

The Motivations for Joining the Postgraduate Program and the Challenges Confronting Libyan MA Students at the Department of English

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ABSTRACT

The central focus of the paper is to explore the motivations of Libyan students to pursue postgraduate studies, and the challenges that may cause students for not completing such studies on time. To achieve these objectives, 34 master's degree students from the Department of English in the Faculty of Languages at the University of Tripoli, participated in this study. The data on these motives and difficulties are gathered through a close-ended questionnaire that is delivered online. The results reveal that students join the master's degree program mainly for better employment and to upgrade their qualifications. Moreover, the results show that the determinants of late completion are significantly institutional and partially personal. Institutional factors include lack of resources, paucity of guidelines for dissertation formats, as well as the lack of workshops for research methodology and instruments for analyzing data. Personal factors, on the other hand, include pressure from parents and family commitments. Finally, the study provides some pedagogical suggestions and recommendations.

المخلص

التركيز الرئيسي لهذه الورقة هو استكشاف دوافع الطلاب الليبيين لمتابعة الدراسات العليا، والتحديات التي قد تجعل الطلاب لا يتمكنون من اتمام دراساتهم في الوقت المحدد. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف شارك في هذه الدراسة 34 طالب وطالبة ماجستير يدرسون بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية اللغات بجامعة طرابلس. وقد تم جمع البيانات المتعلقة بهذه الدوافع والصعوبات من خلال استبيان تم تسليمه عبر برامج التواصل الاجتماعي. اظهرت النتائج أن الطلاب يرغبون في الانضمام في برنامج الدراسات العليا من أجل الحصول على فرص عمل أفضل ورفع مستوى خبرتهم. كما أظهرت

النتائج أن اسباب تأخر انجاز كتابة الرسالة وتسليمها في الوقت المحدد له علاقة إلى حد كبير بالمؤسسة التعليمية و عوامل شخصية تخص الطالب . وشملت العراقيل التي تتعلق بالمؤسسة التعليمية مثل: نقص الامكانيات (الكتب والمراجع)، وعدم وجود ارشادات واضحة ومحددة لكتابة الأطروحة، فضلا عن عدم وجود ورش عمل لمنهجية البحث وأدوات تحليل البيانات). ومن ناحية أخرى، تشمل العوامل التي تخص الطالب مثل: الضغوطات التي يواجهها الطالب من الاهل من اجل استكمال كتابة الرسالة؛ والالتزامات العائلية الاخرى. وقد ختمت الدراسة ببعض المقترحات والتوصيات التربوية وكيفية معالجة هذه المشاكل.

KEYWORDS: Challenges, Motives, Libya, MA Students, Dissertation, Postgraduate Studies, Supervision, Personal Factors, Institutional Factors

Introduction

Research and knowledge production continue to be the hallmark of higher education (Tlali et al., 2022). The postgraduate program has become essential as it provides educational institutions with opportunities to build research capabilities, strengthen academic reputations as well as increase financial gain (Alam et al., 2013, p.875). The postgraduate program is an advanced academic level of learning which exits at two stages : one stage is related to Master of Philosophy (MA) degree and the second one is related to Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree (Haq & Shahzad 2021).

There has been a noticeable increase in the last few years in the number of students wanting to get a high degree (El-Freihat, 2021). Students are motivated to pursue for an MA or a PhD degree either to fulfil personal needs or professional needs (O'connor n.d). Personal needs comprise financial gain, higher salary, to get a promotion, to achieve personal ambition or increase the sense of complacency. Professional needs means the need to have more experience, future success in career, broaden career opportunities, to get stimulated intellectually, seek knowledge on research skills, or to escape from dissatisfying

careers and many more (see also Al Habahbeh, 2014, Sha Di & Jiixin Wen, 2014, Ayub et al., 2017, Haq & Shahzad, 2021, Amani et al., 2022). Moreover, the support from parents or the attitude of immediate family members on gaining master or doctoral degree can be also another motivating factor for joining postgraduate studies (Wiegerovaa, 2016).

In Libyan universities, a growing number of students are eager to join the postgraduate program to particularly obtain an MA degree. As in most countries, students must first complete the courses related to the specialized field of study. Then, students are required in their second year to complete a research in the form of a dissertation or thesis as a compulsory requirement to obtain the degree and graduate (Ebadi & Pourahmad, 2019).

