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# A Systematic Comparative Analysis of Doctor of Education (EdD) Programs

## Unraveling Inconsistencies and Informing Student Choices

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**ABSTRACT**

Prospective doctoral students face a daunting challenge choosing between Doctor of Education (EdD) programs and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education due to programmatic ambiguity, inconsistency, and ill-defined career alignment (Carpenter, 1987; Perry, 2012; Shafer & Giblin, 2008). This qualitative study employed comparative analysis to explore the distinctions between 50 US EdD programs, including completion time, modality, credits, qualifying exam (QE) inclusion and requirements, and dissertation requirements. The theoretical framework used to investigate the root causes and potential outcomes of the EdD and PhD inconsistency included Foucault's Power Theory (Aguirre Rojas, 2021) and Adam's Equity Theory (Adams, 1963, 1965). Findings revealed significant differences between EdD programs and between EdD and PhD programmatic features. This data provides valuable insight for prospective students, informs EdD improvement, and urges consistency or standardization for clarity, integrity, and advancement in the field (Fisher et al., 2020; McMahon et al., 2020; Schafer & Giblin, 2008).

**KEYWORDS**

*Doctor of Education (EdD), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), Foucault's Theory of Power, Adam's Equity Theory*

## INTRODUCTION

The Doctor of Education (EdD) has a long history in academia. However, unlike other professional doctorates (e.g., MD and JD) there are no clearly defined programmatic differences between a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and an EdD (Dewitt, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2019; O'Connor, 2019). Moreover, due to no national licensing or exam requirements in education, EdD programs lack the consistency seen among other professional doctorates. This does not mean that individual educational scholars and higher education organizations have not attempted to define the EdD based on their personal beliefs or organizational goals (Dewitt, 2016; NCES, 2019; O'Connor, 2019; Toma, 2002). Dewitt (2016) positions the EdD as a professional doctorate intended to focus on the practical application of educational research and foundational knowledge to solve real-world (organizational, leadership, and educational) issues. Joseph McNabb, a professor of practice at Northeastern's Graduate School of Education, explains, "With a PhD, [students are] reviewing the research, seeing a gap in the literature, and generating new knowledge based on a theory or hypothesis. Conversely, an EdD student starts with a problem of practice and [works to learn] the skills it will take to resolve that complex problem of practice" (O'Connor, 2019, EdD vs. PhD section) However, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) does not differentiate between a PhD and an EdD (NCES, 2019). The IPEDS considers both terminal degrees and research doctorates (Martinez-Lebron, 2016). Therefore, validating the disconnect between scholars, governing bodies, and institutional leaders in defining the EdD's purpose, curriculum, and necessary key assessments in United States (US) EdD programs. With 176 or more postsecondary institutions (EdDPrograms.org lists 408 institutions offering an EdD) offering an EdD in higher education, this becomes a major problem (Degree Prospects, 2021, as cited in Nyunt, 2022; EdDPrograms, "EdD Programs- Find Accredited Schools", n.d.). If the leaders and experts cannot decide on the purpose, focus, and goal of an EdD (compared to a PhD), prospective EdD students lack the ability to make data-informed decisions when choosing a terminal degree. This inconsistency has led some scholars to question the necessity and rigor of EdD programs, labeling them as a PhD Lite (Nyunt, 2022). Therefore, it is past time to evaluate and adapt EdD programs for consistency, transparency, and clarity (Lovitts, 2005).

A quick online search proves the problem. As of June 2023, a Google search of "the differences between a PhD and an EdD" will render an individual over 36 million results. Most of these results are



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individual higher education institutions (marketing teams) attempting to define what the difference means based on how they have differentiated their PhD and EdD program offerings. Therefore, these are merely conjecture and marketing strategies (not valid or reliable). There are also websites attempting to clarify the differences between programs by categorizing them based on search parameters (e.g., shortest online EdD programs). Yet, you must approach these sites with caution, as they typically include university sponsorship. Finally, a more scholarly peer-reviewed literature review yields limited (three or less) results from the past decade. The lack of specific definitions means every institution is informally deciding the differences between the EdD and PhD based on individual program offerings. This ad hoc system allows for inequities, bias, and structural deficiencies in the field. For example, how can a worthwhile system accept that acquiring an online asynchronous EdD in 24 months with no qualifying exam (QE) and a capstone course project (in lieu of a dissertation) compares to an EdD at an on-campus program over 84 months with a rigorous research focus, arduous QE requirements, and a laborious traditional dissertation that requires years of research, analysis, and synthesis. There is no comparison, yet this is how the system is currently operating.

## THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT, POWER DYNAMICS, AND THE EDD

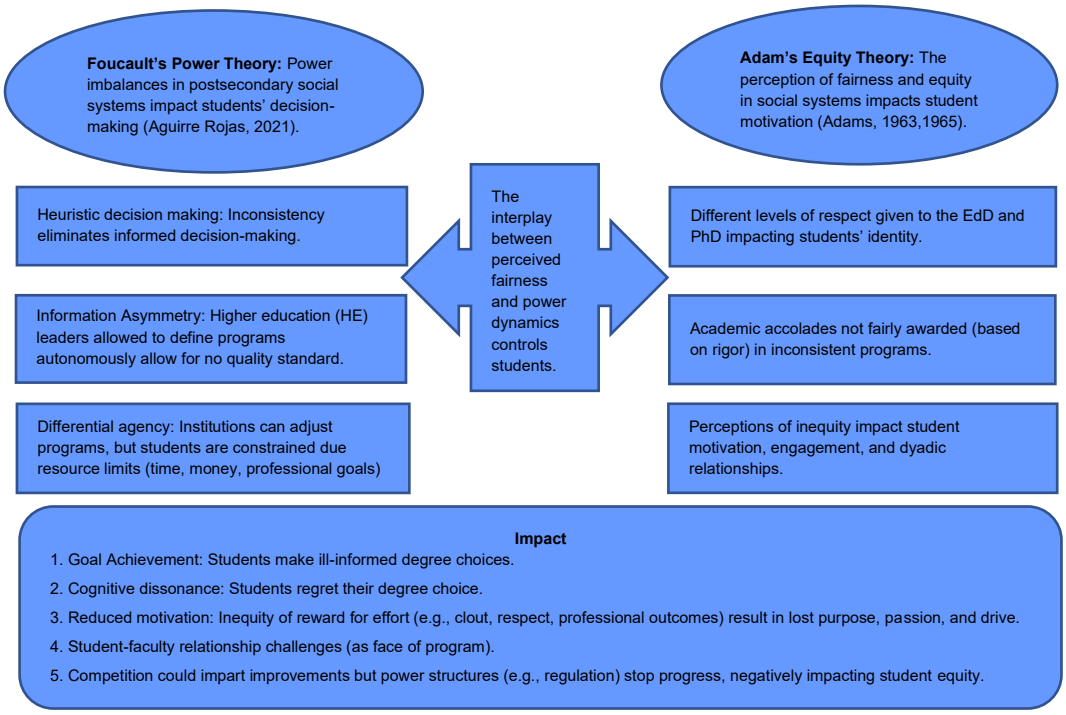
Student demographics are changing in postsecondary education (NCES, 2023). However, this is not the only factor in the external environment that challenges the how things have always been done mentality within these institutions (Clark et al., 2023; Goodman, 2023). Sociocultural trends and attitudes regarding the purpose of education, the cost of education, and the necessity of postsecondary degrees are other factors being questioned (Goodman, 2023). Beyond that, legal, regulatory, economic, competitive, and political powers disrupt these systems in many states (Clark et al., 2023). Yet, noticeable changes in the postsecondary educational industry are slow to be realized (Bowles, 2022).

In most industries, there is constant focus on the external environmental factors that drive ongoing internal innovation, such as strategy changes, structure realignments, and redirection. Yet, postsecondary institutions adjust to market changes and sociocultural trends much more slowly (Bowles, 2022). Still, one sociocultural attitude that is pervasive in other industries (e.g., healthcare [costs], food [ingredients], transportation/airline [fees]) that should be adopted by higher education is transparency, consistency, and clarity (Kavakli, 2021).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are multiple lenses to analyze the issue of EdD program inconsistency. The comparative analysis accentuates EdD inconsistencies constructed by power systems (Aguirre Rojas, 2021) and placed on prospective, current, and postdoctoral students through perceived fairness, equity, and motivation (Adams, 1963, 1965). Therefore, to comprehensively examine the problem, the study analyzes both the power structures responsible for creating and perpetuating inconsistencies in EdD and PhD programs, as well as the motivational implications for doctoral students. These theories offer an epistemological perspective rooted in a critical and social constructivist approach to understanding knowledge, power dynamics, and fairness in society. This conceptual framework visually represents the relationship between the theories and the study's context.

*Figure 1. EdD Inconsistency: Conceptual Framework*



## Foucault's Theory of Power

Foucault's Theory is unique in that it ranks power structures (Aguirre Rojas, 2021). The highest power at play in postsecondary education is the federal and state government, defined as a macropower by Foucault. Governing bodies play a significant role in postsecondary program approval (or denial), accrediting body oversight, postsecondary funds appropriations, and much more. According to Foucault, the state is exercising power in these decisions, while postsecondary institutions, faculty, staff, and students are suffering from the power. However, this is not where the power dynamic stops.

