

# **Does Academic Ambition Explain Employability: An Interpretivism Perspective**

Penn Emmanuel Mbuh,  
Ph.D Student at ICT University  
School of Business Management and sustainability  
ICT University, Cameroon  
[pennemmanuel@gmail.com](mailto:pennemmanuel@gmail.com)

Martha AbejaEkure  
Ph.D Student at ICT University  
School of Business Management/  
Deputy Director  
Makerere University Business School, Uganda  
[mabeja@mubs.ac.ug](mailto:mabeja@mubs.ac.ug)

Alain Vilard Ndi Isoh, Ph.D  
Dean of Studies  
School of Business Management and sustainability  
ICT University, Cameroon  
[alainvilard.isoh@ictuniversity.org](mailto:alainvilard.isoh@ictuniversity.org)

## **ABSTRACT**

Scanty scholarly research has been concluded in the area of academic ambition at the uppermost tier of education, most especially in developing countries. Learning being a lifelong process can be elicited not only for economic, political and or social benefits but by varieties of other incitements. Dominant views associate academic aspirations to professional enhancement and economic benefits. The question of interest addressed in this study is thus: Is academic ambition triggered by the desire to secure employments typical in the case of African countries? This study seeks to explore triggers to doctoral education with employability being the focus in the case of Cameroon, Nigeria and Uganda.

This research is an exploratory case study design, buttressed with the philosophical orientations of subjectivism ontology and interpretivism epistemology. Data was sourced from five (5) focus groups purposively sampled from Cameroon, Ugandan and Nigeria, consisting of 25 doctoral students. Observed data were analysed qualitatively based on Strauss and Corbin's systematic grounded theory procedures to achieve theoretical saturation through three levels of comparative analyses consisting of open coding, axial coding and selective coding processes.

Results were tested for validity and reliability within the parameters of credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability. This study reveals that eight different categories of triggers motivate scholars to pursue a Ph.D. including: social needs, induced factors, personal improvement, emotional needs, financial reasons, employability, contribution to knowledge and political factor. The core category that motivate scholar to pursue a PhD is related to personal improvement; specifically, the need for personal growth. However, empirical evidence that suggests employability as a trigger to pursue a PhD is rather weak as opposed to social needs and induced factors. To this effect, this study concludes that employability is less likely conceived as a trigger to pursue a PhD degree compared to personal improvement and the social needs of belonging.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A doctorate degree is the most admired academic degree and the last in the academic chain that has been in existence since the early 70s (Tornroos, 2017). In some countries, one can get a job with basically a Secondary School Certificate, Bachelor's Degree or Master's Degree. But, the question addressed in this study is, why then do most individuals advance to the level of the Ph.D.? This research seeks to explore the reasons behind the desire of post graduates to pursue a Doctorate Degree. Some scholars argued that the main reason for obtaining a doctorate degree is for personal development (Mickinley et al., 2008). The view expressed by Mickinley et al., supports that of (Diamond et al., 2014) who opined that majority of scholars undertake the doctorate journey for a wide variety of reasons such as contributing to society, promotion requirement, enhance employment opportunities and even political reasons.

This study seeks to explain the underlining drive behind this decision to undertake a Ph.D. Findings from selected studies concluded by authors such as: Mickinley et al. (2008), Tornroos (2017), Neave (1989) revealed that there exist different reasons to obtain a doctorate degree. Evidences from such studies support the aim of this research which is based on developing a model to explain triggers underlining the reason why most scholars desire to obtain a Ph.D. with specific focus on employability. In order to achieve the aforementioned objective, this research attempted to provide answers to this question: Why do scholars desire to obtain a Ph.D.? The scope relevant to this study consists of doctorate students and holders of PhD degrees in selected African countries with particular interest in Cameroon, Uganda and Nigeria.

