“IT’S MORE THAN JUST COLLABORATION”: ROLES AND SUPPORT OF SUPERVISOR THROUGH DOCTORAL STUDENT’S EXPERIENCES

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Annotation
Doctoral studies are seen and expected to be as a driving force for innovations, research and new knowledge across Europe. The specificity, uniqueness and importance of quality assurance of doctoral studies are themes that are widely analysed at international level. Research studies in this field are rather fragmentary in Lithuania. This article aims to make an input into this research field by presenting research results of 8 in-depth interviews with doctoral students by distinguishing supervisor’s roles and support through experiences of doctoral students.

Keywords: doctoral education, doctoral student, supervisor, supervision.

Introduction
Constant tension of global competition, changing requirements and expectations from labour market fosters changes. In the field of doctoral education the development and training of doctoral students' competences by responding changes and expectations of society are increasing rapidly. Doctoral studies are seen and expected to be as a driving force for innovations, research and new knowledge across Europe. Hence, doctoral students are expected to publish their research results in indexed international scientific journals, make presentations in conferences, participate in scientific associations, public life and be recognised as experts of their research field. At the same time, there is a classical approach towards doctoral studies that distinguishes doctoral studies as preparation and training of academics and scholars in specific study field (Sinclair et al., 2014), with more importance for lecturing than researching. This classical approach becomes more discussed and questionable nowadays when requirements for scientific productivity of doctoral students are increasing. Increased importance of globalisation and study internationalisation are challenging for scientific supervisors and organisers of doctoral studies as it is difficult to balance between the classical and modern approach towards doctoral studies and training of doctoral students. At the same time doctoral students are expected to demonstrate independency in research implementation, decision making and academic scientific activities. This means that supervisor is seen more as a mentor than knowledge provider and is expected to provide complex support which requires implementation of different roles (Deuchar, 2008; Lee, 2008; Franke, Ardivsson, 2011; Barnes, Austin, 2009).

This research paper aims to disclose doctoral student's experiences about supervisor's support and roles through different doctoral study activities.

Research object – supervisor's roles and support
Research methods cover analysis of scientific literature and documents, in-depth interviews with doctoral students and descriptive content analysis.

Theoretical background

Literature survey reveals that quite often active participation in scientific research communities and activities plays an important role for the development of researcher who is able to correspond to global changes in education and society. Gardner (2008) specifies that transition to independence may rely on the connection and 'becoming peer' with supervisor, as only the possibility and feeling of being a colleague with the supervisor may help to develop academic independency. Although, according to Jazvac-Martek (2009) when talking about doctoral students' socialization, there is an assumption that it's the faculty who should mainly be responsible for the student's socialization and "rarely considered are student intentions, motivations or the variability of experiences and interactions that influence shifting identities" (Jazvac-Martek, 2009, pg. 254).

While many researchers of doctoral education focusses on the aspects of supervision (Gardner, 2008; Johnston, Milne, 2012; Baptista, 2011; Lee, 2008; Lee, McKenzie, 2011), study completion and reasons for dropouts (McAlpine, Norton, 2006), career trajectories (McAlpine et al, 2013), importance of networking and socialization (Gardner et al., 2012; Pyhältö et al, 2009, Gardner, 2010), students' motivation (Stubb et al, 2012), academics' and students' perceptions on research (Meyer et al, 2005, 2007; ; Akerlind, 2008; Pitcher, 2011; Stubb et al, 2014) etc., literature survey shows that the development of doctoral students' academic independency through the doctoral study process is still missing theoretical and empirical studies. In this field, experiences and stories of individual doctoral students are important as well as the role of doctoral studies as promoters of active and independent researcher. Currently more attention is paid to the changing role of
researching and doctorate as such. After entering doctoral studies, quite often doctoral students are considered as professionals and scholars and so the fact that they are students who might need help and support for research development sometimes is forgotten (Gardner, 2009). Regarding the fact that after completing their studies, doctoral students are expected to conduct independent researches, develop research studies in their study field, actively participate in international scientific communities, share research results and publish them in international scientific journals (Taylor, 2007), it is important to analyze factors and support system that helps and is needed for doctoral students in order to become independent researchers and develop their researcher identities (Debowksi, 2012). Therefore, doctoral students concentrate more on the development of their researching skills and positioning themselves as researchers at national and international levels, rather than trying to fit into formal deadlines and defend their doctoral thesis in time (after 4 or 6 years) (Sinclair et al, 2014). The process of doctoral studies and doctoral student’s experiences are becoming more significant than the result itself (awarding with doctoral degree). But none of the final results would be possible without support provided by supervisor, peer colleagues, academic society, etc. Some researchers who analyse the quality and process of doctoral studies emphasize that preparation of final research thesis should be implemented not only between the doctoral student and supervisor, but it must involve other academics who actively participate in the process of doctoral education within or outside of University of (Lahenius, 2012; Gardner et al, 2012; Pyhalto et al, 2009, Gardner, 2010). This aspect is very important, especially when taking into considerations the fact that doctoral students are encouraged to write interdisciplinary research thesis, which means that having possibility to consult with experts apart from supervisor could help to assure quality of thesis. Nevertheless, most of the doctoral student’s experiences reveal that finalisation of doctoral thesis mainly depend on the supervisor who follows the whole process of thesis writing, research conduction, and at the same time coordinate student’s scientific activities and takes care of the competence development (EUA, 2005, 2009, 2013).