Organizations, businesses, and postsecondary institutions all hold significant power (Aguirre Rojas, 2021). The consequences of organizational power are often evident with consumers. However, the newfound power of social media to call out organizational power plays is causing detrimental impacts on reputation, sales, and profits (Drenik, 2021). Therefore, this results in a faster business response to these public outcries. For example, the airline, healthcare, and grocery industries, have all been called out for providing unclear, inconsistent, or ambiguous information regarding fees, processes, and ingredients. The implications of these inconsistencies begin as trivial or inconvenient, such as having to make multiple phone calls to insurance companies, healthcare providers, and airlines to try to uncover hidden costs. However, they expand to life altering when considering healthcare costs and even reach the level of catastrophic when you consider food allergies. These inconsistencies open the door to lawsuits, presidential and congressional provocation, and potential reputation, sales, and shareholder implications. Yet, inconsistency, lack of transparency, and ambiguity are left to thrive in postsecondary education, with both the metapower and institutional power structures exercising their power at the expense of the student (Lovitts, 2005). Yet, the implications or suffering experienced by the individual are no less dire, including:

1. Program length impacts student ability to start a family, make career changes (i.e., income and job satisfaction), move, take on more professional responsibility, spend time with families, and travel.
2. Completion time and credit requirements impact degree cost with no transparency on return on investment (e.g., salary increase potential) or gainful employment.
3. Potential EdD career outcomes include jobs that do not require an EdD such as Assistant Principal, Reading Program Coordinator, and Instructional Designer, according to job descriptions found on Indeed (Indeed.com). Therefore, clarification is needed regarding other potential credential offerings with less resource expenditure.
4. Hiring practices could favor specific types of EdD institutions, doctorates, and delivery modality. However, the student is unaware of those nuisances because of the lack of clarity in the field (e.g., EdDs in academia and PhDs in the field).
5. The amount of research or practical focus can have varied impacts on professional goals. For example, a K-12 Reading Program Coordinator is not professionally assessed by curriculum vitae (CV) length. However, a postsecondary faculty member would be. Furthermore, students who want to use the degree for professional practice want a curriculum that provides tangible hands-on experience. Specifically, a student who desires a faculty role at a research university needs to conduct ample research while in the PhD program to build a strong CV. Contrarily, a student who desires a role in instructional design would need to demonstrate competency in coding, learning management systems (LMS) applications, and Articulate 360. However, some EdD programs focus primarily on research skills, and others focus on practical skills like critical thinking, decision-making, and program evaluation. Often, the choice comes down to alignment with the final programmatic assessments (QE, dissertation, or Dissertation in Practice (DiP).

The lack of clear evidence to make informed terminal degree choices impacts a student's motivation (Adams, 1963, 1965). According to Adam's Equity Theory, individuals strive for fairness or equity in their social interactions. Specifically, they want a realization that what they put into their degrees equals what they will get out of their degrees. Hence, a lack of transparency regarding key EdD program elements, potential degree outcomes, and professional or career implications leads students to perceive inequity resulting in diminished motivation. For example, spending six years completing a rigorous EdD resulting in the same career outlook as someone who completed a comparatively easy 24-month EdD program causes psychological distress (Adams, 1963). Similarly, EdD students in rigorous six-year research heavy programs (comparable to rigorous PhD programs) who are told their academic efforts equate to a PhD Lite will lose confidence and trust in the power structures or system (Aguirre Rojas, 2021). While some might brush off these perceived inequities as par for the course, the resulting cognitive dissonance can impact student passion, purpose, and drive to complete their doctoral studies. Furthermore, students may feel cheated out of the professional future they envisioned. When potential career outcomes are inaccurate, this could impact a postgraduate's future hireability, potentially impacting earnings, class mobility, and social justice.

If the government, regulatory bodies, and postsecondary institutions wanted to limit their power and improve equity, they would prioritize change and standardization for the reduction and removal of inconsistencies and imbalances in the system. This is the only way to reduce the burden or suffering placed on students to navigate complex systems and decipher how potential degree choices will impact their future based on ambiguous and nuanced programmatic details.

## THE CARNEGIE PROJECT ON EDUCATION DOCTORATE (CPED)

It is important to reference The Carnegie Foundation when recognizing advocates for clarity and consistency in US EdD programs. The Carnegie Foundation developed the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate which aims to study EdD programs to advance program innovation to improve access and equity in EdD programs (CPED, 2002, Our Vision and Mission section). The CPED framework suggests EdD programs should focus on opportunities for practitioner preparation and authentic assessment (CPED, 2022). Moreover, they advocate for differentiating between the EdD and PhD. One of the ways they promote differentiation is by advocating for problem-based or field-based DiP versus traditional dissertations. These assessments shift the focus away from a literature review and research process to focus more on critical thinking and data-driven decision-making.

