



Becoming A Doctor: A Collaborative Autoethnography

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Abstract - An educator, to climb up into academic ranking must take a longer route of getting formal education such as master's or doctorate. In this paper, the authors discuss their journey, challenges, and aspirations in taking post-graduate studies like the Doctor of Education (EdD). Using autoethnography as the research design, which allow writers to narrate their personal experiences and used thematic analysis to analyze them. The authors experienced hardship in finding universities that would fit to their need especially that one of them graduated with a non-thesis master's degree. The other author, who is overseas found it also difficult to look for a university that would accept his situation and could offer flexibility in attending the classes due to the time zone difference and workday schedule. While both authors are enrolled in private education financing the studies could be a burden to one of the authors, so he sought support from his employer and agreed to render a service after, while the other one can cover the fees from his overseas job

Keywords: doctorate, higher education, autoethnography, distance education, lifelong learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

This autoethnography is about two students who graduated with master's degree in the Philippines in two different scenarios. Their journey after graduation shows their struggle to find a university to enroll doctorate degree that would suit their current situation.

Getting a doctorate degree can be both an honor and privilege, a lot of opportunities would open to a professional once known to have the degree and especially coming from a well-known university. Thus, in this case as education professionals, many seek to level up the educational qualifications by getting graduate and post graduate degrees. A doctorate degree also puts the individual at par with other peers who only masters or bachelors of the same field, it gives the graduates edge and, an unwritten, authority about the knowledge being presented.

This paper presents the personal journey enrolling into the doctorate program and reasons of choosing the said path including the challenges they must go through to get admitted in a university, this also acknowledges the influence of the pandemic in forming the decisions they respectively made that would better their teaching careers.

The post-graduate education and private education in the Philippines.

According to Commission on Higher Education (CHED) of the Philippines Memorandum No. 15 series of 2019, doctoral programs have two types: (1) Doctor of Philosophy and (2) Doctoral Degree (Professional Track). These terminal programs are both considered as the highest degree of education that can be recognized by the commission.

Based on the said memorandum, the Doctor of Philosophy or commonly known as Ph.D., is a terminal degree which leads the students to a life of scholarship in an academic discipline. Graduates of this program must show the capacity to contribute original research that would push more the frontier



quality of education of the country. Examples of this degree are Ph.D. in Chemistry, Ph.D. in Linguistics among others. On the other hand, the Doctoral Degree (Professional Track) focuses more on the exceptional performance of an individual in his respective profession. This type of terminal degree is parallel to the Ph.D. degree, however, focuses more on practice rather than pure research. Examples of professional degrees are Doctor of Education (EdD), Doctor of Public Administration (DPA), or Doctor of Medicine (MD).

Depending on the universities, these programs can be offered at a minimum of 24 credit units for course work plus 12 units of dissertation to be presented to the panel of experts and published locally. While some universities would require more than the prescribed credits units, usually 60 credit units, other autonomous universities offer the fast track with only 45 or 48 credits units to complete a doctorate degree.

In the Philippines, private higher education institutions (PHEIs) are classified into three categories: regulated, deregulated, and autonomous. Regulated PHEIs are those colleges and universities that are rather have not met the required points to become deregulated or in the process of having their courses accredited by approved agencies by CHED. While deregulated and autonomous universities are given privileges by the CHED because these PHEIs have already achieved the status after rigorous process of evaluation, accreditation, and visits. However, autonomous universities enjoy more benefits as compared to those deregulated.

According to CHED's memorandum 52, series of 2006, autonomous universities are free from monitoring and evaluation by CHED as compared to regulated and deregulated PHEIs. Also, one of the benefits that autonomous universities are enjoying that deregulated PHEIs do not is the freedom to offer new programs both in undergraduate and graduate without securing permission from the commission. They can also open new satellite campuses or

branches without the need of securing permission from the commission if the said campuses would consider all regulations predetermined by CHED. Autonomous universities shall be able to maintain the quality of services they are offering to continuously enjoy the privileges of the status. As of 2020, there are 2,396 private colleges and universities, including satellite campuses in the Philippines. And according to CHED memorandum 7, series of 2021, there are 71 (2.96%) colleges and universities in the archipelago enjoying the autonomous status, while 16 (0.66%) PHEIs are deregulated. Philippines is composed of more than 7,000 islands.

With that in mind, this autoethnography presents our journey to enrolling the Doctor of Education in Educational Management (EdD – EM). The journey may be personal, and readers may view this as bias – hence this is a personal narrative of us about this phenomenon. This paper presents themes: (1) technical and qualification, (2) delivery, (4) challenges, and (5) aspirations in the future.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach in research, specifically autoethnography was utilized to present the data gathered. As an emerging type of post-modern qualitative research, autoethnography allows the authors to write a highly personalized study based on his or her lived experience to be able to extend the understanding of a certain societal phenomenon (Qutoshi, 2015). This type of study focuses on the unique experience of individuals that may validate other people who are experiencing the same phenomenon through personal narratives (Wall, 2008; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010).