A dissertation is an academic piece of writing which aims to present information on a certain topic to reveal certain results with the assistance and guidance of a supervisor/s (Puspita, 2019, Alsied & Ibrahim, 2018). However, students often consider the dissertation writing process a challenging task (Tiwari, 2023). Since it involves not only writing, but also other myriad steps starting from selecting a research topic to the final stage, which is writing up the dissertation (Brause,1999, Olmos, 2010).

In order to achieve the writing process, students are required to have several skills including the use of proper academic writing skills, research skills, critical thinking, organizing paragraphs, the correct use of grammar and vocabulary, framing the research and structuring arguments, selecting appropriate research methodologies, the literature review and referencing (Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020, Ali et al., 2022) Thus, students must learn how to keep up motivated, be self-regulated and maintain relation with supervisors during the writing progression (Vos, 2013, Turmudi, 2020, Ali et al., 2022). Moreover, writing a dissertation needs to be accomplished in such a precise and a systematic way so that the

students' knowledge, skills, attitudes and values will be reflected in their dissertations (Matin & Khan, 2017).

Writing an MA dissertation can be a daunting task particularly for non-native speakers of English (El Freihat, 2021, Abu Alyan, 2022). Most EFL (English as a Foreign Language) master students face some difficulties in meeting the standards of the dissertation genre (Vos, 2013). It is argued that the lack of linguistic competence or writing experience can be a possible challenge for EFL postgraduate students (Abu Alyan, 2022, Ali et al., 2022). Previous research studies revealed that students' limited knowledge of the second/foreign language's grammar and vocabulary could be key variables for the poor quality of dissertations produced by non-native speakers of English (Hinkel, 2004, as cited in Abu Alyan, 2022). Accordingly, students may often face lexical, syntactic, and discursive writing challenges. Lexical challenges include the students' poor use of academic vocabulary or the students' inability to choose suitable words. On syntactic level, EFL students often use run-on sentences, sentence fragments, unable to paraphrase, and the misuse of different sentence patterns. Any academic research involves the use of various types of sentences, but EFL students often cannot maintain sentence variety in their writing. Similarly, challenges in discourse include "*discourse ambiguities, mixtures of discourse categories, subject shifting in discourse, and overgeneralization of discourse*" (Tiwari, 2023, p.73). It was also reported that students' insufficient knowledge of the aspects of academic writing, lack of revising and editing of the draft, as well as the interference from students' mother tongue can also be other related challenges (Puspita, 2019). In addition to difficulties at the linguistic level, some challenges are related to the genre of dissertations and its components (Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020). In other words, the writing of the introduction chapter, the literature review, research techniques and methods, as well as the discussion of the results (Tiwari, 2023). For example, students frequently fail to include the relevant information in their

literature review chapter and often unable to integrate the related theoretical framework (Divsar, 2018). These difficulties can be attributed to the students' incomplete awareness of the 'rhetorical structure' of the dissertation (Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020, p. 2455).

In addition to linguistic factors and rhetorical problems, postgraduate students may face other sorts of challenges that may contribute to the late completion of postgraduate studies.

Based on the results of enormous previous research, these challenges fall under three factors namely, the institutional climate (cooperation and guidance), the quality of supervision (knowledge, student-supervisor relationship, regular contact and feedback), and the personal characteristics of the postgraduate student (students' knowledge of research skills, commitment, stress, time management) (Matin & Khan, 2017, Haq & Shahzad, 2021, Ishak et al., 2021, Bakhou & Bouhania, 2020, Amani et al., 2022). All these studies have reported that universities, students and supervisors all have important roles to play in the completion of a successful postgraduate program.

Institutional Factors

Institutional-related factors include the lack of research ambiance, the unavailability of resources, the lack of internet facilities, unnecessary departmental delays, lack of cooperation and guidance from staff, administrative inefficiency of departments and universities, and poor social service (Ebadi & Pourahmadi, 2019, Amani et.al., 2022). Some studies have also related the quality of supervision to institutional roles and responsibilities. The study of Spronken-Smith et al. (2018), for instance, have asserted that institutions should ensure that the learning environment and the supervisory process are at their best to foster an effective research and process. An improper environment is considered a contextual problem which produces a research climate with negative interpersonal interactions in certain situations, such those among faculty members and students or in

peer interactions. Thus, factors related to the supervisor, who represents the institution, should include the supervisors' qualifications, the nature of the relationship between students and their supervisors, supervisors' knowledge in the area of study, the regular contact between the student and the supervisor as well as the provision of timely feedback (Yousefi et al., 2015). Moreover, irregular discussions with supervisors can affect the progress of students' writing (Matin & Khan, 2017).