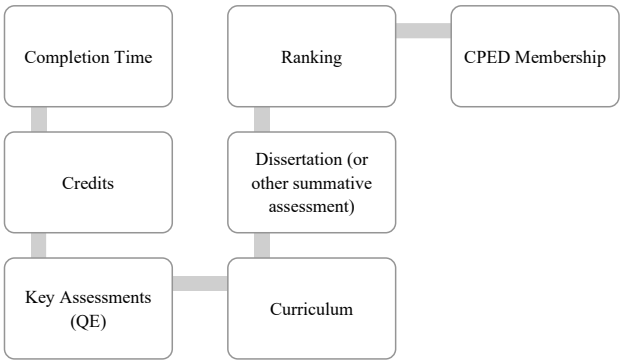
CPED (2022) does not use a power or equity theory to ground their framework, instead they use a Signature Pedagogy to "challenge assumptions, engage in action, and require ongoing assessment and accountability" (para. 6). However, the framework has many references to equity, and the Board of Directors includes internationally renowned critical theorists. Therefore, demonstrating challenging power structures and obtaining equity is at the core of their work.

CPED has recognized that inconsistencies in EdD programs negatively impact access and equity for marginalized groups, and they are attempting to inspire change through CPED membership. For this reason, CPED membership was also included in the comparative analysis of EdD programs. However, not all accredited EdD programs across the US are CPED members.

The research questions guiding the study are as follows:

1. What are the key differences between accredited US EdD programs?
    a. How do these EdD programs compare to PhD programs?
2. How might power systems impact EdD program differences?
3. How might EdD program factors impact student motivation?

*Figure 2. Key Components of EdD Programs*




## RESEARCH METHODS

The aim of social science is to unravel the complexities of the world, its systems, and its intricate interactions to contribute to positive change. However, unlike the pure sciences, the human element in social science makes it impossible to rely solely on quantifiable methods for understanding. Therefore, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) emerged as a reliable method to analyze empirical data, generalize findings, and evaluate programs by blending quantitative and qualitative approaches (Ragin, 1987, 2000, 2009). Ragin's approach facilitates EdD comparisons while allowing for a deeper dive into the intricate details and complexity of each EdD program.

This study utilized publicly available secondary online data to complete the comparative analysis of EdD programs at 50 accredited US postsecondary institutions. The information was gathered from institutional websites, College of Education program information, and links to programs of study, curriculum outlines, and other specific criteria like qualifying exam rubrics. The EdD elements compared included estimated completion time, key assessments (e.g., qualifying exam or similar), credits, modality, dissertation requirements (or similar), CPED membership, and ranking. While there is limited information available related to the number of US EdD programs, the most comprehensive website on EdD programs nationally as of January 2024 is EdDprograms.org. By adding the EdD programs listed for each state, a total of 408 national EdD programs were calculated, significantly higher than cited by Nyunt et al. (2022). Assuming the higher number is accurate (worse-case scenario), 50 US EdD programs equal around 12% of the national today. Suitably, QCA is able to use relatively small and simple data sets (Ragan, 2000). There is no sample size requirement to achieve statistical significance, although ideally there should be enough cases to potentially exhibit all the possible configurations. In a study conducted in 2012, a survey was implemented to calculate case or sample size average in QCA, and the average sample size or case number was 22 (Mello, 2012). Therefore, demonstrating the sample size of 50 to be sufficient to obtain significant data for this study.

The stratified purposeful selection criteria for US EdD programs was chosen to "facilitate comparisons" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). There is no inclusive list of all EdD programs detailing all comparable data. Therefore, necessitating the sample to be chosen at random while also purposefully seeking EdD programs of varied rank, from varied states, and to include both online and in-person modalities. Therefore, ensuring the data was diverse and the outcomes were reliable.

According to Swanson (1971), "thinking without comparison is unthinkable" (p. 145). Therefore, studying a single EdD program cannot adequately analyze, evaluate, or prescribe program improvements without comparison to other EdD programs. To do that, a broad review of relevant data has been collected to cross-analyze the different EdD program standards and requirements (Ragin, 1987). Additionally, a brief comparison of PhD programs was used to compare the EdD findings with PhD programs. This comparison is intended to explore the differences in EdD programs, how EdD programs compare to PhD programs, and how those differences impact student motivation. The comparative analysis methodologies have been applied broadly in educational research to enable the critical and systematic inclusion of the social and educational construction of knowledge and the sociocultural development of programs (Milošević & Maksimović, 2020; Otsuka, 2009; Silova & Brehm, 2010).

