



ACADEMIC ADVISING AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AGREEMENTS A Retrospective Comparative Study on Retention and Success in a Doctoral Program

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KEYWORDS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine and compare the retention and graduation rates of students in a doctoral program in Education that holds collaboration agreements with institutions in Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. Results reveal that the number of years to graduate from the program averaged 7.7 years. Seventy-five percent of the participants from Colombia graduated within four years, whereas 75% of participants in the Dominican Republic graduated within 6.7 years. Findings also highlight the importance of program support from academic advising personnel to assist doctoral students in completing their degrees on time.

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Introduction

Many US higher education institutions (Henceforth, HEIs) partner with institutions abroad to develop international collaboration agreements that allow students to get US degrees in their native language and home country. An international collaboration agreement is a written document that includes the terms and procedures of cooperation between a university in the United States and an institution abroad. Several students who enroll and start an academic program drop out from the institution before completing an undergraduate or a graduate degree. The increased attrition rates of doctoral students have been a significant challenge for higher education (Garuth, 2015). The research literature shows that about 40% to 60% of doctoral students drop out of their program of study (Garuth, 2015; Prieto, 2019). However, it is essential to note that between 2001 and 2018, the number of doctoral degrees conferred increased in the fields of education, from 6,300 to 12,800 degrees, an increase of 103% (National Center for Education Statistics & Institute of Education Sciences, 2020). Students who are part of international agreements follow a cohort model, where they may take coursework together over multiple semesters. Institutions must implement a support system for the collaboration agreement students to aid with persistence and retention.

Completion of a doctoral degree can be an intimidating experience for many students. Colleges and universities have developed services and intervention programs to keep students and reduce attrition rates (Seidman, 2012). Hence, academic advising is a service offered by many HEIs to assist students to succeed in their academic and professional careers. Advising is progressively being seen as a tool for promoting and positively influencing student retention and success (Cuseo, 2019; Swecker et al., 2013). The terms academic advising, student retention and success are frequently used together in higher education (Cuseo, 2019). Various research studies have shown a positive relationship between academic advising and student success and retention

(Swecker et al., 2013). Academic advising is a service that should help improve students' retention and increase graduation rates. Retention is present when students remain active in school until they finish a degree program (Hagedorn, 2012). The key to an effective academic advising model is to find the problems early and direct the students to the right resource, always considering that each student has a unique situation (Argüello, 2020). There are various styles or types of academic advising used depending on each individual's situation. The advising styles used for this study were proactive and prescriptive advising which involve the advisor connecting with the doctoral students before they struggle by telling them what to do. Proactive advising helps with relationship building, a critical element that leads to success and retention (Kalinowski Ohrt, 2016). Unfortunately, very little literature exists on the practice of academic advising on students that are part of international collaboration agreements, and no published literature was found that explores the relationship between retention and graduation rates of doctoral students that are part of international collaboration agreements.

Higher education institutions in the United States that offer collaboration agreements in other countries, usually deliver the courses in a hybrid or blended format. There is a central location in the country where the students typically live and work. The learners convene for an intensive weekend of face-to-face instruction, and the rest of the course is offered through synchronous and asynchronous online education. The faculty members travel from their home country to the international site location to deliver the course. These instructors are bilingual and offer the courses in the student's native language. Furthermore, these programs receive the support of a local field associate employed by the US institution, that assists with the recruitment, admission process, registration issues, and serves as an intermediary between the student and the university.

A doctoral program in Education for non-traditional students from a private, not-for-profit university in South Florida is the initial case study. This doctoral program uses a cohort

model for the international collaboration agreement students, organizing them according to the student's initial term of enrollment. For this study, the researcher conducted a comparative retrospective analysis of completion time, based on academic status (retention) and graduation rates (success) from a total of 17 different cohorts that were part of collaboration agreements between the institution in South Florida and various institutions in Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, from 2009 to 2016. These cohorts were studied because the researcher was their academic advisor during that period. The Doctor of Education program is designed for non-traditional learners with careers and multiple responsibilities of work, school, and family. Although the doctoral program is designed to be completed in three years, the allotted time to finish it is eight years from the initial time of enrollment. The study reveals that there was retention and success in the program across the three countries - Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic - because the completion time was between three to seven years, from the initial enrollment to graduation. The dropout rates were significantly low across the three countries. Academic advising may have been a contributing factor of support to promote retention and success in these cohorts.

