Challenges in Completing Graduation Research Projects: A Descriptive Study of the Experiences of College of Education Students at University of Garmian

Karim Medhat Hatim

University of Garmian-College of Education / Sulaimani - Iraq

Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by fourth-year students in the College of Education at the University of Garmian while preparing their graduation research projects, and to identify differences in the participants' perspectives according to their scientific specializations. A total of 288 students from eight departments within the college participated in the study. In the first stage, the researcher created a 28-paragraph questionnaire to collect data from the research sample. In the second stage, the researcher used a Focus Group methodology to obtain a more in-depth understanding. The questionnaire was presented to a committee of specialized and experienced reviewers to establish face validity, and a preliminary sample of thirty people was used to ensure discriminant validity. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.825$), and the split-half method confirmed the stability of the instrument. The findings showed that the prominent challenges students encounter are finding enough scientific materials, such as articles, books, and not having enough supervision or support from supervisors when conducting research. In addition, students found it difficult to balance their time between other academic and personal obligations

and the demanding requirements of research. Students also experience low confidence in their research skills, primarily due to feeling that they have not received enough training and education in this area during their various educational stages. To increase students' confidence in their research skills, the study suggested that supervisor support should be increased, access to scientific resources should be expanded, and scientific research training programs should be improved.

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الملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف التحديات التي يواجهها طلاب السنة الرابعة في كلية التربية بجامعة گرميان أثناء إعداد مشـــاريع ابحاث التخرج الخاصـــة بهم، وتحديد الفروق في وجهات نظر المشاركين حسب تخصصاتهم العلمية. شـــارك في الدراســـة ما مجموعه 288 طالباً من ثماني أقســـام في الكلية. قام الباحث بإعداد استبيان مكون من 28 فقرة لجمع البيانات من عينة البحث. تم عرض الاستبيان على لجنة من الخبراء و المتخصصين للتحقق من الصـدق الظاهري للأســتبيان، واســتخدمت عينة أولية من ثلاثين شـخصـاً لضـمان الصـــلاحية التمييزية. تم قياس موثوقية الاستبيان باستخدام طريقة معامل ألفا كرونباخ ($\alpha=0.825$)، وأكد اســـلوب التجزئة النصـفية اســتقرار الأداة. في المرحلة الثانية، استخدم الباحث منهجية مجموعات التركيز للحصول على فهم أعمق للتحديات التي يواجهها الطلاب أثناء إعدادهم لمشـــاريع ابحاث التخرج. أظهرت النتائج أن التحديات البارزة التي يواجهها الطلاب هي العثور على مواد علمية كافية، مثل المقالات والكتب، وعدم وجود إشراف أو دعم كافٍ من المشـرفين عند إجراء البحث. بالإضــافة إلى ذلك، وجد الطلاب صـعوبة في الموازنة بين وقتهم و بين الالتزامات الأكاديمية والشخصية الأخرى والمتطلبات الصـــارمة للبحث. كما يعاني الطلاب من انخفاض الثقة في مهاراتهم البحثية، ويرجع ذلك أســاسـاً إلى شـعورهم بعدم تلقي التدريب والتعليم الكافيين في هذا المجال خلال مراحلهم التعليمية ولزيادة ثقة الطلاب في مهاراتهم البحثية،

أوصـت الدراسـة بضـرورة تعزيز دعم المشرفين، وتوسـيع إمكانية الوصـول إلى المصادر العلمية، وتحسين برامج التدريب على البحث العلمي.

Introduction

Universities are essential to the advancement of human society. They serve as centers for learning and critical thinking, where new thoughts are generated, discussed, and developed. Through scientific research, Universities contribute to uncovering the secrets of nature and attempting to employ it for the benefit of humans and other living beings. University research is a cornerstone of higher education, playing a crucial role in the development and advancement of knowledge.

Scientific research is one of the core components of higher education. UNESCO, at its 27th General Conference in November 1993, adopted a recommendation on the recognition of higher education qualifications, including a definition of higher education as high-level programs of scientific research training after secondary studies (Salman and Hassan, 2018). In this context, Walkington (2015) refers to a statement by the University Research Council and the National Conference on University Research in 2005, describing university research as "the pedagogy of the twenty-first century." The statement emphasizes the importance of scientific research in preparing students and developing their critical and creative thinking skills, encouraging them to enhance self-learning abilities, and cultivating research skills through the use of scientific methods for information acquisition, examination, and creative idea generation.

Lester and Lester (1999) highlighted the importance of scientific research across various subject areas. They emphasized the numerous benefits it offers in enhancing comprehension and cultivating students' critical thinking skills. From their perspective, research is a vital instrument for discovering truth and understanding phenomena; it also helps those engaged in academic research become more analytical and critical thinkers (as cited in Ngoc & Ngoc, 2021). Students' engagement with research-based education is a key component and a crucial skill set. To progress in these programs and advance their academic careers, students must undertake research in their specialized fields. In addition to improving their capacity for knowledge generation,

scientific research helps students sharpen their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. (Chankseliani et al., 2021).