Different supervisor’s roles can be found in scientific literature. Lee (2008) has analysed these roles and categorised supervisor’s roles into 5 based on other scientists’ works: functional (supervising the process of preparation of doctoral thesis by helping doctoral student to develop competences that are missing for this research activity); critical thinking (enabling doctoral student to doubt himself and his work, raise questions related to research); enculturation (providing support for integration into academic community inside and outside University); relationship development (supporting student, helping to overcome challenges, inspiring to work as a part of group); and emancipation (encourages student to develop his competences and sees the process of student’s growth as very significant) (Lee, 2008).

It is important to note that scientific literature reveals few key aspects that form the supervising style and supervisor’s attitude towards collaboration with doctoral student, i.e. supervisor’s attitude and development of qualification (Kiley, 2011; Halse, Malfroy, 2010; Bitusikova, 2015), supervisor’s previous experience of himself while being a doctoral student (Lee, 2008); his personal participation in scientific international and national conferences, workshops, associations, seminars, etc. (Halse, Malfroy, 2010; Baptista, 2011, 2012; Barnes, Austin, 2009).

To summarize, it is important to develop relationship between doctoral student and supervisor that are based on trust, openness, mutual respect, search for new ideas, overcoming challenges and inspiring for innovative ideas. These aspects are important criteria when helping doctoral student to develop independency in academic society.

**Research methodology and results**

Analysis of scientific literature and documents was conducted in order to describe and reveal problem field and context. Qualitative research strategy was chosen for data collection and the method of in-depth interview was applied. Finally, descriptive content analysis method was applied for data analysis.

Research participant had to be 1st – 4th year full time doctoral student in the field of social sciences. There were 8 research participants that represented the criteria mentioned above and their main characteristic is presented in table 1 (see below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research participant code</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Study year</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>DS1</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>DS2</td>
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<td>DS3</td>
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<td>DS4</td>
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<tr>
<td>DS5</td>
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<tr>
<td>DS6</td>
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<td>DS7</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>DS8</td>
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Conduction of in-depth interviews quite often face ethical issues because this method allows to collect very personal data about informants personal life, experiences and emotions, that are later analysed and presented in public society (Kvale ir Brinkmann, 2009). Ethical strategy was applied for the implementation of this research that was based on BERA (2011) recommendations where it is distinguished that ethical principles should be applied for five key elements: person, knowledge, democratic values, quality of scientific research and academic freedom (BERA from Atkins and Wallace, 2012, pg. 30). For assurance of confidentiality and anonymity research participant in this research are coded and only short extracts from the interviews are presented while analysis of the research is presented summarised. It is important to note that interview extracts are presented translated and original.

Analysis of research results

In order to understand and reveal support of the supervisor that allows and helps doctoral student to develop their academic independency, research participants were asked to remember their exact experiences and situations that they think has helped or challenged to develop academic independency. Research results are presented following different stages of doctoral studies (preparation of research project for entrance to studies, preparation of work plan, writing doctoral thesis, participation in academic and scientific communities, etc.).

