lewis & Adeney (2014) advise narrative researchers to take time to make a thorough reading of the data gathered to identify "commonalities, connections, and patterns as well as unique moments that stand out" (p. 168). For this reason, I first transcribed the interview responses. After that, I sifted through the transcribed data thoroughly, sentence after sentence to locate essential ideas that make compelling connections with details shared, personal storied life in the introduction section. Those common themes were used as captions in the findings/results section. Memoranda were written while listening to taped interviews, typing transcripts, and reflecting upon the interview. The common themes used in the analysis and interpretation of findings/results section are expressed in the findings.

In this section, I present a comparative discussion of the challenges of international Ph.D. students at the University of Regina without funding from their home countries or the institution with my co-participant. This discussion was presented under the themes, (1) Ph.D. education without funding and the struggles, (2) Neoliberalization and commodification of education experiences with international students and ethnic minorities, impact on those from a poor background, and (3) the challenges of outside campus rigorous part time jobs, lack of jobs on campus, unavailability of study-related jobs. I use pseudonyms to represent myself, and my co-participant in the excerpts shared in this discussion. I represent myself with the letter Q, while the letter O stands for my research participant. The pseudonyms chosen have no relationship with our official names. The discussion demonstrates students' experiences in neoliberal structured higher Education in Canada and its implications for Ph.D. students without funding from their respective countries or institutions.

Before I continue with this discussion, I would like to describe the context within which the interview was conducted and the events prior to the commencement of the interview. By sharing those anecdotes, readers will be able to appreciate the background of this study. As I have already explained in the methods section, my participant was a Ph.D. student who was studying at the University of Regina for almost two years without funding or any on-campus job. His challenges are not that different from mine and several other international students who are caught up in the 'web' of financial struggles and their education. Since the study is a lived experience of the researcher and the participant, it created room for much in-depth discussion and explanation and the way forward for higher education, especially in the education faculty at the University of Regina. The quest to question and advocate a re-look into the trend and trajectories of corporations hijacking higher education was discussed.

The interview was conducted in the office space of the participant. Since we had arranged to interview on that day, my visit to his office did not surprise me. After about 15 minutes of informal, friendly interactions and a snack to set the 'ball rolling,' I gave him the consent form to complete and sign to affirm the ethical standards of the study. He read and signed the form, paving the way for the commencement of the interview. The interview lasted for about an hour. It started at around 6:35 pm. I audio-recorded the interview and later transcribed it. My research participant shared beneficial information to enrich the study. The interview ended successfully with having dived deeply into factors that affect the students and the institution in Ph.D. studies. My study participant expressed his happiness to have taken part in the study. He assured me that he is ever ready to partake in any future study if called upon at any given time. The

FINDINGS/RESULTS

excerpts from the interview under selected themes are presented below:

Ph.D. Studies at the University of Regina and Why?

Ph.D. education in Canada is often rated higher due to its rigorousness and difficulty getting admission. That said, getting admission into any public institution in Canada to undertake Ph.D. studies is often considered a privilege. Many people are turned down for reasons such as the program often designed in a mentored structured form and inadequate supervisors to assist several prospective candidates. It became evident in the interview that my participant and I are both Ph.D. students without funding from our respective countries or the university. Before my offer of admission into the program, I thought that every Ph.D. student at the University had access to funding. I saw the amount of workload on students to perform and achieve specific grades to be eligible to obtain certain benefits like the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR) scholarship, Teaching assistantship, and Research assistantship positions. As I mentioned earlier, both of us are international students without funding and doing non-campus academic and non-academic jobs. However, my research participant mentioned that when he started his master's program at the University three years back, even though he was not fully funded, the amount of money he used to get from the graduate award and other scholarships was enough to keep him glued to his academic work without having to take a part-time job outside the campus. The excerpt below shows his decision to study Ph.D. at the University of Regina:

Q. Okay, all right, thank you very much. So err, can you please share your decision to study at the University of Regina and your struggles with me?

