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Exploring the Challenges of Thesis Writing among Algerian EFL Doctoral Students

The Case of Doctoral Students at English Department University of Kasdi Merbah Ouargla

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Dedication

I dedicate this work:

To my pride in life, my parents Abdelouahab and Hadia

To my brothers Med Saib and Firas

To my sisters Maram and Mayar

Abstract

Doctoral thesis, a fundamental academic document, is known by its complexity. The present study examines the different challenges that are often encountered by EFL doctoral students while producing their PhD thesis. In this regard, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. To collect data, a close-ended questionnaire was addressed to 15 EFL PhD students from the Department of English at Kasdi Merbah University in Ouargla and a structured interview was administered to 3 students from the same department. The participants of the current study were chosen via convenience sampling. The results revealed that doctoral students face linguistic, rhetorical, emotional, and practical challenges while writing their thesis. The data analysis indicated that the common linguistic challenges are developing ideas, outlining, and the use of appropriate vocabulary. While writing the Introduction, Literature Review, and the Statement of the Problem are the most complex sections. In addition, boredom, lack of motivation, and isolation are seen as the most prominent emotional challenges. Finally, managing time, the unavailability of the supervisor, and the coordination between job and thesis are considered real practical challenges. On the basis of these findings, the researcher has attempted to help doctoral students by identifying the common challenges and also to contribute in enhancing the quality of PhD theses.

Keywords: Doctoral Students, Doctoral Thesis, Challenges

List of Abbreviations

EFL: English as Foreign Language

ESL: English as Second Language

LERU: The League of European Research Universities

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

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General Introduction

General Introduction

1. Research Background

Developing the writing capabilities is essential for every student especially academic writing, which is the writing done for academic purposes. Al-Mubarek (2017) describes academic writing as a scientific writing portrayed as organized research used by researchers at higher education level. Graduate students have to write in an academic style because it is important to disciplinary learning and critical for academic success (Fang, 2020). For this reason, it is crucial to know how to write, compose and format an academic document such as: essays, reports, research papers, dissertations, and theses. Hence, writing those different genres can be challenging for students especially the doctoral thesis which is the highest level of education that a student can achieve. In this level, doctoral students have to write a PhD thesis which is a piece of original research that must be carried out by all PhD students in order to get their doctoral degree.

Writing a thesis involves having various skills including a good knowledge about the field of study, academic writing, researching skills, and good arguments of the researcher to express his posture (Olmos, 2010). Attempting to identify these challenges and the reasons behind them will help in enhancing the quality of PhD theses.

2. Statement of the Problem

In the Algerian context, it is reported that doctoral students face many challenges in writing their thesis. It is a challenging task for most of them according to many studies (Gohar et al, 2022), (Komba, 2015), and (Divsar,2018) that have been carried out. They have identified a number of difficulties from topic selection to time management, literature review, finding data and many other aspects. For instance, Divsar (2018) states that the problems of writing a thesis ranged from not knowing what to include, having not enough knowledge, problem in grammar and vocabulary, format, and thesis structure and regulations. On this account, this research is about the main difficulties that doctoral students encounter in the Algerian context.

3. The significance of the Study

The present study is significant for different reasons. First of all, despite that investigation, the researcher found that little research has focused in the same research on the linguistic and non-linguistic writing difficulties of Algerian EFL doctoral students at the university of Kasdi Merbah in Ouargla. Besides, by determining the challenges of doctoral students, it will be possible to find all the difficulties and improve the quality of PhD theses.

4. Objectives

This research aims to identify the challenges that face Algerian EFL doctoral students while writing their theses and the main reasons behind them by focusing on linguistic and non-linguistic writing challenges in the process of thesis writing as a whole. This study attempts also to help in the improvement of the quality of doctoral theses writing in EFL at Algerian universities.

5. Research Questions

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What challenges do Algerian EFL doctoral students encounter in their thesis writing?
2. What are the possible causes of those difficulties?

6. Research Methods

In order to give a deep picture and analysis of the challenges that face PhD students, a sequential mixed methods approach was used. A close-ended questionnaire and a structured interview were employed as research instruments. The first tool was sent via Google forms to doctoral students from the English Department at Kasdi Merbah University Ouargla. However, the second one was done online and was addressed to 3 doctoral students from the same department.

7. Definition of Key terms

Doctoral Student is someone who is advancing through his doctoral studies, has studied all the doctoral program, and whose final accomplishment is doing a thesis *(What Is Doctoral Candidate | IGI Global, n.d.).*

Doctoral Thesis is a piece of original research through which the candidate must demonstrate his scholarly capability of furthering his discipline (Eco, 2015).

Challenges are situations where someone encounter something that requires great mental and physical efforts in order to be done successfully *(Challenge, 2023).*

8. Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is divided into two parts, the first one is theoretical while the second is practical. The theoretical part contains two chapters that cover the review of literature. The first chapter is an introduction to doctoral thesis. The second chapter deals with the challenges of doctoral thesis writing. The second part is a practical one which consists of one chapter that represents the methodology, data collection, and the analysis of results.

Part one: Literature review

Chapter one: Doctoral Thesis

Introduction

Writing a thesis or a dissertation is a challenging procedure as it is one of the requirements of getting a diploma. It generally comes at the end of a student's academic experience. A PhD thesis is generally produced by all PhD students in order to successfully attain their PhD degree. The latter is the highest level of education that the student can achieve. Moreover, PhD thesis demonstrates the level of students and their ability to write correctly and academically. Accordingly, the present chapter attempts to provide a brief review of the literature on doctoral thesis, firstly, by clarifying what is meant by PhD thesis and its history, secondly, by highlighting its importance to doctoral students and finally, by presenting its structure.

1.1.Definition of PhD thesis

A thesis is defined differently in various dictionaries. According to the *Oxford English dictionary*, the term thesis means "a long piece of writing completed by a student as part of university degree, based on their own research" (*Oxford University Press, n.d.*). *Merriam-Webster dictionary* defines a thesis as "a dissertation embodying results of original research and especially substantiating a specific view, especially one written by a candidate for an academic degree" (2019), while *Collins English dictionary* regards a thesis as "a long piece of writing based on your own ideas and research that you do as part of university degree, especially a higher degree such as PhD" (2020).

Many scholars see the PhD thesis from different perspectives. In a large sense, Eco (2015) regards that the PhD thesis is a piece of original research through which the candidate must demonstrate his scholarly capability of furthering his discipline. He added that a thesis is a typewritten manuscript, usually 100 to 400 pages in length, in which the student addresses a particular problem in his chosen field. According to him, the thesis proper generally applies to the doctorate, a degree pursued by those students who wish to specialize and pursue academic research in a particular discipline.

Still, other authors try to define what a "thesis" is. Dong (1988), for instance, defines a thesis as a type of research-process genre with demanding intellectual and rhetorical tasks, and that is a challenging task due to the size of the document needed and the quality of writing.

According to Walker et al (2008), the PhD is the monarch of the academic community. It is the very highest accomplishment that can be sought by students. It signals that its recipient is now ready, eligible, indeed obligated, to make the most dramatic shift in roles: from student to teacher, from apprentice to master, from novice or intern to independent scholar and leader.

1.2. Distinction between Thesis and Dissertation

As stated by the above dictionaries, the formal definitions do not distinguish between the term "thesis" and "dissertation". Still, there is a main difference between them. In U.S. universities, it has become common that the research done by master students is a thesis and the one which is done by doctoral students is a dissertation. However, this distinction is not accepted in all cases because some faculty members see dissertations as theses (Cone &Foster, 2006).

While in UK textbooks, the two senses are reversed. Murray and Beglar (2009), for example state: "A dissertation will normally be submitted as just one of a number of written requirements of a Bachelors or Master degree ... In contrast, a thesis constitutes the sole written requirement for the PhD degree" (p.3).

As Madsen (1992) points out that a doctoral thesis has greater breadth, depth and intention than a master's thesis. Based on the same idea, Elphinstone and Schweitzer (1998) claim that the doctoral thesis is deeper and needs a more comprehensive treatment of the study under investigation unlike the master dissertation.

Despite having different names, Murray and Beglar (2009) see thesis and dissertation very similar in most aspects:

- Both are considered as final projects and are needed for graduation.
- Both follow a good academic writing style.
- They share the same structure, organization and formatting conventions.
- Both require an original work.

1.3.The History of PhD Thesis

When the first doctorates were appeared is not clear. Clark (2006) states that the term 'Master' in Germany had become with less value that's why there was a need for a higher degree to teach at universities. The idea of a written thesis is presented with some debates in the 17th century. He added that German universities gave doctorates in philosophy in 16th century but they were not well recognized by the authorities.

In 1771 the Dr. phil. (PhD) was formally recognized in Prussia. However, it was demonstrated as a mastery of knowledge in a subject and not as a research-based degree (Clark, 2006).

The dates of the first research-based PhDs at some of the League of European Research Universities (LERU) are given in table 1 below.

