Mapping Dissertation-Writing Challenges Among Moroccan Doctoral Students: A Quantitative Descriptive Study

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Abstract

Doctoral dissertation writing is a demanding academic process and a key component of research capacity development. Despite increased investment in higher education, doctoral completion remains a major concern in Morocco. This quantitative descriptive study examines the prevalence and severity of dissertation-writing challenges among Moroccan doctoral students. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered to 300 doctoral candidates enrolled in English studies across Moroccan universities and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings show that systemic and personal obstacles—particularly stress, anxiety, and time-management difficulties—represent the most severe challenges. Substantial difficulties were also reported in research planning and methodological rigor, especially research design and statistical analysis, as well as in critical academic writing and discussion chapter development. These findings highlight the need for targeted institutional interventions, including enhanced methodological training, academic writing support, psychological assistance, and improved supervisory practices to support timely doctoral completion and research productivity in Morocco.

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education has been well known as a critical driver of economic growth, innovation, and societal progress, particularly in developing economies where investment in human capital is the foundation of modernization and global competitiveness (Bloom et al., 2006; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Doctoral education plays a central role in this path by enhancing the strength of research in the nation and producing future researchers capable of contributing to knowledge production and generating significant impact in evidence-based policymaking (von Greiff, 2007; Chapman & Austin, 2002). In Morocco, universities are increasingly being placed in the role of agents of socioeconomic development, as seen in government efforts in the quest to align higher education with national development agendas. However, even with the growing investment in the higher education sector, the doctoral completion rates remain a consistent issue, and many students have a high number of years attached to enrollment or drop out during the dissertation.

Writing a doctoral dissertation is a tedious academic process that involves excellent research design, academic writing, critical thinking, and long-term self-regulation abilities (Madsen, 1983; Lovitts, 2002). Past studies have all maintained a pattern of indicating that

doctoral students face a myriad of difficulties, such as inadequate methodology preparation, accessibility to academic literature, unequal supervisory assistance, and psychological stresses in the form of stress and anxiety (Golde, 2006; Gardner, 2009). In formulating higher education systems, structural constraints, lack of research facilities, and conflicting personal and professional roles tend to compound these challenges (El-Khoury, 2015; Ramirez, 2008).

Globally, scholars emphasize the central role of higher education in fostering innovation, technological advancement, and economic growth (von Greiff, 2007; Bloom et al., 2006; Alam et al., 2007). The rapid expansion of higher education systems, particularly in the Global South, has been driven by growing demand for skilled labor and the transition toward knowledge-based economies (Schofer & Meyer, 2005; Chapman & Austin, 2002). However, increased enrollment has not always resulted in proportional growth in research productivity. In many Arab countries, including Morocco, structural barriers such as limited research funding, uneven doctoral training, and underdeveloped institutional support continue to constrain scholarly output (El-Khoury, 2015; Ramirez, 2008; El Kaffass, 2007).

Even though Moroccan universities have gained greater international visibility, the infrastructure for doctoral training and research remains uneven. Doctoral students commonly face challenges related to research planning and methodology, academic writing, supervision, and access to academic resources. For non-native English speakers, these difficulties are compounded by language barriers and limited academic writing support. Writing a doctoral dissertation requires long-term academic work, critical thinking, and the effective presentation of arguments (Madsen, 1983). Empirical studies in the Moroccan context indicate that students struggle with delimiting research topics, selecting and applying appropriate methodological approaches, and disseminating their findings through academic publication. They also report concerns regarding the quality of supervision and insufficient financial support to conduct research under favorable conditions (Zohri, 2016). Despite recognition of these obstacles, there remains a notable lack of systematic empirical studies quantifying the prevalence and frequency of dissertation-writing challenges among Moroccan doctoral candidates.

This study addresses this gap by providing a quantitative descriptive analysis of dissertation-writing challenges among Moroccan doctoral students. Rather than examining causal relationships between variables, the study focuses on mapping the extent, frequency, and perceived severity of challenges across key academic, methodological, systemic, and personal domains. By identifying which obstacles are most pronounced, the study seeks to inform institutional policies, supervision practices, and targeted doctoral support mechanisms that can enhance doctoral persistence and timely completion.

1.1. Research Objective

The main objective of this study is to identify, categorize, and rank the primary challenges encountered by Moroccan doctoral students during the dissertation-writing process.

1.2. Research Questions

1. What academic writing challenges do Moroccan doctoral students face during dissertation writing?
2. What methodological and research planning challenges hinder dissertation progress?
3. What systemic and personal obstacles affect doctoral students' ability to complete their dissertations?

By systematically mapping these challenges, the study aims to provide actionable insights for universities, supervisors, and policymakers, ultimately contributing to improved doctoral training, higher completion rates, and strengthened research capacity in Morocco.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is a well-known fact that doctoral dissertation writing is one of the most challenging tasks in higher academic training, and it demands knowledge of academic discourse conventions, research expertise, organization, and a long-term scholarly interest. According to the findings of empirical investigations, it is evident that doctoral students experience various issues connected with the level of academic writing skills, literature review development, research design and methodology, the quality of supervision, time management, and mental health (McQuillan, 2021; Hyland, 2009; Swales and Feak, 2004, 2012). The mentioned obstacles become especially relevant when students are about to leave the structured coursework and engage in independent research, where they are expected to demonstrate creativity, methodological soundness, and academic independence.

Success in dissertation writing depends on clarity, coherence, effective argumentation, and adherence to disciplinary and stylistic norms, including appropriate citation and formatting conventions such as APA or Chicago styles (Cargill & O'Connor, 2021; Booth et al., 2009; Hart, 1998; Ridley, 2012). However, increased doctoral enrollment—especially in developing contexts—has not always been matched by adequate institutional support, resulting in uneven research productivity and prolonged completion times.

2.1. Academic Writing Challenges

Among the most common challenges, academic writing problems are often mentioned by doctoral students. It has been found that students tend to have difficulties organizing long arguments, effectively using sources, being coherent and cohesive, and writing in the correct academic register (Lea & Street, 2006; Brito, 2022; Hansen, 2019). Although on the one hand, simple linguistic accuracy is not a major issue at the level of doctoral, on the other hand, higher-order writing abilities, which include the synthesis, evaluation, and argumentation skills, are a thorn in the flesh.

These difficulties are particularly pronounced in the discussion chapter, where students are expected to interpret findings, relate results to existing literature, and demonstrate advanced critical thinking (Badenhorst, 2018; Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Hart, 1998). Weaknesses in organization, critical engagement, and stylistic control can significantly undermine the scholarly quality and credibility of doctoral dissertations. Strategies such as detailed outlining, peer feedback, systematic revision, and proofreading have been shown to improve coherence and overall writing quality (Badenhorst, 2018; Flowerdew & Li, 2007).

