

Chapter 9

Planning, Writing and Defending Doctoral Thesis: Strategies and Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the processes of successfully completing and defending a doctoral thesis. Despite the ever-growing number of candidates registering for doctoral programmes, here is a need to embolden them to fully understand strategies of producing a doctoral thesis and defending it. The chapter focus on six key issues: (1) choosing a research problem (2); reviewing previous literature (3) crafting the methodology (4) results (5) discussions (6) preparing and defending the thesis. The chapter contribution to the field by enabling doctoral candidates to understand ways to navigate the doctoral degree process and completion.

INTRODUCTION

The doctorate is the highest academic degree that a university can award to a doctoral candidate who has successfully completed a defined program of work and research in a particular field of study. The first doctoral degree was granted in Paris in the 12th century (Bourner, Bowden & Laing, 2020). Between the 12th and 19th centuries, doctoral degrees were typically in theology, law, and medicine. The first professional practice doctorate (Doctor of Jurisprudence) was awarded by the College of William and Mary in 1793 in the USA. These degrees were awarded decades

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before the first U.S. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD, from the Latin *Philosophiæ Doctor*) was conferred by Yale University in 1861 (Bourner, Bowden & Laing; 2000). The first English PhD was issued by the University of Oxford in 1920, the same year that Harvard conferred its first “professional doctorate,” a Doctor of Education (EdD). For hundreds of years, the doctorate degree has been held as the upper limit of higher education.

During the early 1990s, the UK doctorate diversified significantly. This shift was driven by the competitive knowledge economy, leading to the launch of professional doctorate programs to respond to demands from industry, professional bodies, and professionals for more relevant forms of learning, skills, and qualifications (Rolfe & Davies, 2009). The professional doctorate has become increasingly popular in several disciplines, including business, health, social sciences, education, and science. Several universities offer doctorates in Education (EdD), Business Administration (DBA), Engineering (EngD), Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy), Public Administration (DPh), and Professional Studies (DProf). Professional doctorates are delivered in part-time mode, and candidates usually have four to eight years to complete the program. These programs vary from research-based to taught programs, including those delivered via distance learning.

Professional doctorate programs are offered in countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, South American countries (e.g., Peru, Chile), the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Gambia, China, India, Indonesia, and several European countries (e.g., France, Monaco, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Ireland, Switzerland). Doctoral research requires identifying a relevant problem, conducting a systematic literature review to identify gaps in the literature, explaining the methodology employed, and demonstrating original contributions to knowledge. While both PhD and professional doctorate research are expected to contribute originally to knowledge, professional doctorate research is more applied and informed by real-world challenges in professional practice. These professional doctorates are becoming increasingly prominent as global education and qualification comparability are needed to promote mobility and strengthen career opportunities. Completing and successfully defending a doctoral thesis often boosts the candidate’s career in their chosen field.

To explain the strategic approach to completing and defending a doctoral thesis.

1. To assist doctoral candidates in understanding the important steps to take when developing their thesis.
2. To suggest ways doctoral candidates should prepare for their viva.
3. To explain the viva process.

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