## **RELEVANT LITERATURE**

The doctorate degree is the next stage after obtaining a master's degree. Tornroos (2017) reviewed of Cyranoski et al. (2011) and Souernann & Roach (2012) show that early research believed that the main reason people enrolled for a doctorate degree is to prepare for an academic career. However, other authors like Diamond et al. (2014), Mickinley et al. (2008) and Tornroos (2017) believed that other reasons exist why people enroll for a Doctorate Degree. Even though some of the authors shared different views on the topic, their ideas were fairly similar. Doctoral studies help to enhance mastery of academic discipline, but it also provides avenue for scholars to make relevant contributions to their communities through research. It is for this reason that McKinley et al. (2008) believed that scholars enroll for the doctorate to enable them contribute to the community. They also opined that other reasons exist such as: personal growth, political reasons and that some just view the doctorate as the next step.

Some scholars argued that it is natural for rational being to advance in personal and professional development. However, some hold the view that graduates undertake higher education predominantly for employment related concerns and believe that possession of a doctorate degree will maximize employability (Meteafe, 2005; Neave 1989). A study concluded by Diamond et al. (2014) revealed that a vast majority of doctoral graduates are in employment. This is in line with the assertion that doctoral studies maximize employability. Also, findings as revealed by Tornroos (2017) showed that out of 24,300 Ph.D holders sampled in Finland, 23,200 are in employment. This shows a 95.5% employment rate for doctorate graduates.

However, some post graduates in gainful employment still enroll for the doctorate degree. Opinions advanced justify such a move typically for career motives such as: change of status, additional benefits and double employment opportunities (Diamond et al 2014), or advance in their current job (Mickinley et al 2008). To an extent, this could be linked to financial reasons where multiple employments and higher grades could generate multiple cashflow streams and better pay. Other than the financial aspect, some employees are obliged to take doctoral studies as formal employment requirement to keep their jobs (Diamond et al 2014). A lot of scholars who enroll for the doctorate degree are either involved in the educational sector or aspiring to be involved in the educational sector. This is proven in Diamond et al (2014) research where 60% of the sample population was employed in the

educational sector. Thus, it is essential for them to obtain a doctorate degree for self-improvement purposes and also to be able to make a significant contribution to their respective fields.

Nevertheless, Tornroos (2017) believed that having a doctorate is not necessarily limited to those who wish to pursue an academic career or to advance in their present career. Even though he supported the fact that some scholars would obtain a doctorate degree to maximize employment, advance in current employment or even have multiple employments, they could equally do so for personal drives such as to add value to oneself and to the community at large. Mickinley et al (2008) also suggested that the desire to obtain a doctorate degree is not only to better oneself but to help the community. People want to be held in high esteem by their peers, and sometimes having a doctorate degree could fill that gap. In the study concluded by Diamond et al (2014), it is revealed that having a doctorate degree will maximize the chances of creating long-term friends and networks.

The doctoral degree program is essentially a process of knowledge building and making meaningful academic contributions in relevant disciplines with the intention of improving the quality of life. Toronoos (2017) believed that, though in some situations, the added value of the actions of an individual doctoral degree holder may not be significant, the cumulative added value from the research and research-based expertise of portfolio of doctoral degree holders has momentous effects at large. This means that even though individuals' research concluded may not be ground-breaking experience, it could inspire the next ground-breaking research.

In conclusion, the aforementioned reviews exposed reasons that motivate one to undertake doctoral studies. These reasons include employment, career advancement, and multiple job opportunities, contribution to communities, self-improvement respect and political reasons. It is basing on this review that this study aims at outlining factors that motivate doctorate studies with specific interest on employability in the case of selected countries in Africa (Cameroon, Nigeria and Uganda) with the intention to develop a model on academic ambition and employability.

## **METHODOLOGY**

According to Sarantakos (2012) research method is the way through which researchers make sense of the object of inquiry. Research strategy is the general plan of how the researcher will go about answering the research questions Saunders et al. (2009). This research is an exploratory case study design, buttressed with the philosophical orientations of subjectivism ontology and interpretivism epistemology. Ontology is the study of being that deals with the nature of reality Mash & Furlong (2002). Meanwhile, Epistemology is concerned with the questions of "What do you know?" and "How do you know it?" According to Tennis (2008), Epistemology is the claim on what knowledge is valid in research, and what constitutes acceptable sources of evidence. Scotland (2012) posits that epistemology is concerned with the nature and forms of knowledge.

