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Factors Affecting the Completion of Studies Beyond the Timeframe of Doctoral Students in Performing Arts, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Year 2025

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Abstract

This study aimed to (1) investigate the problems and factors contributing to delayed graduation among students enrolled in the Doctor of Philosophy Program in Performing Arts, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, and (2) propose solutions to address the issue of graduation beyond the prescribed timeframe. A mixed-methods research design was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The sample consisted of doctoral students who had completed the required three-year study period but had not yet graduated. Quantitative data were collected from 35 international doctoral students from China through questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained from unstructured interviews with six Thai doctoral students. The findings revealed that personal factors were the most influential contributors to delayed graduation, with an overall mean score of 3.08, indicating a moderate level of impact. Factors related to the curriculum and the students' environment were found to have a lower level of impact, with mean scores of 2.19 and 2.31, respectively. Based on the findings, the primary solutions include revising the curriculum to adopt Plan 2.1 for students enrolled from the 2024 academic year onward, which integrates coursework with thesis development, as well as organizing annual orientation programs to ensure that students clearly understand university regulations and graduation requirements.

Keywords: Doctoral students, Graduation, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance of the Problem

Humans are inherently social beings who must learn to coexist harmoniously within society. The ability to adapt to diverse social contexts and life situations is developed through experience, and more importantly, through education. Education plays a crucial role in human development by cultivating knowledge, critical thinking, and perspectives on the world. It enables individuals to understand appropriate social behavior, respond effectively to challenges, and acquire both practical and academic knowledge that contributes to personal and societal advancement. Consequently, education must be systematically managed with clearly defined goals aimed at enhancing human quality and potential (Pongsena et al., 2019).

For individuals who pursue formal education, graduation represents a significant milestone, symbolizing the completion of an academic journey and serving as a socially recognized indicator of achievement. However, graduation is generally expected to occur within a prescribed timeframe. Delays in graduation may raise concerns or prompt questions from academic institutions and society at large. Nevertheless, many students encounter personal responsibilities or life circumstances that cannot be resolved immediately, and such challenges inevitably affect their academic progress.

Based on the researcher's professional experience as an academic support staff member in the Doctor of Philosophy Program in Performing Arts, it was observed that a considerable number of students were unable to complete their studies within the designated three-year study plan. The program is structured across six semesters; however, many doctoral students fail to graduate within this timeframe. Recognizing the significance of this issue, the researcher undertook this study to examine the underlying problems and factors contributing to delayed graduation, as well as to identify potential solutions that may benefit both current and future doctoral students in the program.

1.2 Research Objective

1.2.1 To explore the problems and factors that contribute to delayed graduation among students in the Doctor of Philosophy Program in Performing Arts.

1.2.2 To propose solutions to address the issue of graduation beyond the prescribed timeframe for doctoral students in the Performing Arts program.

2. Literature review

2.1 Concepts related to graduation and factors affecting graduation

2.1.1 Meaning of Graduation

Graduation refers to the completion of the required number of academic credits in accordance with the curriculum and the formal approval of degree conferral by the University Council. Graduation can be categorized into two types: graduation within the timeframe specified by the curriculum and graduation that exceeds the prescribed duration of study (Jaroongdaechakul, 2011).

In addition, graduation may be understood as the attainment of knowledge and skills developed through educational institutions and other learning environments, leading to an individual's academic success in accordance with curriculum requirements. This process relies on each learner's unique abilities, learning capacity, and personal effort (Wongchana & Meengam, 2019).

2.1.2 Factors Affecting Graduation

Khotsumart and Apipalakul (2012) classified factors affecting the duration of graduation into five dimensions: curriculum management, academic research resource services, thesis or independent study implementation, thesis presentation, and thesis or independent study advisors.

Similarly, Thipwalee and Chairinkom (2022) identified five key independent variables influencing graduation duration: students' personal characteristics, regulations related to thesis or independent study requirements, academic research resource services, thesis or independent

study advisors, and family factors. These frameworks highlight that graduation outcomes are shaped by both institutional structures and individual circumstances.

2.2 Related Documents and Research

Rojchanawutthithum (2021) investigated factors affecting graduation among graduate students at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University. The study involved 143 graduate students who completed their studies between the 2016 and 2019 academic years. The findings identified five major factors influencing graduation: student characteristics, achievement motivation, thesis advisor characteristics, family and peer support, and facilities. All factors were rated at a high level of influence. Among these, achievement motivation recorded the highest mean score (4.42), while facilities had the lowest mean score (3.87).