As a method, autoethnography incorporates characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. When writing an autobiography, the author purposively selects what he writes about past experiences. Usually, the author does not necessarily live through these experiences but solely to make them part of a published document; instead, these



experiences are collected using hindsight (Núñez, 2021). While ethnographers study one's culture relational practices, values, and beliefs. Their experiences might not be as immersed as the cultural members, but they understood the concept by becoming participants and observers in the culture (Henrich, 2012; Allen, 2015).

Since this is a collaborative autoethnography, the authors and the subject both present their lived experiences that are the same in the nature of the researched topic. Using the thematic approach in analyzing the data, the authors organized their stories in accordance with the themes identified during the interview process (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2016).

2.2. Data Collection

Both authors scheduled a Zoom meeting that met their convenience schedule to talk about the researched topic. With both agreeing on the time, the Zoom meeting was recorded to review the stories that are presented in the autoethnography and be able to present them aligned with each theme. Discussions were in Filipino; therefore, the ideas are now presented in English.

2.3. Limitations and Research Ethics

Since this paper talks about the personal lived experiences of the authors, it only validates those who may experience the same phenomenon, hence the limitation. Both researchers are aware that autoethnography is personal in nature that personal stories and biases can be exposed during the study. Both researchers have agreed to process their stories.

2.4. Participants of the Study

Jayrome Nunez is an expatriate in Saudi Arabia working as trainer/lecturer at a technical higher education institution, he is currently based in Ras Tanura City, a city in the eastern region of the kingdom. He graduated with a Master of Arts, majoring in Educational Management (MA-EM) from Araullo University. Now, he is enrolled in Ed.D. in Educational Management program at National

University Philippines, also an autonomous university as per CHED memorandum 7, series of 2021.

Louie Gula is a junior high school teacher at Saint Joseph College of Maasin. He is based in Southern Leyte. He graduated with a Master of Education, majoring in Physical Education (MEd-PE) at the Visayas State University. He is currently enrolled in his Ed.D. in Educational Management at National University Philippines, an autonomous university as per CHED memorandum 7, series of 2021.

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

During the Zoom call, the authors asked each other about the reasons they decided to push through their EdD degrees, and why they chose it. It has always been a debate about the difference between PhD and EdD degrees, but according to O'Connor (2019), EdD is geared toward assuming leadership roles, while PhD graduates are geared toward being academics or researchers in educational institutions.

Jayrome: "It has always been my childhood dream to be called a "doctor". We know that the medical doctor is the most popular type of doctor, but I could not afford to send myself to medical school. When I took education for my undergraduate, I realized that I really wanted to lead a school or to become an administrator, this is the reason why I am pushing to take EdD which is primarily focused on practice."

Louie: "As for me, when I was attending my master's study, I did not yet have the idea on my mind to pursue a doctoral study since I thought that I am contented already on the current degree I am pursuing. But then somehow as I grew professionally, I started imagining myself graduating with a doctorate title in my name. I took EdD based on the inclination of my master's degree program (M.Ed.) which belongs to the professional track. I originally wanted to pursue a Ph.D. with a major in Physical Education to strengthen my knowledge more in the practice of teaching and development of research studies that focus on my field of expertise."



In the beginning of the talk, both participants shared their reasons on choosing private education than government of public education.

Jayrome: "One of the reasons I choose private education is efficiency of the processing of admission. I remembered very well when I took my diploma degree in a state university, it took me almost four months before receiving feedback if got in or not. Aside from that, PHEIs also responses quickly in my concerns. Though the tuitions fees are way higher than public universities, I am sure that I will be guided properly in my journey in contrast to SUC (State University or College) would bury me in bureaucracy for many years before finishing a degree. Also, since my university is autonomous, I am confident that the quality of education I am receiving is competitive."

Louie: "I have always considered the requirements needed in a university prior to admission as my basis on choosing PHEI that will not somehow impede the progress in processing. I studied in a public school from my primary education up until I reached the master's level, and so I was thinking of trying to enroll in a private university. Based on my studies too, I have found out that private universities can set their rules based on the convenience of the students if they reach a certain standard like an autonomous title for the school. Lastly, I was considering the program as well offered by a university."

In terms of popularity, according to Dowd (2017), PhD is more popular than EdD because of it's difficult to obtain and the load of work that students would have to undertake to get it (Nunez, Barnachea, Gula, Jabagat, & Urbano, 2022). But why did we still choose to take EdD?