Table 1.1: First research PhDs introduced or granted at some LERU and other European Universities

University of Berlin	Introduced 1810
Université Pierre et Marie Curie (LERU) (then known as Faculté de Sciences)	**Introduced 1810**
Paris-Sorbonne	**1811 (Mechanics and Astronomy)**
Netherlands	**Introduced 1815**
Zurich (LERU)	**1833 (Medicine)**
Geneva (LERU)	**1875 (Law)**
University of London (LERU)	**1921**
Trinity College Dublin (LERU)	**1924**

1.4. The Importance of PhD Thesis to Doctoral Students

The term PhD is short form for Doctor of Philosophy (Philosophiae Doctor), which is frequently known as a Doctorate. As a PhD researcher, it is supposed to pursue structured, supervised research about one of the many related fields of the speciality. After that, they are expected to write a long thesis to show their ability and capacity at conducting an academic and original research. The results of this research should make an original contribution to knowledge and be appropriate and ready for publication. Before pursuing for a PhD, the student should be sure that he/she is interested in the topic to be researched - and has an interest in the process of research along with a strong academic background with a good first degree (Lancaster University Management School, 2005).

According to Cone & Foster (2006), there are many reasons that makes a thesis essential. There are some economic aspects: the PhD research can make a higher income, it can offer an academic job, or a start for a professional career.

Others are intellectual: Research is a way to offer a student many challenges and opportunities to solve conceptual, methodological, and practical problems. Additionally, conducting research is also a way to make a student more curious about psychological or other behavioral science phenomenon. In this regard, completing a thesis for students can fulfill their personal satisfaction of taking on and mastering a complex and challenging task (Cone & Foster, 2006).

For him "Theses have a training function. By conducting these projects, you learn and grow in your research skills and knowledge of the field. You also should expand your ability to think critically, synthesize and extend the work of others, and communicate clearly and professionally. Ideally, the

process should also increase your respect for the empirical aspects of the discipline and your pride in participating in the development of new knowledge about important phenomena" (p.16).

Thereby, writing a dissertation fulfills an essential part of graduation requirements and paves the way for students to become future professors and researchers in the sector of their interest.

1.5.The Structure of Doctoral thesis:

According to Hofstee (2006), the classical thesis structure is as follows:

The structure follows the order Introduction, Literature Review, Methods, Findings and Analysis, and Conclusions as shown in figure 1:

Figure 1.1: Illustration of a thesis's main components

Adapted from (Walker, 2023)

According to Swales and Feak (1994) "the thesis Introduction is of strategic importance: its key role is to create a research space for the writer. It is in the Introduction that the writer makes claims for the centrality or significance of the research in question and begins to outline the overall argument of the thesis" (P.82). Swales and Feak claims that there are 3 main moves to follow in order to write an introduction: (1) To establish a research territory, (2) to identify a niche (gap) in the territory, (3) occupying the niche.

MOVE 1	**Establishing a research territory**
	(a) showing that the area of study is relevant, important, crucial or making general comments (optional) (b) introducing or reviewing items of previous research (obligatory)
MOVE 2	**Establishing a niche**
	(a) indicating a gap in previous research, raising questions about previous research, or expanding previous knowledge (obligatory)
MOVE 3	**Occupying the niche**

Figure 1.2: Illustration of Introduction Moves

Adopted from (Swales & Feak, 1994, p.175)

Moreover, Murray and Beglar (2009) said that the thesis's Introduction can accomplish a variety of tasks, including establishing the context for the study, defining key concepts, outlining the study's objectives, and identifying the audience for whom the study is intended. He added that Introductions should not only provide readers with background information about the study's general topic but also pique their interest. The main elements that an introduction consists of are:

- Background Information
- Purpose of Study
- Problem statement
- Significance and motivation
- Definitions, assumptions, limitations
- Thesis, delineation, research questions
- Brief Chapter overviews

Paltridge and Starfield (2007) claim that the Review of Literature focuses on previous research on the topic. It should also demonstrate the relationship between the student's project and what else has been done in the particular area. Murray and Beglar (2009) state that "literature reviews begin with a reading of the literature, and the quality of your reading largely determines the quality of the literature review". Thus, the literature review section should contain those elements:

- Introduction
- Broad context theory base
- Detailed (works organised by topic or idea)

- Conclusion

After writing the Literature Review, the researcher passes to Methods' section. "Methods refers to the actual research instruments and materials used. The chosen methodology informs the choice of methods and what counts as data" (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007 P.119). Additionally, the method section informs readers about the who, what, when, where and how of your research (Murray & Beglar, 2009). In other words, this section consists of a description of the participants, instruments, procedures and the types of analyses that a researcher will use. Hence, the method section includes the following:

- Introduction
- Research Design
- Research Instruments
- Data
- Analyses
- Limitations
- Ethics
- Conclusion

There are three main moves when writing the Findings (Results) section, the first move provides metatextual information which means the general structure of the chapter. However, on the second move the results are presented. Hence, the interpretation of the results is mentioned in the third move (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). As mentioned below:

- Chapter-introduction, Sections, sub Conclusions
- Chapter-introduction, Sections, sub Conclusions
- Chapter-introduction, Sections, sub Conclusions

Murray and Beglar (2009) in their book, confirm that the results should directly answer the thesis' research questions and clearly indicate the answers, they also see that in this section especially consulting the advisor is important because it is a complex section to write.

Rudestam and Newton (2001) state that the conclusion (Discussion) chapter should contain an overview of the important findings especially the findings which support the hypothesis mentioned in the study, limitation of the study, and recommendations for further research. A good discussion chapter contains:

1. An overview of the significant findings of the study.

2. A consideration of the findings in the light of existing research studies.

3. Implications of the study for current theory (except in purely applied studies).

4. A careful examination of findings that fail to support or only partly support the hypotheses outlined in the study.

5. Limitations of the study that may affect the validity or the generalizability of the results.

6. Recommendations for further research.

7. Implications of the study for professional practice or applied settings (optional).

(Rudestam and Newton, 2001, p.121)

Therefore, Hofstee (2006) summarises them into these essential points:

- Summary of Findings
- Conclusions
- Summary of Contributions
- Future Research

According to Phillips and Pugh (2010), a thesis must contain the four elements of the PhD form. Just the way of the presentation can vary. This is a common example for an empirically-based thesis:

- Introduction (including aims)
- Literature Survey (background theory as a review of the relevant literature)
- Research topic and how it is tackled (focal theory)
- Method (data theory including a description of what has been done)
- Analysis and Results (what was found)
- Discussion (development of focal theory and suggestions for future work)
- Conclusions (short summary and detailed contribution)

It is worth noting here that those components must have been preceded by the front matter covering the following:

- A Title Page (Cover Page)
- Abstract : short informative summary
- Acknowledgements: to you thank or acknowledge those who have been helpful regardless of the type of assistance.
- Table of Contents
- List of Figures and Tables

- Bibliography: is an alphabetical list of resources
- Appendices

Conclusion

 Thesis writing is an essential document that requires specific knowledge and skills from students when producing it. In fact, preparing a thesis is one of the important stages through which students demonstrate their abilities and capacities as PhD candidates. This chapter discussed a contextual knowledge about the different meanings of PhD thesis, first research PhD's in Europe, and its importance to doctoral students was reviewed. Moreover, theses are commonly structured as an introduction, four chapters, and a summarizing discussion. In the next chapter, the challenges that PhD students face when writing their thesis will be discussed.

Chapter Two: Doctoral Thesis Writing Challenges

Introduction:

The thesis writing process is a difficult task for most students because of the complexity of the document itself. Consequently, they have to deal with a number of challenges when writing it. In this level, writing becomes harder than it was at the previous levels. In the present chapter, the main challenges of PhD thesis that have an impact on PhD students are first identified. They are divided to intellectual, emotional, motivational, organizational, and practical challenges. Additionally, the rhetorical and linguistic challenges that affect on the writing process of doctoral students are mentioned.

2.1. Main Challenges of thesis writing

Murray and Beglar (2009) state that there are a number of challenges that may effect on students when conducting a thesis. They divided them into four categories: intellectual challenges, emotional challenges, motivational challenges, and organizational challenges.

2.1.1. Intellectual Challenges

Without doubt, conducting research can be an intellectual task. Hence, the intellectual challenges can arise from a variety of sources, including the following:

2.1.1.1. Identifying a Problem

Every researcher may find a difficulty in identifying the research question. In this section, understanding and comprehending the literature well is important to notice that there is a gap. By locating the gap, it means that the problem is identified. Brailsford (2010) adds that most of the candidates were unable to derive knowledge gaps from the reviewed literature. According to Kearney (2017), Finding a problem with some degree of social significance and seeking out information that will help us get closer to solving it are necessary for filling a gap (Kearney, 2017). Hence, a research gap is an area where a specific question cannot be inferred due to a lack of formation that is because it represents a problem which is not investigated before. (Ajemba & Arene, 2022).

2.1.1.2. Understanding Concepts

To experience intellectual control over the subject matter you are working with, grasping concepts is essential, since students will face problems if the notions are complex or not clear in their mind. In this case, the research will almost certainly be vague, ambiguous, and disorganized. Lyang (2017) claims that the meaning of understanding a concept is that a learner is guided by the must have properties of each example of the concept and ignores the varying can have properties.