Literature Review

International Collaboration Agreements

Colleges and universities worldwide are trying to find out how to best prepare their students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in a globalized world (Helms, 2015). Internationalization is a significant occurrence of great interest to HEIs (Marinoni, 2019). Internationalization can be defined as an intentional process to enhance higher education and research quality and excellence. Internationalization needs to serve societal needs. Each HEI should find its means of internationalizing (IAU, 2020). According to Marinoni, over 90% of HEIs surveyed in the 2019 IAU's fifth Global Survey mentioned internationalization in their mission or strategic plan. Many public and private HEIs in the United

States are constantly seeking international university partnerships with overseas institutions. These partnerships may include collaborative research, student and faculty exchanges, curriculum development, cooperative agreements, or memorandums of understanding, and professional development (Leng, 2016).

Higher Education Institutions seek new avenues to increase student enrollment, and one way to do it is by reaching out to international markets. Many disciplines are becoming more international in scope and seek opportunities for faculty research collaboration on global issues (Helms, 2015). According to the American Council of Education's (henceforth, ACE) 2017 Mapping Internationalization on US Campuses survey, nearly 44 percent of reporting institutions showed they started developing international partnerships or expanded the number of partnerships since 2014. ACE's 2017 Mapping Survey highlights the following results regarding international collaboration and partnerships:

- Nearly 40% of the surveyed institutions have a formal strategy for developing institutional partnerships or are developing this strategy.
- Thirty percent of institutions employ a staff member whose primary responsibility is to develop institutional partnerships. This strategy is more common in institutions that offer masters and doctoral programs.
- Nearly 40% of the respondents have guidelines for developing, approving, and assessing new and existing partnerships.

There are different types of international agreements. The most common ones include student exchange program agreement, affiliation agreement, international postgraduate cooperative agreement, research agreement, and dual degree program agreement. Helms (2015) synthesized two significant categories with themes to identify areas of convergence and best practices when developing international partnerships. The two categories include program administration and management and cultural and contextual issues. The themes for the program administration and management category are (a) transparency and accountability, (b) faculty and staff engagement, (c) quality

assurance, (d) strategic planning and the role of institutional leadership. The following are the themes for the category of the cultural and contextual issue (a) cultural awareness, (b) access and equity, (c) international and human capacity building, and (d) Ethical dilemmas and "negotiated space."

ACE's 2017 Mapping Internationalization on US. Campuses survey also shows that European and Asian countries are at the forefront of current collaborations regarding geographic focus. The top countries for partnership and collaboration expansions include China, South Korea, India, Vietnam, Japan, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Brazil, and Mexico (ACE, 2017). While many HEIs seek international students to attend their home campus, other institutions seek their international through programs for students that live abroad. This type of collaboration is mainly seen in graduate degrees offered for non-traditional students (e.g., working professionals with family responsibilities). Some of these collaborations involve an institutional partner abroad, while others operate independently. These programs often rely on technology since most of them are offered either entirely online or in combination with in-person instruction (ACE, 2017). The programs from the international agreements need to rely on support systems and constant communication to promote persistence, retention, and success among international students.

Academic Advising

Academic advising is a service offered by many higher education institutions to serve better and assist the students. Although advising is a relatively new profession, it has always been a part of higher education (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). From the philosophical point of view, academic advising is based on pragmatism, an American philosophical movement founded by C. S. Peirce and William James, where "through academic advising, experiences are translated, and the consequences of action are examined, embraced, or discarded in relationship to the individual's current beliefs and future dreams" (Kimball & Campbell, 2013, p. 4). Pragmatism has its roots in actions founded on beliefs. These

actions lead to consequences, and these consequences reform beliefs (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). From a sociological standpoint, academic advising extracts from the interactionist theory, where individual views are strengthened or changed through interactions with other people (Kimball & Campbell, 2013).