Jayrome: "I know that PhD is more mainstream than EdD especially in the Philippines, but I want to inform you and those who are reading this that regardless of what you got it is a terminal degree, meaning the highest form of education one could get. I still chose this because I like it and only very few universities offer this course. As we said, PhD is so mainstream, I

wanted to be unique, and I really wanted to become an administrator of a higher education. Therefore, I chose to enroll at BU because their courses are relevant and focused on management, especially in higher education."

Louie: "In terms of popularity, I personally assessed that PhD is the usual degree attained by my professors and on the seminars, I have attended and because of this, somehow it influenced me to pursue it as well. However, considering on the screening stage of my master's program, I do not have a choice but to continue with EdD. When I browsed articles regarding the differences of both degrees, I started to get enlightenment as to how EdD is at par with the other degrees and is not lesser than what I have imagined. I have understood also that they were meant to be on a separate purpose because of its task delegation. I have realized that when I am going to pursue EdD, it is always expected that I may be assigned to an administrative office which is contrary to what I wanted to."

Continuing the discussion, the authors got to the part where they discussed the challenges, they encountered looking for a university to enroll in. Because of Louie's non-thesis program, he had difficulty of finding a university to enroll in because they did not want to admit a graduate of the said program.

Louie: "I could still remember the stress and pressure I experienced when I was informed by my former professors that enrolling in an EdD program would require a thesis in a master's program. Considering my M.Ed. which is a non-thesis program, that's the time I started to panic of finding a university that would accept me. Many universities would reject my application because of this or if they would consider me, I need to take extra credit hours or write a master's thesis so I could enroll to their doctorate program."

"Because of my frustrations, I made a table listing all the universities which fall onto the criteria based on my convenience. When I found one, it wasn't so easy



as well to convince the graduate school. Thankfully, I have currently published papers, and it so happens that it's part of their policy, that is the time that they have considered my admission."

Jayrome: "After I graduated with my master's degree in the pandemic outbreak, I immediately looked for a university that would continue to offer doctoral degrees even at a distance. Being an OFW, I got very limited option but to enroll back in the Philippines as majority of the universities conduct their classes face-to-face. Enrolling here abroad could be costly because I am considered as international student. The pandemic opened a chance for me to pursue my doctorate even though I am so far. Though, some universities I contacted have distance mode, they mentioned that the online or distance setup would just be temporary, and they would immediately return to f2f once the restrictions are lifted."

As both authors get deeper to the discussions, they came to one of the challenges of attending the doctorate degree. Louie lives in the southern Philippines, while Jayrome is overseas. The pandemic has opened opportunities to learners to continue their studies at a distance (Nuñez & Cuisia-Villanueva, 2021) because of the limitations of movement and big gatherings. They also talked about the amount or fees required of the studies:

Louie: "My problem does not stop with the issue of a non-thesis program. It expands on a wider scope when a pandemic has brought schools to closure. I had to find a university that assures me to continue its distance learning, trimester, cheaper, and whether the school accepts my on-hand documents. I even made a table that will comprehensively identify all aspects of my decision-making. When I found a private university, I thought of looking for a sponsor for my studies. I tried to inquire about the admin of the school where I am affiliated to help me fund my studies, thankfully they have approved my request and they promised to shoulder all the academic-related expenses, in

exchange for a return service with 1-year service per semester."

Jayrome: "Being an overseas worker, one of the challenges I faced since I left our country was about getting my degree and upgrading my academic degrees. I graduated my bachelor's degree in 2010 and only got my master's a decade after. It was only because of the pandemic that all schools were forced to offer their programs at a distance. Now, that the scare of the pandemic is subsiding, restrictions are lifted, and schools are welcoming back students in the classroom, so my worry is that maybe I couldn't continue my EdD anymore."

"Fortunately, my prayers are heard, my graduate school decided to continue offering their classes at a distance. I would not let this opportunity past me again. In addition, enrolling doctorate at a private university is not cheap for a regular teacher who receives payment average 300–450 USD a month so while I am earning here abroad, I could support myself. Anyway, payments can be done online. The pandemic has allowed life-long learners like me to pursue higher education despite geographical distance from my university. The only challenge I need to deal with for now is attending the synchronous classes, because Philippines and Saudi Arabia have five-hours difference. I need to wake up 3:00 AM to attend my 8:00 AM class in the Philippines, but that's okay."

The authors discussions went deeper as they talk about their future should they be able to complete their respective program.

Louie: "My mind now is really fixated on finishing my doctorate study as soon as possible. After I graduate, I have decided to continue writing research papers related to my field of expertise and developing more ideas in teaching practice. I am also planning to help my school in advancing its level of accreditation status after I gain experience and enough knowledge. Soon, I hope too that I would be able to help the school in opening in-demand programs."