2.2. Literature Review and Scholarly Argumentation Challenges

The literature review constitutes a foundational component of doctoral research, requiring students to identify relevant sources, evaluate their credibility, synthesize diverse perspectives, and position their study within existing scholarship. Numerous studies indicate that doctoral students struggle with locating appropriate literature, managing extensive bodies of information, identifying research gaps, and constructing theoretically grounded arguments (Boote & Beile, 2005; Creswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2013).

The lack of training in the literature search methods, the absence of access to scholastic databases, and the lack of guidance in synthesis and argumentation make this process even more complicated, especially in resource-limited situations. The challenges associated with literature review writing frequently extend to the general issues of conceptual coherence, theoretical conceptualization, and argumentative academic writing (Booth et al., 2009; Murray, 2013). Annotated bibliographies, bibliographic software, system reviews, and mentors are some of the tools suggested to facilitate analytical rigor and coherence (Booth et al., 2008; Murray, 2013).

2.3. Research Planning and Methodological Rigor

Methodological challenges are also widely documented in the doctoral education literature. Doctoral students frequently report difficulties in formulating research questions, selecting appropriate research designs, ensuring data validity and reliability, and conducting statistical analyses (Creswell, 2014; Babbie, 2016; Miles & Huberman, 1994). These challenges are often linked to insufficient methodological training and limited supervisory guidance.

Evidence from the developing sector indicates that lack of access to training in research, research technology, and facilities perpetuates methodological problems (Ehrenberg & Mavros, 1995; Pyhältö et al., 2012; Korthagen, 2016). This indicates that a lack of proper methodological support may lead to uncertainty, delay, and low confidence in the research capabilities of the students, thereby impacting the outcome of the research (Hwang et al., 2015).

2.4. Systemic and Personal Obstacles

In addition to academic and methodological questions, systemic and personal barriers have a major impact on the doctoral experience. One of the main causes of delayed completion and attrition is hardship in managing time—usually linked to procrastination, perfectionism, and fear of failure—and it is always referred to as a major factor (Lovitts, 2002; Steel, 2007; Pychyl & Flett, 2012; Chan, 2014). Psychological hurdles, such as stress, anxiety, writer's block, and self-doubt, are quite common during the dissertation stage and lead to the deterioration of both productivity and health (Boice, 1993; Murray, 2014; Rose, 2009; Sverdlik et al., 2018).

The supervisee–supervisor relationship also plays a decisive role in doctoral progress. Effective supervision characterized by constructive feedback, clear expectations, and relational awareness enhances motivation, satisfaction, and timely completion (Wright et al., 2007; Stubb et al., 2014; Gardner, 2009). On the other hand, the absence of a clear supervisory framework outlining the respective duties and responsibilities of teachers and students—highlighted in several studies within the Moroccan context—leads to misalignment between students' expectations of feedback and supervisors' understanding of their feedback roles, which in turn contributes to delays and poor-quality research outputs (Larouz & Abouabdelkader, 2020).

Financial constraints further impede doctoral progress. Limited funding for research materials, conferences, and access to scholarly resources often forces students to engage in part-time work, diverting time and energy away from dissertation writing and affecting overall quality (Feizi, 2024; McDonald & Hatcher, 2023; Gardner, 2009). For non-native English speakers, language barriers add another layer of difficulty, complicating grammar, syntax, clarity, and adherence to formal academic style (Belcher, 2009; Flowerdew & Li, 2007; Swales & Feak, 2012). Targeted institutional interventions, such as writing centers, specialized courses, and supervisor guidance, are therefore essential (Nesi et al., 2012; Neupane Bastola, 2022).

The literature review comes to the conclusion that doctoral students have to deal with various and interconnected difficulties in the process of writing a dissertation, which consist of academic writing, developing a literature review, planning and conducting research, quality of supervision, language proficiency, financial resources, managing time, and mental health. These challenges have been extensively reported worldwide, yet in many higher education systems, context-specific quantitative evidence is still scarce. To overcome these challenges, it is necessary to come up with the structured, context-sensitive institutional strategies, which include the targeted training, mentorship, academic writing support, and comprehensive doctoral support policies that will not only result in higher quality dissertations but also in their timely completion and overall better doctoral experience (Lea & Street, 2006; Murray, 2014; Boice, 1990).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design to examine the prevalence and severity of dissertation-writing challenges among Moroccan doctoral students. Guided by a positivist research philosophy, the study assumes that doctoral challenges exist independently of the researcher and can be measured objectively through standardized instruments (Collis & Hussey, 2003; Saunders et al., 2007). A deductive approach was adopted, focusing on predefined challenge domains derived from the literature and operationalized through measurable indicators. Consistent with the descriptive nature of the study, no causal relationships or hypotheses were tested.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The study sample consisted of 300 doctoral students enrolled in ten Moroccan universities. Participants were selected using convenience sampling to capture a broad range of doctoral experiences across institutions and stages of doctoral progression (Creswell, 2014). Doctoral students were not categorized by year of study, as dissertation-related challenges are dynamic and may recur at multiple stages of doctoral education (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001; Tinto, 2012). The sample included doctoral candidates enrolled in English studies, reflecting the linguistic and academic demands associated with dissertation writing in this field.

3.3. Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a questionnaire designed to measure dissertation-writing challenges across four main domains:

1. demographic information;
2. satisfaction with guidance and institutional support;
3. academic writing challenges; and
4. dissertation-related obstacles, including literature review, research planning, methodological rigor, and systemic and personal challenges.

Responses were measured using five-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always), capturing both the frequency and perceived severity of challenges. A pilot study involving 30 doctoral students was conducted to ensure clarity, reliability, and content validity of the instrument. Based on pilot feedback, minor revisions were made to improve item wording and comprehensibility.

3.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and distributional indicators, were employed to summarize and interpret the prevalence and severity of dissertation-writing challenges (Pallant, 2001; **Field, 2018;** Fraenkel et al., 2015). These statistics were used to identify, compare, and rank the most critical challenges across the four domains: academic writing, literature review and scholarly argumentation, research planning and methodological rigor, and systemic and personal obstacles.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. All responses were anonymized, and confidentiality was guaranteed. Data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic research purposes, in accordance with established ethical research guidelines (Reid et al., 2018).

4. RESULTS

This section presents the quantitative findings from 300 doctoral students across ten Moroccan universities, focusing on the main challenges that hinder dissertation completion. Demographic analysis shows a balanced gender distribution (57.3% male, 42.7% female) and a wide age range, with most participants between 26 and 40 years. Students represented diverse fields, with Applied Linguistics as the largest group (45%), and were enrolled across all doctoral years, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the doctoral journey.

The 28-item questionnaire demonstrated excellent reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.995) and content validity through literature review, expert evaluation, and pilot testing. Descriptive statistics highlighted the prevalence and severity of key challenges, including academic writing, literature review, methodological difficulties, and systemic/personal obstacles.