According to Zhang et al. (2019), advising positively relates to students' success and retention. The advising literature suggests that an effective advising model can help promote student retention and reduce dropout rates (Backhus, 1989). Academic advising is considered a systematic and developmental process that involves a relationship between an academic advisor and a student to facilitate problem-solving, resource identification, and goal setting in the learner's academic and professional life (Swecker et al., 2013). Academic advising helps advisees clarify their beliefs, values, and experiences to accomplish their goals (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). Furthermore, advising contributes to the students' satisfaction, persistence, and success in their academic careers (Folsom et al., 2015). Academic advisors should (a) adopt different approaches and strategies when having a conversation with a student; (b) teach students to find helpful academic resources, decide, and solve problems; (c) help the students create pathways to their academic goals; (d) foster the advisor-advisee relationship and develop strong communication skills; (e) be knowledgeable about the different academic programs, policies, and procedures; and (f) monitor the students' academic progress (Argüello, 2020; Drake et al., 2013; Folsom et al., 2015).

Kimball and Campbell (2013) consider academic advising as "an intentional process shaped by several ways of thinking about students" (p. 4). As a result, advisors must apply the best advising type or approach depending on the advisee's major, degree level, and situation. Some of the most common advising approaches include (a) developmental advising, (b) prescriptive advising, (c) appreciative advising, (d) proactive advising, (e) learning-centered advising, (f) strengths-based advising, and (g) group advising, among others (Argüello, 2020; Drake et al., 2013). Advisors can use different

advising approaches or use the method that best suits the situation. Advisors also refine their techniques in conversations with colleagues and interactions with students (Kimball & Campbell, 2013). Academic advisors work with a variety of students. As a result, they need to consider and understand the unique characteristics of a student. Advisors need to recognize cultural barriers and the needs of international and minority students (Archambault, 2016).

Over the last decade, many colleges and universities have been struggling with low enrollment and high attrition rates, especially at the graduate level. Academic advisors can play an essential role in promoting student retention and success to attract and retain graduate students, especially at the doctoral level. Most of the institutions that offer postgraduate degrees have faculty in charge of advising the candidates. Proactive advising (known initially as intrusive advising) is an approach or strategy that can help engage the students in purposeful discussions (Ohrablo, 2017). Proactive advising promotes relationship building, a crucial component that helps students succeed in their degree program (Kalinowski Ohrt, 2016). Moreover, in this approach, the advisor becomes involved with the advisee from an academic and holistic perspective (Varney, 2013). This type of advising also shows the advisor's ability to communicate degree completion requirements and give clear and accurate academic guidance (Kalinowski Ohrt, 2016). Besides building relationships, proactive advising promotes trust, knowledge, clear communication, and care. In this advising approach, proactive advisors are the ones who start the contact with the students, especially at critical points during their program of study (Poynter Jeschke et al., 2001). Proactive advisors can identify students who need enrollment and registration assistance, offer help and resources to students to avoid potential problems, and teach strategies and skills to students to engage with the institution (Varney, 2013). Proactive advising uses some characteristics of prescriptive academic advising, such as experience, structured programs, and awareness of student needs (Varney, 2013).

The other non-intrusive approach, prescriptive advising, is quick and efficient.

Advisors using a prescriptive approach primarily advise students on course selections and other requirements for their majors. When using this approach, advisors do not engage students in a conversation regarding their short- or long-term goals but rather answer students' immediate questions (Poynter Jeschke et al., 2001). Prescriptive advising relies heavily on technology rather than on live contact with an advisor. Students can download their transcript, program requirements, and receive advice in the format of email communications and Frequently Asked Questions documents (Poynter Jeschke et al., 2001). The prescriptive advisor is authority-based and advisor-dominated (Gravel, 2012). Using a combination of proactive and prescriptive advising with doctoral students may help increase retention and success.

Retention and Success

Retention can be defined as remaining in college or university until completing a degree (Hagedorn, 2012). In the literature about retention, we can find the terms *persistence* and *retention* used interchangeably. The significant difference is that *persistence* is a student-initiated decision, while *retention* is from the institutional perspective (T. G. Mortenson, 2012). Most of the retention research focuses on the first year of college and undergraduate students (Hagedorn, 2012); however, recently, more attention has been given to graduate retention. Hagedorn (2012) identifies at least four types of retention: institutional, system, in the major, and a particular course. Retention is being considered an outcome of well-delivered services (Backhus, 1989). According to Drake (2011), three critical elements work in student retention: (a) the value of connecting the student early on to the HEI through learning support systems, (b) the support from faculty and staff, and (c) solid academic advising.