This study follows an interpretivism perspective which allows for an understanding of the ways to appraise, conceptualize, and understand events and concepts as well as categories since these are assumed to influence individual behaviour Kaplan & Duchon (1988). Data was sourced from five (5) focus groups purposively sampled from Cameroon, Ugandan and Nigeria, consisting of 25 doctoral students regarding the phenomenon under study. Observed data were analyzed qualitatively basing on the Grounded theory procedure(s) developed by Strauss and Corbin (1989) to achieve theoretical saturation through three levels of comparative analyses. These levels consist of open coding, axial coding and selective coding processes. Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

This study adopted a hybrid of the Straussian and Glasserian Grounded Theory schools of thought. The Glasserian School stresses the interpretive, contextual and emergent nature of theory development. The Straussian School, on the other hand, emphasizes highly complex and systematic coding techniques and permits a preliminary literature study to identify research problems and the areas in which to look for data (Thai, *et al.*, 2012). Results were tested for validity and reliability within the parameters of credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability

## DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

To arrive at theoretical saturation as specified by the provisions of grounded theory (Straus and Corbin, 1989), data collected must reach the point where there is no emergent information/opinion. Data obtained from the initial coding process of phase I is as shown on appendix 1. Respondents ID were coded for ethical reasons and their responses are regrouped to constitute categories as shown on the axial coding process in Table 1.

**Table 1: Axial Coding Process**

<b>Interview question</b>	<b>Open coding/ Sub-categories</b>	<b>Categories</b>
Why do you wish to obtain a Ph.D.?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Prestige (PRE)</i></li> <li>• <i>Belonging (BEL)</i></li> <li>• <i>Influence (INF)</i></li> <li>• Job sustainability (JS)</li> <li>• Stay Busy (SB)</li> <li>• <i>Personal Growth (PG)</i></li> <li>• <i>Academic Advancement (AA)</i></li> <li>• Passion (PA)</li> <li>• Accomplishment (ACC)</li> <li>• <i>Innovation (INN)</i></li> <li>• <i>Knowledge (KNO)</i></li> <li>• <i>Give Back to the community (GB)</i></li> <li>• Multiple Careers (MC)</li> <li>• Career Advancement (CA)</li> <li>• <i>Scholarship (SCH)</i></li> <li>• <i>Earn more (EM)</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>Social Need (SN)</i></p> <p>Induced Influence (IN)</p> <p><i>Personal Improvement (IM)</i></p> <p>Emotional Need (EN)</p> <p><i>Contribute To Knowledge (CO)</i></p> <p>Employment (EM)</p> <p><i>Finance (FI)</i></p>

**Source: Field Data (2019)**

The analysis continued with phase II data collection to test theoretical saturation. The provision of theoretical saturation after series of regrouping of codes could not be concluded at phase I. Phase II data collection and coding process was effected .The Initial coding from 10 interviewees was conducted and results are shown in appendix II. Initial coding gotten from phase II data collection was further regrouped into subcategories and categories as shown in the axial coding results in Table 2.

**Table 2: Axial Coding Process**

<b>Interview question</b>	<b>Open coding</b>	<b>Categories</b>
Why do you wish to obtain a Ph.D.?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Passion (PA)</li> <li>• Self-actualisation (SA)</li> <li>• <i>Prestige (PRE)</i></li> <li>• <i>Belonging (BEL)</i></li> <li>• <i>Exemplary (EXE)</i></li> <li>• Earn More (EM)</li> <li>• Financial Availability (FA)</li> <li>• <i>Demand by parent (DP)</i></li> <li>• <i>Job sustainability (JS)</i></li> <li>• Personal Growth (PG)</li> <li>• Academic Advancement (AA)</li> <li>• <i>Multiple career (MC)</i></li> <li>• <i>Career advancement (CA)</i></li> <li>• <i>Get Job (GJ)</i></li> <li>• Knowledge ( KNO)</li> <li>• Gender Inequality (GI)</li> <li>• <i>Government Policy (GP)</i></li> </ul>	<p>Emotional Need (EN)</p> <p><i>Social (SO)</i></p> <p>Finance (FI)</p> <p><i>Induced (IN)</i></p> <p>Improvement (IM)</p> <p><i>Employment (EM)</i></p> <p>Contribute (CO)</p> <p><i>Political (PO)</i></p>