Secondary education is a crucial stage in a student's academic life. This stage is essential for shaping and refining students' personalities, preparing them to become active contributors to their communities. Secondary education gives students the tools needed for assessing data, thinking rationally, and creatively solving issues by encouraging scientific curiosity, critical thinking, academic integrity, and a dedication to lifelong learning. Secondary education also instills ethical values, honesty, and diligence in students, turning them into responsible individuals who contribute positively to the community.

Al-Omari (2021) emphasizes the importance of secondary education in shaping students' personalities and readying them to be active participants in their societies. To achieve these goals, Al-Omari suggests the necessity of effectively teaching students scientific research skills through modern research methods that involve active participation in experimental research activities. Additionally, he highlights the importance of providing teachers with the skills to instruct students in research methodologies.

To effectively accomplish the objectives stated in curricula for basic education, it is essential to critically examine the educational instruments and fundamental ideas that facilitate successful learning. This involves prioritizing instructional strategies that enable students to actively discover new information and engage in self-directed participation. Fostering active learner engagement in the educational process is also crucial, along with the clear and precise formulation of educational goals (Bashir & Elias, 2007). Preparing university students to conduct research is one of the most fundamental principles of their academic journey. It provides them with opportunities to work beyond the traditional classroom setting and equips them with the necessary skills to become proficient researchers in the future. Research stimulates intellectual curiosity, fosters a sense of independence in learning, and helps students gain a deeper understanding of their chosen subject matter. Additionally, undergraduate research prepares students for future academic or professional aspirations by offering a unique opportunity to expand current knowledge. MacKug (2006) emphasizes that by conducting research projects, students can demonstrate their writing skills.

These projects, in turn, lead to the acquisition of beneficial research skills for students, such as identifying researchable topics, problem-solving techniques, critical thinking, and analytical and statistical skills (as cited in Kareem, & Abdulrahman, 2023).

Conducting research and writing research papers is considered one of the most important requirements of university education. They provide students with an opportunity to acquire specialized knowledge and develop critical thinking and academic writing skills. Elizabeth and Sofiou (2019) highlight that the process of writing a research paper by university students plays a significant role in helping them achieve academic gains and success throughout their educational journey. This is accomplished by enhancing their reading and writing skills at various levels. Reading for research involves not only gathering information but also demands a deep understanding of the collected data and a critical assessment of the sources for their credibility, which is essential in research evaluation and publication acceptance. Additionally, the act of composing research papers contributes to the development of students' thinking skills by stimulating them to establish connections between ideas, deduce causal relationships, and draw logical conclusions based on evidence. All these aspects collectively strengthen the students' capacity for self-directed learning and scientific research, which is a fundamental pillar for achieving academic success.

Although many universities acknowledge the importance of scientific research and inquiry-based learning in students' academic journeys, and while many of these institutions offer programs aimed at developing students' research and academic writing skills, students still encounter numerous challenges and obstacles that directly or indirectly affect the quality of their research and academic output. These challenges include personal aspects, as students may struggle with time management, balancing their academic studies, research requirements, and personal lives, which can lead to psychological and social pressures stemming from poor time organization. In academic terms, students might encounter difficulties in grasping the methodologies and procedures of scientific research. They also face significant challenges in locating trustworthy sources and extracting essential information from them. Additionally, students may struggle with the utilization of statistical tools and the scientific documentation of sources. Otoluwa et al. (2021) state that students have a great deal of difficulty when writing their research paper. While students may write essays or brief research papers with ease, creating a comprehensive research document in the

form of a thesis is far more challenging. Thesis writing calls for exact formatting and precise language, which can be confusing for many.

University of Garmian was established in (2010) as part of the efforts of the Kurdistan Regional Government to expand higher education opportunities in the region. The university initially started as a branch of the University of Sulaimani, but it was granted independent status in 2010 and officially named University of Garmian.

Like any new university, the University of Garmian faces numerous challenges and difficulties that have a negative impact on the quality of educational services provided to students. In addition to the traditional obstacles encountered by new researchers in general. Addressing the specific challenges of University of Garmian is essential to improving the undergraduate research experience. Each academic institution has its own unique culture, resources, and student characteristics, which make it essential to use specialized strategies to effectively support students.

Understanding and addressing these challenges are crucial for several reasons. Firstly, by considering the unique academic requirements and limitations of the university, this study ensures that support mechanisms and assistance are relevant to the specific context. Second, it allows for the creation of targeted solutions that match the goals and needs of Garmian students, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and scope of the program for preparing students for research

Research Problem

Higher education is witnessing a growing emphasis on developing scientific research skills among university students globally. Many universities encourage research and studies aimed at identifying the difficulties and challenges faced by students during their graduation research projects. As a newly established university, the University of Garmian, like any other modern academic institution, still lacks sufficient research in this crucial area. Based on the researcher's experience and knowledge, students at the University of Garmian encounter significant difficulties in conducting their graduation research. However, to date, no study has attempted to explore the specific areas of challenge and diagnose those obstacles.