According to the research results, collaboration with supervisor before doctoral studies have very positive influence as both sides know and understand their expectations, capabilities, have common understanding of research, its' purpose and importance of development of new knowledge. This cooperation usually starts during master studies "<...> when I was finishing my master thesis we’ve discussed what I should afterwards so that I could pretend for doctoral study place <...>" (DS2). According to some of the research participant, this cooperation could be a key aspect helping to enter doctoral studies "preparation of research project is a possibility to demonstrate your own potential to your colleagues. <...> in my case, we worked a really long time and supervisor’s involvement was huge. It was from A to Z, I would say ‘under control’ but in a good way this ‘control’, as nothing was left unchecked, none part or word. Everything was proved, everything was discussed” (DS1). Even though it is not known who will be approved as a supervisor of doctoral student, some of research participants believe that this moral and intellectual support is undoubtedly important. In this situation it is important to balance between the controlling role of supervisor and enabling student to work independently.

Informants reveal very different experiences of collaboration with supervisor in the process of writing dissertation thesis. Some supervisors act like colleagues and they actively participate in discussions, initiate meetings and generate ideas, although sometimes this role can overpower the trust in student’s capabilities to provide personal insights, ideas and offers "<...> it’s always like that when we meet, she starts sharing ideas that are usually different from the ones we’ve discusses last time <...> it’s a pity she does not even try to understand or listen to my ideas even though I believe I know a bit more than she does <...>" (DS7). Other informants have experienced collaboration that is based on mutual respect “we’ve spent much time for discussions and clearance of my research problem, aim, objectives, methodology <...> and it’s always like that – we email to each other about some new thoughts or insights about research, then we meet and have valuable discussion” (DS8).

During the doctoral studies students are obliged to publish two or more scientific articles based on their research. It is not regulated whether these articles should be prepared by doctoral student himself or with co-authors (supervisor, other scientists). Few of the research participants described this duty as the one where supervisor can really encourage and inspire student to experiment, learn, make decisions and develop independency "<...> my supervisors knows I have published few articles before studies began so I have that practise and knowledge, so now I feel quite free to develop my own ideas about possible topic for article or presentation <...> she [supervisor] discusses my ideas, gives her own insights about that topic and then reads what I’ve written, provides feedback. So I trust myself more now and I can do more things on my own” (DS3). However some informants shared their quite challenging experiences related to publication when supervisor is concentrated mainly quantitative aspect of published articles "<...> I feel pressure to prepare the higher number of publications but <...> then quality degrades <...>" (DS2), or by co-authoring supervisor even though he was not involved into preparation of article: ‘I was shocked when supervisor started reproaching that he was not added as co-author to my publication <...> but he did nothing, even when I asked to review this article he was like ‘I don’t have time at this moment and I trust you did a great job’. <...> and then he complained he was not co-author” (DS6). This situation may disclose the reality of nowadays scientific life where academics are required to publish a high number of articles in order to increase level of scientific activities.

Another period of doctoral studies where students expect support from their supervisors is doctoral students’ assessment which is organised twice a year to assess students’ progress in their studies. Research participants distinguished different elements when talking about this process, by distinguishing preparation
of assessment documents and student’s presentation of his report on progress for the committee. Research results demonstrate that usually supervisors do not involve into this process though doctoral students have different attitudes and thoughts about supervisors involvement, some students see this as a sign of their independency: “there is no need to say that since the 1st year a lot has changed and supervisor doesn’t check my documents now <...> but I see it as a sign of my independence development, as I have gained more experience and maybe know more in my research field” (DS1), while other students express need for more support and interest: “<...> supervisor never participate in committee meetings and that’s when I always wish for more support. <...> it looks like she doesn’t even care if I succeed or not <...>” (DS5). Analysis of interviews demonstrated that these students’ experiences depend on supervisors’ experiences while they were doctoral students and the way they worked and studied: “<...> she said she was supervised this way <...>” (DS5).

