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Messaoudi Maroua¹, Rezzoug Ibtissem ², Zineb Belhachani ³, Guericha khaled⁴, Bouchair Maroua Rym ⁵, Sallama hanane kaouther ⁶, Lamri mohamed⁷, Nour Elhouda Demmene Debbig ⁸, Bouchair Malak⁹, Ben Saad Amina¹⁰

¹University of El Oued, Algeria

²University of Setif 02, Algeria

^{3,5-10}University of Abdelhamid Mehri Constantine 02, Algeria

⁴University Kasdi Merbah Ouargla, Algeria

Email: messaoudi-marwa@univ-eloued.dz, Rezzoug_ibtissem@hotmail.fr, zineb.belhachani@univ-constantine2.dz, khaled2017guerricha2017@gmail.com, marouarym.bouchair@univ-constantine2.dz, kaouther.sellama@univ-constantine2.dz, Mohamed.lamri@univ-constantine2.dz, nour.demmenedebbih@univ-constantine2.dz, malak.bouchair@univ-constantine2.dz, amina.bensaad@univ-constantine2.dz

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Abstract:

The current study aimed to explore the level of challenges faced by PhD students from their own perspective and to examine the level of each variable within the study sample. The study was conducted on a sample consisting of 100 students, comprising 47 male and 53 female students, who were selected using stratified random sampling from the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at the University of El Oued. To achieve the research objectives and test its hypotheses, a measurement tool was developed to identify the level of challenges faced by PhD students. The study found that the level of challenges faced by PhD students is high.

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Problem Identification:

The third stage of university education (doctoral level) is at the pinnacle of higher education and serves as the primary foundation for training professors, researchers, and developing research and expertise in Algerian universities. The extent of our scientific progress, the discovery of theories, and scientific inventions depend largely on the originality, creativity, and ability of PhD students to find solutions to various societal problems.

The doctoral phase represents a critical turning point in a student's academic journey, as it serves as a bridge from being a student to becoming a research professor. At every new stage, the student

The challenges faced by PhD students in completing academic research (A field study at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at the University of Martyr Hama Lakhdar El Oued) faces new events, circumstances, and requirements that may cause feelings of anxiety, pressure, and imbalance. If they successfully navigate these challenges and adapt, they feel satisfied with themselves and their lives. If not, their sense of satisfaction and perceived competence diminishes. PhD students encounter several challenges and difficulties throughout their academic journey.

For the purpose of the current study, attention was given to identifying four dimensions of difficulties faced by PhD students: challenges related to completing the dissertation, challenges related to publishing discussion papers, difficulties in delivering presentations at scientific conferences, and challenges related to academic training. These challenges tend to increase as students progress in their academic years because PhD candidates bear a greater responsibility in scientific research than they did before. Doctoral research is considered one of the highest levels of scientific research, requiring a high level of scientific precision and methodology. However, it is evident that many PhD candidates are delayed in completing their research, with many even exceeding the legally allotted time, prompting the question of what factors contribute to these delays in completion, defense, and obtaining the degree.

One possible reason for this delay in completing Algerian PhD research is the specific conditions or difficulties that PhD students face in finishing their dissertations. These challenges include the lack of scientific resources and references, the constant pursuit of academic integrity, poor research environment facilities, all of which are new difficulties that impact their personal, social, and psychological lives, as they devote most of their time to study and research.

This is also highlighted by Saadia and others (2020) in their study, which points out that PhD students, during their scientific research and doctoral studies, face several difficulties that pose a constant threat to their academic and professional path. Among the most significant challenges are those related to scientific publishing. Scientific publishing is viewed as the outcome of a student's persistent effort and research. It is considered the scientific product and culmination of any researcher's work, aimed at contributing valuable knowledge to society. However, due to the regulations and procedures established by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research to organize the process of scientific publishing, PhD students often find themselves constrained and struggling to publish their dissertation-related articles.

One of the main obstacles is the limited number of classified journals (Category C), which are necessary for the dissertation defense process. As a result, the academic future of the students has become dependent on this new type of research challenge—scientific publishing. The prevailing sentiment is: no dissertation defense without the publication of a scientific article. This situation has exacerbated the delays, hindered the dissertation defense process, and led to feelings of failure and frustration among researchers. This is further supported by Khattab's (2017) study, which notes that many researchers have conducted substantial studies but encountered significant difficulties in publishing their work, leading to intellectual stagnation and decreased motivation for further research.