## FINDINGS

It is important to note that while the differences in the programs are vast, so are the terms, verbiage, language, and measurement tools (e.g., rubrics, templates, credits, hours, transfer requirements, admission standards) used to describe the programs to the public. These inconsistencies create challenges for potential students to compare the differences in the programs when making selections, and they generate hurdles for completing a comparative analysis. For example, what one institution deems applied research another might call a DiP. Yet, the requirements for research, literature review, and scholarly writing might be largely similar. For the purposes of this study, researchers retained the verbiage used by the institution to categorize and classify their programmatic components. In rare instances, inferences had to be made to define or categorize EdD components. For example, if no comparable terms were used to define final assessments, based on the requirements, they were categorized in tandem with similar program assessments. All efforts

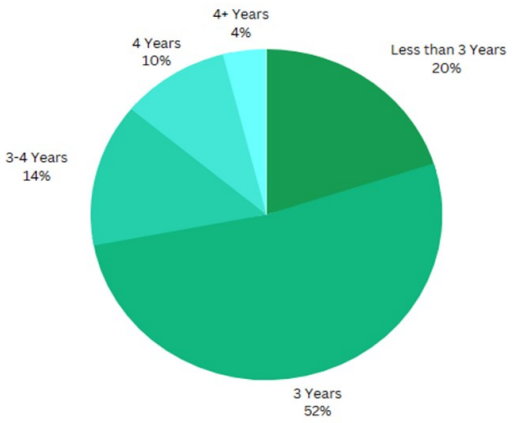
were made to compare the program differences systematically and accurately to safeguard result credibility. The following sections details key programmatic comparison findings.

## Average Completion Time, Credits, and Costs

Time is a valuable resource. Arguably, it is one of the most important factors when choosing a postgraduate degree. The way credit requirements impact time varies because of inconsistent term lengths (e.g., semesters or quarters) between institutions, and due to how the institution incorporates master's degree credits. For example, if one postsecondary institution breaks its learning periods up into four per year, and the student takes 2 classes each period with credits equaling 3 for each course, the student would complete 24 credits per year. However, if an institution has two learning periods per year (two semesters) and the student takes two classes worth 3 credits per period, the student completes 12 credits per year. Immediately, the level of confusion in navigating this intricacy is obvious. If the prospective student is not an expert in postsecondary admission practices, they would not understand these differences and be unable to make a sound decision.

Completion time equals money spent, which is certainly a critical element of this decision. Gainful employment regulation pushed postsecondary institutions to ensure that the money spent on the degree results in meaningful income growth (US Department of Education, 2022). An individual might call this a return on their investment, and individuals completing a terminal degree expect a discernible return on investment, including improved job satisfaction, salary increases, or security (Cooper, 2021). Therefore, time and money spent are both critical ethical and legal/regulatory factors. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the linear relationship between credits and average completion time (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between program length (time) and credits r (50) = .368, p= .008. This result clarifies that credit requirements still equate to completion time, despite the various ways term lengths are organized (e.g., 4-week courses, 6-week courses, quarters, semesters, summer courses). The following figure depicts the vast US EdD completion time differences, ranging from 24 to more than 60 months, emphasizing that 36 months is the most common degree completion time, including dissertation.

*Figure 3. EdD Average Completion Time Comparison*




## Qualifying Exam

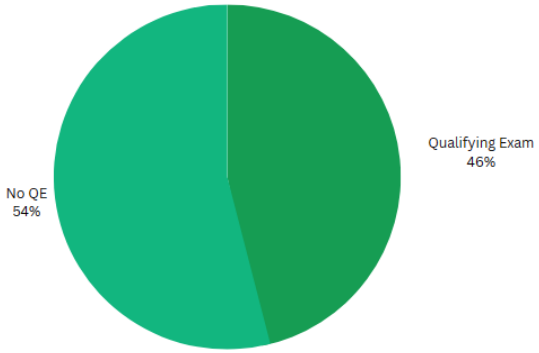
During the journey to degree attainment, many doctoral programs require students to complete some version of a QE or comprehensive exam to demonstrate readiness to conduct independent scholarly dissertations (Manus et al., 1992). This key assessment has been largely unexplored in research literature (Fisher et al., 2019). Acquiring data on QE approaches opens the door to explore the utility of this key assessment and program benchmark. According to McMahon et al. (2020), QE preparation processes fail to produce comprehensive results, meaning they are not encouraging higher student pass rates. This begs the question, if the instruction does not encourage sufficient pass rates, who is at fault? The individuals that deliver the QE preparation instruction, those that receive it, or both? Suffice it to say, there is only one party penalized for this outcome.