Supervision

Supervision plays an essential factor in the success of writing a dissertation (Ismail et al., 2011). Both supervisors and students are usually under a lot of pressure to finish the dissertation-writing within a well-defined time frame (Alam et al., 2013). Postgraduate students may face various problems with their supervisors. These may include the supervisors' lack of experiences and commitment, irregular meetings with supervisors, and the lack of communication or misunderstanding between the supervisor and the student. A further challenge highlighted in previous research is that a large number of supervisors may lack the knowledge of how to conduct an effective postgraduate research supervision (Amani et al., 2022). Moreover, some supervisors lack the guidelines of postgraduate supervision which could result in delays in receiving feedback (Ali et al., 2022). The results of Tlali et al. (2022) indicated that the lack of training for supervisors, and the lack of clarity on the supervisory guidelines were one of the main reasons for students to not finish writing their dissertations on time.

Moreover, the relationship between the supervisor and the postgraduate student has always been considered as a key factor in determining the success or the failure of a postgraduate research work (Ishak et al., 2021). Accordingly, supervisors are expected to provide guidance, support and constructive feedback. Moreover, students usually feel discouraged when they find out

that their supervisors have only “*scanned their work or not read their work*” (Tlali et al., 2022, p.26). Also, problems may emerge from the lack of communication between students and their supervisors. A broken supervisory relationship will eventually cause students to feel frustrated with their research progress, and they might also fail to finish their research. On the other hand, when both students and supervisors are willing to listen to each other and to talk openly about the problems related to the research, this will result in a well-formed supervisory relationship as well as future research collaboration (Dericks et al., 2019).

Also, due to the rising number of students joining the postgraduate program, most university teaching staff have heavy workload: teach, mark assignments and examinations; publish their own research work as well as do administrative work as heads or deans of departments or faculties. As a result, some supervisors work under pressure and frustration, especially those who have no experience and lack extensive research knowledge or skills (Tlali et al., 2022).

The study of Yousefi et al. (2015) have implied that an effective supervision is based on three important elements. First, supervisors should create a professional relationship with students. This can be achieved by helping their students choose suitable research topics, urge or assist them to complete their surveys, and help students with their personal and general problems. Another important element is related to the quality of guidance given by supervisors. Finally, communication skills used in supervisor-student relationship can also affect the dissertation-writing process. Good communication in research supervision is an essential component of any supervisory task.

Personal Factors

Apart from supervision related factors, the personal characteristics of the student were also found to be a necessary part to an effective completion of postgraduate studies (Amani et al., 2022).

The personal life of postgraduate students has a strong impact in their ability to complete their studies successfully (Wanasinghe, 2020). These include challenges related to the candidates' *personal issues* and the level of their *academic competency*.

The personal issues cover the financial status of the student, family responsibilities, the students' emotional and psychological state, the student's self-esteem, frustration, lack of motivation, work and health state, time or stress management skills, lack of commitment during the writing process, changes in a career path that may also have a notable impact and may be in a conflict with students' commitment to their studies (Ali et al., 2022). The level of academic competence encompasses issues related to the students' educational background, the level of students' academic knowledge, the attitude towards the research project, the students' writing and speaking English skills are also other personal causes for students not completing their studies on time. It is further argued that the students' ability to communicate their ideas and thoughts in English, which may not be their first language, is another important consideration for students to succeed in the postgraduate program. This also goes together with the students' ability to plan and prioritize their research activities in line with set of deadlines (Wanasinghe, 2020).