O. Err, if I would remember to err, the main reason I decided to undertake a Ph.D. program at U of R was that I completed my master's here and have already built a positive relationship with the academic staff in the department and colleagues, students. I will say U of R has become my academic home. However, the main struggles I can talk of now are the issues of funding and finding academic-related jobs such as TA, RA, or Fellowship programs on campus. In fact, I have been struggling with having to take part-time jobs and my studies. When I was given the offer to undertake the Ph.D. program, I was so excited about being privileged to be counted among a few in terms of achieving greater height in academia. This is because growing up in Africa, it has always been my dream to be called a doctor. However, when I read my letter of offer and realized that the offer was without funding, I was at a crossroads, as I know the enormity of what Ph.D. studies is all

about, and without funding, that became a huge challenge for me.

It could be perceived from the excerpt that my research participant enjoyed learning at U of R from his master' stage and the kind of bond he has built with the teaching staff and colleague students. He claims that at the master' stage of his study, he did not struggle with funding and having to take part-time jobs off-campus. His views on higher education funding were positive, but when he took up a Ph.D. program without funding, he realized how strenuous it is to combine off-campus physical jobs with his studies. My participant added that those challenges in taking a Ph.D. program without funding create a stressful situation of having to maintain his grades and finances. Unlike others, with full funding from their respective governments or universities, students without funding have to fend for themselves and their families. These often increase stress, attrition, and a long time to complete the program. One important thing that stands out here is that the lack of funding for studying a Ph.D. program creates a challenge for the students in terms of their academic and physical well-being. These views are in accordance with the study by Junor & Usher (2002) that the financial burden on postgraduate students becomes an enormous challenge.

Completion Rate and Times to Completion

It became known in the interview that completion of a Ph.D. program in Canada, especially in the humanities, is often not linear as it takes on average 5-7 years to complete the program, and even with that long time of having to study, the completion rate sits at 50%. Looking at the times of completion and the rate of completion, it becomes evident that funding and the amount of time spent on actual studies could either assist the candidates in completing within a short period as well as the rate of completion. The research participant pointed out that even though the quest for higher education is on the increase among all demographic groups, the issue of funding becomes a barrier. This indicates a neoliberal 'glass ceiling' that prevents others from achieving academic height.

Q. The Next Question is how long are you Anticipating to Finish the Program?

O. Anyway, most often, it is something you may not decide by yourself because there are many things involved and so many factors. Like at this level, one has to do a dissertation, and it goes through different committee members for approval, so it could take more than you expected. Another thing is that sometimes, there are courses you would like to take at certain times to complete the coursework component of the program, and it may not be available during specific semesters. All these prolong the completion years. The way the programs are structured seriously affects the completion time. Like this semester, I planned

to take a course, but the course was canceled at the last minute due to low enrolment. So, the question of completion is something one cannot directly say. With the uncertainty of the completion date coupled with no funding seriously takes a hit on one finance. For example, fees must be paid, accommodation, feeding, and taking care of the immediate and extended family as African culture often demands.

The excerpt above shows the participant's frustration with the non-linear or unstructured way Ph.D. programs are conducted at the university. The disappointment can be seen from the participant's argument of responsibilities and uncertainties. The bureaucratic stages involved in getting the degree done, according to his response, indicate the longer times to completion and the financial strain it takes on Ph.D. students without funding. His facial expressions and other gestures indicate that the situation is dire among international Ph.D. students on study visas who have no access to loans locally or access to a full-time job due to visa restrictions. He was worried that since he did not get any funding, it remains precarious that it would be extremely difficult to complete the program if his time to completion were prolonged. These opinions expressed by the participant affirm the findings by Elgar (2003), stating the financial challenges international students face as their visa restrictions prevent them from taking full-time jobs while studying.