Additionally, PhD students are required to undertake other compulsory tasks, such as specialized training and delivering scientific presentations. These tasks consume considerable time. Instead of focusing on their dissertation, students often find themselves exploring topics unrelated to their research, which is one of the main reasons for extending the legally prescribed period of three years.

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Moreover, students are not only working toward their dissertation defense but also aiming for employment, which requires additional teaching hours. These additional responsibilities, such as preparing lectures, grading, and invigilating exams, demand significant time and effort.

All of these factors contribute to academic pressures that permeate students' lives, affecting their ability to efficiently perform their research tasks. However, individuals vary in how they respond to these difficulties. Some may become discouraged, leading to frustration, despair, and reduced productivity, while others may persist with determination and diligence to achieve their academic goals.

Based on the aforementioned points, the current study will attempt to answer the following question:

What is the level of challenges faced by PhD students?

1. Research Hypotheses:

Based on the research problem and the findings of some previous studies, the current study is based on the following hypothesis:

The level of challenges faced by PhD students is high.

2. Study Objectives:

The primary objective of this study is to explore the level of challenges that PhD students encounter throughout their academic journey.

3. Study Boundaries:

The boundaries of the current study are outlined as follows:

3-1 Temporal Boundaries:

The study was conducted from November 2020 until its completion.

3-2 Spatial Boundaries:

This study was carried out in the Wilaya of El Oued, specifically at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Martyr Hama Lakhdar University – El Oued.

3-3 Human Boundaries:

The study was applied to PhD students at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at El Oued University, with a total sample of 100 male and female students.

3-4 Subject Boundaries:

The study is limited by its subject, theoretical framework, and operational definitions. It is also confined by its methodology, measurement tools, and statistical techniques.

4. Key Concepts of the Study:

In this section, the primary concept of the current study—*difficulties*—will be addressed.

- **Hanna (1977)** defines difficulties as anything that obstructs the achievement of a particular goal and requires additional mental or physical effort to overcome (Hanna, 1977, p. 20).
- **Abdel Gammal (2019)** describes them as the obstacles and hindrances (information access, administrative, financial, academic environment, publishing, and distribution) faced by researchers in the preparation of scientific research (Gammal, 2019, p. 366).
- **Abriem (2020)** defines difficulties as all barriers that prevent researchers from completing their doctoral dissertations within the designated timeframe (Abriem, 2020, p. 33).

Operational Definition: In the current study, *difficulties* are defined as the level of burdens associated with academic tasks perceived by PhD students. These include difficulties related to completing the dissertation, publishing the discussion paper, preparing and delivering presentations at scientific conferences, and the academic training received by first-year PhD students.

These difficulties will be measured by the score obtained by students after responding to the items on the "PhD Student Difficulties Scale," prepared by the researchers. The scale consists of 40 items, divided into four dimensions: difficulties related to completing the dissertation, publishing the discussion paper, delivering presentations at scientific conferences, and academic training.

5. Study Methodology:

Since the current study aims to explore the level of difficulties faced by PhD students, the **descriptive exploratory method** is the most suitable approach for this study.

6. Study Population:

The study population consists of all PhD students from the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at Martyr Hamma Lakhdar University – El Oued. The total population is (192) students, comprising (90) male students and (102) female students.

7. Study Sample:

The primary sample of the study consisted of (100) individuals, selected using the stratified random sampling method. The sample included (47) males, representing 47%, and (53) females, representing 53%.

8. Study Tool:

The **PhD Student Difficulties Scale** was developed by the researchers and initially consisted of 39 negative items divided into four dimensions. To ensure the appropriateness of the scale for PhD students, its reliability and validity were measured according to the following procedures:

8-1 Scale Reliability:

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The reliability coefficients of the scale were calculated using **split-half reliability** with the Guttman formula and **internal consistency** using Cronbach's alpha (α). The following table provides a summary of the reliability coefficients obtained through both methods:

Table 1: Reliability Coefficients using Internal Consistency and Guttman Split-Half Methods.

Guttman	Cronbach's alpha (α).
0.93	0.84

Thus, we can conclude that the scale demonstrates acceptable levels of reliability.

8-2 Scale Validity:

8-2-1 Expert Validity:

To assess the validity of the scale in terms of items, instructions, and options, the scale was presented to a group of professors from various fields. All the items on the scale were approved by the experts, with the exception of item 11 in the first dimension, which was split, and item 1 in the second dimension, which was modified.