Kalsbeck (2013) offers the 4 Ps framework that can be used at the institutional level to promote strategies for student retention and success. The 4 Ps framework is "a construct for reframing the retention discussion in a way that enables institutional improvement by challenging some conventional wisdom and prevailing perspectives that have characterized

retention strategy for years" (Kalsbeck, 2013, p. 6). The 4 Ps approach focuses on profile, progress, process, and promise. The profile refers to graduation rates, which are institutional attributes. Progress is the attribute of successfully completing the degree. The process is the force that institutions need to focus on for a retention strategy. The promise focuses on the student outcomes that are part of the institution's purposes and brand promise (Kalsbeck, 2013).

Doctoral student success includes retention and completion rates and the program's ability to produce effective scholars in the field (Bagaka's et al., 2015). At the doctoral level, the term attrition is more commonly used to describe the dropout or departure of the candidates (Tinto, 1993). Research on attrition rates at the doctoral level is not as substantial as it is at the undergraduate level. Attrition rates for postgraduate students studying for academic or professional degrees continue to surpass 50% for face-to-face programs (Rigler et al., 2017; Twale, 2015) and 50-70% for online doctoral programs (Rigler et al., 2017), causing a significant problem for higher education (Garuth, 2015). Besides the high attrition rates, some researchers note that the time to complete their doctoral degree has increased (Bowen & Rudenstine, 2014). Many postgraduate students who start their academic program drop out before completing their degree because they do not feel satisfied with the faculty, their advisor, or the work involved (Twale, 2015). Causing them, as a result, significant financial losses, and emotional burdens (Miller, 2013).

Lake et al. (2018) examined retention and graduation rates for doctoral programs that used a cohort model based on the initial time of enrollment at a Mid-Atlantic university. This qualitative study found that the program's success was because of the faculty encouragement, the cohort model, self-motivation, and program structure. Completing doctoral degrees can be exhausting and challenging because of different factors, such as time spent away from friends and family and other personal, professional, or financial matters (Maddox, 2017). Rigler et al. (2017) analysed 79 studies related to doctoral attrition and

persistence to explore the reasons for partition among doctoral students, and the four reasons that emerged are: (a) dissertation committee management and chair-candidate relationship; (b) candidate socialization and support systems; (c) candidate preparedness; and (d) financial considerations. Some of these challenges that doctoral students currently face may be reduced by enhancing the research and cooperative skills and creating a more effective relationship between the dissertation committee and the candidate.

According to Garuth (2015), it is vital to provide support to international, non-traditional, and minority doctoral students, which involves encouragement, compassion, collaboration, and friendship. In summary, the high attrition rates of doctoral students create damaging consequences for the institution and the student. Consequently, providing a support system for the doctoral student that is part of a cohort model, should include (a) a new student orientation session, (b) an assigned academic advisor and mentor, (c) academic support activities, (d) mental health services, and (e) a dissertation committee that guides the student accordingly.

The Cohort Model

The literature presents various definitions of a cohort. Lawrence (2002) defines a *cohort* as a "small group of learners who complete an entire program of study as a single unit" (Lawrence, 2002, p. 83). Ferguson and Brown (2019) define a *cohort* as "students working collaboratively together as a group or unit and is a common organizational structure in many professional post-secondary programs" (p. 96). Researchers suggest that a cohort model can reduce student isolation, foster a sense of community and collaboration, promote overall student support, and increase retention (Ferguson & Brown, 2019; Fifolt & Breaux, 2018; Lawrence, 2002).

Cohort models are effective in educational programs that offer international collaboration agreements because they are an effective way of keeping students on track and monitor their progress throughout the program of study (Ferguson & Brown, 2019). These cohorts usually comprise 10 to 25 students that share similar academic and professional backgrounds.

These learners typically are pursuing a graduate degree that lasts over 18 months (K. G. Mortenson & Sathe, 2017). The cohort model can be offered in a traditional, online, or blended formats. Although the cohort model may provide benefits for the institution and the students, one challenge it presents is that if the learners want to complete the program at their own pace or they encounter difficulty in one semester, this may hinder their academic progress. Cohorts develop close bonds and a greater sense of interpersonal connections among the students, the faculty, and the staff because of the time spent working together and interactions in and outside the classroom (K. G. Mortenson & Sathe, 2017).