2.1.1.3.   Designing the Research

The soundness of the research design is the most important factor governing the success of any research project. The research design, which provides a clear picture of both the construction and conduct of the research, is the overall strategy proposed by researchers to conduct an investigation (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001). Thus, "a completed research design shows the step-by-step sequence of actions in carrying out an investigation essential to obtaining objective, reliable, and valid information" (Mauch & Park, 2003, p.123). In this regard, an incorrect methodology provides results which are not valid. Among the common problems that students face in terms of research methodology is selecting the sample of research (Alsied and Ibrahim, 2017). In such case, the intervention of the supervisor is crucial.

2.1.1.4.   Mastering the Research Tools

The anxiety of students may appear from the fear of the lack of use of such tools before. It is needed to master using those instruments, and here the supervisor can help. Also, holding research seminars that are designed to introduce the way of conducting research and types of research tools may help in mastering the research tools (Murray & Beglar, 2009).

2.1.1.5.   Organising Information Logically

In long theses, students will encounter the challenge of finding a huge amount of information which are complex, and trying to make them logical, coherent, and flow. This can be particularly difficult in this case because of the increased amount and complexity of information (Murray & Beglar, 2009).

2.1.2. Emotional Challenges

When conducting a thesis, students will experience emotional ups and downs from time to time. Thus, if a student produces an original work that may bring new ideas to his/her field, he/she will be satisfied. However, students may identify areas where problems arise and lead them to be under depression, and in fact this make them lose control of their research.

Sometimes, students face a crisis of confidence. In an instant, because of many reasons they may lose faith in themselves and that make them feel that they are incompetent to do research. Paltridge & Starfield in their book *Thesis and Dissertation Writing* (2007) claim that the lack of confidence is called the 'imposter syndrome', it leads to "writer's block" which is the inability to write a research thesis. Confidence, according to Norman & Hyland (2003), is a learning factor that can

affect students' engagement and development when conducting research. It is also important to maintain faith with yourself and believe that you are there because you deserve to be, so you should have faith in yourself. As we shall see, it is at these times that the support and of those around us can be crucial, and often it is all that is needed to get us back on track and into the correct mindset (Murray & Beglar, 2009).

As we know, conducting research with a view to obtaining a degree involves working alone and this sometimes leads to a feeling of dislocation and isolation. PhD students experience isolation and lack of belonging and unfair perceptions (Hanassb, 2006). According to Nicholson (2009) social isolation is "a state in which the individual lacks a sense of social belonging, lacks engagement with others, has a very limited number of social contacts, and is deficient in fulfilling and quality relationships" (p.1344). In other words, loneliness and isolation can be a cause of distress for both researchers who have family around them, as well as those who do not. According to Delamont et al. (2004) the intellectual isolation need not be accompanied by social or emotional isolation. The last will slow down the pace of work. Additionally, research is fundamentally a very private endeavor that's why it can be a very isolating experience. You may feel disconnected from those around you and frustrated - even disturbed - by the fact that others don't really have a window into your world or understand what you are going through (Murray & Beglar, 2009).

Furthermore, another emotional challenge that a student may meet is his/her relationship with the supervisor. The choice of the supervisor can be a critical issue or an obstacle in the research's development. Unfortunately, this relationship led to a great stress and anxiety. Yousefi (2015) sees that the relationship between the student and the supervisor should be examined, so that the supervisor can help students in improving their research skill. However, Murray (2002) shows that being afraid from the supervisor's feedback have an effect on the student's writing ability. According to Holloway and Walker (2000), a bad relationship is frequently leads to depression and demoralization as well as the potential for failing to complete a PhD. In addition, Regular supervisory meetings offer significant opportunities to discuss progress, identify and address problems, and explore and exchange ideas. They are one of the most crucial ways to maintain progress and a good supervisor-subordinate relationship (Thompson et al, 2005). Researchers were faced to serious issues with their supervisors; some of them argue about the supervisors' rudeness and mistreatment in situations where there is a lack of open and secure communication between the two parties (Tiwari,2019). To sum up, supervisors are essential to a PhD student's ability to successfully complete their research because

they offer professional guidance to help them produce the highest quality research throughout their PhD candidature.

Bryne (1988) states that thinking a lot about the reader's impression and reaction about the work is considered as a psychological problem. According to Phillips and Pugh (2005), there are psychological aspects which consist of a strong emotional component. He listed three major ones that effect on the emotional side of a student.

▪ Enthusiasm:

Every student starts his research full of enthusiasm. However, spending a long time to solve a single problem is the main factor that cause the diminishment of enthusiasm.

▪ Boredom:

In the middle of the research period, most students tend to get fed up and bored, and sometimes feel stuck. The latter appears from concentrating on the same thing for an extended period of time.

▪ Frustration:

The cause of being frustrated for the majority of students when conducting research is the lack of concentration on the problem in hand. This becomes increasingly frustrating.

Gordon (2003) clarifies that fear and anxiety are examples of psychological issues. There is correlation between self-doubt, self-criticism, and lack of confidence in one's abilities.

2.1.3. Motivational Challenges

For longer research projects, it is difficult to maintain motivation. Sasson (2019) explains that a lack of motivation refers to having a deficient level of passion and enthusiasm in doing a job. Furthermore, Shore (2017) also clarifies that a lack of motivation can be interpreted as an uncaring attitude toward what one supposed to do. Many responsibilities in life may distract students from their academic work. "Typical scenarios include a death in the family, a family member who needs to be cared for, health problems, visa difficulties, work-related problems such as the loss of a job or a significant increase in workload, financial difficulties and accommodation problems" (Murray & Beglar, 2009 P.14). The latter are some commitments that will interrupt students' research and force them to disengage with it. As, all of these things affect on the students' level of motivation. But according to a study conducted in Albania, there are three main sources of motivation for pursuing higher education: personal, professional, and environmental factors (Uka, 2012).

2.1.4. Organisational Challenges

There are many challenges related to organization that a student can fall into. If a student is not well organized that means he/she tends to make a very little progress in his/her study. Hence, disorganization is a sense of failure ana a lack of achievement which can be fatal to the student's mind and to the progress of the thesis (Murray & Beglar, 2009). They added that prioritizing your responsibilities and try to create (and write down) a schedule that reflects those priorities, this will give you enough time to remain engaged - at least to some extent - with your research. The latter helps a student to be organized.

2.1.5. Practical Challenges

To obtain a PhD, a number of practical tasks have to be undertaken within a limited period. They are essential to achieve success.

2.1.5.1.   Time Management

As stated by Thondhloana, Mawere, Weda (2011), faulty time management reduces an individual's interest and passion in completing the task on time. Moreover, for most students, 3 years appear to be a long time for completing single piece of research. The recent lead students to be in trouble in managing time and planning. As Macan et al. explains, "In trying to read all the books and chapters assigned, meet paper deadlines, and participate in extracurricular activities, college students may become overwhelmed with feelings that there is not enough time to complete all their work adequately" (p.706). Given this time pressure, successful time management is considered important by students. "Indeed, a survey showed that 67% of the undergraduates at our university reported that their greatest personal need (of 40 needs on a checklist) was 'to manage my time more effectively" (Britton and Tesser, p. 406). Time constraints is a major problem for researchers, consuming time is difficult for them to find enough time to read various sources (Tiwari, 2019).

2.1.5.2.   The Importance of Deadlines

Among the practical aspects, we can find the importance of deadlines to PhD students."Deadlines create a necessary tension between doing original work and reporting its progress, either orally or in writing" (Phillips & Pugh, 2005 P.88). Most students leave their work to the last minute because working under pressure is the best solution to work hard. For these reasons, having exact and definite deadlines is crucial. On this point, Students encounter a difficulty when the supervisor underestimate the importance of deadlines.

2.1.5.3.   Self-help and peer support groups

The majority of PhD students when they work towards their research think that no one is interested with their work that is why they pass a long time alone, and this makes them think about dropping out. However, it is not the case because if they share their feelings with others and start talking about them, they may feel better. Just one or two postgraduates are enough to share thoughts, ideas, and feelings with them. According to research, peer support groups and group feedback may be effective in assisting writers' development as well as in preventing potential isolation (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Caffarella and Barnett (2000) add that the critiques that the students receive from their peers is an important element in improving the academic writing style.

2.2. Doctoral Thesis Writing Challenges

Academic writing differs from other genres. Al-Mansour (2015) describes it as "a host of references, information, and evidence to support it" (p.95). Bryne (1988) divided the problems that makes writing difficult into two main aspects: linguistic challenges and rhetorical challenges. He claims that these linguistic problems comprise grammatical and vocabulary difficulties, and also the week selection of appropriate words and sentences. Many students who tend to write a thesis in EFL/ESL still struggle with linguistic difficulties such as problems of grammar, limitations in vocabulary, language use, and choice of sentences (Divsar ,2018). He added that his study was about the challenges encountered by Iranian TEFL students in thesis writing, the results of this study revealed that linguistic difficulties (e.g., grammatical and organizational problems and lack of mastery of academic writing style) constituted the major challenge for Iranian EFL students. This is also supported by Çetinkaya & Yılmaz (2017) who confirm that grammar, word choice, proper structure, translation, and conjunctions have also been added to students' challenges. In addition, Hinkel (2004) argues that insufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary as well as the complexity of the task of writing thesis itself are reasons for the bad quality of theses written by students. Casnave and Hubbard (1992) in their research, reported that first year doctoral students who are non-native speakers have problems with surfer-level features of writing such as grammatical accuracy and vocabulary appropriateness. Linguistic difficulty refers to the language forms and functions used in the writing. This is also supported by Moses & Mohamad (2019) who also reported that many writers felt that they lack of vocabulary, are weak at grammar and spelling.

