

Factors Affecting the Quality of Student's Doctoral and Master Research

The Case of English Department at Khenchela University

العوامل المؤثرة في جودة أبحاث طلاب الدكتوراه والماستر
جامعة خنشلة أنموذجا

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Abstract:

This study was carried out to offer deep insight into the issues affecting master and doctoral students by reviewing and critically analysing recent literature on the master and doctoral experience. Qualitative research was used in an attempt to gain in-depth information and ensure that the data reflect what is happening. Findings revealed that good quality research is imperative to bring positive changes in educational system. Supervisors, students' knowledge and skills, and institutional logistical factors could affect it. These factors are important indicators for stakeholders in order to promote and improve educational practices.

Key words: Master and doctoral research; quality research; supervision; students' knowledge and skills; institutional logistical factors.

ملخص

تم إجراء هذه الدراسة لتقديم نظرة عميقة حول القضايا التي تؤثر على طلاب الماجستير والدكتوراه من خلال مراجعة الأدبيات الحديثة وتحليلها بشكل نقدي حول تجربة الماجستير والدكتوراه. تم استخدام البحث النوعي في محاولة للحصول على معلومات متعمقة والتأكد من أن البيانات تعكس ما يحدث. أظهرت النتائج أن البحث الجيد أمر ضروري لإحداث تغييرات إيجابية في النظام التعليمي. يمكن أن يتأثر بالمشرفين ومعرفة الطلاب ومهاراتهم والعوامل المؤسسية واللوجستية. هذه العوامل هي مؤشرات مهمة لأصحاب المصلحة من أجل تعزيز وتحسين الممارسات التعليمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: بحوث الماجستير والدكتوراه؛ بحث الجودة؛ المشرفون؛ معرفة الطلاب ومهاراتهم؛ العوامل المؤسسية واللوجستية.

Introduction

Today, the research literature related to the factors affecting the quality of PhD and

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master research has gained interest of most researchers. The growing number of master and doctorate holders led researchers to carry out many studies to find out how doctoral dissertation research reach high quality, and hence enters into the larger body of knowledge and discourse. Many studies have been carried out to diagnose the situation. For example, (Brandi & Vaughn, 2014, p. 1049) stated that research in this issue must be done to provide evidence on how research becomes of high quality, and therefore contributes to the body of knowledge. This makes it important to investigate which factors in doctoral education programs are related to satisfaction, and progress. Some sources consider supervision and work based contexts have received little attention. (Sverdlik, Hall, & Alpin, 2018, p. 364) believe that the most notable factors affecting doctoral students' experiences include supervision, their personal and social lives, departmental support and socialization, as well as financial opportunities. (Matin & Khan, 2017, p. 22) mentioned three categories of doctoral success predictors: academic environmental factors, supervision-related factors and students' prior knowledge. Similarly, (Rooij, 2019, p. 49) pointed that researchers refer to three categories of doctoral success predictors : (1) supervision, (2) academic support and (3) personal factors (self-efficacy). Therefore, this study aims at getting more insights into the issues affecting master and doctoral students by reviewing and critically analysing recent literature on master and doctoral experience.

1. Characteristics of a High Quality Thesis

Generally speaking, there are a number of qualities which characterize a high quality academic document. It has a research gap that tackles one of the most important issues in education, great hypothesis to help guide the way you approach and conduct your research study, well organized and structured, and free from plagiarism.

Many studies have reported that the characteristics of 'high quality' PhD theses include the significance of the student's research topic, potential of the thesis for publication, use of the research literature in the design of the study and writing of the thesis, logic and clarity of the reporting and discussion of findings. According to (Mahmood, 2011, p. 34), quality of research is measured in terms of reliability and validity. That is, a research based on reliable data sources and with a strong internal and external validity is of high quality research. From the perspective of Fink (1998) as cited in (Benson, Nduru, & Amisah, 2015, p. 12), research must have certain key elements or features such as "validity and reliability of research design, and free from plagiarism" to qualify as quality research.

(Paltridge & Starfield, 2007, pp. 17-18) listed the following points:

- A good background knowledge about the topic;
- Appropriate and justified research method;

- Thorough presentation and interpretation of results;
- Original contribution to knowledge.