Previous Studies

A lot of research has been conducted in other countries to explore the motivations and the challenges that postgraduate students may face during their postgraduate studies or during the writing of their dissertations. In the study of Amani et al. (2022), it was found that the motivations of students in several universities of Tanzania to undertake postgraduate studies were mainly for employment prospects, better salary, career progression or change, personal development, and prestige. It was also revealed that both institutional and personal factors were affecting the students' writing progress. Institutional factors included a non-

supportive research environment, heavy supervisors' workload, supervisors' lack of motivation, and low entry qualifications by candidates. On the other hand, personal factors included the students' poor educational background, social and financial problems, lack of good communication skills, research incompetency, low commitment, and partial study leave. Abu Alyan (2022) examined the challenges of writing dissertation among Palestinian MA students in the Department of English at the Islamic University of Gaza. The study has revealed a few challenges, "*most of which implied pedagogical orientations inadequacies*" (p.46), particularly in research methodology, choosing a suitable research topic, lack of academic writing skills, insufficient feedback from supervisors, limited resources and lack of online digital materials. Also, it was found in Haq & Shazad (2021) that the majority of postgraduate students, in four universities in the Punjab province of Pakistan, pursue an MA or a PhD degree to achieve better employment opportunities and for work promotions. With regard to the challenges, the students faced obstacles related to tough work schedule, family responsibilities, and lack of critical thinking. In the study of Wanasinghe (2020) revealed that the students of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) encountered several challenges. The research has shown that the majority of students did not go beyond their research proposals. The students attributed their failure to complete their dissertations to both personal and academic factors. Academic issues included determining a suitable research topic, the difficulty of collecting data from different samples, and the difficulty of meeting supervisors to seek for advice and feedback. It was also shown that insufficient support from family, problems on time management, family commitments and travelling long distances to the university were some of the personal barriers to the completion of the students' dissertations. Bakhou & Bouhania (2021) attempted to explore the obstacles that Algerian EFL postgraduate students experience in

the process of writing their dissertations. The findings revealed that Algerian EFL students perceived linguistic challenges as less problematic than sociocultural challenges. The former included the students' paucity of academic writing skills and limited research knowledge, whereas the latter covered the lack of family support as well as supervisors', limited cooperation of research samples and insufficient academic preparation.

Franco (2021) focused on challenges that the students of the Library and Information science at Bulacan State University experienced during the Pandemic. The results of the study showed that personal factors received the highest score. Students were unfamiliar with the process of research and some of them had difficulties in selecting the research topic. Communication with supervisors was also another challenge for students. In other words, the absence of face-to-face discussion with supervisors and relying only on online meetings was another problem which students had to face. A final challenge was related to the lack of resources. According to the participants, it was tough to find all the relevant literature and studies they needed online, or even browse hardbound copies of books and dissertations since they were not allowed to go to the library.

A study by El-Freihat (2021) attempted to investigate the challenges that Jordanian MA students face when writing their dissertation. Results have shown that the level of infrastructure challenges (services, equipment, devices) was ranked first. The study suggested that such challenge is *"due to the fact that universities in Jordan lack the adequate resources that can help students complete their MA"* (p.3275). Moreover, communication problems with supervisors was chosen to be the second challenge for the Jordanian students. Accordingly, supervisors were found to lack the sufficient knowledge on how to use the different technological applications to communicate with their students. Finally, the challenge related to time management was ranked in the last place. Results revealed that MA students had the inability to

manage their time effectively due to lacking of deadlines, and this implied that the students could take more time in submitting their dissertations.

In Iran, Ebadi & Pourahmadi (2019) looked at the difficulties which confronted Iranian EFL postgraduate students. The common reported challenges included the lack of research knowledge, the inability to write academically using special vocabularies, and choosing a researchable topic. Moreover, students agreed that the inability in managing time, lack of motivation, lack of job security were among challenges they faced when writing their MA dissertations. Likewise, Divsar (2018) investigated the obstacles encountering Iranian EFL students in the stage of writing their dissertations. The study reported that the most common challenges were related to linguistic factors (e.g. grammatical problems and the lack of mastery of academic writing style). The study has also shown other difficulties ranging from instructional and pedagogical inadequacies to time management, limited supervisory support, and the students' loss of passion and motivation.

In Bangladesh, Matin & Khan (2017) conducted a study in 20 different medical schools. The identified problems comprised the students' lack of research knowledge, students' lack of commitment, time constraint, excess workload, lack of fund, irregular meetings with supervisors. Institute related problems covered the insufficiency of relevant resources, absence of research format and guidance of thesis writing and limited cooperation from the institute. In Safari et al. (2015), it was found that the challenges which influenced the writing of postgraduate students in Kermanshah University in the Faculty of Medicine were the lack of research facilities and organizational support. The study suggested that the access to internet with appropriate speed, providing different databases, equipping research labs for scientific research and advanced laboratory devices can encourage the participation of students in conducting research activities.