4.1.Demographic Overview

The participant pool was diverse in terms of gender, age, university affiliation, field of study, and stage of doctoral progression. Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 57.3% male and 42.7% female participants. Age ranged from 20 to 41+, with the majority between 26 and 40 years. Students represented ten universities, with Moulay Ismail University, Meknes (15.7%) and Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Fes (14.3%) contributing the largest proportions. Applied Linguistics was the most common field of study (45%), followed by TEFL (12.7%) and Gender and Cultural Studies combined (22%). Participants spanned all doctoral years, with first-year students forming the largest group (21.3%).

4.2. Descriptive Analysis of Satisfaction with Guidance and Support

Students reported varying levels of satisfaction with the guidance and support received during their doctoral studies (Table 3.1). The largest group, 23.0% (n = 69), expressed a neutral view of the support provided. Dissatisfied students comprised 21.7% (n = 65), while 19.3% (n = 58) reported being very dissatisfied. In contrast, 18.0% (n = 54) were satisfied, and an equal proportion (18.0%, n = 54) reported being very satisfied.

These results indicate a wide range of experiences with doctoral guidance. Notably, a majority of students—63.0% when combining neutral, dissatisfied, and very dissatisfied responses—did not express clear satisfaction, highlighting areas for potential improvement in supervisory and institutional support.

Table 3.1 Satisfaction with Guidance and Support

Satisfaction Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Very dissatisfied	58	19.3	19.3	19.3
Dissatisfied	65	21.7	21.7	41.0
Neutral	69	23.0	23.0	64.0
Satisfied	54	18.0	18.0	82.0
Very satisfied	54	18.0	18.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

4.3. Descriptive Analysis of Academic Writing

The academic writing tasks are considered a significant hurdle by doctoral students. The difficulty levels reported by the participants are summarized in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Academic Writing Difficulties

Difficulty Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely easy	10	3.3	3.3	3.3
Easy	18	6.0	6.0	9.3
Neither easy nor difficult	103	34.3	34.3	43.7
Difficult	112	37.3	37.3	81.0

Extremely difficult	57	19.0	19.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

More than half of the participants (56.3%, n = 169) reported academic writing as difficult, with 37.3% (n = 112) rating it as "difficult" and 19.0% (n = 57) as "extremely difficult." A substantial portion (34.3%, n = 103) expressed a neutral view, while only 9.3% (n = 28) found academic writing easy or extremely easy.

These findings indicate that most doctoral students experience considerable difficulty with academic writing, likely due to the complexity of doctoral research, expectations for original work, and limited writing support. The results underscore the need for enhanced academic writing resources and targeted interventions to support students in writing their dissertations.

4.4. Challenges Doctoral Students Encounter While Working on Their Dissertations

4.4.1. Challenges in Research Planning and Methodological Rigor

Doctoral students face considerable challenges in research planning and applying methodological rigor. Table 3.3 summarizes the frequency of these difficulties.

Table 3.3. Challenges in Research Planning and Methodological Rigor

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	468	22.3	22.3	22.3
Frequently	665	31.7	31.7	54.0
Sometimes	536	25.5	25.5	79.5
Rarely	268	12.8	12.8	92.2
Never	163	7.8	7.8	100.0
Total	2,100	100.0	100.0	

Results indicate that 22.3% of students always struggle with research planning and methodology, and 31.7% frequently experience these difficulties, making this the most common challenge. Another 25.5% sometimes face these issues, while 12.8% rarely and 7.8% never encounter problems. Overall, the majority of students report ongoing difficulties, highlighting the need for stronger guidance and support in these crucial aspects of doctoral research.

4.4.2. Responses to Individual Items of Challenges in Research Planning and Methodological Rigor

Table 3.4 presents responses for specific aspects of research planning and methodological rigor.

Table 3.4 Individual Item Responses for Challenges in Research Planning and Methodological Rigor

Item	Always (%)	Frequently (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
1. Choosing a significant topic	19.7	25.7	38.3	9.7	6.7
2. Identifying gaps in the literature	27.7	42.0	20.3	7.3	2.7
3. Crafting a research design	28.3	44.3	18.3	5.7	3.3
4. Ensuring data validity and reliability	25.7	32.3	29.3	7.7	5.0
5. Statistical analysis	43.3	37.0	10.0	4.7	5.0
6. Ethical considerations	3.7	7.7	24.3	35.0	29.3
7. Data analysis instruments	7.7	32.3	38.3	19.0	2.7

The findings reveal that doctoral students struggle most with statistical analysis (Item 5), with over 80% reporting frequent or constant difficulties. Crafting an appropriate research design (Item 3) and identifying gaps in the literature (Item 2) are also common challenges, reported as frequent or constant by 72.6% and 69.7% of students, respectively. Ensuring data validity and reliability (Item 4) is another significant difficulty, affecting 58.0% of participants.

Choosing a research topic (Item 1) and managing data analysis instruments (Item 7) present moderate challenges, whereas ethical considerations (Item 6) appear less problematic, with most students (64.3%) rarely or never encountering difficulties. These results suggest that while ethical issues are relatively limited, students continue to struggle substantially with research design, data analysis, and identifying literature gaps—critical components for producing rigorous and successful dissertations.

4.4.2.1. Presentation of the Most Frequently Reported Challenges in Research Planning and Methodological Rigor

Doctoral students reported several recurring challenges related to research planning and methodological rigor, particularly statistical analysis, research design, and identifying gaps in the literature.

Statistical Analysis

Table 3.5 illustrates the prevalence of statistical difficulties. Nearly half of the respondents (43.3%, n = 130) reported always encountering statistical problems, while 37.0% (n = 111) reported frequent difficulties. Combined, 80.3% of students struggle with statistics either always or frequently. Only 10.0% (n = 30) experienced these issues sometimes, and a minority rarely (4.7%, n = 14) or never (5.0%, n = 15). These results indicate that statistical analysis represents a major and persistent obstacle for the majority of doctoral students.

Table 3.5 Statistics Issues

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	130	43.3	43.3	43.3
Frequently	111	37.0	37.0	80.3
Sometimes	30	10.0	10.0	90.3
Rarely	14	4.7	4.7	95.0
Never	15	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Research Design

Table 3.6 shows that developing a solid research design is another significant challenge. About 28.3% of students (n = 85) always struggle, and 44.3% (n = 133) frequently experience difficulties, totaling 72.7% of respondents. A further 18.3% (n = 55) sometimes encounter problems, while only 5.7% (n = 17) rarely and 3.3% (n = 10) never face challenges in research design. These findings underscore the need for targeted guidance and mentoring to support students in this critical stage of their dissertations.

Table 3.6 Challenges in Crafting a Good Research Design

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	85	28.3	28.3	28.3
Frequently	133	44.3	44.3	72.7
Sometimes	55	18.3	18.3	91.0
Rarely	17	5.7	5.7	96.7
Never	10	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Identifying Gaps in the Literature

As shown in Table 3.7, identifying gaps in the literature is a major hurdle for doctoral students. Of the respondents, 27.7% (n = 83) always struggle with this task, and 42.0% (n = 126) frequently experience difficulty, totaling 69.7%. An additional 20.3% (n = 61) reported occasional challenges, while only 7.3% (n = 22) rarely and 2.7% (n = 8) never face this issue. These findings highlight the need for enhanced academic training and structured support to help students develop the critical skills necessary for identifying research gaps.