This last point is highly stressed by researchers who believe in the importance of newness of knowledge in carrying out a research. Therefore, the quality of the dissertation reflects the extent to which the findings can be applied in the field, and how much society can benefit from it.

2. Factors contributing to high quality dissertation research

There are a number of factors that contribute to high quality dissertation research, the following are the most cited and stressed in the literature.

2.1 Supervision Factors

Research and supervision have become a vital process in the successful of graduate and postgraduate research. In this process, the supervisor is designated by the administration to guide and advise the student's research development.

A strongly established finding in doctoral education research is the significance of high quality supervision for PhD student's satisfaction and (timely) completion. Different aspects of PhD supervision have been investigated, such as the supervisor's availability, different types of support, and the quality of the supervisor's relationship (Bair & Hawworth, 2004). In addition, the relationship between the supervisor-supervisee is very important, especially supervisor's availability in order to provide timely answers to questions and feedback on the student's written work.

2.2 Prior Knowledge Factors

The most important single factor influencing research is what the learner already knows. Thus, the students' perceptions, experiences and competence are part of quality research. In addition, the huge quantity of information available online make it difficult for novice students to choose with certainty valid and reliable sources. (Anthony, 2009) stated that students must be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of different online sources that they used in the process of preparation and research. In other words, the student should develop the skill of assessing the credibility of online sources they find in order to delimit valid and invalid sources.

2.3 Academic Factors

Academic facilities play an important role in student's academic performance. With university being an institution that hopes to graduate excellent individuals, it is important to provide researchers with laboratories, video conferencing facility, and digital library facility. Absence of these facilities affects the quality of research as they constitute a barrier for doing quality research. In this respect, universities where students live and school settings may be important in influencing their academic success. Therefore, the relationship between the impact of environmental factors and the

students' academic performance is important to explore, especially at higher education. The following questions were raised in order to address the purpose of this study:

- a-What are the supervisory factors associated with the quality of research?
- b-Does students' prior knowledge influence the quality of research?
- c-What are the academic environmental factors associated with the quality of research?

3. Research Methodology

This section is concerned with the methodology employed to carry out the study. A detailed account of the method, subjects and data collection are provided. A theoretical consideration of field work methodology is also addressed wherever appropriate .

3.1 Choice of the Method

In order to answer the research questions, a qualitative research design was employed. According to (Wood, 2006, p. 3) qualitative research is concerned with life as it is lived, things as they happen, and situations as they are constructed in the day-to-day, moment-to-moment course of events. Similarly, (Creswell, 2014, p. 234) holds that information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research. Thus, the use of the qualitative research is an attempt to gain in-depth information and ensure that the data reflect what is happening.

3.2 Population

Participants to the research study were seven (03 males and 04 females) teachers all holding a PhD degree with twelve years experience in teaching and supervision. They were sampled through purposive sampling. Purposive samples are non-randomly selected based on the objective of the study and through their characteristics. The choice of the sample is based on the judgment that they are subjective to issue under investigation. According to the study, supervisors who have enough experience with supervision were selected.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The study intends to employ the semi - structured in-depth interview in obtaining data from the research participants. It has several advantages. First, it is administered individually to members of the sample and the information is completed by the researcher himself, thus ensuring that all questions be answered by all informants. Second, the interview allows for personal explanations of questions, in case any point(s) need(s) to be clarified. These interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants (Creswell, 2014, p. 294). In the same vein, (Borg & Gall, 1996) stated "an interview permits open-ended explorations of topics and elicits responses that are

couched in the unique words of the respondents". These advantages help researchers to develop a real sense of a person's understanding of a situation.

4. Significance of the Study

This study provides important insights on the factors that affect the progress of PhD and master students, while at the same time revealing a serious gap in supervisors' role, academic environmental factors, and students' prior knowledge, which can contribute to the quality in the research progress of students. This study may be useful to universities interested in improving the quality of research of current students. It may also identify dimensions of research quality that prospective students could use as a guide to improve their research.

5. Results and Discussion

The purpose of the study was to investigate advisors' views about the factors affecting high quality research in PhD and Master theses in the department of English at Khenchela university.

The main research questions of the study were:

a-What are the supervisory factors associated with the quality of research?

b-Does students' prior knowledge influence the quality of research?

c-What are the academic and environmental factors associated with the quality of research?