**Source: Field Data (2019)**

According to the provisions of grounded theory, saturation is reached when there is no new/emergent codes from the interview responses. Results from phase II coding reveal an emergent of political factor as a new category thereby indicating that the data is not theoretically saturated. Thus further sampling was conducted as shown in phase III appendix III. The regrouping of the emergent codes from phase III interviews is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Axial Coding Process**

Interview question	Open coding	Categories
Why do you wish to obtain a Ph.D.?	• Personal growth (PG)	Improvement (IM)
	• Academic advancement (AA)	
	• <i>Passion (PA)</i>	<i>Emotional Need (EN)</i>
	• <i>Self-Actualisation(SP)</i>	
	• Belong (BEL)	Social Need (SN)
	• Knowledge (KNO)	Contribute (CO)
	• <i>Stay Busy (SB)</i>	<i>Induced (IN)</i>
	• <i>Job sustainability (JS)</i>	
	• Multiple Career (MC)	Employment (EM)
	• Get Job (GJ)	

**Source: Field Data (2019)**

Based on the aforementioned continuous comparative analyses of data from the respective phases of interviews, the categorization of codes at phase III of the interview process reached theoretical saturation with evidence showing that no new category was created. At this point, the researcher claimed validity of the responses observed and proceeded to the next stage of selective coding process based on cross-sectional mapping of responses and codes as shown on appendix IV. The final comparative analysis of emergent codes, subcategories and core categories are illustrated in Table 4. The structural model from the analysis is shown on appendix V.

**Table 4: Selective Coding Process**

CATEGORIES / SUB-CATEGORIES	CODES	RATING (%)	SELECT CAT %	THEME/CONCEPT
SOCIAL NEED (SN)	• Prestige (PRE)	12%	(-Bel/ SN:32%)	
	• Belonging (BEL)	32%		
	• Influence (INF)	4%		
	• Be Exemplary (EXE)	4%		
INDUCED (IN)	• Job Sustainability (JS)	32%	(JS/IN: 32%)	
	• Stay Busy (SB)	8%		
	• Demanded By Parent (DP)	4%		
PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT (IM)	• Personal Growth (PG)	40%	(PG/IM: 40%)	(PG/IM)
	• Academic Advancement (AA)	20%		
EMOTIONAL NEEDS (EN)	• Passion (PA)	28%	(PA/EN: 28%)	
	• Self-Actualization (SA)	16%		
	• Accomplishment (ACC)	20%		
FINANCE (FI)	• Scholarship (SCH)	4%	(EM/FI: 12%)	
	• Earn More (EM)	12%		
	• Financial Availability (FA)	4%		
Employment (EM)	• Multiple Career (MC)	20%		
	• Career Advancement (CA)	20%		
	• Get Job (GJ)	12%		
CONTRIBUTION (CO)	• Innovation (INN)	4%	(KNO/CO: 16%)	
	• Knowledge (KNO)	16%		

	• Give Back to the Community (GB)	4%	
	• Gender Inequality (GI)	4%	
POLITICAL (PO)	• Government Policy (GP)	4%	(GP/PO: 4%)

**Source: Field Data (2019)**

## MEMOING

For the purpose of achieving theoretical saturation, this research was carried out in 3 phases, and stopped at the third stage because saturation was attained. During the first phase, categories such as social need, influence, personal improvement, emotional need, contribution to knowledge, employability and finance were established. After the second phase, a new category emerged (Political Factor). The researcher therefore continued to the third stage where no new category emerged. It is at that stage where theoretical saturation was attained.

From the data analysis, it was observed that the need for personal growth emerged as the major trigger behind the drive to obtain a Ph.D. Thus the research concludes that post graduates pursue the PhD to better themselves. The findings revealed by Mickinley et al (2008) supports our conclusion which holds that the main drive for obtaining a Ph.D is to better oneself. Tornroos (2017) also back this conclusion.

## RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDY

Recommendations for further research include: Reasons early dropouts at the Ph.D. Programs, Carry out this same study with a larger scope (more countries), carry out a quantitative base approach on this topic and A cross-sectional perspective based on gender consideration on the topic: academic ambition and employability.