Pinyosermrat et al. (2024) examined factors affecting the graduation duration of master's degree students at the Faculty of Medicine, Ramathibodi Hospital, Mahidol University. The results indicated that the most influential factors were related to thesis or research advisors, particularly the accessibility and communication channels between students and advisors, with an overall mean score of 4.49. In contrast, academic research resource services were found to have the least influence, although the mean score remained relatively high at 4.16.

Mankhatitham et al. (2024) conducted a study on factors affecting graduation among master's degree students in the Master of Business Administration program at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. The findings revealed that advisor-related factors exerted the greatest influence on graduation outcomes, with a mean score of 4.35.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Instruments

The research instruments employed in this study consisted of a questionnaire and unstructured interviews. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions designed to collect quantitative data regarding factors influencing delayed graduation. In addition, unstructured interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative insights into students' experiences and perspectives related to graduation beyond the prescribed timeframe. The collected data were subsequently analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected using questionnaires developed by the researchers. The quantitative data were obtained from a sample of 35 international doctoral students from China enrolled in the Doctor of Philosophy Program in Performing Arts, Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University. These students had completed the required three-year study period but had not yet graduated.

In addition to the questionnaire survey, unstructured interviews were conducted with six Thai doctoral students from the same program. The purpose of these interviews was to gain deeper insights into contextual and personal factors contributing to delayed graduation, particularly from the perspectives of students with different academic and professional backgrounds.

3.3 Data Analysis

After data collection, the questionnaire responses were reviewed for completeness and accuracy and subsequently analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistical methods

were employed to summarize and interpret the data. The results were presented in tabular form, displaying relevant statistical values.

Specifically, the data analysis was conducted as follows:

3.3.1 Demographic Analysis of Respondents (Part 1, Items 1–3):

A checklist format was used to analyze respondents’ demographic information. Frequency and percentage distributions were calculated to describe the characteristics of the participants.

3.3.2 Analysis of Factors Affecting Delayed Graduation (Part 2):

Checklist-based responses were analyzed using frequency, mean, and standard deviation to examine factors influencing delayed graduation among doctoral students in Performing Arts at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in 2025.

3.3.3 Analysis of Additional Factors and Qualitative Feedback:

Responses from open-ended questionnaire items and unstructured interviews were analyzed to identify recurring themes and shared concerns among students. These findings were used to inform proposed solutions and recommendations aimed at improving graduation outcomes.

4. Results

The results of this study were derived from questionnaire responses collected from 35 international doctoral students from China and unstructured interviews conducted with six Thai doctoral students enrolled in the Doctor of Philosophy Program in Performing Arts. Of the 35 distributed questionnaires, 18 were returned and deemed valid for analysis. The findings are presented below.

Table 1 Factors Affecting the Completion of Studies Beyond the Timeframe Year 2025

Factors Affecting the Completion of Studies Beyond the Timeframe	Mean	S.D.	Value interpretation
Personal issues of the students			
1. Family responsibilities and obligations	2.78	1.97	Moderate
2. Professional responsibilities and work obligations	4.44	0.96	Very High
3. The number of days residing in Thailand does not meet the required criteria	3.56	1.48	High
4. Health issues	2.56	1.91	Low
5. Financial problems	2.06	1.31	Very Low
Mean	3.08	1.53	Moderate
Problems related to the curriculum			
1. The program offers only the dissertation component (Type 1.1 curriculum)	2.67	1.51	Moderate
2. There are too many extracurricular activities	3.06	1.90	Moderate
3. There is insufficient frequency of meetings between advisors and students	0.83	1.72	Very Low
Mean	2.19	1.71	Low

Factors Affecting the Completion of Studies Beyond the Timeframe	Mean	S.D.	Value interpretation
Problems arising from the students environment			
1. The weather conditions are not suitable for fieldwork required for the dissertation	1.33	1.62	Very Low
2. The data or performances to be studied are located in remote areas, requiring significant travel time	2.61	1.87	Moderate
3. Informants relevant to the research have limited availability for providing information or interviews	3.00	1.33	Moderate
Mean	2.31	1.61	Low

Source: Nonticha Kantida (2025)

4.1 Factors Affecting the Completion of Studies Beyond the Prescribed Timeframe

Table 1 presents the factors affecting delayed graduation among doctoral students in Performing Arts in the year 2025, categorized into three main dimensions: personal factors, curriculum-related factors, and environmental factors.

Personal factors were found to have an overall mean score of 3.08, indicating a moderate level of impact. Among these, professional responsibilities and work obligations emerged as the most significant factor contributing to delayed graduation, with a very high mean score of 4.44. The number of days residing in Thailand not meeting program requirements also had a high level of impact (mean = 3.56). In contrast, health-related issues (mean = 2.56) and financial problems (mean = 2.06) were perceived as having a relatively low impact on delayed graduation.