Theme 1: Supervision

The supervisors' views regarding supervision were a clear indicator of their skills and competencies.

They stated that research supervision is all about collaboration. They believe that sharing ideas often helps Supervisor A: supervision plays a vital role in the process of research. It allows the supervisee to make the right choices related to the topic, hypothesis, research questions and get rid of the confusion that impacts negatively research.

Good supervision and a well-guided supervisee will pave the way to the researcher to gain confidence to embark on the research without delay. High quality of research can be attained when a supervisor eliminates the obstacles that researchers go through (choice of the topic, its feasibility, its significance,). The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee is of a great importance as it helps communication which is, I believe, the essence of research.

Supervising is a continuing process of learning; it requires appropriate skills teaching experience alone is not enough.

Supervisor B: PhD and Master's students are novice researchers, learning to

conduct sound research following the requirements and guidelines set within academia. Accordingly, they must be directed by an expert within the field of their interest, who guides them along this journey.

Thus, supervision is a matter of academic and scientific support that forms and polishes the product of the student through assisting him in selecting the best methods and procedures in his research. Perfect supervision is undoubtedly determined by a strong, friendly relationship between the supervisor and supervisee, which provides the latter with the supporting and motivating atmosphere for completing his work.

In other words, the researcher is a human being, and his psychological wellness is as important as his academic and scientific load. Therefore, the supervisor must assist his supervisee both academically and psychologically to produce high quality research.

Similarly, **supervisor C** explained his role through guidance and advice". He added, supervisor is part of any scientific enquiry. He has the duty to set goals and set deadlines for the accomplishment of the assigned task. He has to organize the workflow, provide guidance and constructive feedback and inspect the productivity of the researcher(s) under his supervision. He ensures compliance with all drafting regulations for proper scientific products, helps students in planning their research, provide students with feedback on their written work and/or presentations and hold regular tutorials. Our results confirm many previous studies, especially the work of (Parveen, Watson, & Dhingra, 2016, p. 227) who concluded that the supervisors should intervene where limitations and learning needs are identified

Theme 2: Students' Research Competencies and Skills

All the supervisors reported that in order to achieve high quality research, master and PhD students should be competent in academic writing and research methodology. However, most students do not have the requisite research skills and competencies.

They agreed that most students fail to come up with a research gap, to state clearly the problem of the study, or even justify their choices regarding research methodology. They also reported several cases of plagiarism.

Supervisor B: PhD and Master's students are supposed to have acquired essential academic and methodological requisites. Basically, a researcher must be familiar with the nature of scientific research and its aims. Then, he must differentiate between different types of research and the approaches adopted in each type. Most importantly, the researcher must possess the methodological tools and skills for conducting scientific research starting from formulating questions and hypotheses to choosing the accurate data collection tools. Moreover, he must master statistical analysis tools such as SPSS or similar programs.

Supervisor C: In order to complete a high profile PhD research, a student should

have a good command of the language, a good handling of the computing tool and above all an excellent knowledge of the scientific research facets. They will be very useful. They will help researchers quickly access resources and save energy and time.

Supervisor D: I think that a PhD Student should be well acquainted with principals of critical thinking, and have a high critical spirit, as he should also be sufficiently aware with methodological studies, and cope with the latest developments in the field. In the same vein, (Matin & Khan, 2017, p. 26) identified that lack of students' knowledge, experience, commitment in thesis works are important factors for quality research. Developing research skills prior to research is important for students. (Meerah, 2012) stated that the major difficulties postgraduate students experience is research skills, especially methodological skills and using appropriate analysis and statistics.

Theme 3: Academic Environment

All of the supervisors interviewed believe of the importance of the academic environment in the process of research.

Supervisor A mentioned that Labs, laboratories and other facilities enlarge the researcher's knowledge about his area of expertise and other related fields. These facilities affect positively the research because they constitute opportunities for researchers to gain more insights and may take new directions they did not think about taking.

Same remark made by **Supervisor B:** resources , such as open-access databases, Libraries, laboratories, Video conferencing facility, and Digital library facility, strengthen the research and save time and effort for the researcher. Simply, the more data is easily-accessed, the better and quicker research is conducted.