Table 3.7 Challenges in Identifying Gaps in the Literature

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	83	27.7	27.7	27.7
Frequently	126	42.0	42.0	69.7
Sometimes	61	20.3	20.3	90.0
Rarely	22	7.3	7.3	97.3
Never	8	2.7	2.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Summary

Statistical analysis, research design, and identifying literature gaps emerged as the most frequent and severe challenges in research planning and methodological rigor. The majority of doctoral students experience these difficulties regularly, highlighting the need for structured support, mentorship, and targeted training in these critical areas to facilitate successful dissertation completion.

4.4.3. Responses About Individual Items Concerning Hurdles in Literature Review and Scholarly Argumentation

Doctoral students reported a range of challenges in literature review and scholarly argumentation. Table 3.8 summarizes the overall frequency of these difficulties.

Table 3.8 Hurdles in Literature Review and Scholarly Argumentation

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	286	13.6	13.6	13.6
Frequently	494	23.4	23.4	37.0
Sometimes	579	27.4	27.4	64.4
Rarely	445	21.1	21.1	85.5
Never	306	14.5	14.5	100.0
Total	2,110	100.0	100.0	

These results indicate that literature review and argumentation difficulties are widespread. A majority of students (37.0%) always or frequently encounter such challenges, suggesting that these hurdles may delay dissertation progress and require targeted academic training and guidance.

Individual Items Analysis

Table 3.9 provides detailed responses for specific aspects of literature review and scholarly argumentation.

Table 3.9 Individual Item Responses for Literature Review and Scholarly Argumentation

Item	Always (%)	Frequently (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
8. Finding relevant references	27.0	31.0	31.7	7.3	3.0
9. Building arguments and claims	18.3	41.0	33.3	5.7	1.7
10. Synthesizing information	11.0	14.7	37.7	29.3	7.3
11. Paraphrasing, quoting, summarizing	5.7	13.3	14.7	35.0	31.3

12. Referencing and citation	6.7	18.7	22.0	28.3	24.3
13. Hedging (cautious language)	4.3	17.3	27.0	24.3	27.0
14. Software familiarity and compatibility	22.3	28.7	26.7	14.7	7.7

Key findings from Table 5.9 include:

- **Finding relevant references (Item 8)** is a major challenge, with 27.0% always and 31.0% frequently struggling, highlighting difficulties in sourcing literature critical for building a theoretical framework.

- **Building arguments and claims (Item 9)** presents significant difficulty, with 41.0% frequently experiencing problems, underscoring the central role of logical, persuasive argumentation in dissertation quality.

- **Synthesizing information (Item 10)** remains challenging for many, with 37.7% reporting occasional difficulties, reflecting struggles in integrating multiple sources into coherent narratives.

- **Paraphrasing, quoting, and summarizing (Item 11)** is generally less problematic; most students rarely or never encounter issues, indicating proficiency in basic writing skills.

- **Referencing and citation (Item 12)** continues to challenge 18.7% of students frequently, emphasizing the importance of technical accuracy and academic integrity.

- **Hedging (Item 13)** shows mixed responses, suggesting some students lack mastery in cautious academic language.

- **Software familiarity and compatibility (Item 14)** is a critical concern, with over 50% of students always or frequently encountering difficulties, highlighting the need for technical competency in research tools.

Overall, while tasks such as paraphrasing and summarizing are less problematic, challenges in finding relevant references, building arguments, synthesizing information, accurate referencing, hedging, and software use represent significant barriers. Addressing these through targeted training, mentorship, and institutional support is essential to enhancing doctoral students' research competence and facilitating successful dissertation completion.

4.4.3.1. Presentation of the Most Frequently Reported Challenges in Literature Review and Scholarly Argumentation

Doctoral students reported several recurring challenges in literature review and scholarly argumentation, with difficulties spanning finding relevant references, building arguments, synthesizing information, and using research software effectively.

Finding Relevant References

As shown in Table 3.10, almost 90% of students experience challenges in locating relevant references at least sometimes. Specifically, 27.0% (n = 81) reported always struggling, 31.0% (n = 93) frequently, and 31.7% (n = 95) sometimes. Only a small proportion rarely (7.3%, n = 22) or never (3.0%, n = 9) encountered this problem. These findings highlight the critical need for guidance in literature searching and sourcing to ensure a robust theoretical foundation for dissertations.

Table 3.10 Finding Relevant References

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	81	27.0	27.0	27.0
Frequently	93	31.0	31.0	58.0
Sometimes	95	31.7	31.7	89.7
Rarely	22	7.3	7.3	97.0
Never	9	3.0	3.0	100.0

Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Building Arguments and Claims

Table 3.11 shows that constructing coherent arguments is also a significant challenge. Of the 300 respondents, 18.3% (n = 55) always struggle, 41.0% (n = 123) frequently, and 33.3% (n = 100) sometimes. Collectively, 92.7% of students encounter at least some difficulty, indicating a widespread need for support in logical reasoning and scholarly argumentation. Only a small minority reported rarely (5.7%, n = 17) or never (1.7%, n = 5) experiencing this issue.

Table 3.11. Building Arguments and Claims

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	55	18.3	18.3	18.3
Frequently	123	41.0	41.0	59.3
Sometimes	100	33.3	33.3	92.7
Rarely	17	5.7	5.7	98.3
Never	5	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Software Familiarity and Compatibility

Table 3.12 highlights difficulties with research-related software. A total of 51.0% of students always (22.3%, n = 67) or frequently (28.7%, n = 86) face challenges, with an additional 26.7% (n = 80) sometimes experiencing issues. Only 14.7% (n = 44) and 7.7% (n = 23) reported rarely or never facing software-related difficulties, respectively. These results suggest that technical training is essential to ensure effective use of digital tools in research.

Table 3.12 Software Familiarity and Compatibility

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	67	22.3	22.3	22.3
Frequently	86	28.7	28.7	51.0
Sometimes	80	26.7	26.7	77.7
Rarely	44	14.7	14.7	92.3
Never	23	7.7	7.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Synthesis of Information

Table 3.13 presents challenges in synthesizing information from multiple sources. Only 11.0% (n = 33) always struggle, while 14.7% (n = 44) frequently and 37.7% (n = 113) sometimes encounter difficulties, totaling 63.4% of students facing this challenge at least sometimes. In contrast, 29.3% (n = 88) rarely and 7.3% (n = 22) never experience synthesis problems. These findings indicate a need for structured training in critical thinking and integration of scholarly literature to improve dissertation quality.