To address the above problem, the following questions have been formulated to identify the research problem:

1. What are the main challenges faced by fourth-year students at the University of Garmian when preparing their graduation research projects?
2. Are there statistically significant differences in the nature of challenges faced by fourth-year students at the University of Garmian during their graduation research project preparation, based on their academic majors?

Importance of the Study

Research projects are essential for academic achievement and professional preparation. Understanding student difficulties in research writing allows universities to create targeted support programs. Identifying and understanding the difficulties faced by students in writing research projects can help develop targeted academic support programs. The findings of this study may be used to inform the creation of workshops, mentorship programs, and intervention programs that address the specific problems faced by students at University of Garmian. Furthermore, the study's findings may enhance university research pedagogy. By identifying areas where students struggle or need support, the university can improve its curriculum, instructional strategies, and resource allocation to better meet the needs of students working on research projects. Furthermore, the findings of the study can guide institutional policies related to academic support, research funding, and resource distribution. This information is crucial for ensuring that university policies create an environment favorable to academic success and research, while also aligning with the needs of students as indicated.

Research Objectives

1- Identifying the challenges faced by fourth-year students at the University of Garmian in completing their graduation research project.

2- To identify any significant differences in the nature and frequency of challenges across various disciplines?

Research Hypothesis

There are no statistically significant differences in the challenges faced by fourth-year students at the University of Garmian attributed to the academic department to which the students belong.

Scope of the Study

This study included all fourth-year students of the College of Education at the University of Garmian for the academic year 2023-2024.

Definitions of Terms

Challenges:

Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary defines challenge as "The situation of being faced with something that need great mental or physical efforts in order to done successfully and therefore tests a person's ability".

Collins COBUILD advanced learner's dictionary defines challenges as "Something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination".

Oxford dictionary defines challenges as "A new or difficult task that tests somebody's ability

and skill".

Scientific Research:

"Scientific research is a continuous and social activity, involving promotion and checking of ideas among colleagues. Research has to be planned carefully, with attention to design, variables, samples and subsequent data analysis. If all these areas are not thoroughly planned, results may be ambiguous or useless" (Coolican, 2024).

"Research is a type of systematic investigation that is empirical in nature and is designed to contribute to public knowledge" (Trochim et al, 2016) .

Graduation Research Project:

The graduation project is one of the most important requirements for completing an academic degree in various disciplines. It serves as a comprehensive research experience where students face real scientific challenges. This experience begins by identifying a specific problem related to their field of study. The student then formulates a testable hypothesis and designs appropriate experiments to validate this hypothesis.

The graduation project represents a rich experience that helps students develop their research and scientific skills, boost their self-confidence, and acquire the practical experience necessary to enter the job market (Rasol et al., 2015).

A research project is an in-depth paper developed by students to explore a chosen concept or idea from their academic studies. It involves independent research and critical thinking, allowing students to delve into a specific topic of interest and contribute to their understanding of the subject matter (Mustafa, 2004).

The graduation project is an individual or collaborative research endeavor undertaken by students to address a specific idea and formulate it as a research problem under the direct supervision of faculty members within a designated course with assigned hours and units. The primary objective of this undertaking is to train students in the initial stages of their academic journey on how to write and prepare scientific research, thereby ensuring that they can build upon this skill more accurately, objectively, and scientifically in their graduate studies. Additionally, it aims to educate students on the fundamentals of scientific research, its ethics, and the importance of upholding academic integrity when composing their research projects (Al-farhad, 2024).

Previous Studies

Numerous research works explore the challenges that university students encounter while undertaking and completing their final graduation projects.

Altikriti (2022) studied the challenges facing Jordanian undergraduate students in writing graduation research papers.

The study aimed to explore the challenges and difficulties that English Language and Literature students face in writing graduation research papers at the University of Jordan. The researcher used a questionnaire as the main data collection tool. The study sample included 45 students from the Department of English Language and Literature. The results showed that students were struggling with fundamental issues in writing their graduation research papers, including a lack of understanding of the writing process, limited access to reliable resources, difficulty in grasping research methodology, and inadequate training in academic writing.

Villanueva (2017) Study.

Titled: Identifying Problems of Undergraduate Students in Writing Research: Basis for Scaffolding

   This study aimed to identify the challenges undergraduate students at Bulacan State University in the Philippines face in different stages of the research writing process. The researcher adopted a descriptive survey method, with questionnaires as the main data collection tool. The study sample included students from the College of Education at Bulacan State University who were taking the research methodology course and were enrolled in the second semester of the 2016-2017 academic year. The study's findings showed that university students faced significant challenges in completing their research papers, including difficulties in formulating research titles, identifying stakeholders, aligning research with supporting theory, validating research instruments, interpreting data, and citing references correctly.