The study highlighted the vast differences in QE approaches, and it also uncovered a trend toward QE exclusion in EdD programs. QE differences include:

1. A written or oral exam or both types at different program stages. The point at which the assessment occurs ranges from after the first year to after the third year.
2. Some institutions administer a preliminary exam before the qualifying exam.
3. Some students prepare for the QE under the guidance of a faculty mentor in their programs of study (DiPietro et al., 2009), and others are not assigned mentors until after successful QE completion.
4. One institution has a college-wide QE that involves faculty developing questions surrounding the student's area of interest. They also have a program-specific QE where the student demonstrates their scholarly acumen through options such as a literature review, a journal article submission, or a scholarly portfolio.

There is little agreement on the soundest methods to assess student readiness for the dissertation process (Estrem & Lucas, 2003; Kearns et al., 2008; Shafer & Giblin, 2008). Kearns et al. (2008) argue that alternative QE methods reduce students' anxiety, improve their abilities to perform academic work, and reduce the time for doctoral degree completion. Yet, the most interesting data discovered was that most EdD programs no longer include a QE requirement, as depicted in Figure 4.

*Figure 4. EdD Qualification Exam Inclusion*



## Dissertation

The doctoral dissertation entails conducting research and making an original contribution to the field (Montuori & Donnelly, 2013). Just mentioning the word dissertation elicits one-up comparisons, horror stories that replicate walking five miles in the snow to school narratives, and blood, sweat, and tears references among the post doctorate crowd. Therefore, the fear of this stage of the doctoral process is not unfounded. Doctoral students often learn, usually through the informal communication grapevine, the dissertation is where many doctoral students are left in their pursuits to the terminal degree. However, the results of this study illuminate a changing trend in dissertation practice, less traditional dissertations in EdD programs. However, less is not none, therefore, a wide gap in consistency still exists, as demonstrated in the following table.

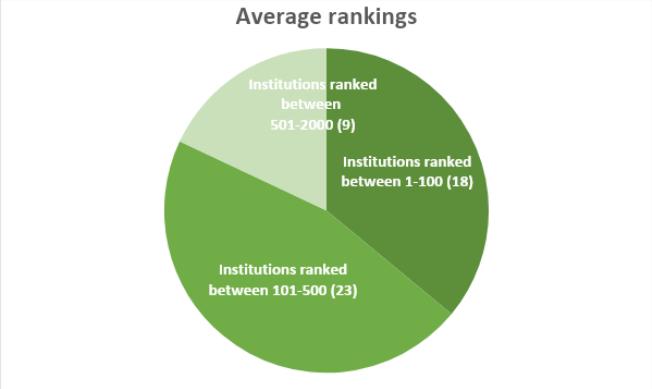
*Table 1. A Brief Explanation of EdD Dissertation Types*

| Dissertation Type | Number of Institutions | Brief Explanation |
|---|---|---|
| Traditional | 17 | Original research, literature review, committee/chair assignment, (demonstrated with lengthy formal writing obligation) |
| Dissertation in Practice (DiP) | 7 | Solving real-world problems, no original research required (e.g., secondary data or practitioner research), based on literature, existing data, personal experience (often less strenuous writing requirements) |
| Applied/Action Research | 9 | Improving one's own practices through planning, action, observation, and reflection (demonstration differs) |
| Capstone Project/ Completed in Course | 14 | Showcases student's academic growth by demonstrating solutions to problems (demonstration differs) |
| Literature Review | 1 | Synthesizing literature requires scholarly writing acumen but no critical thinking or solutions |
| Residency | 1 | Like an internship, approval from coordinator, no writing or demonstration of outcomes |
| No dissertation | 1 | NA |

## U.S. News and World Report and College Factual Average Ranking

Collegiate ranking systems are under scrutiny (Ali, 2022). So much so, that universities such as Yale have dropped out of national ranking programs. However, the purpose of including ranking in this comparative analysis was not to validate the collegiate ranking systems. Instead, the rankings were included to determine if higher ranked, arguably more prestigious institutions, with EdD programs were immune to inconsistencies and perceived inequities in EdD programs compared to PhD programs. Additionally, the rankings provided a gauge to ensure inclusion of institutions with varied standings in the study. Remarkably, the Pearson correlation analysis showed no significant correlation between rank and program length, credits, or QE inclusion. Therefore, insinuating that more prestigious or highly ranked institutions do not have more rigorous EdD programs. The following figure depicts the average ranking of institutions included in the comparative analysis study.