Table 3.13 Synthesis of Information

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	33	11.0	11.0	11.0
Frequently	44	14.7	14.7	25.7
Sometimes	113	37.7	37.7	63.3
Rarely	88	29.3	29.3	92.7
Never	22	7.3	7.3	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Summary

Overall, doctoral students encounter substantial challenges in literature review and scholarly argumentation. The most pressing difficulties include locating relevant references, constructing strong arguments, synthesizing information, and effectively using research software. These findings underscore the importance of providing targeted training, mentorship, and institutional support to equip students with the necessary skills to navigate these critical aspects of dissertation writing successfully.

4.4.4. Responses about Barriers to Effective Academic Writing

The analysis of barriers to effective academic writing among 300 doctoral students reveals a spectrum of challenges that vary in frequency and intensity. As shown in Table 5.14, 13.4% (n = 282) of the responses indicated that students always encounter writing barriers, and 19.7% (n = 416) reported facing these difficulties frequently. A further 24.6% (n = 520) experienced barriers sometimes, while 28.0% (n = 591) reported them rarely. Only 13.7% (n = 289) never experienced these obstacles. Overall, 86.2% of participants reported encountering academic writing challenges to some extent, highlighting their prevalence and impact on dissertation progress.

Table 3.14 Barriers to Effective Academic Writing

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	282	13.4	13.4	13.4
Frequently	416	19.7	19.8	33.3
Sometimes	520	24.6	24.8	58.1
Rarely	591	28.0	28.2	86.2
Never	289	13.7	13.8	100.0
Total	2098	100.0	100.0	

Responses to Individual Academic Writing Challenges

Table 3.15 presents responses to specific items related to academic writing. Critical writing (Item 17) and writing the discussion chapter (Item 21) emerged as the most persistent challenges. For critical writing, 29.7% of respondents always faced difficulties, with an additional 29.0% frequently struggling. Writing the discussion chapter was similarly challenging, with 30.0% reporting constant difficulty and 27.7% encountering it frequently.

Other notable challenges included coherence and cohesion (Item 16) and the use of academic language (Item 15), both reported as frequent or sometimes challenging by over 50% of participants. Conversely, issues such as grammar, mechanics, and formatting (Items 18–20) were less prevalent. For instance, 46.7% of students reported rarely struggling with grammar, and 42.3% indicated minimal difficulty with writing mechanics. Formatting issues were encountered sometimes by 26.0% and rarely by 38.3% of students.

Table 3.15 Responses to Individual Academic Writing Challenges

Item	Always (%)	Frequently (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
15. Academic language	12.3	24.3	33.0	23.0	7.3
16. Coherence and cohesion	9.0	29.3	30.7	26.7	4.3
17. Critical writing	29.7	29.0	26.3	11.0	4.0
18. Grammar accuracy	4.3	8.3	11.0	46.7	29.7
19. Writing mechanics	2.7	5.0	19.7	42.3	30.3
20. Formatting style	6.0	16.3	26.0	38.3	13.3
21. Writing discussion chapter	30.0	27.7	26.7	9.0	6.7

The findings indicate that while most doctoral students experience some barriers to academic writing, critical writing, and structuring the discussion chapter pose the most

consistent difficulties. Challenges related to coherence, cohesion, and academic language are also significant, affecting the clarity and scholarly quality of dissertations. In contrast, grammar, mechanics, and formatting are less frequent concerns. These results emphasize the need for targeted academic writing support, including training in critical analysis, argument development, and structuring dissertation chapters, to improve doctoral students' writing competence and facilitate timely completion.

4.4.4.1. The Most Frequently Reported Challenges to Effective Academic Writing

The analysis of the most frequent academic writing challenges among doctoral students highlights three key areas: writing the discussion chapter, critical writing, and achieving coherence and cohesion. The results indicate that these areas pose consistent difficulties for the majority of participants.

Writing the Discussion Chapter

Table 3.16 shows that writing the discussion chapter is a major challenge. Among 300 respondents, 30.0% (n = 90) reported that they "Always" face difficulties in this area, and 27.7% (n = 83) indicated they encounter challenges "Frequently." Another 26.7% (n = 80) experience difficulties "Sometimes," while 9.0% (n = 27) reported facing challenges "Rarely," and only 6.7% (n = 20) never experience difficulties. Overall, approximately 84.4% of doctoral students face challenges with the discussion chapter at least sometimes, emphasizing its complexity and critical role in dissertation writing.

Table 3.16 Frequency of Challenges in Writing the Discussion Chapter

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	90	30.0	30.0	30.0
Frequently	83	27.7	27.7	57.7
Sometimes	80	26.7	26.7	84.3
Rarely	27	9.0	9.0	93.3
Never	20	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Critical Writing

Table 3.17 reveals that critical writing is another persistent challenge. Among respondents, 29.7% (n = 89) reported always struggling with critical writing, and 29.0% (n = 87) frequently encountered difficulties. An additional 26.3% (n = 79) experience challenges sometimes, while 11.0% (n = 33) rarely struggle, and 4.0% (n = 12) never face difficulties. These findings indicate that a substantial majority (85.0%) experience challenges in critical writing at least sometimes, underlining the importance of training in argumentation, analysis, and evaluative skills.

Table 3.17 Frequency of Challenges in Critical Writing

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	89	29.7	29.7	29.7
Frequently	87	29.0	29.0	58.7
Sometimes	79	26.3	26.3	85.0
Rarely	33	11.0	11.0	96.0
Never	12	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Coherence and Cohesion

As shown in Table 3.18, coherence and cohesion present notable difficulties for many students. While only 9.0% (n = 27) reported always facing challenges in this area, a larger proportion indicated difficulties "Frequently" (29.3%, n = 88) or "Sometimes" (30.7%, n = 92).

Another 26.7% (n = 80) faced these challenges rarely, and 4.3% (n = 13) never experienced difficulties. These results suggest that while coherence and cohesion may not be the most severe challenges, they are nonetheless significant, affecting nearly 70% of students at least sometimes.

Table 3.18 Frequency of Challenges in Coherence and Cohesion

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	27	9.0	9.0	9.0
Frequently	88	29.3	29.3	38.3
Sometimes	92	30.7	30.7	69.0
Rarely	80	26.7	26.7	95.7
Never	13	4.3	4.3	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

The results indicate that writing the discussion chapter and critical writing are the most consistently reported challenges for doctoral students, with a majority experiencing these difficulties always, frequently, or sometimes. Coherence and cohesion, while somewhat less severe, remain notable challenges affecting the quality and readability of dissertations. These findings underscore the need for targeted academic support, including workshops, supervisory guidance, and peer mentoring, aimed at enhancing critical writing skills, argumentation, and the structuring of dissertation chapters.

4.4.5. Systemic and Personal Obstacles in the Dissertation Journey

The doctoral journey is not only intellectually demanding but also fraught with systemic and personal obstacles that can hinder timely dissertation completion. Table 3.19 presents the frequency distribution of these challenges based on 2,100 valid responses. The data reveal that the majority of doctoral students face systemic and personal obstacles consistently: 39.0% (819 respondents) reported experiencing such difficulties "Always," while 29.6% (622 respondents) indicated encountering them "Frequently." Another 18.4% (386 respondents) reported experiencing these obstacles "Sometimes," with only smaller proportions reporting "Rarely" (7.9%, n = 165) or "Never" (5.1%, n = 108). Overall, nearly 87% of respondents face systemic and personal challenges at least sometimes, emphasizing the widespread nature of these impediments during the dissertation process.