Both native and non-native thesis writers' profit from explicit instruction on how to structure a thesis and its component parts (Biggs et al., 1999) and (Torrance & Thomas, 1994). In this regard, it

is important to emphasize on the structure of specific written genres. The aim of Tardy's book (2005) is to help supervisors in giving advices to their students about rhetorical structuring of the thesis. "The advanced academic literacy needed by research students requires not only linguistic ability but 'rhetorical insight' into their 'disciplinary community's ways of building and disseminating information". Tardy (2005), Shaw (1991), Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006), Ho (2013), Komba (2016) and Singh (2015) have found that many students encounter difficulties at the level of structring the parts of a thesis. The results of their studies showed that the difficult sections to write are: Introduction and Discussion (Shaw, 1991), Literature Review (H0, 2013) and Discussion of Results (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006). The reason of these difficulties is the unawerness of the rhetorical structure. In another study, Singh (2015) indicated that EFLstudents found writing the Literature Review, Methodology, and Findings sections very difficult. Writing organization is a rhetorical problem, students lack the mastery of composition structure, they lack what each section should contain (Goma, 2010). Biggam (2008) confirms that the researcher is not only confronted with grammatical issues, he/she is confronted with abstract issues, which primarily revolve around the inability to master the structure of the dissertation and to manage it in the required. He adds that while most researchers are aware of the structure or outline of the dissertation, in practice they lack practice or application of the dissertation's elements. For instance, they do not know how to conduct a literature review or create a questionnaire, despite having a thorough understanding of the outline of the dissertation.

Conclusion

Doctoral students spend the bulk of their time preparing a thesis. Therefore, the thesis writing process provides plenty of challenges that a student may encounter. Further, the chapter discussed the well-known types of challenges that PhD students faced. First, intellectual, emotional, motivational, and organizational challenges effect on conducting a thesis. Second, practical aspects are listed. Finally, linguistic and rhetorical problems of thesis writing are examined.

Part two: The Practical Part

Chapter three: Methodology and Results

Introduction

The study in hand examines the challenges of thesis writing that are faced by Algerian EFL doctoral students. The preceding chapters have reviewed the relevant literature that constitutes the theoretical framework of this study. This chapter is devoted to account for the research design and methodology, and to report its findings. Firstly, the study's general approach and methodology are described. Next, the instruments selected to collect data are demonstrated, and the sample of the study is described. Finally, the results are reported and discussed.

3.1. Methodology

The present study is exploratory in nature with a sequential mixed-methods underlying approach. Exploratory studies are a valuable means of understanding what is happening, to seek new insights, to ask questions and to assess phenomenon in a new light (Yin,1994). In this regard, the goal of exploratory research is to formulate problems, clarify concepts, and form hypotheses. Accordingly, considering the study's objectives, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used in this investigation. Hence, the quantitative approach was used first, followed by the qualitative approach. Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird, and McCormick (1992) stress the importance of quantitative research in generating factual, reliable outcome data that are generalizable to some larger population. Whereas, the qualitative research produces rich, detailed and valid process data based on the participant's rather than the investigator's interpretations.

3.2. Methods

To collect data for the present study, a close-ended online questionnaire and structured interview were used. The questionnaire was used to identify the common challenges that are faced by EFL doctoral students when writing their thesis, and the interview was addressed to understand further the PhD students' common challenges.

3.3. Description of Instruments

3.3.1. Description of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in the present study is a close-ended questionnaire (see appendix 1). Closed-ended questions are often used to describe a person's attributes, beliefs, or attitudes (Dillman et al., 2014). Hence, the major benefit of close-ended questions is that their analysis is clear and not subjective.

The present questionnaire incorporates close-ended questions to be answered through selecting from a defined set of responses. Besides, the Likert scale was used including five points: (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree. "The Likert scale is one of the

most frequently used methods for the measurement of social attitude. 'The method of summated ratings' developed by Likert in 1932" (Singh, 2006, p.207). It is divided into five sections.

Section 1: It contains 3 questions about the students' profile.

Section 2: It contains 6 questions related to the linguistic challenges.

Section 3: It consists of 8 questions; its aim is to gain information about the rhetorical challenges.

Section 4: It consists of 6 questions about the students' psychological challenges.

Section 5: It includes 5 questions concerning students' practical challenges.

3.3.1.1. Administration of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was sent via Google forms to EFL doctoral students voluntarily. The participants were asked to fill in the close-ended questionnaire by choosing the appropriate option. Only 15 participants responded to Google forms and sent their answers in a short period of time.

3.3.2. Description of the Interview

The second instrument used in this study is the interview (see appendix 2). "Interviewing is a process of personal interaction between a researcher and a respondent" (Krishan Kumar,1992). In this path, George (2022) sees that the interview allows the researcher to gather rich information and to draw more detailed conclusions than other research methods. Accordingly, there are several types of interviews depending on whether the questions are controlled in advance by the researcher or not. In the present study, the researcher used a structured interview. The interview contains an introductory part that explains the purpose of the study to the interviewees. All the questions are open-ended so that the PhD student can add more explanations to the study in hand. To obtain a deep picture about the most common challenges of thesis writing, the questions were divided into four main sections and one general section.

- The first question (Q1) in **Section One** is about the general background of the participants.
- The questions in **Section Two** (Q2-Q3-Q4) are aimed to identify the common linguistic problems.
- The fifth question (Q5) in **Section Three** is about the three main difficult sections in a thesis according to doctoral students.
- The questions in **Section Four** (Q6-Q7-Q8) concern the psychological and emotional side of a student when preparing a thesis.

- The questions in **Section Five** (Q9-Q10-Q11) are about the most known practical challenges that a student encounter, another concluding question (Q12) is added to this section.

3.3.2.1. Administration of the interview

The interview was addressed to 3 EFL doctoral students. It was done just after the collection and the analysis of the questionnaire's responses. It consists of 12 questions that were designed in the attempt of obtaining accurate and deep responses that are richer than the questionnaire questions. Structured interview was conducted online in order to understand further the most common challenges that are done by EFL PhD students to enhance the quality of thesis writing.

3.3.3. Piloting

A pilot study is regarded as a small feasibility study to test the adequacy of the planned methods for a larger investigation (Arain, Campbell, Cooper, & Lancaster, 2010). For them, the purpose of this study is to prevent making fatal flaw in the research that costs time and money. Based on the above explication, the present research did not use a pilot study.

3.4. Samples

The sample of the current study is 15 EFL doctoral students doing research in literary translation, comparative literature, linguistics, and others specialized in didactics at Kasdi Merbah University Ouargla (KMUO). This sample includes 9 males and 6 females. Besides, 3 students were interviewed. The sampling strategy selected is convenience sampling.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

Two procedures were followed to achieve the study's objectives. The first is a 'questionnaire' and the second is an 'interview'. Depending on the nature of the research instruments, each one of them has a different way of analysis. The questionnaire data were analyzed on the basis of quantitative view while interview data were analyzed according to the qualitative one.

3.5.1. Analysis of the Questionnaire

In order to analyze the data, a descriptive statistics method was used. The data were analyzed by using the Excel software for the purpose of calculating the mean which is the numerical average of a set of values. It was calculated in order to identify the mean score of the challenges that EFL Algerian students encounter while writing a thesis. The results were converted into graphs.

3.5.2. Analysis of the Interview

In the first stage, the interviews with the 3 participants were transcribed word by word. Then, in the second stage, the researcher started by analyzing the content. In order to analyze the content, a

grounded theory was used. The grounded theory is a research method for qualitative research that enables the researcher to generate theories from data (Glaser in Walsh, Holton et al 2015). In this theory, there are three main steps that a researcher has to follow: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the last stage, the answers were interpreted to fit the necessary results.

3.6. Results and Discussion

3.6.1. Results of the Questionnaire

Section One: Students' Profile

The participants are EFL doctoral students at Kasdi Merbah University Ouargla (KMUO). As shown in Figure 1, (60%) of those participants are males whereas (40%) are females.
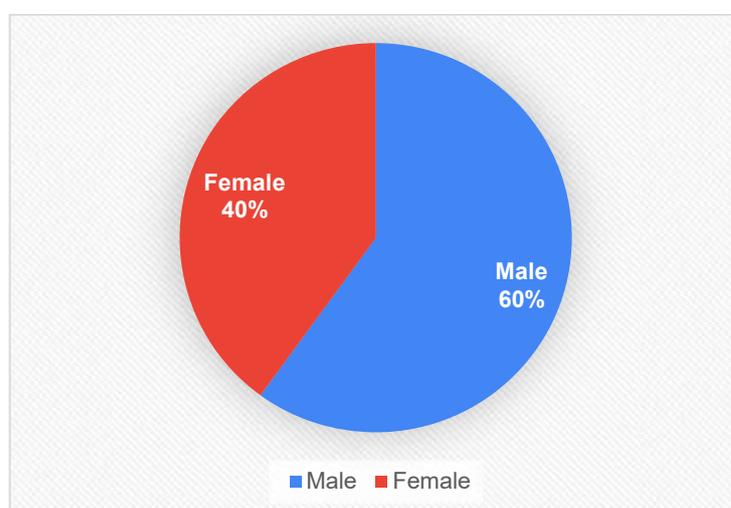
Figure 3.1: PhD Students' Gender