8-2-2 Internal Consistency Validity:

The validity of the scale was measured through **internal consistency** using Pearson's correlation coefficient. The following were calculated:

- The correlations between the items and the total scores for the dimensions to which they belong. The correlation values of the items with their respective dimensions were statistically significant, ranging between **0.49 and 0.79**, all of which were significant at $p < 0.01$.
- The correlations between the scores of the dimensions and the total score of the scale showed statistically significant correlations, ranging between **0.67 and 0.88**, indicating that the dimensions of the academic pressure scale are consistent with the total score of the scale.

After verifying the normal distribution of the study sample, standard deviations were calculated, and a benchmark for the scale was established for reference.

In conclusion, after calculating the validity and reliability indicators for the academic pressure scale, the final version of the scale consists of 37 items distributed across four dimensions. The first dimension addresses the difficulties related to completing the dissertation, which includes 14 items. The second dimension covers the difficulties associated with publishing the discussion paper, comprising 12 items. The third dimension focuses on the challenges of delivering presentations at scientific conferences, consisting of 6 items. Lastly, the fourth dimension addresses the difficulties related to academic training, with 7 items.

Student responses on this scale are based on a five-point Likert scale : Strongly Agree , Agree , Neutral , Disagree , Strongly Disagree.

9. Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of the Study Question Results:

Referring to the interpretation criteria for the results from the scale that measures the level of difficulties faced by PhD students, the following data was obtained:

Table 2: Distribution of student levels according to the variable "level of difficulties faced by PhD students.

Levels Variable	Low		Moderate		High	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Academic Pressure	25	25%	29	29%	46	46%

It is evident from Table 2 that the number of students facing a low level of difficulties is 25, representing 25%. Meanwhile, the number of students facing a moderate level of difficulties is 29, representing 29%. On the other hand, the number of students facing a high level of difficulties is 46, representing 46%. To verify the significance of differences between these levels, we applied the Chi-Square (χ^2) test. The following table illustrates this:

Table 3: Significance of differences between levels of academic pressure.

Indicators Academic Pressure	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	Chi-Square (χ^2)	Significance Level
Low	25	33.33	1.08	0.01
Moderate	29	33.33		
High	46	33.33		

It is evident from Table 3 that the value of Chi-Square ($\chi^2 = 1.08$) is statistically significant at the significance level of (0.01). From this, we can conclude that there are statistically significant differences in the levels of difficulties faced by PhD students.

Since the highest percentage was in favor of the third level, we can answer the first question as follows: the level of difficulties faced by PhD students is high.

This result aligns with the findings of Abriem (2020) in her study, which aimed to explore the personal and external difficulties that hinder and delay the completion of doctoral research, as perceived by professors with PhDs based on their experience. Additionally, the results of this study are consistent with those of the study by Gnoa and Qoreishi (2022), which aimed to uncover the obstacles PhD students face in completing academic research and to understand the impact of their specialization, professional status, and distance from the university.

This result can be explained by the fact that PhD students constantly face challenges throughout the doctoral phase, as they bear greater responsibility in scientific research compared to earlier academic stages. Doctoral research requires a high level of intellectual effort and must be completed

The challenges faced by PhD students in completing academic research (A field study at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at the University of Martyr Hama Lakhdar El Oued) with great scientific and methodological precision. This creates significant pressure on students and leaves them unable to develop their research topic and formulate a clear scientific and methodological vision. Additionally, there are certain conditions and difficulties that obstruct PhD students from completing their research and dissertations, such as the inability to start research due to perfectionism or the desire to produce a dissertation free from scientific and methodological errors. Furthermore, the lack of references related to the study variables in libraries and the absence of a conducive research environment are all challenges that prevent students from completing their dissertations on time.

Among the other difficulties faced by students is completing and publishing the discussion article in a classified scientific journal. Students often struggle with insufficient knowledge of how to draft the article, as it is a new experience in specialized scientific writing. They also face demanding requirements regarding the format and content of the article, as well as tight deadlines for submitting articles to journals and long waiting times for article approval and publication. All these challenges can hinder PhD students in their academic and research journeys.

Another factor that contributes to the high level of difficulties among the study sample is the other compulsory tasks PhD students must complete, such as receiving specialized training. This creates continuous pressure throughout their academic journey, especially during the first year, as the curriculum and required workload are extensive. In addition, individual and group assignments take up a considerable amount of time. Instead of focusing on their dissertation, students find themselves working on other topics unrelated to their research. All of this contributes to difficulties in their lives and affects their ability to perform research tasks.

Al-Amayra and Asha (2012) confirmed this finding, noting that reports, assignments, and research are requirements for success in coursework, but students feel overwhelmed by these demands as they do not have enough time to complete them (Al-Amayra & Asha, 2012, p. 202).

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