Qasem & Zayid (2019) Study

   Title: The Challenges and problems faced by Students in the Early Stage of Writing Research Projects in L2, University of Bisha, Saudi Arabia

   This study aimed to identify the challenges that university students face in the early stages of writing research proposals and projects. The study sample included undergraduate students in the final year of the College of Arts and Sciences at Bisha University in Nammas, Saudi Arabia. About 60 students from the English Department and the Computer Science Department participated in the study. The study examined the challenges of writing research proposals and projects, including difficulties with topic selection, methodology, motivation, knowledge gaps, time constraints, and psychological pressure. The results showed that most participants struggled with writing in English, with about 70% citing it as a major challenge, and many preferring to conduct research in their native language.

Abu Khalaf & Dr. Nader, 2018 Study

   Title: The Size of Administrative, Technical, and Linguistic Problems Facing Students Studying the Graduate Project Course at the Open University of Jerusalem

This study aimed to identify the size of the administrative, technical, and linguistic problems faced by students studying the graduate project course at the Open University of Jerusalem from their perspective. The study also aimed to identify the impact of the variables of gender, age, and type of experience on the size of these problems.

The researcher used a descriptive-analytical approach. The research community consisted of all students in the graduate project course in all educational regions and study centers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for the academic year (2005-2006), with a total of (1285) male and female students. The sample size represented 10% of the research community and amounted to (129) male and female students. The researcher used a questionnaire to determine the size of the problems faced by students in preparing the graduate project. The study found that students in the graduate project course faced significant challenges, including a lack of access to a good library, limited research experience, and a heavy academic workload. Additionally, students struggled with applying statistical methods correctly, understanding research types, and writing in a clear and grammatically correct way.

Research Methodology

In this research, an analytical descriptive approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. A questionnaire was used as a tool for quantitative data collection, and Focus Groups were conducted for qualitative data gathering.

Research Population and Sample

The research population included all fourth-year students in the College of Education at the University of Garmian for the academic year 2023-2024, which encompasses ten academic departments. Due to the year-end holiday, two departments could not participate in the study.

The research sample represents the students who attended and participated in the survey from the remaining eight departments. Incomplete Comprehensive Enumeration Sample was used to select the sample from the available students on the survey day, resulting in a total sample of 288 students distributed across the eight departments as follows: 59 students from the English Department, 39 students from the Psychological and Educational Sciences Department, 23 students from the biology Department, 49 students from the Physics Department, 30 students from the Geography Department, 21 students from the History Department, 29 students from

the Kurdish Language Department, and 38 students from the Arabic Language Department. Table (1)

Table (1) Research Sample

Departments	Frequency	Percent
English	59	20.5
Psychological and Educational Sciences	39	13.5
Biology	23	8.0
Physics	49	17.0
Geography	30	10.4
History	21	7.3
Kurdish language	29	10.1
Arabic language	38	13.2
Total	288	100.0

Data Collection Tool

To assess the difficulties faced by university students in completing their graduation research projects, a self-administered questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire was based on a review of previous studies such us Altikriti (2022), Al-Mokhtar (2022), Mohammad El-Freihat (2021), Qasem and Zayid (2019) consisting in the preliminary format of (30) items that utilized a 5-point Likert scale.

Since the vast majority of the research sample were only proficient in the Kurdish language, the researcher translated the questionnaire into Kurdish. To ensure the accuracy of the translation, the original English version was sent to a bilingual specialist in English and Kurdish for translation into Kurdish. The questionnaire was then sent to another bilingual specialist in Kurdish and English for back-translation

into English. By comparing the original English version with the back-translated version, the accuracy of the questionnaire translation was confirmed.

Validity of the Tool

To establish the face validity of the instrument, a content validation process was employed. A panel of experts, recruited from various relevant fields within University of Garmian, was invited to evaluate the instrument's content. These experts reviewed the instrument items and provided feedback on their clarity, relevance to the research objectives, and overall representativeness of the target construct. Their remarks were carefully analyzed, leading to refinements of the instrument. The final version of the instrument comprised 28 items, ensuring a comprehensive and well-defined measure for the study.

Verifying the Extremity Comparison

To assess the validity of the test, a two-extreme-groups method was applied to a pilot sample of 30 individuals, separate from the main sample. The questionnaire items were ranked in ascending order according to the total scores, from the lowest to the highest score. Then, the sample was divided into two extreme groups, each representing 33% of the total sample size.

To verify the existence of a statistically significant difference between the two groups, an independent sample t-test was employed. The results, as presented in Table 2, revealed that the t-value was statistically significant at a level of p = .000 (less than .05). Table (2).

Table (2) Validity of Extreme Comparison for the Scale

	participants	N	Mean	F	sig	t	df	sig
scores	Lower scores	10	73.90	.161	.693	-10.73	18	.000
	Higher scores	10	105.20					

The results of the above table indicate that the value of the t-test is significant at the 0.000 level, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, we conclude that there are statistically significant differences between the lower and upper groups. This suggests that the questionnaire is valid.