Methodology

The study was conducted at a higher education institution in South Florida. The institution offers a variety of programs at the undergraduate, graduate, professional, and doctoral levels. For this investigation, the researcher conducted retrospective comparative data analysis of existing de-identified archival academic records of students from the Doctor of Education program offered through collaboration agreements in three specific countries—Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. The enrollment years for the cohorts under study ranged from 2009 to 2016, although the university continues to enroll and graduate students from these cohorts and countries. These cohorts were studied because of the institution's significant number of international agreements with other higher education institutions in Latin America, the substantial number of enrolled students in the doctoral program in Education, and the researcher's access to student records since she was their academic advisor during that time.

The research questions that framed this study were:

RQ1: How long did doctoral students from collaboration agreements in Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic take to complete their degree based on their academic status?

RQ2: Is there a difference between the number of years to graduation across the three

countries -Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic -?

Program Description

The Doctor of Education (EdD) program at the private, not-for-profit university in South Florida is offered through the College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. The EdD is designed for adult practitioners and leaders of organizations in the field of education and related areas. The institution of higher education in South Florida is highly recognized nationally and internationally for its experience and collaboration in providing high-quality graduate educational programs. The International Program's office of the College of Education has signed multiple collaboration agreements with institutions of higher education in Latin America and other parts of the world to offer the hybrid EdD. The parties collaborate to make possible a series of initiatives that will improve education in that country. The doctoral program implements a cohort model for the courses offered with the collaboration agreement countries. Students meet online and one weekend in a central location for each class, every term, for three years. Students work on their dissertation with a dissertation committee electronically and virtually. Although the EdD program is designed to be completed in three years, doctoral students are allotted eight years from the initial term of enrollment to meet all degree requirements. An additional two years of extension may be granted with an approved dissertation proposal. The EdD program has eight different concentrations, and students must select one concentration area. If the students do not complete their dissertation within the three years, they need to register for Continuing Dissertation Services every term until the dissertation has been officially approved.

For this study, the researcher analysed the retention and success of the doctoral program in three countries in Latin America -Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. The concentrations offered in a blended format in these countries include Higher Education Leadership (HE), Instructional Leadership (IL), Instructional Technology and Distance Education (ITDE), and Organizational Leadership (OL).

Each concentration had between 66 to 69 credit hours, and the program was offered in Spanish. During 2009 and 2016, the College of Education signed four collaboration agreements with institutions in Colombia, eight collaboration agreements with different institutions in Mexico, and five collaboration agreements with the Dominican Republic. Some standard clauses of the collaboration agreements include:

- The EdD with the respective concentration follows the curriculum, academic, and administrative guidelines of the institution in South Florida, adapting, as much as possible, to the educational needs of the society in Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic.

- The HEI in South Florida: (a) appoints persons who will direct at administering the program, both academically and administratively; (b) manages de curriculum of the EdD and its implementation; (c) provides the support so that participants can meet the academic requirements in a timely manner; (d) maintains the academic standards of the accrediting agencies; (e) sets the amounts to be paid by the participants for enrollment, services, and any other student fee; (f) designates a local representative who will assist in the organization and administration of the program; and (g) assumes all costs of transportation by air and/or land, hotel, food, and honorariums of the faculty.

- The HEI in Colombia, Mexico, or the Dominican Republic: (a) provides a suitable infrastructure and technological support; (b) promotes the program internally and recruits the students; (c) collects from students and makes

stipulated payments to the U.S. institution; (d) assures that the offered curriculum does not infringe on the legal rules and regulations of the country; and (e) provides support of the program and collaborate in all other activities within reason.

- The doctoral candidates in Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic handle the procedures and costs associated with the validation of the degree obtained.

Participants and Sample

For this study, de-identified retrospective data of students enrolled in a Doctoral program from the College of Education and School of Criminal Justice that offers collaboration agreements with institutions in Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic were retrieved. The specified time for the analysed data was for seven years, between the Fall 2009 term and the Fall 2016 term, which are the years when the researcher was the students' academic advisor. The number of participants was 378 doctoral students from Mexico, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic, who were enrolled in the Doctor of Education programs during the selected timeframe. From the total number of participants, approximately 63 participants were from Colombia, 147 participants were from Mexico, and 168 participants were from the Dominican Republic. Table 1 shows the breakdown of doctoral cohorts per country, the concentration of study, the initial term of enrollment, and the estimated completion term of three years.