Final aspect to be discussed is communication with other scientists and participation in scientific and academic communities where students have possibilities to develop their competences, discuss their research topics, find new ideas or broaden their understanding in research field. All research participants pointed this aspect as a very important although experiences were different as some students saw this participation as their own responsibility, while others expected supervisors to help get integrated into scientific communities. “On the second week of my studies supervisor invited me to the meeting with international experts as one of them had expertise in my research field. I was so happy and scared to make a bad impression as I was not ready to discuss my topic in English. <...> supervisor helped me a lot and now I trust myself more and can develop networks on my own” (DS4). Some students demonstrated their independency by developing research network on their own: “<...> I always liked to be in intercultural environment and I saw these studies as an opportunity to develop this network even more. <...> supervisor knows I’m this kind of person and she encourages me to travel, to email, to find contacts with experts in my field. So in our case it’s more me who introduces supervisor to new colleagues of mine <...>” (DS3). Even though some research participants expressed the lack of support from supervisor in this field, it is important to discuss whether it is really supervisors’ duty to provide this help, though sometimes this help may be the simple encouragement to overcome inner barriers and develop networks on their own.

Doctoral education is a very specific field where the relationship between student and supervisor may be crucial for the finalisation of doctoral thesis. Even though the research results that are presented in this article reveal some challenging aspects of this collaboration, it is important to implement deeper research and try to answer to the question if all the expectations of doctoral students are proper and justified, and if supervisor is able or of he have to cover all these roles and provide all this support to a student. If “It’s more than just collaboration” (DS3) than what are the boundaries between supervisors obligations and students independent initiatives?

Conclusions

Theoretical data analysis disclosed 5 main roles that are recognised in scientific literature and were disclosed in this research, i.e. functional, enculturation, emancipation, relationship development and critical thinking. Although students’ experiences were not analysed according to these categories of roles, data demonstrates that even during different doctoral study activities, all these roles may interrelate and be very complex. Data analysis has revealed that supervisor’s involvement into student’s scientific activities depend on specific activities and supervisor’s earlier experience. Supervisor mainly focuses and provides help that is directly connected to preparation of final doctoral thesis, generation of new ideas and publication of scientific articles. When supervisor treats his student as a colleague, he inspires student to trust himself and at the same time encourages the development of student’s independency. At the same time they build relationship that are based on mutual respect, trust, and openness. However research results demonstrated that students feel lack of support when developing research networks and participating in assessment activities.

Regarding the fact that doctoral students experiences when collaborating with supervisor and students independency development are of great importance in nowadays educational research world, it is important to discuss how supervisor has to provide constructive critics and feedback that foster students doubts, search for new solutions, opinions, etc. At the same time, another aspect has to be considered when talking about collaboration – what are roles of supervisor and if he is able or he has to implement all of them.

Research limitations

This paper presents research data of 8 in-depth interviews so it cannot be applied for a whole target group, i.e. for all doctoral students. Besides, this research disclose very subjective experiences as they represent only doctoral students and does not involve supervisors’ experiences and opinions. Finally, research results present experiences of doctoral students in the field of social sciences so it may be very different in
other fields of doctoral studies where studies and students' works are less individual.

Literatūra
Santrauka

„TAI DAUGIAU NEI TIK BENDRADARBIAVIMAS“: MOKSLINIO VADOVO VAIĐMENYS IR PARAMA PER DOKTORANTŪROS STUDIJŲ PATIRTIS

Doktorantūros studijos yra laikomos kaip varomoji jėga inovacijoms, tyrimams ir naujų žinių kūrimui visoje Europoje. Doktorantūros studijų specifika, išskirtinumas ir jų pokyčiai užtikrinimas yra plačiai analizuojamos temos tarptautiniu lygmeniu. Lietuvos moksliniai tyrimai šioje temoje yra gana fragmentiški. Šiuo straipsniu siekiama prisidėti prie tyrimo lauko, pateikiant 8 giluminio interviu su doktorantais tyrimo duomenis, siekiant atskleisti mokslinių vadovų vaidmenis ir jų paramą doktorantams, išryškėjantčius per pačių doktorantų patirtis.

Esminiai žodžiai: doktorantūros studijos, doktorantas, vadovavimas doktorantui, mokslinis vadovas.