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To be finished but not on time - Doctoral students' reflections on the PhD journey

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Many doctoral students finish their PhD studies on time. However, many doctoral students do not complete their studies or do not complete their studies on time for number of reasons (Haven, 2023; Polkinghorne et al. 2023; Burman, 2018). In the Swedish context, doctoral positions at higher education institutions are paid positions for a period of four years or five years if teaching is included in their doctoral position. Doctoral students find themselves as students and teachers which may involve stress and burnout (Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2023). Further consequences of the pandemic may have impact on doctoral students (Dahlgren, 2023). For doctoral students who do not finish their thesis on time, many often return to a teaching position at their institution and complete their studies in their free time. The aim of this paper is to explore and analyse doctoral students' reflections on their PhD journey. Two research questions were posed: 1) How do doctoral students describe the support they received during their PhD journey and 2) How can these challenges and possibilities be understood as a model to support doctoral students whose PhD journey takes more time? In this small pre-study, two doctoral students were interviewed. Semi-structure interviews were conducted with the doctoral students within three months after their dissertations. The challenges were seen in time to focus on writing, support in writing and structuring the capstone over an extended period of time.

Changes in supervisors were also noted as a process which in some cases extended their doctoral journey.

Possibilities which provided support for these doctoral students were seen in collegial support,

support from department heads and other researchers and teachers. Doctoral colleagues were also an important part of the support to continue doctoral studies and complete their doctoral work, and more support in seminars and dialogue with senior researchers would have been beneficial. The preliminary results of this study show that these doctoral students experienced support throughout their doctoral journey. More research is needed to ascertain if and when further support could have been given, as well as if this support would have had impact on the length of their doctoral journey. The research contribution could be of interest for doctoral students and supervisors, as well as institutions who support doctoral students nationally and internationally.

References:

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