Table 1
Breakdown of Doctoral Cohorts per Country, Concentration, Initial Term of Enrollment, Estimated Completion Term of Three Years

Country/Cohort	Concentration	Initial Term of Enrollment	Three-Years Completion Term*
Colombia			
Colombia 1	ITDE	Fall 2009	Summer 2012
Colombia 2	ITDE	Fall 2012	Summer 2015
Colombia 3	OL	Fall 2013	Summer 2016
Colombia 4	HE/OL	Fall 2015	Summer 2018
Mexico			
Mexico 1	ITDE	Fall 2006	Summer 2009
Mexico 2	ITDE	Winter 2008	Fall 2010
Mexico 3	HE/IL	Fall 2011	Summer 2014
Mexico 4	HE/IL	Fall 2012	Summer 2015
Mexico 5	HE/OL	Fall 2012	Summer 2015
Mexico 6	HE/IL	Fall 2013	Summer 2016
Mexico 7	ITDE	Fall 2014	Summer 2017
Mexico 8	ITDE	Fall 2015	Summer 2018
Dom. Republic			
DR 1	OL	Fall 2006	Summer 2009
DR 2	HE/IL	Fall 2008	Summer 2011
DR 3	OL/IL	Winter 2010	Fall 2012
DR 4	OL/IL	Winter 2012	Fall 2014
DR 5	HE/IL	Summer 2013	Fall 2015

Note. The program sequence is for 3 years. However, students have an allotted time of 8 years plus 2 years of extension, if the dissertation proposal is approved, to complete the doctoral program.

Concentrations offered: HE = Higher Education; IL = Instructional Leadership; ITDE = Instructional Technology and Distance Education; OL= Organizational Leadership

Source: FCE&SCJ Academic Advising Office. (2021). Ellucian Banner Student Management Information System, Data Query.

After obtaining permission from the Institutional Review Board, the researcher requested the de-identified doctoral student records from the cohorts in Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic, between 2009 and 2016, to the office of Academic Advising of the College. The requested reports contained the following de-identified information: country, concentration, academic status (active, inactive / due to graduation, or inactive /withdrawn), the first term in the program, last term in the program, grade point average, number of total completed credits, and academic holds. Also, the

researcher requested a copy of the collaboration agreements from the International Program office of the College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. The researcher also retrieved sample copies of the academic advising emails she sent to the doctoral students.

Research Design

This study used descriptive statistics to investigate the number of years to complete the doctoral program, by student status and by country. The goal of descriptive statistics is to

help summarize the overall trends in the data and provide insight into where one result stands compared to others (Creswell, 2015). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the differences in mean graduation years across and within countries. The ANOVA is a statistical method used to test differences between two or more groups (Creswell, 2015).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher defined *retention status* as a student enrolled in the EdD program from the initial term and good academic standing (active status). On the other hand, the researcher defined *success* if a student has completed all academic program requirements and graduated within the allotted time (number of years to graduation across countries). The variables in program status (first and last term in the program, inactive/due to graduation, active, and inactive/withdrawn) were included in the investigation. Additional variables (concentration, number of completed credits, GPA, and catalogue terms) were included in the study but did not show significant predictors of retention or success.

Data Collection

Data collection comprised historical data retrieved from reports generated by the academic advising office, stored in the student database system. The researcher drew additional data from the international collaboration agreements, stored in the International Programs office database. Reports, generated by a graduate academic advisor included de-identified data for doctoral students (N = 572) from Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic from 2009 to 2016. Copies of the international collaboration agreements generated (N =17) by the Assistant Director of the International Programs office included the terms and conditions for the agreements between the College of Education and the various institutions in Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic.

Exclusions. The researcher reviewed the data for anomalies and eliminated 194 records from the initial query of 572, based on the following predetermined criteria: student records that showed that they completed the doctoral program in less than 2.7 years or were not

enrolled in the program between 2009 and 2016. Most likely, these participants were miscoded.

Analysis

Statistics were collected using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 as a means of statistical analysis. The statistical tests used in this research were descriptive statistics (i.e., range, mean, standard deviation), frequency distribution statistics, and variance (ANOVA). Frequency distributions are descriptive statistics that provide information and a summarized data set. Furthermore, a frequency distribution provides categorical information on the number of occurrences (Allen., 2017). The ANOVA refers to statistical procedures that use the F test to evaluate the overall fit of a linear model to the observed data. Therefore, the ANOVA is a comprehensive test that allows comparing the means of two or more variables. Moreover, ANOVA compares the variability between and within a group of variables (Salkind, 2007).