*Figure 5. EdD Comparative Analysis: Average Institutional Ranking*




## EDD AND PHD COMPARISON

The results reveal vast differences in key US EdD program requirements. While the primary focus of this study was comparing EdD programs, it is impossible to garner a strong understanding of the challenges of the system without a brief comparison to the Educational PhD Some postsecondary institutions differentiate the requirements of their EdD and PhD, however, at other institutions, the EdD program mirrors the educational PhD with a strong research focus. For example, at the University of Florida, there are very minimal differences between the EdD and PhD. The website explains they both have a strong research focus, offered part time, and the average time to completion is the same, around four years. The following table illustrates a brief comparison of all (identified) educational Ph.Ds. in the state of Florida. These institutions range from regional public, public flagship, to online for-profit. The average time to completion for PhD programs was 36.5 months and EdD programs was 37.2. The rankings (US News & World Report and College Factual) ranged from 47 to 607.5. The QE (or similar) was required at 75% of the PhD institutions while only 46% of EdD programs required it. The dissertation was required at 87.5% of PhD programs and 40% of EdD programs required a traditional dissertation. However, if you include some form of culminating assessment (e.g., dissertation, DiP, action research) the result is 98% as detailed in Table 2.

*Table 2. PhD Comparison State of Florida Table*

| University | Credits | Avg. Completion Time (mo.) | Ranking Avg | Key Assessments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| UF | 90 | 60 | 47 | Both |
| FSU | 81 | 54 | 87.5 | Both |
| Keiser | 60 | 39 | 142.5 | No diss or QE |
| UCF | 63 | 54 | 155 | QE-portfolio and Diss |
| USF | 59 | 54 | 159 | Both |
| UM | 42 | 42 | 83.5 | Both |
| FIU | 51 | 51 | 203.5 | No QE, Diss |
| BU | 54 | 36 | 670.75 | Both |

The comparison data demonstrate vast differences in key US EdD program requirements. In many institutions, the requirements focus more on application and solving problems of practice. This was demonstrated by a non-traditional culminating assessment, such as a DiP Despite significant differences in EdD program rigor (time of completion, credits, and key required assessment criteria), all students are graduating with the same credential. A specific item of note that underscores the necessity of the study, the study included an EdD program at a lower-ranked (bottom third) public regional institution with a longer average completion time than all the Education Ph.Ds. in the state, including two flagship institutions. Additionally, this EdD program has the same key assessment requirements as those PhD programs (QE and traditional dissertation). In contemplation of Foucault's Power Theory (Aguirre Rojas, 2021) and Adam's Equity Theory (Adams 1963, 1965), this difference sparks two possible assumptions. 1) The higher education institution has hierarchical power structures (among leadership, administration, faculty) that wield control and suffering over students. 2) These power structures impact fairness and equity relative to their students when they compare themselves to students in other national and state terminal degrees. The student outcry regarding these differences would probably be more severe if they could navigate the power structure and reduce information asymmetry to identify them. Table 3 includes the data compared for the 50 US EdD programs included in this study.