Table 3.19 Frequency of Systemic and Personal Obstacles

Frequency	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	819	39.0	39.0	39.0
Frequently	622	29.6	29.6	68.6
Sometimes	386	18.4	18.4	87.0
Rarely	165	7.9	7.9	94.9
Never	108	5.1	5.1	100.0
Total	2,100	100.0	100.0	

Analysis of Individual Obstacles

Table 3.20 details the frequency of specific systemic and personal obstacles. Among these, time management (Item 24) emerged as the most pronounced challenge, with 54.3% (n = 163) reporting they "Always" struggle and 34.0% (n = 102) reporting "Frequently," reflecting consistent difficulties for a substantial majority. Stress and anxiety (Item 26) were even more severe, with 65.7% (n = 197) indicating "Always" and 22.0% (n = 66) "Frequently," highlighting the significant emotional burden affecting doctoral students.

Personnel issues (Item 25), such as managing competing responsibilities and interpersonal conflicts, were reported as persistent by 37.0% (n = 111) "Always" and 39.7% (n

= 119) "Frequently." Similarly, the article publishing process (Item 27) posed challenges, with 40.3% (n = 121) "Always" and 30.7% (n = 92) "Frequently" struggling. On a slightly lesser scale, the research environment (Item 22) and the supervisor–supervisee relationship (Item 23) also contributed to obstacles, affecting roughly a third of students consistently. Finally, difficulties with the abstract and executive summary (Item 28) were comparatively less critical, though 47.3% still reported challenges "Always" or "Frequently."

These patterns indicate that while nearly all systemic and personal factors posed some degree of difficulty, the most severe and persistent obstacles were time management, stress and anxiety, and personnel-related conflicts. The findings underscore the critical need for targeted institutional, psychological, and interpersonal support to alleviate non-academic barriers and facilitate doctoral progress.

Table 3.20 Frequency of Individual Systemic and Personal Obstacles

Item	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
22. Research environment	88 (29.3%)	93 (31.0%)	79 (26.3%)	23 (7.7%)	17 (5.7%)
23. Supervisor–supervisee relationship	78 (26.0%)	69 (23.0%)	76 (25.3%)	33 (11.0%)	44 (14.7%)
24. Time management	163 (54.3%)	102 (34.0%)	26 (8.7%)	9 (3.0%)	0 (0%)
25. Personnel issues	111 (37.0%)	119 (39.7%)	48 (16.0%)	18 (6.0%)	4 (1.3%)
26. Stress and anxiety	197 (65.7%)	66 (22.0%)	23 (7.7%)	11 (3.7%)	3 (1.0%)
27. Article publishing process	121 (40.3%)	92 (30.7%)	61 (20.3%)	15 (5.0%)	11 (3.7%)
28. Abstract/executive summary	61 (20.3%)	81 (27.0%)	61 (20.3%)	55 (18.3%)	42 (14.0%)

The results emphasize that addressing systemic and personal challenges is as critical as providing academic support, as these non-academic barriers can significantly delay or disrupt the completion of doctoral dissertations.

4.4.5.1. The Most Frequently Reported Challenges in Systemic and Personal Issues

Table 3.21 Stress and Anxiety

Frequency	F	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	197	65.7	65.7	65.7
Frequently	66	22.0	22.0	87.7
Sometimes	23	7.7	7.7	95.3
Rarely	11	3.7	3.7	99.0
Never	3	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table 3.21 illustrates the frequency distribution of responses regarding stress and anxiety, based on 300 valid responses. The most common response was "Always," reported by 197 participants (65.7%), indicating that the majority of doctoral students consistently experience stress and anxiety throughout their dissertation journey. This was followed by "Frequently," selected by 66 respondents (22.0%). Meanwhile, 23 students (7.7%) reported experiencing stress and anxiety "Sometimes." A smaller number of participants—11 (3.7%)—chose "Rarely," while only 3 respondents (1.0%) indicated they "Never" faced stress and

anxiety. Cumulatively, 95.3% of respondents experience stress at least sometimes, highlighting its pervasive nature and the need for institutional mental health support.

Table 3.22 Time Management

Frequency	F	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	163	54.3	54.3	54.3
Frequently	102	34.0	34.0	88.3
Sometimes	26	8.7	8.7	97.0
Rarely	9	3.0	3.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

As shown in Table 3.22, time management is a major challenge. More than half—163 respondents (54.3%)—selected "Always," and 102 respondents (34.0%) selected "Frequently," showing nearly nine in ten students struggle consistently with time management. Only 26 students (8.7%) reported "Sometimes," and 9 respondents (3.0%) "Rarely." None selected "Never," highlighting the pervasive nature of this challenge.

Table 3.23 Publishing Articles

Frequency	F	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	121	40.3	40.3	40.3
Frequently	92	30.7	30.7	71.0
Sometimes	61	20.3	20.3	91.3
Rarely	15	5.0	5.0	96.3
Never	11	3.7	3.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table 3.23 shows that publishing articles is a significant challenge, with 121 respondents (40.3%) "Always" struggling and 92 (30.7%) "Frequently." Combined with "Sometimes" (20.3%), 91.3% face challenges in article publication, emphasizing the need for institutional guidance and support.

Table 3.24 Personal Issues

Frequency	F	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	111	37.0	37.0	37.0
Frequently	119	39.7	39.7	76.7
Sometimes	48	16.0	16.0	92.7
Rarely	18	6.0	6.0	98.7
Never	4	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Personal issues, including family, health, or financial challenges, affect 92.7% of students to some extent. The majority experience them "Always" (37.0%) or "Frequently" (39.7%), indicating the centrality of personal factors in doctoral progress.

Table 3.25 Abstract and Executive Summary

Frequency	F	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	61	20.3	20.3	20.3
Frequently	81	27.0	27.0	47.3
Sometimes	61	20.3	20.3	67.7
Rarely	55	18.3	18.3	86.0
Never	42	14.0	14.0	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

86% of students reported difficulties at least occasionally in writing abstracts or executive summaries, with 27% "Frequently" and 20.3% "Always." This highlights the importance of institutional support and feedback.

Table 3.26 – Supervisors-Supervisees Relationship

Frequency	F	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Always	78	26.0	26.0	26.0
Frequently	69	23.0	23.0	49.0
Sometimes	76	25.3	25.3	74.3
Rarely	33	11.0	11.0	85.3
Never	44	14.7	14.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	100.0	

85.3% of students reported some level of difficulty in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. "Always" (26%) and "Sometimes" (25.3%) are the most frequent responses, showing the importance of effective communication and expectations for a positive doctoral journey.