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## WEBSITE

### CCS PBR Study Report Topic 1: Reasons for Embarking on a PhD

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: Opening coding phase I

Respondents codes	Description/codes	Respondents codes	Description/codes
<b>Adb</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional requirement</li> <li>Presents more opportunity</li> <li>Prestige</li> </ul>	<b>Tre</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve oneself</li> <li>Increase knowledge</li> <li>Mastery</li> </ul>
<b>Sil</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Love for education</li> <li>Overcome educational limit</li> <li>Have influence</li> <li>Feel satisfied</li> </ul>	<b>Nda</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further education</li> <li>Improve professional career</li> <li>Enhance intellectual</li> </ul>
<b>Shay</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Idea of research</li> <li>Joy of discovery</li> <li>Belonging</li> <li>Work with intellectuals</li> <li>High pay</li> </ul>	<b>Andy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Become a university lecturer</li> <li>Accomplish life vision</li> <li>Professional multitasking</li> <li>Occupy my self</li> </ul>
<b>Mic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Belong with academicians</li> <li>Contribute to Research</li> <li>Increase retirement age</li> <li>Earn more</li> <li>Socialize with scholars</li> </ul>	<b>Shak</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better oneself</li> <li>Give back to the community</li> <li>Enhance knowledge</li> <li>Increase ranks at work</li> <li>Attain academic saturation</li> </ul>

<b>Syl</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve something significant</li> <li>• Enhance professional career</li> <li>• Swap Career</li> <li>• Fit in higher society</li> <li>• Scholarship</li> <li>• Discover new things</li> </ul>	<b>Don</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic requirement</li> <li>• Professional enhancement</li> </ul>
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Source: Field data compiled by researcher (2019)

### Appendix II: Open coding phase II

Respondents codes	Description/codes	R codes	Description/codes
<b>Ony</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To become a professor</li> <li>• To be an embodiment of knowledge</li> <li>• To become an international scholar</li> <li>• Earn higher</li> </ul>	<b>Van</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demanded by parent</li> </ul>
<b>Aba</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn more about entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Learn research in various contexts</li> <li>• Increase opportunities for employability</li> <li>• Improve consultancy competencies</li> <li>• Promotion at work</li> </ul>	<b>Isa</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set a good example to children</li> <li>• Be a fully licensed academician</li> </ul>
<b>Lan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love of research</li> <li>• Changing government policies</li> </ul>	<b>Bat</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attain the highest level of education</li> <li>• Have a good level to teach in the university</li> <li>• Accomplish childhood dream</li> </ul>
<b>Gan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic advancement</li> <li>• Be a researcher</li> <li>• Job competency</li> <li>• Knowledge sharing</li> <li>• Be an independent learner</li> <li>• Prerequisite for promotion</li> </ul>	<b>Bar</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide new body of knowledge for academicians</li> <li>• Requirement to work in academic institution</li> <li>• Prestige</li> <li>• Generate scientific information</li> <li>• Mitigating human problems</li> </ul>
<b>Kyo</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal achievement</li> <li>• Self-improvement</li> <li>• Value addition for consultancy</li> <li>• Attain equal qualifications with peers</li> <li>• As a woman to resolve gender imbalances at work</li> </ul>	<b>Kwe</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-actualisation</li> <li>• Strategic retirement</li> <li>• Stay relevant</li> <li>• Funds for tuition fees are available</li> </ul>

### Appendix III: Table 5: Open Coding Phase III

Respondents codes	Description/codes	R codes	Description/codes
<b>Ekv</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance career opportunities</li> <li>• Gain Skills</li> </ul>	<b>Abu</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attain a higher degree</li> <li>• Become knowledgeable</li> </ul>



**Sam**

- To keep away from blank mind and stay busy
- Improve qualifications
- Become more marketable in employment world
- Self-actualization
- Make dad proud

**Muy**

- Be an independent researcher
- Supervise graduate and undergraduate students' research
- Gain skills in research and grant writing
- Academic growth and advancement
- —To be able to publish

**Kat**

- Be able to fit in academic world
- Self-fulfillment
- Realize dream of being PhD holder
- Command in area of specialty (CSR)
- To fit into institutional goals
- To be promoted to senior lecturer



# APPENDIX V: Structural Model