Funding for Students from other Faculties in the Same Institution and Similar Faculties in other Institutions

The fundamental issue of funding has been a challenge in higher institutions since the neo-liberalization and commodification of education. Different departments and institutions are now competing at various levels to attract funding from private and corporate donors in order to be functional. This unequal sourcing of funds sees some departments or institutions having more funding than others do. Hence the disparity of who gets funding or not in various departments and institutions. Through their ideals of solidifying their influence on society, many organizations donate large sums of money to specific institutions and departments like sciences to advance their interest. However, departments such as humanities or social sciences often receive less funding from the corporate world as these organizations see them as unproductive in making profits from their graduate. Moreover, the ideas of social justice, decolonization, equity, fairness, and transparency often advocated for by these departments make them unattractive to the corporations. Therefore, with the limited funding from the government, it is often difficult for the department to provide forms of funding to all its postgraduate students.

Q: What do you think about funding for Ph.D. Students in other Departments like Sciences, Engineering, and Institutions?

O: Yeah, like we already said, lack of funding can make the completion time longer. For instance, a program of 3 years may be completed in 5 -6 years because of having to take jobs outside to sustain oneself. A more extended period to complete a program. Another effect is some good students who may want to pursue a Ph.D. program here may look for other universities that offer funds; I was told about other opportunities in other universities when I was applying for this program here. The only thing that made me stay here is because of the bond I have built here. This will be a turn-off for many bright students who would want to come here to pursue their Ph.D. studies. With regard to the sciences, I think the corporatization of such departments is bringing in funding to support their Ph.D. students. I believe the education faculty should be forming partnerships with organizations to get more funding for their programs. Especially Ph.D. programs, I know they are trying their best, but much still needs to be done. Because lack of funding may lead to students quitting their studies due to high cost, another issue that can crop in is institutional brain-drain; potential students will seek greener pastures in institutions or countries that can offer them funding.

The participant expresses his frustration about the impact lack of funding has on the completion time, and rate in humanities while students from departments such as sciences and engineering Ph.D. students are often fully funded as well as the impact the funding has on their completion rate and time. The issue of sciences being aligned with big business and corporations for money came up in our discussion. The participant also had a notion that maybe the education department is not doing enough in terms of their strategies for enticing big businesses for money to be able to support their students. The issue of lack of funding making the department unattractive to the top and talented students was of concern to the participant. He had the feeling that as an emerging institution like U of R, not having a financial structure that will support Ph.D. students to focus on their studies can create incidences such as higher attrition and lower attendance rate. The participant's opinion on funding in the department is in line with the survey by Saunders (2010) about the impact of neoliberalism as "united by three broad beliefs: the benevolence of the free market, minimal state intervention, and regulation of the economy, and the individual as a rational economic actor" (p. 45). This indicates financial inequality in different departments and institutions of higher learning.

International and Local Ph.D. Students (Financial Burden)

The issue of funding between international and local Ph.D. students often comes up in discussions. According to the institutional structures in Canada, international students usually pay fees and levies higher than local students do. The comparison in terms of financial challenges and the Ph.D. program is because there is the need to have a comprehensive, holistic view of the situation at hand in order not to generalize the main financial challenges and obstacles based on Ph.D. studies. It came to our attention during our discussion. From the literature of the study, on average, almost 80% of Ph.D. students are already employed in full-time positions. Aside from funding from the university, the local students have access to funding from the government or the banks contrary, unlike the international students.

Q: Do you think there are any differences in terms of financial challenges between the local students and the international students who are not funded?

O: Ahmm...anyway I cannot say much because the administration will have to know how many scholarships local and international students should be getting.

Q: Are we in the same boat?

O: that is what I am just trying to unravel, you know Canadian policy is that citizens are often considered first in terms of scholarships or job offers and international students with study permits are last. Most of the time, international students are the last to be considered when it comes to jobs and related financial opportunities. In addition, local students have access to soft loans for their studies, which international students do not. Therefore, I do not think we are on the same boat financially.