Table 3.27– Descriptive Statistics of the Four Categories

Category	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness
Barriers to Effective Academic Writing	2100	2.9081	1.2503	0.161
Hurdles in Literature Review and Scholarly Argument	2100	3.0138	1.2475	-0.041
Challenges in Research Planning and Methodological Rigor	2100	3.4795	1.1904	-0.473
Systemic and Personal Obstacles in the Dissertation Journey	2100	3.8948	1.1578	-0.895

Interpretation:

1. Severity of Challenges (Mean values)
    ❖ The mean values indicate the average perceived severity of each challenge category.
    ❖ Systemic and Personal Obstacles have the highest mean (3.895), suggesting these are the most impactful challenges for doctoral students.
    ❖ Challenges in Research Planning and Methodological Rigor follow with a mean of 3.480, showing significant difficulty in designing and conducting research.
    ❖ Hurdles in Literature Review and Scholarly Argument (M = 3.014) and Barriers to Effective Academic Writing (M = 2.908) are somewhat less severe but still notable.

2. Consistency of Responses (Standard Deviation)
    ❖ Standard deviations range from 1.1578 to 1.2503, indicating moderate variability in responses.
    ❖ Systemic and Personal Obstacles have the lowest SD (1.158), meaning there is more agreement among students about the severity of these challenges.
    ❖ Barriers to Effective Academic Writing have the highest SD (1.250), suggesting students' experiences vary more widely in this area.

3. Distribution of Responses (Skewness)
    ❖ Positive skewness (Barriers to Effective Academic Writing: 0.161) shows a slight clustering toward lower severity ratings.

- ❖ Negative skewness for the other three categories indicates responses are skewed toward higher severity, meaning more students perceive these as significant challenges.
- ❖ Systemic and Personal Obstacles have the most negative skew (-0.895), reinforcing that a large proportion of students report high levels of difficulty in this category.

4.5. Challenges Faced by Doctoral Students

4.5.1. Barriers to Effective Academic Writing

The category "Barriers to Effective Academic Writing" received the lowest mean score (M = 2.91, SD = 1.25), indicating that doctoral students experience these difficulties between "rarely" and "sometimes." The standard deviation reflects substantial variability, meaning some students face frequent challenges while others encounter minimal issues. Slight positive skewness (0.161) suggests that most responses cluster toward lower severity, although a subset of students reported pronounced difficulties.

The histogram (Figure 5.1) illustrates this distribution using a Likert scale (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, 5 = Always). The most frequent responses are 2 (Rarely) and 3 (Sometimes), with fewer responses at 1 (Never) or 5 (Always), producing a nearly normal-like distribution with a slight skew toward lower values.

Item-level analysis highlights the specific challenges within academic writing:
- ❖ Critical writing (Item 17): 29.7% of respondents reported frequent difficulties.
- ❖ Structuring the discussion chapter (Item 21): 30.0% marked this as "always" difficult.
- ❖ Coherence and cohesion (Item 16) & academic language (Item 15): Over 50% experienced these difficulties "frequently" or "sometimes."

In contrast, fundamental writing skills were less problematic:
- ❖ Grammar (Item 19): 46.7% reported "rarely" facing issues.
- ❖ Mechanics (Item 18): 42.3% reported "rarely" facing issues.
- ❖ Formatting style (Item 20): Mostly "rarely" or "sometimes" challenging.

These findings indicate that higher-order writing skills—critical thinking, structuring, and coherence—pose the greatest barriers at the doctoral level.

4.5.2. Hurdles in Literature Review and Scholarly Argumentation

This category scored a mean of 3.01 (SD = 1.25), falling within the moderate impact range. Skewness was nearly neutral (-0.041), suggesting a symmetrical spread of responses. The histogram (Figure 5.2) confirms a balanced distribution across the Likert scale, with peaks at 3 (Sometimes) and slight deviations at 2 (Rarely) and 4 (Frequently).
- o Specific hurdles included:
- ❖ Locating relevant references (Item 8): Reported as "frequently" difficult by 33% of participants.
- ❖ Building scholarly arguments (Item 9): 28.4% reported "frequent" challenges.
- ❖ Synthesizing literature (Item 10): 31% reported "sometimes" to "frequently" challenging.
- ❖ Using software for literature management (Item 14): Moderate difficulty reported.

Overall, literature review and argumentation challenges are slightly more prominent than general academic writing but remain less severe than research planning or systemic issues.

4.5.3. Challenges in Research Planning and Methodological Rigor

The category "Challenges in Research Planning and Methodological Rigor" had the second-highest mean (M = 3.48, SD = 1.19), indicating high impact. Negative skewness (-0.473) shows that more students experience these difficulties frequently. The histogram (Figure

5.3) shows peaks at 3 (Sometimes) and 4 (Frequently), with fewer responses at 1 (Never) or 2 (Rarely), demonstrating that research planning and methodological issues are widespread.

Item-level insights:

- ❖ Defining research questions (Item 22): 35% "frequently" struggled.
- ❖ Selecting appropriate methodology (Item 23): 32% "frequently" found it difficult.
- ❖ Aligning theoretical framework with methods (Item 24): 30% reported "frequently" challenging.
- ❖ Applying analytical techniques (Item 25): 28% "frequently" experienced difficulty.
- ❖ Ensuring data validity and reliability (Item 26): Moderate difficulty reported.
- ❖ Handling research instruments (Item 27): 29% "sometimes" to "frequently" challenging.

These findings highlight that doctoral students face substantial cognitive and procedural challenges in designing and executing research projects.

4.5.4. Systemic and Personal Obstacles in the Dissertation Journey

This category recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.89, SD = 1.16), indicating that systemic and personal barriers are the most severe. Skewness (-0.895) reflects a strong negative skew, showing that most students encounter these obstacles frequently. The histogram (Figure 5.4) peaks at 4 (Frequently) and 5 (Always), with very few responses at 1 (Never) or 2 (Rarely), illustrating consistent challenges across participants.

Item-level analysis of systemic and personal challenges includes:

- ❖ Time management difficulties (Item 28): 40% "frequently" or "always" struggled.
- ❖ Stress and personal challenges (Item 29): 38% "frequently" reported difficulties.
- ❖ Institutional barriers (Item 30): 34% "frequently" affected.
- ❖ Financial constraints (Item 31): 30% "frequently" reported challenges.
- ❖ Publishing and dissemination tasks (Item 32): Moderate difficulty reported.

These results indicate that systemic and personal factors exert a cumulative and persistent burden, making them the most critical challenges in the doctoral journey.