*Table 3. Comparative Analysis of Accredited EdD Programs in the US*

| University | Ranking | QE | Avg. CT | Credits | Diss | Diss Type | CPED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FGCU | 331-440 | 1 | 60 | 81 | 1 | Dissertation | 0 |
| SFSU | 234 | 1 | 36 | 60 | 0 | Ed. Problem | 0 |
| CPP | 14 | 1 | 36 | 60 | 0 | Lit Review | 1 |
| CSUEB | 331-440 | 1 | 36 | 60 | 1 | Ed. Problem | 1 |
| CSUN | 32 | 1 | 36 | 60 | 1 | Ed. Problem | 1 |
| RU | 127 | 1 | 38 | 72 | 0 | POP | 1 |
| USF | 97 | 1 | 36 | 54 | 0 | DIP | 1 |
| VU | 13 | 0 | 36 | 54 | 0 | Cap Grp Prjt | 0 |
| DU | 105 | 0 | 36 | 63 | 0 | Diss in CW | 1 |
| BU | 77 | 0 | 36 | 65 | 0 | DIP | 1 |
| UI | 41 | 1 | 48 | 96 | 1 | Dissertation | 0 |
| UD | 127 | 0 | 36 | 60 | 0 | DIP | 1 |
| CU | Unranked | 0 | 24 | 32 | 0 | Final Project | 0 |
| UF | 29 | 1 | 48 | 56 | 1 | NA | 1 |
| FSU | 55 | 1 | 36 | 69 | 1 | Dissertation | 1 |
| BC | 36 | 1 | 36 | 39 | 0 | Project-ExecD | 1 |
| UG | 49 | 0 | 36 | 55 | 0 | AR | 1 |
| ASU | 121 | 0 | 36 | 60 | 0 | AR | 1 |
| IU | 72 | 1 | 36 | 60 | 1 | Dissertation | 1 |
| UM | 137 | 0 | 36 | 60 | 0 | Cap Project | 1 |
| UV | 25 | 1 | 66 | 72 | 0 | Cap Project | 0 |
| OSU | 49 | 0 | 36 | 51 | 0 | DIP | 1 |
| UW | 55 | 0 | 36 | 60 | 1 | Dissertation | 1 |
| PSU | 77 | 0 | 36 | 60 | 1 | Dissertation | 0 |
| UT | 151 | 0 | 33 | 57 | 0 | NA | 1 |
| HU | 3 | 0 | 36 | 32 | 0 | Cap Project | 0 |
| UP | 124 | 1 | 24 | 60 | 1 | Dissertation | 0 |
| CAU | 331-440 | 0 | 24 | 60 | 1 | Dissertation | 0 |
| UNCC | 29 | 1 | 48 | 48 | 0 | DIP, BR, or AR | 1 |
| UoPh | 331-440 | 0 | 42 | 54 | 0 | Diss in CW | 0 |
| Capella | Unranked | 0 | 35 | 40 | 0 | DIP in CW | 1 |
| NSU | 219 | 0 | 42 | 55 | 0 | Capstone | 0 |
| MSU | 77 | 0 | 36 | 45 | 0 | Group DIP | 1 |
| BarryU | 331-440 | 0 | 36 | 54 | 0 | DIP | 1 |
| CCSU | 101 | 0 | 42 | 45 | 0 | Diss in CW | 1 |
| ISU | 127 | 0 | 36 | 54 | 0 | DIP | 1 |
| KSU | 213 | 1 | 42 | 72 | 1 | Dissertation | 1 |
| NDSU | 285 | 0 | 42 | 60 | 1 | Dissertation | 1 |
| TSU | 331-440 | 1 | 48 | 60 | 0 | Residency | 1 |
| UCF | 137 | 1 | 36 | 54 | 1 | Dissertation | 0 |
| GCU | 331-440 | 0 | 36 | 60 | 1 | Dissertation | 0 |

| University | Ranking | QE | Avg. CT | Credits | Diss | Diss Type | CPED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MU | 285 | 0 | 36 | 54 | 0 | Dissertation | 0 |
| JHU | 1 | 1 | 48 | 54 | 0 | Dissertation | 0 |
| UNL | 95 | 1 | 48 | 90 | 1 | Dissertation | 1 |
| GVSU | 101 | 1 | 42 | 60 | 1 | Dissertation | 0 |
| UMD | 74 | 0 | 36 | 48 | 0 | DIP | 1 |
| UMN | 34 | 0 | 36 | 72 | 0 | DIP | 1 |
| LSU | 76 | 0 | 48 | 54 | 0 | Dissertation | 0 |
| UIUC | 1 | 1 | 48 | 64 | 1 | Dissertation | 1 |
| IU-B | 76 | 0 | 36 | 60 | 0 | DIP | 1 |
| KU | 93 | 1 | 36 | 60 | 0 | DIP | 1 |
| UCR | 150 | 0 | 54 | 60 | 0 | Dissertation | 1 |

## Significance

The purpose of this comparative analysis was to systematically explore the inconsistencies, ambiguities, and nuanced differences in EdD programs. Epistemologically, Foucault's Power Theory (Aguirre Rojas, 2021) informs skepticism toward dominant power structures who wield power through information asymmetry, ambiguity, and malleability. Adam's Equity Theory (Adams, 1963, 1965) focuses on perceptions of fairness and the distribution of resources within social relationships. Motivation is based on the evaluation of one's inputs and outputs, relative to others. The perception of inequities or unfairness results in reduced motivation and engagement. Equity Theory posits EdD clarity as social capital, with interpersonal dynamics being the metric. Combined, these two theories emphasize the intersectionality of power and equity. Highlighting how power imbalances can influence perceptions of fairness and access to information. Together, they also challenge the traditional knowledge hierarchies and strive to amplify marginalized voices.

Therefore, this study encourages EdD power structures, including federal and state governments and regulatory bodies, accrediting bodies, postsecondary institutional leaders, educational policy decision-makers, and College of Education administration to examine and clarify EdD purposes (compared to the PhD), curriculum, and outcomes. However, the initial onus falls on the macropower to create policy regulating EdD standards that ensure integrity and accountability. Therefore, differentiating between the PhD and EdD, enhancing consistency in EdD programs, and creating equity that allows for comparing program differences. These efforts could empower students to make more informed doctoral program enrollment decisions that are better aligned with personal and professional goals. The findings from this study contribute to the limited global body of research on EdD programs, especially comparison of the educational PhD and the EdD. Furthermore, the findings dispel the current rhetoric depicting all EdDs as less rigorous than the PhD.

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