

ABSTRACT

In the field of education, doctoral programs are expected to prepare the future leaders of the field. With the doctoral process being so unique, a necessary interaction between the student and faculty is essential in order for the student to develop an expert-level understanding of the field. Literature indicates, however, that doctoral programs in education are trending toward being offered as online programs, which is causing many researchers and leaders in the field to worry that the lack of traditional instruction and interaction will have a damaging effect on the quality of educational doctoral programs. This nationwide, cross-sectional exploratory study examined the culminating activity in education leadership doctoral programs, the dissertation, in an attempt to assess the quality of research being produced from online and traditional doctoral programs. This research highlights general areas where education leadership doctoral programs are using similar quality levels of reference sources to produce dissertations and areas where the quality levels differ. The results of this study may provide a foundation for further study in the area of dissertation and doctoral program quality.

Keywords: education leadership, doctoral programs, dissertation quality, online education