Supervisor D stated that he strongly agrees with the fact that open-access databases, Libraries, laboratories, Video conferencing facility, and Digital library facility, affect the quality of the research because in addition to the role these aids play in providing relevant data about the subject matter, they enable the student save time and effort that can be exploited to improve his work.

(Matin & Khan, 2017, p. 23) maintained that cooperation from the institute in terms of providing guidance, resources and research cell help post graduate and graduate students achieve high quality research. Our study findings support the results of the study conducted by (Mahmooda, Asghar, & Naoreen, 2013, p. 2783) who investigated the factors that lead to success or failure of research projects and to find out critical factors that contribute to the success of research project. The results of his study show that administrative support is a paramount factor for the success of research projects. (Heng, Obaidul hamid, & khan, 2020, p. 976) also found that research productivity is influenced by academic environment. He stated :

‘The evidence presented in this review prompts us to believe that many scholars in peripheral contexts live and work in environments which tend to hold them back from engaging actively in research and publication’
(Heng, Obaidul hamid, & khan, 2020, p. 976)

Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore factors that contribute to high quality of doctoral and master research in the department of English at the University of Khenchela. Qualitative data from advisors’ interview were collected to explore three main themes considered by several researchers as the most important contributing factors to high quality research namely supervision, students’ prior knowledge, and institutional environment.

The findings revealed that supervision has a remarkable impact on the training of graduate and postgraduate students. Mentoring skills such as, advising students to transfer knowledge, and to supervise them are key determinants of students’ performance. Besides the quality of a supervisor’s mentoring skills and experience, students’ knowledge and skills play also an important role in achieving a high quality research.

Their competence in learning skills, their knowledge in research methodology and their motivation towards the completion of the research project are key factors determinants. In addition, institutional barriers like the absence of the necessary resources for educational activities, inadequate access to necessary research equipment, and inadequate library facilities slow down the research process.

The result of this study revealed that there is a need for more attention to these factors in order to boost the quality of research at the tertiary level. These factors are important indicators for stakeholders in order to promote and improve educational practices. Therefore, we recommend the following :

- Designing rigorous and comprehensive evaluation criteria to recognize and reward high-quality research in education doctoral and master research should be used as a tool for knowledge creation, assessing the validity of scientific claims and producing evidentiary bases for problem-solving and implementation.
- Doctoral and master research should focus only on critical issues in Algerian education master’s degree program pedagogy, contents and delivery modalities in some universities leave much to be desired. Master’s degree programs are keys when it comes to the fundamental ideas, roadmap and structure for organizing and delivering doctoral degree programs.
- Experts in the field should develop a framework for monitoring and assessing the quality of doctoral and master programs in universities. Critical processes such as dissertation defense, acceptable norms of supervision and of the quality of dissertations are matters that are of little concern. Plagiarism has become a serious concern among supervisors.
- This study also recommends that plagiarism check software should be given to

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supervisors so they can help their respective students to make sure that their theses/dissertations are plagiarism free or within tolerance limits.

- Finally, One of the limitations of this study is sample size; the power of our findings might increase if we conducted more interviews. The time restriction imposed on the study makes it difficult to expand the sample size. The small sample limits the generalizability of findings. Future research could use questionnaires to complement the research conducted in this study. Questionnaires could provide insights into some unanswered questions in this study.

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Appendix

Interview

Dear Sir / Madame ,

This unstructured interview is designed to explore factors affecting the quality of students’ master and doctoral research in the Department of English – University of Khenchela. The main objectives of this interview are to find out how supervision, students’ prior knowledge and academic environment constitute the factors that may affect the quality of research.

We would like to assure you that all your details and responses will be kept confidential and all information will be anonymized in any report arising from this study. Your cooperation will help a lot in carrying out the enquiry.

1- Supervision

What is the role of supervision in the process of research? Do you believe that good supervision and well-guided supervisee will affect the outcome of the research?

How can a supervisor help supervisee achieve a high quality of research?

Do you think the relationship between supervisor-supervisee is important? How does this relation affect the quality of research?

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2- Students’ prior knowledge (Students’ Research Competencies and Skills)

What are important epistemological prerequisites and methodological skills for PhD students to complete a high profile research?

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3- Academic environment

How can open-access databases, Libraries, laboratories, Video conferencing facility, and Digital library facility, affect the quality of students’ doctoral and master research?

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THANK YOU