

Pre-liminal variation of experience of dental hygiene diploma students embarking on their degree completion program

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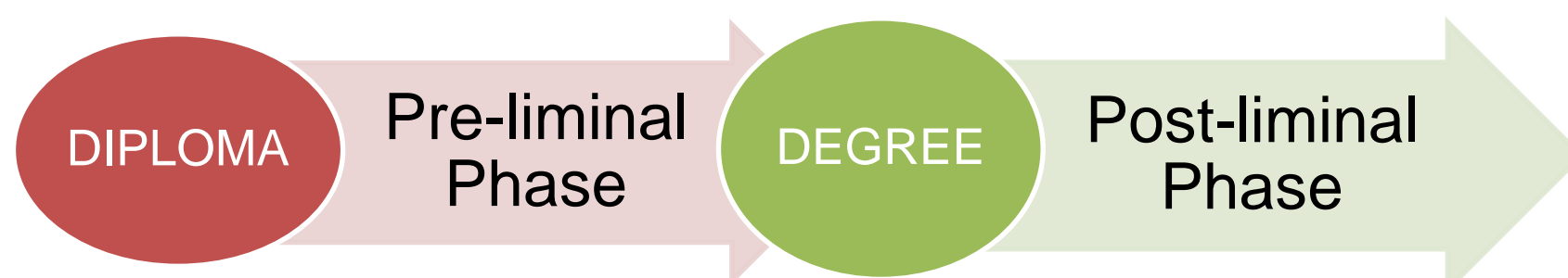
INTRODUCTION

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METHODS

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (#Pro00072407).

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample of dental hygiene diploma graduates who were continuing directly into the degree-completion program. Participation was voluntary.



- Interview questions explored:
 - Why did the student decide to complete degree completion studies?
 - What factors influenced their decision?
 - What were their expectations?
 - How do they believe their expectations of them as a student may change?
- Qualitative coding utilizing a phenomenographical approach resulted in the identification of themes aligned with the variation of expectations and motivations of the students.

RESULTS

Data analysis of eight transcripts identified several themes within expectations and motivations.

Expectations

Theme 1

Increased Competency

- Acquire additional knowledge and skills both clinically and academically
- Participant B: “...I am expecting to increase my knowledge to some extent”

Theme 2

Effort Required

- Mixed expectations on effort based on perception of academic environment
- Participant G: “...I would expect that [with] another year of university it should become more challenging... just to like build on your skills...”
- Participant F: “...I feel like it will be different cause a lot of its, uh, well online and self-lead I guess and then I feel like just based on that, it might be more relaxed...or we may perceive it as being more relaxed.”

Theme 3

Course Activities

- Mixed expectation from types of assessment
- Participant C: “...I don't foresee them [course instructors] doing that many group projects...”
- Participant A: “...really heavy emphasis on writing papers and doing research...”

Theme 4

Modality

- The movement to online courses would be challenging
- Participant E: “...it's going (sic) to be a bit of a challenge because I'm so used to being in a classroom...”

Motivations

Students' perceptions of the degree-completion year were intertwined with a description of their motivation. Students described:

- **Internal Motivation**
 - To improve in their profession
 - Expand future career choice
 - To have the opportunity to deepen their academic experience
- **External Motivation**
 - Responding to outside expectations (family, peers, acquisition of degree)
 - Perceived effort (short term, location)
 - Perceived employability

DISCUSSION

Students articulated a variety of different reasons for immediately pursuing their degree. Considerations that guided this decision included the short-term impact of an additional year of study, as well as long-term implications on their careers.

Themes that emerged illustrated this variety of expectations and motivation. Students had mixed perceptions of their expectations of the acquisition of a degree. A range of motivations were described from both an intrinsic and extrinsic perspective.

CONCLUSION

Students entering the degree-completion program do not seem fully aware of possible adaptations that may be required to successfully navigate their new learning environment but can articulate a desire to earn a degree as part of their academic and career goals.

The results of this study describes the student's pre-liminal perspective of their entry into their final degree-acquisition year. It is important to understand this pre-liminal state to implement strategies to support this transition of dental hygiene degree-completion students.

Future studies could correlate if the variety of pre-liminal perceptions align with their actual experience within their degree-completion year. Additional work could be done to determine if their motivation colours their expectations of their academic experience.



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