From the above interaction, it can be seen that initially, the participant did not quite understand the question leading to his first response. My second question drew his attention to the issue at stake, and he then responded that rather answers the question. The critical thing to note here is that I did not directly make any move or suggestions to indicate his answer was wrong. The follow-up question provided a progressive conversation based on the issue at hand. The participant responses indicated the local and international students' variances without funding. The distinctions made by the participant are in accordance with the statement made by Calder et al. (2016) that universities recruit international students for various reasons, such as generating revenue for neoliberal higher education studies and funding in the global north. Still, the plights of Ph.D. students in terms of funding are often neglected.

Neoliberal Policies of Higher Education in Canada

Higher education in Canada has seen a drastic slice in its funding from the Federal and Provincial governments, which is, directly and indirectly, affecting the manner in which these institutions are run and the impact on the lives of activities and programs that can enhance teaching and learning. The discussion looked at how these budget cuts affect how awards and funding are given to students to assist their education. The concepts of neo-liberalization and corporatization of higher education were interestingly discussed.

Q: In what ways are neoliberal policies in higher education affecting doctoral students funding?

O: Yeah.... My brother, to tell you the truth, I am not a politician, and whether liberals or conservatives spend on higher education will depend on the market. Market factors such as a decrease in the price of oil can affect a country like Canada, which can affect the budget for higher education.

Q: That is true, but what I mean here are capitalistic policies that favor more prominent corporations at the expense of the people, like using the money to buy influence in institutions and government to support their business interests.

O: Actually, when the private sector takes over higher education for their parochial interest, that is dangerous, and the need for a state monitoring role is essential. Organizations helping in funding institutions are part of their corporate social responsibility, and collaborating with governments is not bad. Nevertheless, when there are no mechanisms to monitor the intentions of these institutions, which becomes problematic. As a matter of fact, if they now take control of how institutions should be run, this becomes a challenge for the independence of universities. The parochial interest of the corporations then replaces individual, institutional and societal interests. Such capitalistic advancements should continually be monitored. You know to tell you the truth, the influences of corporations have been creeping into institutions of higher learning faster than we can even imagine. For example, there is an ongoing attempt to limit the academic freedom of professors, tenure in universities is increasingly becoming stressful, and benefits to staff and students are becoming leaner every day. The man let me say that I think it is time for society to speak out and act against corporation greed and unjust advancement. It is disheartening, you know!!!

The above interactions first showed how the participant was not clear about the word neoliberalism. With his first response, he instead spoke about political ideologies of being a liberal or a conservative and how

the behavior of the world economic system can affect government spending on higher education. Nevertheless, looking at the follow-up statement for the clarification of the question, I did not tell the participant what you were saying was wrong. Still, as the interviewer, my role there was to facilitate the whole process. In using such an approach, the participant then understood the question much better and offered insightful comments about the issue and how it will, in the end, affect the autonomy of higher education across the world. His views affirm the study by Shcherbakova & Molodychenko (2018) that "neoliberalism initiates transformative processes at the "core" of universities making this institution similar to factories with the corresponding managerial system (system of certification for teachers, investment policy, and so on) creating an exceptional business environment at educational sphere" (p. 115). The post-colonial and spheres of social life change their own essential principle of activities such as social intervention programs, collaborative development, pro-poor policies to fit the neoliberal metaphor where the underlining agenda of almost all policies and institutions are to serve the interest of the business community at the expense of the people. The excerpt by the participant indicates how a pro-business approach to funding higher education is having an impact on having to develop himself through his means of funding. The idea of adult education in higher institutions has been relegated to the backbench and is replaced with lifelong learning where individuals have to develop themselves.

Final Views of Higher Education Funding

With the boom of many people seeking higher education, the issue of funding and other institutional support is dwindling. This is raising a considerable barrier to those from low-income countries in the global north and south. The policies of charging international students levy on international students, and most institutions are running out of options for funding Ph.D. studies of their students, especially in humanities. It is time to reconsider the government and corporations' role in how higher education could be funded by supporting institutional instruments to provide better education to students and students with specific emphasis on Ph.D. students to get enough funding to support their sustenance through the program.

Q: So, Finally, What Are Your Last Words Based On Our Discussion Today?