The study of Couto & Pogner (2015) focused on the barriers that could hinder students from finishing their postgraduate studies at several Danish universities. The study has found that students faced challenges such as doubts in choosing suitable topic and research questions, analyzing data, and communicating with their supervisors. From the supervisors' perspective, students had difficulties in defining the research problem and manage their time, sense of insecurity and the lack of establishing collaborative relation with supervisors and staff.

Bushesha et al. (2018) attempted to investigate the problems facing supervisors and students in the stage of dissertation-writing in the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). The study identified number of problems such as limited communication between students and supervisors, paucity of payments for supervisors, students' limited English language proficiency and writing skills, late submission of final drafts, and restricted access to literature.

As far as the Libyan context is concerned, limited studies have attempted to tackle the different problems that Libyan EFL students face. However, the focus was mainly on linguistic, academic and research related issues. For instance, the study by Emhammed et al. (2020) focused on the perspectives of Libyan undergraduate students undertaking their graduation projects at the Department of English at Sirte University. The most identified challenges were related to the aspects of academic writing, working within groups, data collection, applying research methods, and the insufficient skills regarding the practical part of research. However, the majority of students experienced positive relationships with their supervisors. Also, Alsied & Ibrahim (2018) examined the major challenges faced by Libyan EFL learners at Sebha University in research writing. The highly identified problems included difficulties in choosing a topic, formulating research problems, and writing a literature review. Also, there were challenges in collecting and analyzing data, ineffective

background knowledge about research, paucity of motivation, and lack of resources in the library. A study was conducted by Abusrewel in (2023) aimed to investigate the hurdles that Libyan postgraduate students in the Faculty of Languages and the Libyan Academy in Janzour face when preparing their research proposals. The study has revealed that issues related to academic writing, topic selection, reading and synthesizing the literature, selecting research methods, and lack of supervisors for consultation were the most common problems students encountered during the stage of writing their research proposals.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is twofold: one is to examine the reasons behind the increase number of Libyan students wanting to enter the postgraduate program, and secondly explore the challenges that may impede postgraduate students from completing and submitting their dissertations on time.

Limitations of the Study

The study examines the challenges from the students' perspectives with disregard to the supervisors' views. Moreover, the sample of the study is confined to the students of the Department of English in the Faculty of Languages.

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted during the Autumn Semester of the year 2023-2024. The sample of the study comprised 34 MA students from the Department of English in the Faculty of Languages at the University of Tripoli. The participants in this study were 29 (85.3%) females and 5 (14.7%) males, they all ranged from the age of 30 to 35 years old. As for carer status, 85.3% were employed and 14.7% were unemployed. In determining the choice of the participants, the researcher have put several criteria. Firstly, the

students must be full-time MA students in the Department of English. Secondly, the students must be in the writing phase and have completed all their course-work. Finally, the students must have written some parts of the dissertation. Thus, the minimum would be the first chapter (the introduction chapter) and the maximum would be the final chapter (the conclusion chapter). In this study, 20.6% of the students were in the stage of writing their literature review chapter, 14.7% in their methodology chapter, 8.8% in their analysis chapter and 8.8% in their conclusion chapter. It is worth to mention that the majority of the participants have completed their coursework since the semesters of the year 2020-2021. Thus, the students went beyond the due date of the submission of their dissertations.

Instrument

To gather data for this study, the researcher developed a questionnaire by referring to a set of previous studies such as (Al Habahbeh, 2013, Wanasinghe, 2020, El-Freihat, 2021, Haq & Shazad, 2021, Bakhou & Bouhania, 2021, Amani et.al, 2022). The questionnaire, which was delivered online via google forms, consisted of three parts. The first part focused on the demographic information of the respondents, namely: gender, age, and career status. The second part was concerned with questions related to the reasons for joining the MA program. The final part of the questionnaire consisted of (29) items, which were related to the challenges that may impede the completion of the students' dissertations. The method of response was a 5-point Likert scale in which 1 indicates "Strongly Disagree", 2 indicates "Disagree", 3 indicates "Neutral", 4 indicates "Agree", and 5 indicates "Strongly Disagree". These challenges were presented into items or statements linked to supervision-related problems, institutional factors, and the students' personal characteristics.

Data Analysis and Findings

The findings are presented with accordance to the objectives of the study. The first section covers the motivations of the students for joining the postgraduate program, while the second section reveals the challenges which hinder MA students from finishing writing their dissertations within the time frame.