Scale reliability

An exploratory study was conducted to assess the reliability of a scale measuring difficulties in completing graduation research projects at the College of Education of the University of Garmian. The objective of this test was to examine the internal consistency of the scale using Cronbach's alpha method. The study included the participation of 30 male and female students who were not part of the original research sample. The analysis of the collected data revealed a high level of internal consistency for the questionnaire, as indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.825. This suggests that the items within the scale are highly correlated, providing evidence of good internal consistency for the measure, as presented in Table (3).

Table (3) the value of Cronbach's alpha for the scale

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.825	28

Cronbach's alpha is a statistical measure used to determine the internal consistency reliability of a set of items, particularly in psychometric research. It assesses the consistency or agreement among a set of items designed to measure a specific construct or variable. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating stronger internal consistency. Generally, a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable, although this threshold may vary depending on the research context and purpose (Harrison et al., 2020).

To ensure the reliability of the scale, a split-half reliability test was conducted on a pilot sample of 30 participants. This involved dividing the questionnaire into two halves: one containing odd-numbered questions and the other containing even-

numbered questions. The correlation coefficient was then calculated to determine how well scores on each half matched. To account for the potential bias of splitting the questionnaire, the Spearman-Brown formula was used to estimate the overall internal consistency coefficient for the entire scale.

Based on the correlation coefficient reported in Table 3, the two halves of the questionnaire appear to be highly correlated, suggesting good internal consistency for the test. Table (4).

Table (4) Split-Half Reliability Analysis

N	Correlation coefficient before correction	correction of the coefficient using the Spearman-Brown equation.
30	.810	8.95

Following the establishment of instrument validity and reliability, the researcher administered the questionnaire to the designated sample population. Upon completion of data collection and subsequent exclusion of incomplete responses, a final sample size of 288 usable questionnaires was achieved.

The data was entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS V23) software.

To address the first research question, responses were operationalized using a five-point Likert scale (Pimentel, 2010). Scores were interpreted according to the following categories, as displayed in Table (5). This categorization scheme provided a framework for analyzing participant responses and drawing conclusions about their agreement or disagreement with the presented statements.

Table (5) Five-point grading values for the Likert scale

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4.20 - 5	3.40 – 4.19	2.60 – 3.39	1.80 – 2.59	1 - 1.79
Very high	High	Medium	Low	Very low

Determination of Severity Levels

A scoring method was implemented to categorize the severity of the problem into distinct levels. This method involved calculating the interval between severity levels based on the equation:

Severity Interval = (Maximum Value - Minimum Value) / Number of Levels

Where:

- Maximum Value represents the highest possible score on the scale.

- Minimum Value represents the lowest possible score on the scale.

- Number of Levels refers to the predetermined number of severity categories (e.g., low, medium, high).

In this study, the maximum possible score was set at 5 and the minimum score at 1. The desired number of severity levels was three (low, medium, high). Substituting these values into the equation:

Severity Interval = (5 - 1) / 3 = 4 / 3 = 1.33

This calculation indicated a severity interval of 1.33. To establish the range of scores for each severity level, this interval was added sequentially to the minimum value (1).

- Level 1 (Low):   1.00 to 2.33

- Level 2 (Medium): 234 to 3.67

- Level 3 (High):   268 to 5.00

This approach ensured a consistent and objective method for classifying the severity levels based on the chosen scoring scale.

Results

First Research Question

The primary research question of this study investigates the challenges that university students faced during their graduation research projects. A quantitative approach was employed, utilizing a survey instrument with a five-point Likert scale ("Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree") to measure student perceptions of various challenges. The collected data was categorized into pre-defined severity levels (low, medium, high) to facilitate a more nuanced analysis of the challenges faced.

Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were calculated for each difficulty assessed in the survey. These statistics are detailed in Table (6), offering a comprehensive overview of the perceived challenges levels and the variability in student experiences.

Table (6) Mean, S. deviation, Rank and severity of each paragraph.

Q. N	Paragraph	Mean	SD	Rank	Severity
1	Choosing an appropriate research topic for my graduation project was a challenging task.	3.28	1.27	15	Medium
2	Managing my time to work on my graduation project was difficult.	3.71	1.19	3	High
3	It was challenging to find the appropriate sources (books, journals, and research papers) for my graduation project.	3.61	1.39	4	Medium
4	One of my problems was not knowing how to find the right sources for my research.	3.45	1.42	6	Medium
5	The lack of adequate resources, including books, journals, and research materials, in the university library was one of our challenges.	3.86	1.34	1	High