O: My final comments and recommendation..... Oh boy, I have already spoken enough but on this critical issue of funding for International Ph.D. students, especially in our university, is for the institution to reach out to a mutual public-private partnership with corporations to raise enough money to be able to assist us with funding. I think there is a lot of money in the system for both rich individuals and

corporations. It is, therefore, necessary for the sectors in charge of students' welfare to seek more information and assist students in being able to apply for these positions. The predicament of not having enough funding will be students and prospective students seeking greener pastures in other institutions or departments that are willing to offer financial assistance.

From the final excerpt above, it is evident that my participant admits that lack of funding can lead to attrition, higher stress level, longer times to completion, and institution or departments becoming less attractive to brilliant and diverse students. This has a short and long-term effect on the institution's reputation as a research hub and the immediate community losing brilliant talent to other provinces and the world. The study by (Horta et al., 2019) added that:

"For universities, there is an interest in having new Ph.D. students, given their potentially high human capital and because, at least in some systems, they also bring funding. In contrast, the accumulation of large numbers of students who, by taking longer than expected, occupy otherwise free slots may be detrimental in those systems where this implies overloading supervisors or leading to the rejection of new candidates. In general, to postpone the Ph.D. date tends to be harmful to the candidate, and potentially may lead to project a negative image for prospective Ph.D. students and funding agencies" (p. 2).

Lack of funding does not only have a negative impact on the Ph.D. students, but the entire process of attrition and longevity of staying in the institution creates a ripple effect for the instructors, the prospective students, and the whole system. It is an undeniable fact that rapid completion of the Ph.D. degree is indicative of a structured system where necessary support is given to the students in the areas of funding and structural assistance.

Limitations

The study was limited by the fact that the participant was my friend and may not have ideally spoken about the issue. Even though using purposive sampling provided room for justification for generalizing from the sample being studied, whether such generalizations are theoretical, analytic, or logical. Such a trend can lead to misinterpretation of what the participant meant during the interview. So purposive sampling, irrespective of the type of purposive sampling used, can be highly prone to researcher bias. The other limitations of the study are the size of the participants. In this study, since only one participant was used, it will be difficult to generalize the findings on funding issues in other departments or institutions and even about the challenges of local students. The other limitations in

this study were the period and the limited focus on funding challenges of international Ph.D. students. Having a smaller sample size, as in this study when only one participant was used, affects the reliability results because it leads to a higher variability, which may lead to bias.

Finally, the participant's views on issues such as neoliberalism and the impact of lack of funding and opportunities for international Ph.D. students were limited to his personal lived experience at the Faculty of Education. That becomes a limitation because other students, such as those in other departments, those with stipends, and those with strong financial backgrounds, were not included in the study. Hence, finding the overall economic challenges of international Ph.D. students at the University of Regina is not possible. The fact that the study only focused on predominantly funding becomes a limitation, as there are many other factors of issues affecting Ph.D. students other than funding.

IMPLICATION/APPLICATION/ CONCLUSION

I have presented details of my findings from my co-participant regarding the issue of funding facing international Ph.D. students at the University of Regina. The research question for this study has been adequately answered. The study shows that international Ph.D. students without funding from their home countries or the institutions they study are often faced with financial trauma leading to attrition, long times to completion, and going home without a degree in certain situations. Furthermore, the study shows that such international students go through stressful experiences due to having to do manual, menial jobs coupled with their studies to survive. I believe this study reveals the different circumstances under which the effect of neoliberal funding strategies for higher education is causing stressful situations for International Ph.D. students.

The study shows that since financial situations play a vital role in the successful and timely completion of Ph.D. studies, money issues can create a glass ceiling against successful completion. Therefore, institutional support in terms of funding should be a priority in addressing international Ph.D. students' challenges as they vie for academic and research excellence. Therefore, I recommend that institutions, key political decision-makers, and big businesses consider assisting Ph.D. students through feasible and adequate financial support for them to focus on their academic and professional development. In addition, I will also recommend that future studies consider having participants from other departments, and more issues other than funding facing Ph.D. students should be investigated.

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