According to the results in Figure 2, most of the participants (40%) are aged between 30-35. However, few of them (13%) are aged above 40. The rest (27%) are aged between 25-30 and (20%) aged between 35-40. As indicated in Figure 3, their specialities include Linguistics (40%), Comparative Literature (20%), Literary Translation (20%), and Didactics (20%).
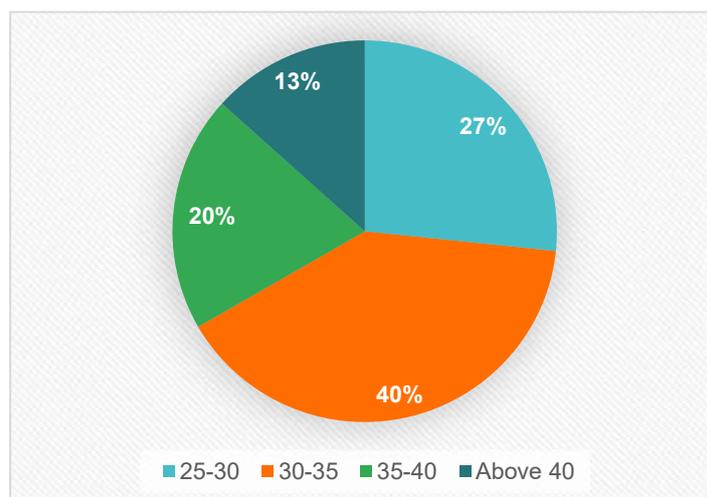
Figure3.2: PhD Students' Age
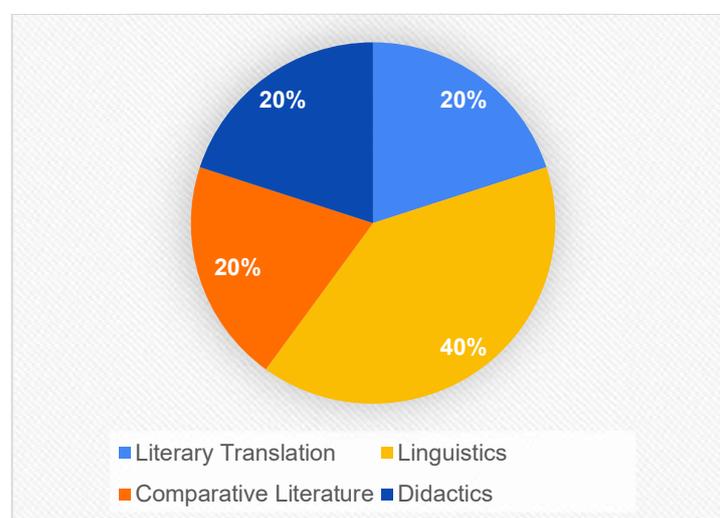
Figure 3.3: PhD Students' Specialities

Section Two: Linguistic Challenges

Findings on the challenges related to linguistic aspects demonstrate, according to Figure 4, that the linguistic aspects which are not challenging encompass using grammar (4.2), organizing sentences and paragraphs (4.1), using the appropriate vocabulary (3.5), plagiarism (3.5) while those which are challenging include developing ideas (3.4) and making an outline before writing a draft (3.3).
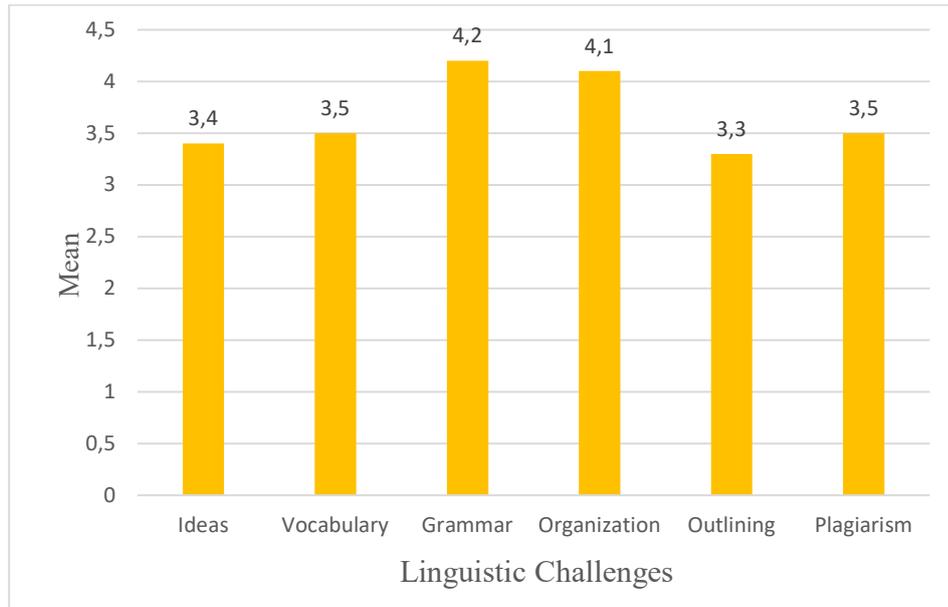
Figure 3.4: PhD Students' Linguistic Challenges

Section Three: Rhetorical Challenges

As appears in Figure 5, the respondents affirmed that they do not face real challenges in the rhetorical features of texts with mean scores ranging between (3.3) and (3.7), such as writing titles, abstracts, data collection analysis, discussion, and conclusion. However, writing a literature review is said to be somewhat challenging (2.9). The mean score (2.8) indicates that the issues of writing an introduction and writing a statement of a problem are relatively difficult compared to the rest of aspects.
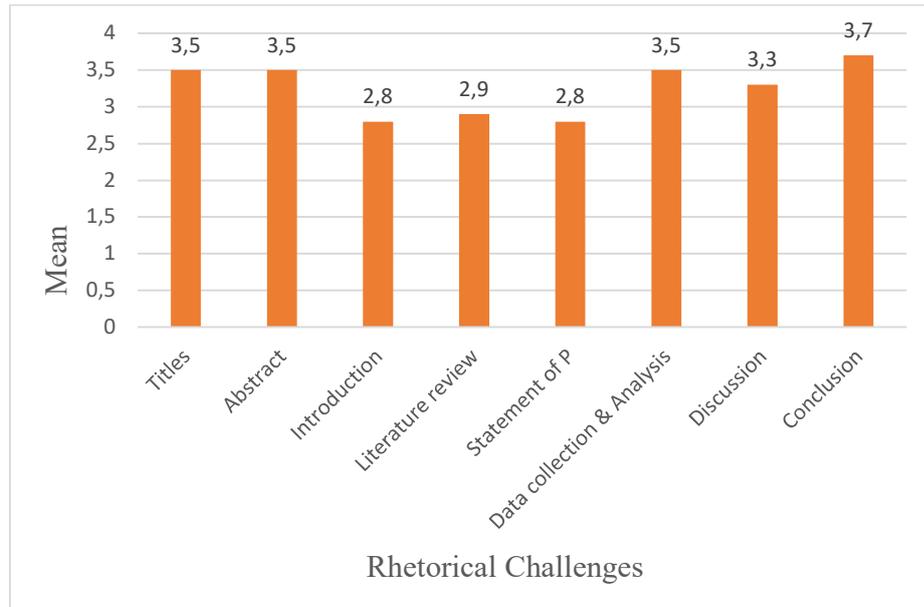
Figure 3.5: PhD Students' Rhetorical Challenges

Section Three: Emotional Challenges

As shown in Figure 6, the respondents indicated that the problem of the lack of confidence (2.9), being isolated (2.5), and being anxious about viva day (2.5) are not really challenging aspects when writing a thesis. Relatively difficult are the aspects of the lack of motivation (2.2), being bored and frustrated (2.1), and the lack of enthusiasm (1.9).
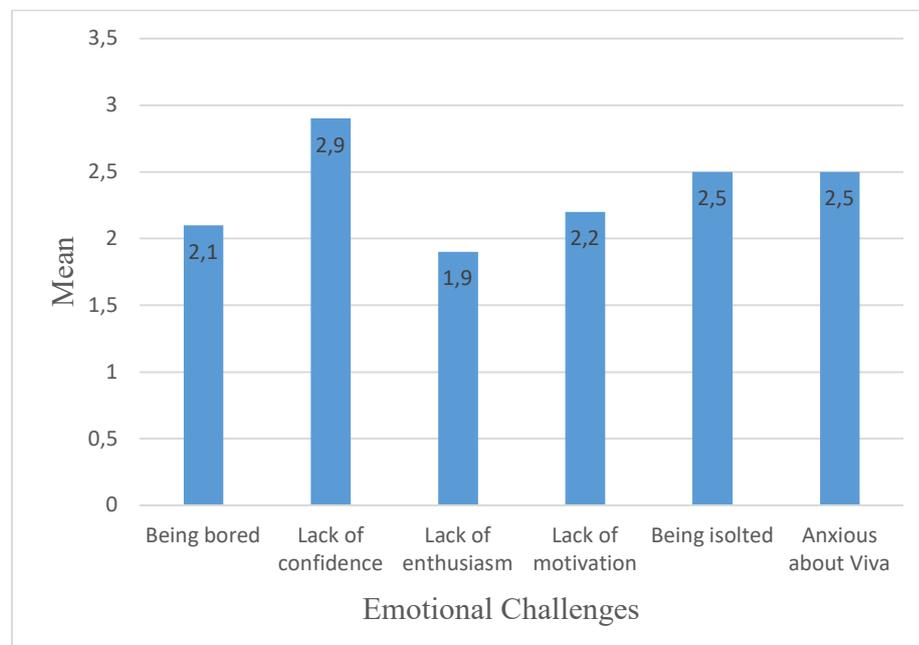
Figure 3.6: PhD Students' Emotional Challenges