Q. N	Paragraph	Mean	SD	Rank	Severity
6	My knowledge was limited regarding the methods of scientific research.	3.39	1.25	8	Medium
7	My knowledge was limited regarding how to use a computer.	3.33	1.47	10	Medium
8	My knowledge was limited regarding how to use the Internet.	2.57	1.41	28	Medium
9	I had limited knowledge about how to effectively search the Internet for sources for my research.	2.91	1.35	26	Medium
10	I had limited knowledge about how to use other studies as sources in my research.	3.08	1.36	25	Medium
11	I had little knowledge of how to present my research problem in a scientific manner.	3.32	1.21	13	Medium
12	I had little knowledge about how to formulate my research questions in a scientific manner.	3.24	1.23	19	Medium
13	I had little knowledge about how to formulate the objectives of my research in a scientific manner.	3.22	1.24	22	Medium
14	I had limited knowledge in the field of statistics and its application in my research.	3.44	1.30	7	Medium
15	The lack of formal guidelines on the principles of conducting scientific research in my college was another issue.	3.59	1.37	5	Medium
16	My research supervisor did not provide me with the proper guidance.	2.75	1.48	27	Medium
17	Students are not sufficiently qualified for scientific research at different stages of their education.	3.82	1.39	2	High

Q. N	Paragraph	Mean	SD	Rank	Severity
18	My limited knowledge of other languages, including Arabic and English, among others, presented another challenge.	3.37	1.46	9	Medium
19	My knowledge was limited regarding the methods of academic writing.	3.32	1.30	12	Medium
20	I had little knowledge about how to analyze the information I had collected.	3.22	1.24	21	Medium
21	I had little knowledge about how to collect field data for my research.	3.25	1.18	18	Medium
22	I had little knowledge of data collection instruments such as surveys, interviews, and observations.	3.26	1.19	16	Medium
23	I had little knowledge of how to extract and present the results of my research.	3.30	2.18	14	Medium
24	I had little knowledge about how to present the findings of my research in the final report.	3.33	1.55	11	Medium
25	I had little knowledge about how to design tables and figures to present the results of my research.	3.10	1.26	24	Medium
26	I had little knowledge about how to paraphrase ideas from other sources.	3.17	1.23	23	Medium
27	I had little knowledge about how to compare the findings of my research with those of previous studies.	3.26	1.31	17	Medium
28	I had little knowledge of how to properly document the sources of my research in an academic manner.	3.23	1.30	20	Medium

The survey results, detailed in Table (6), illustrate the challenges university students encounter while completing their graduation research projects. The data were classified into severity levels (low, medium, high) based on predefined score ranges to aid analysis.

Table (6) indicates that three of the questionnaire paragraphs had a high degree of severity, while the remaining twenty-six paragraphs were of medium severity. It is also clear from Table (6), that Paragraph (5), which states, " The lack of adequate resources, including books, journals, and research materials, in the university library was one of our challenges" ranked first with a high degree of severity. It had a mean of (3.86) and a standard deviation of (1.34). Paragraph (17), "Students are not sufficiently qualified for scientific research at different stages of their education," came in second place with a high mean of (3.82) and a standard deviation of (1.39). Paragraph (2), "Managing my time to work on my graduation project was difficult." ranked third with a high mean of (3.71) and a standard deviation of (1.19). Meanwhile, Paragraph (3), "It was challenging to find the appropriate sources (books, journals, and research papers) for my graduation project." came in fourth with a mean of (3.61) and a standard deviation of (1.39). Paragraph (15), "The lack of formal guidelines on the principles of conducting scientific research in my college was another issue.," ranked fifth, with a mean of (3.59) and a standard deviation of (1.37). Finally, Paragraph (8), "My knowledge was limited regarding how to use the Internet." came in last, with a mean of (2.57) and a standard deviation of (1.41).

The survey results revealed several key challenges faced by students in conducting their research projects. One of the primary concerns was the lack of available sources. Students expressed dissatisfaction with the insufficient resources in the university library and found it challenging to access online sources as well. This scarcity of sources hindered their research process and impacted the overall quality of their work. Additionally, many students felt they did not receive adequate guidance and supervision from their assigned supervisors. They believed that the lack of guidance affected their research negatively, leaving them with a sense of uncertainty and, at times, misdirection. The respondents also highlighted the issue of time management, stating that balancing academic and personal commitments proved difficult, which, in turn, slowed down their research progress. Furthermore, a significant number of students indicated a shortage of necessary research skills and training before initiating their projects.

This lack of preparation made the research process more daunting and complicated. Lastly, linguistic barriers emerged as a notable challenge, particularly regarding the Kurdish language. Many sources were in languages other than Kurdish, making it difficult for students to access and understand the information they needed for their research.

Second Research Question

Are there statistically significant differences in the nature of challenges faced by fourth-year students at the University of Garmian during their graduation research project preparation, based on their academic majors?

This study investigated the challenges faced by undergraduate students from different departments within the College of Education at the University of Garmian. The analysis included a sample of 288 students and employed a one-way between groups analysis of variance ANOVA to examine statistically significant differences in the difficulties reported by students from eight different departments.