Curriculum-related factors were found to have a low overall impact on delayed graduation, with a mean score of 2.19. Students moderately agreed that the structure of the program as a dissertation-only curriculum (Type 1.1) contributed to delays (mean = 2.67). Similarly, excessive extracurricular activities were rated at a moderate level of impact (mean = 3.06). However, insufficient meetings between advisors and students were perceived as having a very low impact, with a mean score of 0.83, suggesting that advisor availability was not a major concern among the respondents.

Environmental factors were also found to have a low overall impact on delayed graduation, with a mean score of 2.31. Weather conditions unsuitable for fieldwork were rated as having a very low impact (mean = 1.33). Factors related to the geographical distance of research sites (mean = 2.61) and the limited availability of research informants (mean = 3.00) were rated at a moderate level, indicating that logistical challenges posed some difficulties but were not the primary causes of delayed graduation.

4.2 Additional Factors from Open-Ended Responses and Interviews

Analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses revealed additional challenges reported by students in similar directions. A major concern involved the requirement for doctoral students to publish two academic articles prior to graduation. Frequent changes in the university's publication criteria were reported to cause delays, as students required additional time to identify suitable journals that met institutional standards.

Furthermore, several students expressed concerns regarding the requirement for a minimum number of residency days in Thailand. Failure to meet this requirement was perceived as posing

potential risks to the recognition of their academic qualifications in China, thereby increasing pressure and contributing to delayed graduation.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the primary factors contributing to delayed graduation among doctoral students in Performing Arts are personal in nature. Overall, personal factors were rated at a moderate level of impact, with a mean score of 3.08. Among these, professional responsibilities and work obligations emerged as the most significant issue, receiving the highest mean score of 4.44. This finding indicates that balancing academic demands with professional commitments poses a major challenge for doctoral students.

In contrast, the least influential personal factor was financial difficulty, which recorded a relatively low mean score of 2.06. With regard to curriculum-related factors, insufficient meetings between advisors and students were perceived as having the lowest impact on delayed graduation (mean = 0.83). Similarly, among environmental factors, unsuitable weather conditions for fieldwork were found to exert the least influence, with a mean score of 1.33.

5.2 Discussion

Findings from unstructured interviews with six Thai doctoral students further supported the quantitative results. Similar to the Chinese student cohort, Thai students identified professional responsibilities as the primary factor contributing to delayed graduation. All interviewed Thai students were employed as university lecturers, requiring them to balance teaching responsibilities with research and dissertation writing. Additionally, personal factors such as health issues and family responsibilities, including childbirth and recovery periods, were reported to have affected their academic progress.

Furthermore, qualitative feedback from open-ended questionnaire responses indicated that publication requirements constituted a significant challenge for doctoral students. The requirement to publish two academic articles prior to graduation, coupled with frequent changes in institutional publication criteria, resulted in prolonged decision-making and delays in journal selection. These findings are consistent with the study by Khotsumart and Apipalakul (2012), which identified thesis presentation and academic dissemination as major factors affecting graduation timelines. Their study suggested that limited academic writing skills—particularly in English—and restricted access to publication platforms may contribute to such delays.

However, the findings of the present study differ from those reported by Thipwalee and Chairinkom (2022), who found that advisor-related factors had the greatest influence on graduation duration, with a mean score of 4.61. In contrast, the current study revealed that factors related to advisor meetings had the lowest mean score (0.83). This discrepancy may be attributed to the regular and consistent communication between advisors and doctoral students in the Performing Arts program, which appears to mitigate advisor-related challenges.

5.3 Recommendations and Practical Implications (Revised)

Based on the analysis of the findings, several practical solutions have been proposed to encourage timely graduation among doctoral students. In response to the identified challenges, the curriculum of the Doctor of Philosophy Program in Performing Arts was revised in the

2024 academic year. Under the revised curriculum, students enrolled from the 2024 academic year onward follow Plan 2.1, which integrates coursework with thesis development. Core courses supporting this structure include Performing Arts Research Methodologies, designed to enhance students' understanding of Thai research frameworks, and Academic Reading and Writing, aimed at strengthening research, reading, and academic writing skills.

In addition, the program now organizes an orientation session at the beginning of each academic year to ensure that students are fully informed about university regulations and graduation requirements. For challenges arising from personal or contextual factors, as reflected in student feedback, the researcher plans to present the findings and recommendations to program administrators and relevant university units. This approach aims to reduce gaps that contribute to delayed graduation and to improve overall academic outcomes for doctoral students.

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