Section Five: Practical Challenges

The participants in Figure 7 affirm that sharing feelings with other peers (3.5), the limited availability and assistance offered by the supervisor (3.3), being not able to define short and long-term goals (3.1) are not challenging. However, the mean score (2.4) indicates that those participants face a difficulty in making a coordination between their job and their thesis, and also in managing their time.
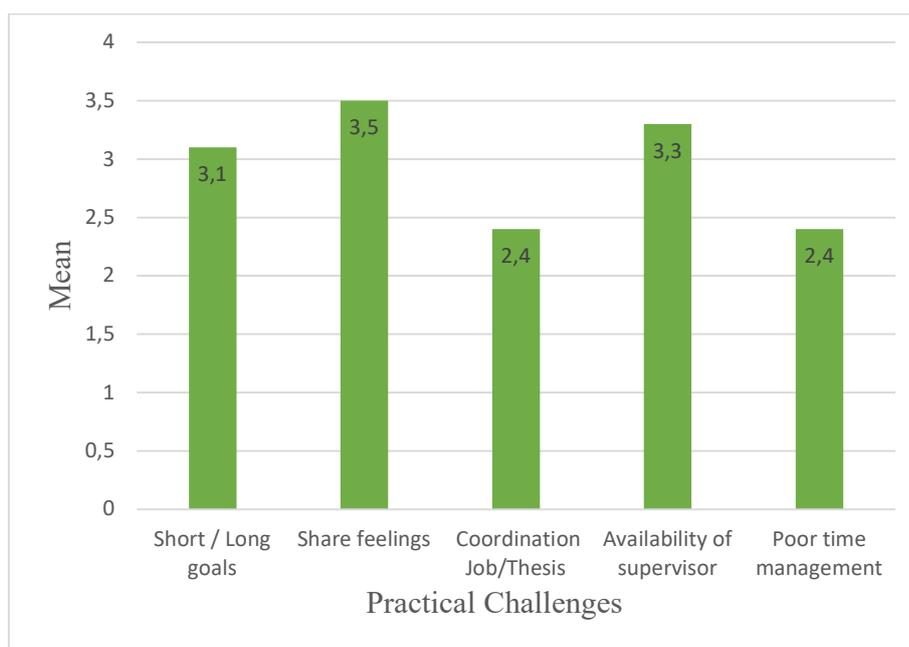
Figure 3.7: PhD Students' Practical Challenges

According to the above results, we have found that the main challenges that EFL doctoral students encounter are: (1) Using appropriate vocabulary, developing ideas, and outlining are the common linguistic challenges. (2) An Introduction, a Literature Review, and a Statement of the Problem are the main difficult sections to write. (3) As for the most challenging aspects that are related to the emotional and psychological part, we can mention lack of motivation and enthusiasm, boredom, and being isolated. (4) Coordination between job and thesis, the unavailability of the supervisor, and poor time management are considered challenging during the production of a thesis.

3.6.2. Results of the Interview

The analyses of the interview responses are based on thematic views. The results of this tool are presented in the following sections.

3.6.2.1. Section One: General Information

In this section, the researcher aims at gathering background information of the participants of the present study. The answers of question 1 are displayed in Table 3.2.

Q1: Can you describe your general background as a PhD candidate?

Table 3.2: PhD Students' General Background

Data presented are about the general information of the participated students.

Main Categories	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree	Mangistère
System	LMD	LMD	ENS
Speciality	Applied Linguistics	Literary Translation	Applied Linguistics
Year	The 4th year	The 4th year	The 6th year
Status	PhD Candidate	PhD Candidate	PhD Candidate + Teacher at University

Results in Table 2 show that 2 students have a master degree but the other one has a magistére degree. The study system of both participant 1 and 2 is an LMD system unlike participant 3 who studied at the ENS. Applied Linguistics is the speciality of student 1 and 3. However, student 2 majored in Literary Translation. In other words, most of the participants in this interview majored in Applied Linguistics. Their experience as a PhD candidate ranges between 4 and 6 years. As for their status, two of them are just PhD candidates, but for the other one is a PhD candidate and at the same time a teacher at university.

3.6.2.2. Section Two: Linguistic Challenges

Section two of the interview deals with the questions that discuss the linguistic challenges that are faced by EFL PhD students while writing a thesis. The results are shown in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Q2: How can the problem of using the appropriate vocabulary hinder the writing process?

Table 3.3: The Problem of Using the Appropriate Vocabulary

The use of the appropriate vocabulary while writing a thesis is regarded as a problem for some PhD students.

Main Categories	Sub-Categories
1.The reasons behind the problem	- Difficulty of the topic
	- Ambiguity of the variables
	- Limited range of words
2.The results of the problem	- Misinterpretation of the reader
	- Loss of clarity

Responses to question 2 that categorized in Table 3. The students' interpretations of the difficulty in choosing the appropriate vocabulary involve three main elements: (1) Difficulty of the topic, (2) Ambiguity of the variables and (3) limited range of words. Participant 1 thinks that at this level using an appropriate vocabulary in not really challenging unless the topic of the researcher is difficult or the variables of the study are ambiguous, for her this is the only reason that may lead her not to use appropriate vocabulary. Some respondents see that this problem leads to: (1) Misinterpretation of the reader and (2) loss of clarity especially when conveying the intended meaning.

Q3: In your point of view, why outlining is regarded as a difficult step before you start writing?

Table 3.4: The Problem of Outlining

Before starting writing, making an outline is an essential step that should be done. Many students regard making outlines as a hard step.

Participants	Difficulties in making an outline
Participant 1	- Lack of experience
Participant 2	- Limitation of ideas
Participant 3	- Unfamiliarity of the topic
	-Random deciding of the appropriate elements

Table 4 demonstrates that there exist different difficulties that an EFL PhD candidate face before starting writing. According to participant 3, when the researcher lacks familiarity with the topic, he/she will struggle in making a good outline. Participant 1 sees another aspect as a difficulty which is the lack of experience. She states:

> *Personally, the main cause that makes doing an outline difficult is the lack of experience, doing just a master dissertation is not enough to be good in outlining. Moreover, like we all know that if the outline is not clear, the outcome will not be good. That's why outlining is considered as a difficult step because we think a lot about results, we always want to catch the reader's intention by making good outlines.*

Q4: As the results shown, developing ideas when writing a thesis is a challenging task, why?

Table 3.5: Developing Ideas as a Challenging Task

Developing ideas is considered as a complex task for most doctoral students.

Main Categories	Sub-Categories
Challenges	- Developing ideas in complex topics is challenging
	-Lack of knowledge about the topic is challenging when developing ideas
	Developing ideas that are related to the point of view of the researcher is complex
	- The length of the thesis affects on the development of ideas (finding and developing ideas in all the huge amounts of pages is challenging)

As it is presented in Table 5, the interviewees claim that there are four main challenges that are related to developing ideas while writing a thesis. Firstly, the problem of developing ideas appears when the researcher's topic is complex or when he/she lacks knowledge about it. Secondly, participant 3 shows that the complexity occurs when the researcher tries to develop his/her opinion. She clarifies:

> *I think that developing ideas can be challenging when the researcher tries to develop coherent ideas that express his/her point of view and not that of the author who is citing, this is a problem that most researchers suffer from. Also, the researcher's ability to paraphrase and avoid plagiarism is a complex issue that a researcher may face when developing ideas.*

Finally, the response of participant 1 shows that the huge number of pages in a thesis is challenging, for her writing all these pages and trying to find the suitable ideas and develop them is hard.

3.6.2.3. Section Three: Rhetorical Challenges

The third section comprises one question that is divided into three parts. It is about writing the three main difficult sections of a thesis. The previous results have shown that writing the Introduction, the

Literature Review and the Statement of the Problem is a hard task for EFL doctoral students. The responses of question 5 are displayed in Table 6.

Q5: What are the main problems that occur in the following sections while writing your thesis?

A. Introduction
B. Literature Review
C. Statement of the Problem

Table 3.6: PhD Students' Challenges in the Rhetorical Part

Writing thesis' sections is a challenging task for all PhD candidates especially these three sections: Introduction, Literature Review and Statement of the Problem.

Sections	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Introduction	- Finding the accurate and appropriate ideas to be included in the introduction is an obstacle for PhD candidates.	- Guiding the reader smoothly from general background to specific research focus is hard.	- Writing something general that includes all the variables of the study is complex.
Literature Review	- Difficulty in finding relevant sources -Finding the gap is difficult in this step.	- looking for and identifying relevant sources are time consuming and Overwhelming.	- Being unable to find appropriate sources.
Statement of Problem	- Convincing the reader that the research deserves to be investigated is difficult.	- To identify areas that have not been explored before is hard.	- The problem needs to be contextualized and to the point, here is the complexity.