The mean scores for each department are as follows: English (92.47, SD = 17.36), Psychological and Educational Sciences (94.84, SD = 15.66), Biology (85.73, SD = 14.33), Physics (97.44, SD = 20.25), Geography (89.00, SD = 18.51), History (88.52, SD = 21.61), Kurdish Language (99.86, SD = 19.25), and Arabic Language (87.39, SD = 18.70). Table (7)

Table (7) Descriptive statistics

Departments	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
English	59	92.474	17.366
Psychological and Educational Sciences	39	94.846	15.668
Biology	23	85.739	14.331

Physics	49	97.449	20.256
Geography	30	89.000	18.513
History	21	88.523	21.613
Kurdish language	29	99.862	19.253
Arabic language	38	87.394	18.700
Total	288	92.527	18.607

Test of Homogeneity of Variances:

Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, $F(7,280) = 0.676$, p = 0.692. Table (8).

Table (8) Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.676	7	280	.692

The ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences in the difficulties encountered among the departments, $F(7,280) = 2.447$, p = .019. Although the differences were statistically significant, the actual differences in mean scores between the groups were small. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .05, which according to Cohen's (1988) classification, indicates a small effect size (Pallant, 2020, pp. 268-269). Table (9).

Table (9) ANOVA Test

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5727.666	7	818.238	2.447	.019
Within Groups	93638.111	280	334.422		
Total	99365.778	287			

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test did not identify any significant differences between specific pairs of departments, suggesting that while the overall ANOVA was significant, no two departments had a large enough difference in mean scores to be individually significant.

The results indicate that while there is a statistically significant difference in the reported difficulties among students from different departments, the practical significance of these differences is minimal. This suggests that departmental affiliation has some impact on the difficulties students face in their research projects, but other factors might play a more crucial role. Further research could explore these additional factors to better understand the underlying causes of these difficulties.

To gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties faced by university students during their graduation research projects, the researcher employed a Focus Group method in the second stage. A colleague was engaged to assist with this interaction. Two Focus Group sessions were organized: the first with a group of five graduate students, using the "Focus Group" strategy. The questions for this session were developed based on the research objectives and reviewed by experts to ensure they were clear, accurate, and relevant to the intended scope of measurement.

The colleague led the first session, which took place on May 23, 2024, with a group of five graduate students from University of Garmian who had completed their graduation research during their undergraduate studies. The session lasted for an hour and a half and was held in one of the university's College of Education halls. The facilitator began by providing participants with instructions on how to participate and an overview of the topic under discussion. She emphasized confidentiality and assured participants that their names would not be revealed and that the shared information would only be used for scientific research. The participants expressed their willingness to participate in the Focus Group and their hope that such efforts would help identify and address the obstacles that student researchers face when conducting graduation research.

The discussion questions were then introduced, and the members were given an opportunity to examine the questions among themselves before sharing their thoughts and participating in a discussion about the session's central issues. A mobile phone was used to record the conversations, which were later transcribed

The second session was held online via the Viber app on June 17, 2024, with a group of three graduates from various specialties who had previously written and discussed graduation research projects. This session also lasted an hour. After presenting the meeting's subject and goals and assuring participants of the privacy of their names, the facilitator continued by asking the questions.

The Focus Group sessions with University of Garmian's students revealed a common set of difficulties and concerns regarding their research projects. The participants emphasized the lack of sufficient resources as a major problem. This included difficulty accessing electronic sources due to a lack of expertise and limited access to appropriate resources in university libraries. The students also faced language barriers and felt they lacked the essential language skills for conducting effective research.

Professors' supervision and guidance were noted to be variable. Some students felt they had to figure out how to conduct research on their own, while others received only minimal assistance. This variation highlights the need for improved and standardized support from academic supervisors.

In addition, participants expressed a desire for more support at specific stages of the research process, particularly in data collection and sample selection, proposal formulation, and research discussion preparation.

They also raised concerns about the availability of academic resources, highlighting that students rely heavily on the internet due to the university library's insufficient scientific resources.

According to the students, resource limitations had a significant impact on the depth and quality of their research. They felt that the lack of sources restricted their ability to conduct comprehensive research and, at times, led to the rejection of their work. Additionally, time management was a common obstacle as students struggled to balance their research with academic obligations, personal commitments, internships, and religious observances during Ramadan.

Moreover, the participants acknowledged that their level of preparation for skill development varied throughout their studies. They preferred the informal academic preparation provided by the advice and insights of previous graduates over more formal methods. This suggests that research skill development benefits from peer support and mentorship.

It was noted that there were no seminars or workshops on research methods, which impacted the students' overall preparation. They felt that their academic curriculum lacked essential elements, such as practical guidance and instruction in research methods.

Lastly, the students recognized the importance of being fluent in a foreign language, selecting relevant research topics, and mastering the use of computers and the internet for future success. They placed a high value on developing research skills and knowledge that would support their success in both academic and professional endeavors.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges that University of Garmian, College of Education students faced when working on their research projects. To collect preliminary data, a questionnaire was used in the first stage. The Focus Group approach was applied in the second stage to gain deeper insights. This method allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties by capturing both general patterns and specific individual experiences.