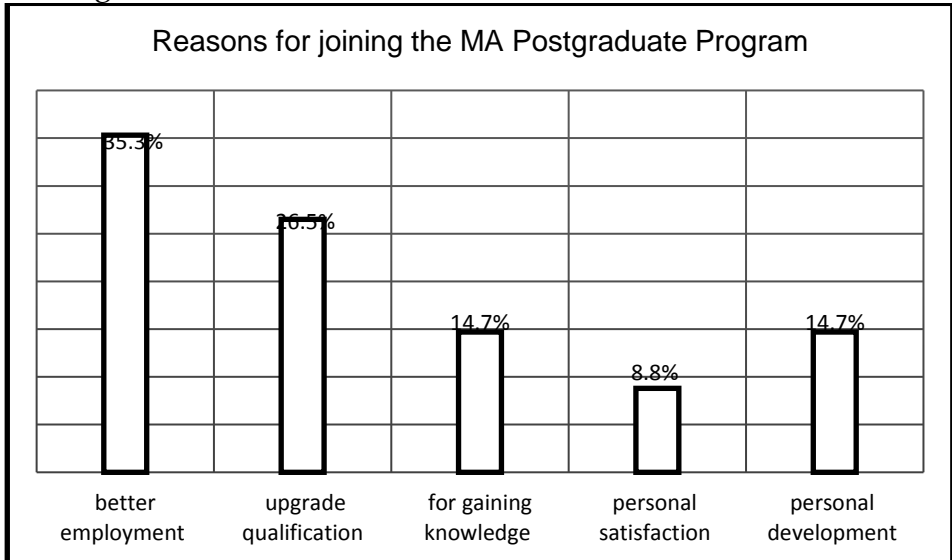


Figure (1) reasons for joining the MA postgraduate program

Figure (1) reveals that 35.3% of the respondents' prior reason for embarking on postgraduate studies was 'to get better employment', while 26.5% of the students were intended to join the postgraduate program to 'upgrade their qualifications'. Moreover, 14.7% of the respondents were motivated to enroll in the postgraduate program 'to gain knowledge' which was equally ranked in the third position with 'personal development' with 14.7%. Finally, 8.8% responded that their intention to join the program was for 'personal satisfaction'.

Causes of Late completion of dissertation writing Table (1) Supervision related challenges

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1-My supervisor has less time to help me or read my work due to his/ her work overload and other commitments.	8.8%	11.8%	23.5%	32.4%	23.5%
2- I usually receive insufficient or unsatisfactory feedback from my supervisor.	2.9%	5.9%	14.7%	38.2%	38.2%
3-The lack of communication between me and my supervisor delayed the thesis writing process.	5.9 %	14.7%	20.6%	35.3%	23.5%
4-There is a breakdown relation or a contradiction between me and my supervisor even after the research topic has been approved.	2.9%	5.9%	17.6%	44.1%	29.4%
5-There is a contradiction between my schedule and the one of my supervisor's.	5.9%	11.8%	11.8%	50%	20.6%
6-There is not a fixed time or day to contact or see my supervisor.	17.6%	29.4%	17.6%	20.6%	14.7%
7-My supervisor does not respond directly to my calls or messages or emails.	2.9%	11.8%	11.8%	35.3%	38.2%
8-My supervisor prefers traditional communication channels i.e. social media tools are not an option in the supervisory relationship.	8.8%	8.8%	17.6%	32.4%	32.4%
9-My supervisor has poor knowledge of my research topic in order to guide me properly.	0	0	14.7%	44.1%	41.2%
10-My supervisor lacks knowledge and experience of how to supervise.	0	2.9%	8.8%	38.2%	50%

As observed from the given results in table (1), surprisingly larger percentage of the participants seemed to have no problems with their supervisors. Therefore, in terms of assistance, 32.4% of the students disagreed that their supervisors have less time to help as shown in statement (1). As for statement (2), 38.2% of the respondents strongly disagreed that they do not receive enough feedback from their supervisors. As for communication, 35.3% of the students disagreed that there is a lack of communication between them and their supervisors as in statement (3). In statement (4), 44.1% disagreed that there is a breakdown relationship between them and their supervisors, and 29.4% chose strongly disagree. As for (5), 50% of the respondents disagreed that there is a contradiction between their schedule and their supervisors'.