Data in Table 6 demonstrates that the main problem of the interviewees while writing an Introduction is writing something general that includes all the important elements that catch the reader's attention. Moreover, it is seen from the above Table that the three participants have the same view concerning the difficulty in writing the Literature Review section. For them, the difficulty in writing this part of the thesis is to find relevant sources to the study. Participant 3 added that identifying such sources, reading, analyzing, and summarizing or paraphrasing them is time consuming. Furthermore, the challenges that face doctoral students while writing the Statement of the Problem according to participant 1 are:

1. Make a balance between writing informative statement of problem and precise one.
2. Trying to convince the reader that the research deserves to be investigated.

However, participant 2 saw that identifying areas that have not been explored before is challenging in this section. While participant 3 told that the difficulty while writing a statement of problem is to make it direct to the point and contextualized.

3.6.2.4. Section Four: Emotional Challenges

The fourth section focused on the emotional and psychological issues that affect on EFL doctoral students when writing their doctoral thesis, including boredom, lack of motivation, and isolation. The answers of questions 6, 7 and 8 are displayed in Tables 7, 8 and 9.

Q6: How can the feeling of being bored affects on the process of your writing?

Q7: What is the reason behind the lack of motivation and enthusiasm during thesis writing?

Q8: To what extent can the thesis affect the act of being isolated?

Table 3.7: PhD Students' Emotional Challenges

The emotional and the psychological side has many impacts on the PhD students' process of writing.

Main Categories	Sub-Categories
• Feeling Bored	- It may cause stopping the whole work - It leads to procrastination in work - It can lead to decrease in concentration - Being not productive
• Lack of Motivation	- Lack of interest leads to lack of motivation - External factors have great impact - Lack of encouragement and supporting - When the researcher becomes tired, stressed, and overwhelmed means there is no motivation
• Being Isolated	- It leads to feel disconnected -It may lead to psychological problems

The interviewees' responses to question 6, 7 and 8 give an idea about the psychological reasons that affect the doctoral students when preparing their thesis. For the sixth question, all of them agree that boredom may lead the researcher to procrastinate or stop the work, also participant 1 confirmed that being bored equals not being productive.

For the seventh question, participant 1 maintains that the lack of motivation has many reasons. She clarifies:

> *I have two factors that let me lose motivation. Firstly, the lack of interest leads to lack of motivation. Secondly, the external factors such as health, family… have a great impact on the PhD candidates.*

While participant 3 explains:

There are many reasons behind the lack of motivation, among these is the lack of encouragement and support from the supervisor, colleagues and also the family.

In the last question of this section, all the participants agree that the issue of isolation causes many psychological problems.

3.6.2.5. Section Five: Practical Challenges

In this section, many practical tasks have to be done in order to achieve success. However, PhD candidates face several challenges and difficulties concerning the practical issues. Questions 9, 10 and 11 are displayed in Tables 8, 9 and 10.

Q9: Can you describe your experience of being unable to coordinate between your job and your thesis?

Table 3.8: PhD Students' Experiences in the Coordination between Job and Thesis

To coordinate between your job and your thesis is something complicated for most doctoral students.

PhD students' experiences

- Doing a thesis and working at the same time makes the researcher can not do a real progress

- It is time and effort consuming

- The researcher needs enough time and full concentration

- As a researcher and worker, doing a good progress only on holidays

- Making a balance between work and thesis is something hard to do

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Responses in Table 8 show that working and doing a thesis at the same time is very challenging for the majority of doctoral students. For instance, participant 3 confirms that achieving a real progress when working is like an impossible task. She states:

For me, achieving the thesis and working at the same time makes me can not do a real progress. Especially in my case, I live in a town and work in another one. Preparing lessons for example is time and effort consuming. I believe that research needs to have enough time to can achieve it. Personally, I was able to make a real progress on holidays and not in the days when I work.

Participant 2 also has the same point of view as participant 3. Whereas participant 1 says that she has not a job that's why her full concentration is on her thesis.

Q10: How do you deal with the unavailability of the supervisor for a long time; and how can the latter affect your progress?

Table 3.9: The Results behind the Lack of Supervision

The unavailability of the supervisor can be a problem for some PhD students.

Sub-Categories

- The importance of being in contact with the supervisor helps the supervisee not to be lost and confused.

- The wise guidance of the supervision is extremely beneficial

- Having an experience with doing research before is enough to rely on self-supervision

- Being guided by a supervisor is not necessary at this stage

---

In response to question 10, both participant 1 and 3 told that it is not really a problem if the supervisor is unavailable at this stage, relying on self-supervision and working independently is enough because of the previous experiences. Whereas for participant 2, the unavailability of the supervisor is considered as a problem. Firstly, she underlines the necessity of the availability of the supervisor as a result of avoiding the feeling of being lost or confused. Secondly, the wise guidance by the supervisor is beneficial in order to make quick steps in the work. In general, according to the above responses, there are some PhD students' who work independently without the help of the supervisor. However, on the other hand, there are others who rely on the guidance of the supervisor and see that its unavailability can affect negatively on their work.

Q11: When do you usually face the problem of poor time management?

Table 3.10: Time Management Problems and their effects on Doctoral Students

The wrong time management has a big impact in reducing the interest of doctoral students in completing their thesis on time.

Main Categories	Sub-Categories
Factors behind time management	- Putting tasks until the last minute
	- Overload excessive work
	- Seeking for perfection
	- Being not organized
	- At the earlier stages of a thesis, writing articles, contributing in conferences and seminars leads the researcher to be in trouble with time management

According to the answers of question 11, all the participants face different problems in managing time. The participants find that letting their tasks at the last moment, doing an excessive work, perfectionism, disorganization are reasons that may prevent completing the work on time. As participant 1 commented, such as writing articles, contributing in seminars and conferences lead to procrastination in work and be not able to manage time.

Q12: Thank you for all your valuable information, is there anything else you would like to add before we end?

Table 3.11: Additional Information

Main Categories	Sub-Categories
General ideas about	- Conducting research needs a perseverant researcher
thesis writing	- Scheduling writing is the best way to complete on time

At the end, as Table 11 shows, only 2 participants added their general advices about tips to follow in order not to encounter difficulties when writing a thesis.

3.6. Recapitulation

According to the above results and the data analysis of both the closed-ended questionnaire and the structured interview, it is concluded that EFL doctoral students of Kasdi Merbah University Ouargla face several challenges and difficulties in writing a doctoral thesis both in linguistic and non-linguistic challenges.

As the present study focused first on the linguistic challenges, the results have shown that using the appropriate vocabulary is challenging just when the topic and the variables of the study are difficult. Also, outlining is challenging because most of times the researchers lack experience and topic familiarity. Besides, developing ideas is the most common linguistic challenge for PhD students, it occurs as a consequence of the complexity of the study, developing ideas concerning the researcher's point of view, and the length of a thesis also affect on this problem.

Moreover, the findings about the rhetorical challenges imply that writing an introduction is difficult because it should be general, include all the variables, and catches the reader's attention. While finding suitable sources and identifying the gap is challenging when writing the literature review section. Whereas the statement of the problem is considered also as a challenging section when writing a thesis mainly because it should convince the reader that this study deserves to be investigated.

Furthermore, it is found that boredom leads to procrastination, external factors influence the researcher to be not motivated, and being isolated may cause psychological problems. These problems are related to the emotional challenges.

In addition, it is important to highlight that the study focused also on the practical challenges that a doctoral students encounter. In the light of these findings, working and doing a thesis at the same time is extremely challenging. Additionally, the unavailability of the supervisor affects only on some students because the majority relies on self-supervision. Finally, managing time is really difficult to maintain.

Conclusion

In the present chapter, the methodology, the data collection tools, and the analysis procedures were outlined. Challenges of EFL doctoral students when writing a thesis were analyzed quantitively and qualitatively using a questionnaire and an interview. From the results discussed above, the following answers could be responses for the proposed research questions. It is concluded that the main difficulties of EFL doctoral students in writing a PhD thesis lie in linguistic, rhetorical, emotional, and practical challenges. The questionnaire targeted four core issues: (1) Using appropriate vocabulary, outlining, and developing ideas are the most common linguistic challenges. (2) Writing an introduction, literature review, and statement of the problem are the most difficult sections. (3) Boredom, lack of motivation, and isolation are the three main emotional challenges. (4) The common practical challenges are the coordination between job and thesis, the unavailability of the supervisor, and time management. However, the results of the interview revealed at identifying the real cause of each problem that is mentioned above. On the whole, it was possible through this analysis to identify the main linguistic and non-linguistic challenges that encounter EFL doctoral students at the university of Ouargla, and also these findings may help in the improvement of the quality of PhD theses writing in EFL.