The questionnaire revealed a number of widespread problems. Many students reported difficulties in finding sufficient resources, including internet databases and library materials. Doubts and dissatisfaction were also heightened by the belief among many students that their supervisors were not providing adequate direction. The lack of training programs and workshops to clarify the fundamentals of monitoring student research may contribute to this issue, as instructors and professors might not possess the necessary supervisory skills. Supporting this viewpoint. Cotze and Harnt (2001) support this view by arguing that problems of academic supervision are mainly due to the ambiguity of the philosophy, objectives, and procedures of academic supervision for both students and academic advisors. Akyürek and Afacan (2019) also suggested that supervisors at universities should be trained to equip future researchers with essential research skills. In light of this study, it is evident that academics lack effective supervisory abilities (Otoluwa et al,2021).

Another major issue that students faced was managing their time effectively, as many struggled to balance their research projects with their personal and academic obligations. According to Qasim and Zayed's (2019) study on the difficulties faced by students during project implementation, students have a limited amount of time to complete their research projects. This study revealed that fourth-year students experience the most significant time pressures as they prepare to finish their coursework, write their graduation thesis, and engage in scientific research (Linh & Quyen, 2022). Furthermore, a significant number of participants expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to conduct research, attributing this to shortcomings in their education and training. These findings align with those of Gupta (2012), who identified similar factors contributing to graduate students' failures during the research process. These factors include a lack of research skills, a negative view of research as difficult, challenging relationships with supervisors, poor time management, difficulty finding a suitable supervisor, insufficient research resources, a lack of understanding of research culture, and a lack of cooperation (Linh & Quyen, 2022).

To dig deeper into these issues, two Focus Group sessions were held to explore these topics in more detail. Rich qualitative data was gathered from the first in-person session with five graduates and the second online session with three graduates from various specializations. The main challenge identified in both Focus Group sessions was the lack of readily available resources. Participants noted the inadequacy of the university library and the difficulty of finding relevant internet resources due to limited

experience and language obstacles. One participant specifically highlighted the challenge of conducting research due to the limited availability of Kurdish sources. These findings align with the questionnaire responses, which emphasize the need for improved access to academic databases and library services.

The insufficient supervision was further demonstrated by the Focus Groups. Students mentioned that their supervisors frequently gave them little direction and expected them to be self-sufficient. This presented particular challenges during the two crucial stages of the research process, such as data collection and analysis. Participants also reported receiving contradictory instructions from several professors, which added to their confusion. These findings support the questionnaire feedback and highlight the need for more organized and supportive supervisory procedures. Simuforosa et al. (2015) emphasized the significance of scientific supervision in research. They noted that scientific supervision is a fundamental element that ensures students remain on the right track in their research and adhere to scientific, professional, and ethical standards. Furthermore, it greatly contributes to the successful completion of research within the designated time frame.

Time management issues were a constant concern. Focus Group participants provided detailed descriptions of the specific difficulties they faced, such as balancing research with coursework, practical experiences, and personal commitments. These detailed descriptions support the questionnaire responses and highlight the complexity of time management challenges. Elmabruk and Bishti (2020) found in their study that a significant number of participants faced challenges with time management. They revealed that the demands of research, academic pursuits, and personal life obligations created additional burdens, increasing pressure and negatively impacting the quality of their graduate research outputs.

The lack of adequate training and preparation was another significant issue addressed. Focus Group participants felt that their ability to conduct successful research was limited by their underdeveloped research skills. This viewpoint was reflected in the questionnaire results, where many students reported feeling unprepared. The Focus Groups recommended increasing seminars and practical training in research to develop essential skills. These findings aligned with the results of Qamar's (2023) study, which revealed that 51% of students considered supervision and training obstacles as significant challenges during their graduate research projects.

The effectiveness of current support mechanisms received mixed feedback from the Focus Groups. While some participants acknowledged the value of occasional seminars, the general view was that these opportunities were rare and insufficient. This finding suggests that the university should improve both the accessibility and quality of its research support programs.

The results from the questionnaire and Focus Group discussions highlight several areas needing improvement. Firstly, it is crucial to enhance library resources and ensure better access to online databases. Secondly, the university should consider implementing more structured and supportive mentoring practices to assist students in their research efforts. Additionally, providing comprehensive research training and workshops can help address the skills limitations identified by students. Finally, improving the availability and effectiveness of support systems, such as seminars and peer learning opportunities, can equip students with the essential tools and confidence to conduct their research effectively.

Conclusion

This study underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by students at the University of Garmian during their graduation research projects. Addressing these challenges can enhance the overall quality of student research projects and better prepare them for their future academic endeavors. These findings underscore the importance of providing students with comprehensive support, including access to diverse sources, clear guidance from supervisors, improved time management skills, and linguistic assistance to overcome language barriers.

By addressing these issues through targeted improvements in resources, supervision, training, and support, the university can significantly enhance the research experience and outcomes for its students. The findings provide a valuable foundation for developing strategies to support student researchers more effectively in the future.

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