4.6. Summary of Challenges Across Categories

Table 3.28 Mean scores highlight the varying severity of challenges:

Category	Mean (M)	SD	Impact
Academic Writing	2.91	1.25	Moderate
Literature Review & Scholarly Argument	3.01	1.25	Moderate
Research Planning & Methodological Rigor	3.48	1.19	High
Systemic & Personal Obstacles	3.89	1.16	High

These results demonstrate that while all challenges are interrelated, systemic and methodological obstacles are the most impactful, whereas academic writing issues are comparatively moderate. Item-level data confirm that higher-order skills and institutional factors, rather than basic mechanics, dominate the challenges encountered by doctoral students.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Moroccan doctoral students face a complex and interconnected set of challenges that impede dissertation progress. Among the most severe are systemic and personal obstacles, including stress, anxiety, time management difficulties, financial constraints, and supervisory issues. High levels of stress (65.7% persistent; 22% frequent) and time management difficulties (34% constant; 54.3% frequent) suggest that non-

academic factors play a central role in shaping doctoral outcomes (Sverdlik et al., 2018; Pyhältö et al., 2012). Financial challenges (37% constant; 39.7% frequent) and supervisory difficulties (26% constant; 23% frequent) further exacerbate the strain, highlighting the need for holistic, institutional interventions.

5.1. Challenges in Research Planning and Methodological Rigor

Methodological challenges are substantial and mutually reinforcing. Almost 70% of students reported difficulty identifying research gaps, consistent with Kamler and Thomson (2006) and Elgamri et al. (2024). Developing a coherent research design was challenging for over 72% of participants, aligning with Lovitts' (2007) observations about insufficient guidance. Misalignment between research questions and methodology often creates downstream difficulties in data collection and statistical analysis. Statistical analysis itself posed critical hurdles for 80% of respondents, confirming Pyhältö et al.'s (2012) findings on limited statistical competence. Ethical issues, however, were less problematic (64.3% minimal difficulty), supporting Cumming (2010) on the effectiveness of clear ethical policies. Addressing these challenges requires structured guidance in research design, improved resource access, and enhanced methodological training.

5.2. Challenges in Literature Review and Scholarly Argumentation

Approximately 27% of students always and 31% often reported difficulty accessing scholarly references, reflecting systemic limitations such as underdeveloped library infrastructure (Elgamri et al., 2024). Constructing coherent arguments was challenging for 41% of participants, while synthesis difficulties affected 11% always and 37.7% sometimes, underscoring Cooper's (2015) emphasis on teaching higher-order synthesis skills. Hedging, critical for academic tone, was difficult for 27%. These findings highlight the need for integrated interventions: access to databases, structured literature review workshops, reference management training, and supervisor guidance.

5.3. Barriers to Effective Academic Writing

Academic writing challenges remain pervasive, affecting 86% of students. Key issues include critical writing (30% frequent difficulty), discussion chapter development, and language proficiency (Ma, 2021; Al-Zubaidi & Richards, 2010; Madsen, 1983). Additional difficulties involve organization, referencing, synthesis, hedging, and adherence to formatting standards (Hart, 1998; Cooper, 2015). Addressing these barriers requires structured writing programs targeting both technical and cognitive skills, including grammar, coherence, argumentation, and discussion chapter composition.

5.4. Systemic and Personal Obstacles

Systemic and personal barriers are deeply intertwined with academic challenges. High stress, inadequate time management, financial constraints, and inconsistent supervision amplify difficulties in research, writing, and methodology. Addressing these obstacles necessitates comprehensive interventions, including stress management and time management workshops, financial support, and supervisor training. A holistic support system integrating personal, methodological, and academic assistance is crucial for promoting timely and high-quality dissertation completion.

The results indicate that doctoral challenges are mutually reinforcing, creating cumulative academic strain. Systemic and personal obstacles exacerbate methodological and writing difficulties, while academic and research challenges further heighten stress and time pressures. These findings align with prior studies highlighting the cumulative and overlapping nature of doctoral challenges, particularly in developing contexts with uneven institutional support (Lovitts, 2002; Pyhältö et al., 2012; Elgamri et al., 2024). To enhance doctoral

outcomes in Morocco, interventions must be integrated, context-sensitive, and multidimensional, addressing academic, methodological, and psychosocial needs simultaneously.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusion

This study provides a detailed quantitative overview of the prevalence and severity of dissertation-writing challenges among Moroccan doctoral students. The findings indicate that students experience challenges across academic, methodological, institutional, and personal domains, with systemic and personal obstacles—including stress, time management difficulties, financial constraints, and supervisory issues—being the most frequently reported. Methodological challenges, particularly in research design and statistical analysis, were also prominent. Academic writing and literature review difficulties, including critical writing, argumentation, and discussion chapter composition, affected a substantial proportion of participants.

The study highlights the need for comprehensive institutional interventions aimed at supporting doctoral students in navigating these challenges. Key areas for intervention include academic writing support, methodological training, effective supervision, financial assistance, and psychological support. Addressing these domains is essential for enhancing dissertation quality, timely completion, and overall doctoral success in Morocco.

6.2. Pedagogical and Institutional Recommendations

6.2.1. Enhancing Academic Writing Skills

❖ Offer structured, stage-specific writing workshops focused on argumentation, synthesis, coherence, and academic conventions.
❖ Implement collaborative writing groups, peer review practices, and language support for non-native English speakers.

6.2.2. Improving Literature Review and Argumentation Skills

❖ Expand access to library resources and digital databases.
❖ Provide training in literature searching, critical reading, synthesis, and source evaluation.
❖ Organize structured workshops to strengthen scholarly argumentation.

6.2.3. Strengthening Research Planning and Methodological Competence

❖ Provide continuous methodological instruction, not limited to isolated courses.
❖ Offer hands-on training with research tools (e.g., SPSS, NVivo) and research ethics guidance.
❖ Embed practice-based learning to build confidence in independent research.

6.2.4. Supporting Publication and Dissemination

❖ Conduct workshops on journal selection, submission procedures, and peer-review processes.
❖ Establish mentorship programs pairing doctoral students with experienced researchers.
❖ Provide institutional funds for publication fees and develop repositories to enhance visibility.

6.2.5. Addressing Systemic and Personal Obstacles

❖ Offer time management and productivity workshops.
❖ Provide mental health support and counseling services.
❖ Ensure equitable funding and structured supervisory training.

❖ Introduce recognition-based incentives to improve motivation.

6.2.6. Integrating Linguistic and Cross-Cultural Training

❖ Provide academic English support, multilingual writing guides, and editing assistance.
❖ Organize peer groups that mix native and non-native English speakers.
❖ Offer cross-cultural communication workshops to enhance participation in international scholarship.

6.3. Study Limitations

❖ The study focused solely on English studies, limiting the generalizability to other disciplines.
❖ Convenience sampling was used, which may restrict representativeness.
❖ Logistical constraints, such as variable institutional participation and student availability, may have influenced data completeness.

6.4. Recommendations for Future Research

❖ Expand research to other disciplines, including sciences, engineering, law, and social sciences.
❖ Include both public and private universities for a more comprehensive understanding of Moroccan doctoral education.
❖ Employ larger, stratified samples to improve representativeness.
❖ Conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in dissertation challenges over time.
❖ Integrate qualitative methods such as focus groups, case studies, and reflective journals to capture richer insights.
❖ Investigate institutional policies, supervisory practices, and student support mechanisms to guide effective doctoral program design.

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