General conclusion

Writing academically is essential especially in the higher education level. Hence, learning the academic writing in majority of cases is learning genres. These genres require the researcher to develop a set of academic writing skills. Theses are among the most common and complex genres of writing in the academic field. As a result, this study focuses on the challenges that EFL doctoral students encounter when writing such genre. In order to achieve the study's objectives, two questions were raised: 1) What challenges do Algerian EFL students encounter in their thesis writing? 2) What are the possible causes of those difficulties? To answer these two questions a quantitative and qualitative methods were used. A closed ended questionnaire was administered in order to identify the challenges that face EFL doctoral students in the writing process of a thesis, and a structured interview was done to understand further the most common challenges and the reasons behind them. The results of the questionnaire revealed that there are linguistic challenges and non-linguistic challenges which are divided into rhetorical, emotional, and practical. Through the analysis of the findings, the researcher has found that developing ideas and outlining are very challenging concerning the linguistic aspects. Rhetorically, writing the introduction, the literature review, and the statement of the problem are difficult sections to write. Being bored, lack f motivation and enthusiasm, and being isolated are considered as the common emotional challenges. The results also showed that among the well-known practical challenges, there are the coordination between job and thesis, the unavailability of the supervisor, and time management. However, the findings of the interview revealed the main causes and reasons behind the above common challenges.

To conclude, this study attempts at identifying the main linguistic and non-linguistic challenges that EFL doctoral students face while writing a thesis, to determine the reasons behind these challenges, and finally to help in the improvement of the quality of PhD theses.

Limitations of the study

Data were collected from the University of Kasdi Merbah Ouargla at English department, which does not necessarily mean that they are applicable for all the departments of the same university and for the other universities. Therefore, the sample of 15 EFL doctoral students was too small to be generalized on all EFL students since it cannot be judged as a reflection of their levels. In this regard, further research should cover a large sample.

Further Recommendations

As the findings of the present study shows, the researcher identified the common challenges of thesis writing and the reasons behind them. To eliminate such challenges, it would be helpful if

the universities apply some solutions to potential PhD students' problems. First of all, organizing workshops at university which aims at improving the students' linguistic abilities. Secondly, creating appropriate conditions for students who work by reducing their workload in order not to face a difficulty in making a coordination between their job and thesis. Finally, it would be helpful if the university organize regular meetings, they can be presential at the department or virtual via Zoom or Google meet in order to discuss their problems and difficulties. The above solutions can be useful to doctoral students and help in the improvement of their PhD theses' quality.

As for the investigation for further research, conducting research about the challenges of ESL doctoral students to see whether the challenges are similar to or different from that in EFL.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for EFL Doctoral Students

Dear students,

This questionnaire is done to collect data for the accomplishment of a master's dissertation. It is about "Exploring the Challenges of Thesis Writing among EFL Doctoral Students". Thus, you are kindly requested to fill in this questionnaire. Your responses will help us effectively to reach the research objectives.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Section one: Doctoral Student's Profile

Q1. Select your gender

Male ☐   Female ☐

Q2. Select your age

25-30 ☐   35-40 ☐

30-35 ☐   Over 40 ☐

Q3. Select your speciality

Comparative Literature ☐   Applied linguistics ☐

Literary Translation ☐   Others: ……………

Section Two: Challenges of Thesis Writing

Instruction: Tick the appropriate choice for you

1. **Strongly Disagree**   3. **Neutral**

                                                    5. **Strongly Agree**

2. **Disagree**   4. **Agree**

A. Linguistic Challenges

Do you face a problem in…?	1	2	3	4	5
Developing ideas					
Using the appropriate vocabulary					
Using grammar					
Organizing sentences and paragraphs					
Making an outline before writing a draft					
Plagiarism					

B. Rhetorical challenges

Instruction: Tick the appropriate choice for you

1. **Strongly Disagree**   3. Neutral
                                          5. Strongly Agree
2. **Disagree**   4. Agree

Do you find writing the following sections of the thesis challenging?	1	2	3	4	5
Formulating titles					
Writing abstracts					
Writing Introduction					
Writing the literature review					
Writing a statement of the problem					
Writing the methods section					
Writing about data collection and analysis					
Writing the discussion section					
Writing the conclusion					

C. Emotional Challenges
Instruction: Tick the appropriate choice for you

1. **Strongly Disagree**   3. Neutral
                                          5. Strongly Agree
2.Disagree   4. Agree

While writing your thesis, do you face the following?	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of enthusiasm					
Feeling bored and frustrated					
Lack of confidence					
Being isolated					
Lack of interest and motivation					
Being anxious about the Viva Day					

D. Practical Challenges

Instruction: Tick the appropriate choice for you

1. **Strongly Disagree**   3. **Neutral**

                                                              5. **Strongly Agree**

2. **Disagree**   4. **Agree**

Do you have a problem with…?	1	2	3	4	5
Being not able to define short and long-term goals					
Being not able to share ideas and feelings with other PhD peers					
Being not able to make coordination between your job and your thesis					
Limited availability and assistance offered by the supervisor					
Poor time management					

Appendix 2: EFL Doctoral Students' Interview

This interview is a part of a master dissertation which deals with the common challenges that Algerian EFL doctoral students encounter when writing their theses. The main aim of this qualitative tool is to collect data about the most frequent challenges in the process of thesis writing. Through this interview, we aim at improving the quality of PhD theses in Algeria. The interview will be recorded, and its data will be used for research purposes. We assure a total anonymity of the interviewees' responses.

Section One: General Information

1. Can you describe your general background as a PhD candidate?

Section Two: Linguistic challenges

2. How can the problem of using the appropriate vocabulary hinder the writing process?

3. In your point of view, why outlining is regarded as a difficult step before you start writing?

4. As the results shown, developing ideas when writing a thesis is a challenging task, why?

Section Three: Rhetorical challenges

5. What are the main problems that occur in the following sections while writing your thesis?

    A. Introduction

    B. Literature Review

    C. Statement of the Problem

Section Four: Emotional challenges

6. How can the feeling of being bored affects on the process of your writing?

7. What is the reason behind the lack of motivation and enthusiasm during thesis writing?

8. To what extent can the thesis affect the act of being isolated?

Section Five: Practical challenges

9. Can you describe your experience of being unable to coordinate between your job and your thesis?

10. How do you deal with the unavailability of the supervisor for a long time; and how can the latter affect your progress?

11. When do you usually face the problem of poor time management?

12. Thank you for all your valuable information, is there anything else you would like to add before we end?

Résumé

La thèse de doctorat est un document académique fondamental connu par sa complexité. Notre travail vise alors à identifier les différents défis des doctorants d'anglais langue étrangère dans la rédaction de leur thèse. Et pour mener à bien notre recherche, nous avons opté pour une analyse quantitative et qualitative. Pour collecter les données, un questionnaire fermé a été adressé à 15 étudiants du département d'anglais à l'université Kasdi Merbah Ouargla et avec un entretien a été adressé à 3 étudiants du même département. Les participants à cette étude sont sélectionnés grâce à la technique d'échantillonnage de commodité. Les résultats ont révélé que les doctorants d'anglais langue étrangère confrontent un ensemble de défis : linguistiques, rhétoriques, émotionnels, et pratiques. L'analyse des données a indiqué que les défis linguistiques connus résident dans le développement des idées, la schématisation, et l'utilisation d'un vocabulaire bien approprié. L'écriture de l'introduction, la revue de littérature, et l'énoncé du problème sont parmi les sections les plus complexes. En outre, l'ennui, le manque de motivation, et l'isolement sont considérés comme étant des défis émotionnels. Finalement, la gestion du temps, l'absence et la non-disponibilité du directeur de thèse, et enfin la coordination entre le travail et la thèse sont des défis pratiques. A la base de ces résultats, notre recherche tente à aider les doctorants à travers l'identification des défis les plus connus, ce qui contribuera certainement à l'amélioration de la qualité des thèses de doctorat.

Mots-clés : Les Doctorants, La Thèse de doctorat, Les Défis

الملخص

تعد أطروحة الدكتوراه وثيقة أكاديمية أساسية، تُعرف بتعقيدها. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى دراسة التحديات المختلفة التي غالباً ما يواجهها الطلاب الجامعيون في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أثناء إعداد أطروحتهم. في هذا السياق، تم استخدام كل من الأساليب الكمية والنوعية. لجمع البيانات، تم توجيه استبيان مغلق لـ 15 طالبًا في الدكتوراه في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة قاصدي مرباح ورقلة، وتم إجراء مقابلة مهيكلة مع 3 طلاب من نفس الكلية. تم اختيار مشاركي الدراسة الحالية باستعمال عينة متاحة. أظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب الجامعيين يواجهون تحديات لغوية وبلاغية وعاطفية وعملية أثناء كتابة أطروحاتهم. أشار تحليل البيانات إلى أن التحديات اللغوية الشائعة تتمثل في تطوير الأفكار والتنظيم، واستخدام المفردات المناسبة. بينما تُعتبر كتابة المقدمة واستعراض الأدبيات وبيان المشكلة أكثر الأقسام تعقيدًا. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يُعتبر الملل وعدم الدافعية والعزلة تحديات عاطفية معروفة. وأخيرًا، تعتبر إدارة الوقت وعدم توفر المشرف والتنسيق بين العمل والأطروحة تحديات عملية شهيرة. بناءً على هذه النتائج، حاول الباحث مساعدة الطلاب الجامعيين من خلال تحديد التحديات الشائعة وأيضًا المساهمة في تعزيز جودة أطروحات الدكتوراه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: *طلبة الدكتوراه، أطروحة الدكتوراه، التحديات*