The following null and alternate hypotheses guided this study for the ANOVA analysis:

H0: There is no significant difference in the number of years it took participants to graduate across the three countries -Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic.

H1: There is a significant difference in the number of years it took participants to graduate across the three countries -Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic.

Limitations

Some aspects of this study may limit its generalizability. Specifically, the number of cases for each country was not the same. Although proactive and prescriptive advising services were delivered to the participants, the researcher could not measure the relationship between academic advising and student retention and success. The interactions with the students via telephone calls or email correspondences were not recorded. Therefore, success and retention were measured on the basis of academic status and the number of years to graduation across the three selected countries. Finally, the researcher looked at the numbers of

years to graduation across the three countries only, whereas, simultaneously, the College of Education also had collaboration agreements with other countries in the Caribbean and Asia.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows an analysis of the 378 doctoral student cases by the number of participants and the range of years by academic student status (Active, Graduated, Withdrawn) by country. The participants from Colombia with an *Active* status ($N = 25$) averaged $M = 3.72$ with a $SD = .93$ on the number of years in the program. The participants from Colombia, with a *Graduated* status ($N = 37$) averaged $M = 4.81$ with a $SD = 1.99$ on the number of years it took them to complete the program. The doctoral students from Colombia with a *Withdrawn* status ($N = 1$) averaged $M = 6.33$ with a $SD = 0$ on the number of years.

Based on the frequency distribution analysis, 15.9% of the doctoral students in Colombia completed all the program requirements in 3

years. However, 28.6% of the students completed the program in 4 years. Moreover, 6.4% of the EdD students received an additional extension to complete the degree requirements.

The participants from Mexico with an *Active* status ($N = 108$) averaged $M = 4.14$ with a $SD = 1.00$ on the number of years they have been active in the program. The participants from Mexico with a *Graduated* status ($N = 61$) averaged $M = 5.03$ with a $SD = 1.71$ on the number of years it took them to complete the doctoral program. The participants from Mexico with a *Withdrawn* status ($N = 10$) averaged $M = 4.90$, with a $SD = 1.59$ on the number of years to drop out from the program. The frequency distribution analysis of years in Mexico presents that 21.1% of the participants from Mexico completed all EdD program requirements within the three years established by the program sequence, 76.2% of the participants from Mexico completed the EdD within 3.3 and 7.7 years. Only 2.7% of the participants exceeded the 8-year allotted time to complete the program.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Mean Years by Academic Student Status (Active, Graduated, Withdrawn) by Country

Country	Program Status	N	Range Statistic	Min. Statistic	Max. Statistic	Mean Statistic	Mean Error	Std. Dev. Statistic
	Number of Years							
Colombia	Active	25	4.7	3.0	7.7	3.720	.185	.9264
	Graduated	37	7.3	3.0	10.3	4.811	.327	1.991
	Withdrawn	1	.0	6.3	6.3	6.333	.	.
Dom. Rep.	Active	108	6.0	3.0	9.0	4.926	.186	1.933
	Graduated	52	7.7	3.0	10.7	5.628	.240	1.733
	Withdrawn	8	5.3	3.3	8.7	6.667	.660	1.868
Mexico	Active	76	3.3	3.0	6.3	4.136	.114	1.001
	Graduated	61	6.3	3.0	9.3	5.033	.021	1.714
	Withdrawn	10	4.7	3.0	7.7	4.900	.502	1.587

Source: FCE&SCJ Academic Advising Office. (2021). Ellucian Banner Student Management Information System, Data Query.

The participants from the Dominican Republic with an *Active* status ($N = 76$) averaged $M = 4.93$ with a $SD = 1.93$ on the number of years they remained active in the program. The participants

from the Dominican Republic with a *Graduated* status ($N = 52$) averaged $M = 5.63$ with a $SD = 1.73$ on the number of years it took them to complete all the degree requirements. The

participants from the Dominican Republic with a *Withdrawn* status ($N = 8$) averaged $M = 6.67$ with a $SD = 1.87$ on the number of years to drop out from the program. According to the frequency distribution analysis of years in the Dominican Republic, 22.6% of the participants in the Dominican Republic finished all degree requirements in three years. However, 8.4% of the participants received an extension and

finished the program between 8.3 and 10.7 years.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

A one-way analysis of variance revealed no statistical significance in the number of years it took participants to graduate when grouped by country $F(2, 147) = 2.615, p > 0.05$. The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
ANOVA of the Number of Years to Graduation Across Countries

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16.808	2	8.404	2.615	.077
Within Groups	472.422	147	3.214		
Total	489.2302	149			

Source: FCE&SCJ Academic Advising Office. (2021). Ellucian Banner Student Management Information System, Data Query.