Jayrome: "I am looking forward to finishing my degree because by that, I would be the first in both my families (father and mother sides) to get the terminal degree. It would bring pride to my family, and I could inspire more of my relatives back home to strive more and get higher education. In addition, I am also planning to settle and find a good employment anywhere in our country. I think it should not be difficult anymore with a doctorate degree. Aside from this, inshallah, if I have another chance, I would love to take another master's or doctorate degree which focuses on research and development because I really want to be good in this field and be able to contribute to the body of knowledge."

4. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the finding, the two participants are situated from two different geographical locations. Louie resides in the southern part of the country and Jayrome is currently working overseas. The pandemic allowed the authors to continue their studies amidst the distance and in case of Jayrome, the time zone. Louie enrolled to EdD program because his master's degree is a professional track which is a non-thesis track, and it must be aligned to a doctorate degree in the professional track as per the requirement of the university he enrolled in. In relation to his master's degree, the university allowed him to enter the EdD program without taking additional credit units or writing master's thesis because of his remarkable accomplishments in publishing research articles in different international programs. Meanwhile, Jayrome graduated with a thesis, he however really wanted to pursue leadership role in an educational institution, hence getting his master's degree in educational management.

The authors encountered challenges in looking for institutions to enroll because of the gradual lifting of restrictions of PHEIs which would require students to study face-to-face. Given the situation, Louie lives in the southern Philippines and currently enrolled in a university in capital, Metro Manila. The pandemic

allowed him to enroll and continue at the distance mode because his university's autonomous status which gives it privilege to continue the said modality. Jayrome, on the other hand can pursue his program at a different autonomous university because of the flexibility that the PHEI offers to the students including those overseas. With its status, Jayrome's university was able to accommodate him and attend synchronous classes every Saturday using Zoom and asynchronous LMS.

Furthermore, as it is a public knowledge that private education in any country cost way more than government educational institutions. Louie was able to send himself into PHEI with the help of his school. They made an agreement that the school would finance his studies provided that a service would be rendered after graduation. It mentioned that for every semester spent on a study is equivalent to one year of return service. Therefore, Louie's EdD program could be finished in five terms (45 credit units) which would equal to five years of return service. Jayrome on the other hand, could support himself because of overseas work salary could relatively cover the fees required by his institution. His program consists of 45 credit units which are way more than the recommended by the commission. His program is targeted to be finished in seven terms. With the amount ranging from 500 – 700 USD per semester to study doctorate degree in an autonomous university, the authors still opted to enroll because of the efficiency and conveniences of these universities in delivering services, such as fast track doctorate degree, online payments, email domain services, and learning management systems.

It can be concluded that the authors encountered different challenges in enrolling to their respective doctorate programs. The pandemic has opened opportunities for these lifelong learners to pursue their post graduate studies at a distance. With the fast-pace technological development and adaptation of institutions lifelong learners all over the world can access education at their fingertips.



Taking doctorate degree is a sure step in achieving a higher rank in the academic institution one is affiliated to, it would give them an edge for a fast promotion and pay increments. Education is an investment, so paying a private education provider could cost an arm and leg to an ordinary Filipino employee, but there are ways in which arrangement can be done so the student could get support from the employer.

The advent of the pandemic opened wider options for overseas Filipinos to access educational institutions which are traditionally offer only face-to-face programs. It allowed them to have other choices other than public open or distance universities which would take longer years before a student could finish a degree.

Autonomous universities in the Philippines enjoy more freedom in offering courses that would fit to the needs of the time which allow them to be flexible in their degree offerings. With vivid academic requirements from the CHED to complete a program, autonomous universities may opt to fast-track their curricular services provided that it still aligned with the recommended number of credit units.

After rigorously recalling the participants' journey through EdD, they recommend that other autonomous PHEIs to be more flexible and exercise their privilege to be able to offer better and efficient services to students from different parts of the Philippines or to those abroad. PHEIs should take into consideration those who graduated with non-thesis masters' degrees lessen the burden in requiring them bridging courses or writing a thesis to get admitted to their doctorate program. Nothing was mentioned in CHED memoranda about requiring them to accomplish additional requirements.

Educational administrators can use this narrative in order for them to improve their efficiency in offering academic services and reaching more learners globally. This will allow them to widen their understanding about the plight of learners trying to get hold of a degree at the most convenient and

accessible way possible. The aid of technological advancements would surely be a factor, but the policies and regulations play big roles in the process.

Future researchers and autoethnographers could use this paper as an anchor or reference on their ongoing study because it is a real validation of experience in a particular phenomenon. Autoethnography is an emerging type of research that validates other people's experience through the author(s) narratives.

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The authors did not receive any monetary funding from any individual or organization in the conduct of this study. In addition, there were no conflicts arose or recorded upon the onset of the autoethnography.

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