Discussion

The study reveals no significant difference in the number of years it took participants from Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic to graduate from the EdD program. The average number of years it took participants to graduate was between 6.3 and 7.7 years across the three countries. This study further provides evidence that during 2009 and 2016, the EdD program promoted retention and success across the three countries. From a total of 378 participants, 55% of them remained active, 40% of the participants graduated. Only 5% of the participants dropped out of the program.

As previously noted, the doctoral program is designed to be completed in three years, but the students have an allotted time of eight years to complete all degree requirements. The results from the study show that 26% of the participants across the three countries completed the doctoral program within the three years' sequence, 32% of the participants completed the program between three and four years, 34% of the participants completed the program within five to eight years from the initial term of enrollment, and 7% of the participants received an extension to finish their dissertation. A study

of the distribution of students shows that in Colombia, at least 75% of the participants in the four cohorts graduated within 4 years; whereas, in Mexico, 77% of the participants in the eight cohorts graduated within 5 years, and 75% of the participants from the five cohorts of the Dominican Republic, graduated within 6.7 years. While some participants finished the program in three years, most of the participants completed the degree requirements within the allotted eight-year time limit. Not completing the program within the three-year mark can become a financial burden on the students.

All participants in the three countries received academic advising services during 2009 and 2016. The most common advising approaches used with these cohorts were proactive and prescriptive advising. Every term, the advisor sent emails with information about course registration, important dates, and other details that could help the student succeed with their studies. Individual electronic communications were also handled between the advisor and advised. Advising could have been one factor that helped retain the students in the program.

Recommendations and Future Research

As shown in the literature, academic advising has been considered a leading factor for student retention and success in higher education. Descriptive statistics were employed in this study to examine and compare the retention and graduation rates of students in a doctoral program in Education that holds collaboration agreements with institutions in Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. The study results show that 95% of the students from these three countries persisted in the program. Moreover, 26% of the participants across the three countries completed the doctoral program within the three-year sequence.

Although retention is consistent with the literature, the study shows a need to continuously monitor the number of students who finish the program at a certain time. Furthermore, this study shows that while the mean years were not different when one looks at the distribution of graduates across time, Colombia seems to graduate students in a lesser number of years. In contrast, that is not the case for Mexico and the Dominican Republic. From an advising perspective, this study merits further examination of what factors are important or could affect the amount of time to promote retention and success by country. For example, future studies should look at all the advising strategies used in Colombia versus Mexico and the Dominican Republic. Additionally, the various advising strategies should be compared. Having an institutional system that tracks all advising encounters would also help document this information. The academic advising office should consider different factors that affect these groups of students (i.e., financial, professional, and personal responsibilities) when applying the various advising strategies, especially for those who remain active in the program and have taken a long time to complete their studies. Finally, ACE's (2017) best practices for conducting international collaboration agreements should continue or be implemented in the graduate programs offered by the higher education institution in South Florida.

Summary

A doctoral program in Education for non-traditional students from a private, not-for-profit university in South Florida that offers international collaboration agreements with institutions in Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic was the initial case study. This retrospective comparative study used descriptive statistics to explore the number of years to complete the doctoral program, by student status by country. The analysis of variance was used to investigate the differences in mean graduation years across and within countries. For the purposes of this study, the researcher defines *retention* status as a student enrolled in the doctoral program from the initial term and good academic standing (active status). On the other hand, *success* is defined here as a student who completed all the academic program requirements and graduated within the allotted time period (number of years to graduation across countries).

Although the study illustrates no significant difference in the number of years it took participants from Colombia, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic to graduate from the EdD program, findings from this study illustrate that there was retention and success across the three countries. The results from the study show that 26% of the participants across the three countries completed the doctoral program within the three years' sequence; therefore, the study is consistent with the doctoral literature, which presents that most doctoral students may take a longer time to complete the degree program than what the institution recommends. Therefore, the study shows a need to continuously monitor the number of students who finish the program within the recommended time and continue providing academic support to those struggling to finish their degrees.

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