However, 29.4% of the participants agreed that there is no fixed time and day to contact their supervisors. Also, 38.2% disagreed that their supervisors do not respond to their calls and emails. Moreover, 32.4.% responded that their supervisors do not confine themselves to traditional communication channels only. As for how much knowledge supervisors are aware of their students' research topics, 44.1% of the students disagreed that their supervisors lack knowledge as revealed in statement (9) and 50% of the students strongly disagreed that their supervisors lack the experience to supervise as shown in (10).

Table (2) Institutional related Challenges

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1-The university lacks research atmosphere.	17.6%	52.9%	17.6%	5.9%	5.9%
2-The university library lacks the adequate relevant scientific resources (books, journals etc.) and online digital materials for my research topic.	23.5%	47.1%	17.6%	8.8%	2.9%
3-Shortage of Master's dissertation supervisors.	14.7%	38.2%	44.1%	2.9%	0
4- The department does not follow adequate guidelines or specific formats for dissertation writing.	8.8%	35.3%	23.5%	23.5%	8.8%
5- The department lacks supervisory guidelines for supervisors to follow.	5.9%	32.4%	35.3%	20.6.9 %	5.9%
6- The university lacks the adequate facilities such as IT labs, library, internet access, well-furnished study rooms for postgraduate students...etc.	35.5%	48.4%	14.7%	2.9%	0
7- There is lack of departmental workshops and seminars for postgraduate students.	20.6%	38.2%	26.5%	11.8%	2.9%
8- There is no training or even tools to use for statistics or software for data analysis.	38.2%	41.2%	14.7%	5.9%	0
9-There is not enough cooperation and assistance from academic staff (supervisors and lecturers).	11.8%	32.4%	38.2%	14.7%	2.9%

Table (2) reveals the findings related to institutional related challenges. In statement (1), 52.9% of the participants agreed that the university lack a research atmosphere. As for statement (2), 47.1% agreed that the university lack the relevant resources. As a reply for statement (3), 44.1% went neutral while 38.2% agreed that there are not enough supervisors. As for the students' reaction to statement (4), 35.3% of the respondents agreed that the department lack guidelines or formats for dissertation writing, while 23.5% chose neutral. For statement (5), 32.4% of the students agreed that there are no guidelines for supervisors to follow, while 35.3% chose neutral. As for (6), 48.4% agreed and 35.5% strongly agreed that the univeristy lacks the required facilities for postgraduate students. As a reply for statement (7), 38.2 % agreed that there are no organised workshops and seminars in the department. In their response to statement (8), 38.2% of the participants strongly agreed that there is no training or tools to the use for statistics or software for data analysis and 41.2% of the respondents chose agree. Finally, 32.4% agreed that there is not enough assistance from the departmental staff and 38.2% went neutral for the same statement as shown in (9).

Table (3) Personal-related Challenges

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1-I don't have enough academic writing skills or research skills for dissertation writing.	8.8%	26.5%	17.6%	44.1%	8.8%
2- I am not confident enough with my writing skills.	0	26.5%	20.6%	35.3%	17.6%
3-I lack critical thinking	2.9%	17.6%	26.5%	35.3%	17.6%
4-I don't have the financial support to finish	2.9%	14.7%	23.5%	41.2%	17.6%

my dissertation.					
5-Family responsibilities are holding me down.	26.5%	23.5%	20.5%	20.8%	8.8%
6- The nature of job or the tight schedule in my place of work is holding me down.	8.8%	14.7%	26.5%	35.3%	14.7%
7- There is always pressure from my parents and relatives to finish the dissertation.	17.6%	38.2%	23.5%	8.8%	11.8%
8- I lack the commitment or the interest to finish any assigned task related to dissertation writing.	5.9%	23.5%	11.8%	47.1%	11.8%
9- Excessive social activities always keep me busy which hinder my academic work.	2.9%	29.4%	20.6%	38.2%	8.8%
10-There is not enough support from family to finish the dissertation.	2.9%	5.9%	5.9%	29.4%	55.9%

Table (3) displays the impact of students' personal problems on completing their dissertations. As for statement (1), 44.1% disagreed that they do not have enough academic or research skills while 26.5% did agree. Also, 35.5% disagreed that they lack any confidence with their writing skills while 26.5% agreed as revealed in statement (2). As for (3), 35.3% disagreed that they lack critical thinking while 26.5% went for neutral. As for (4), 41.2% disagreed that they have any financial difficulties while 23.5% were neutral in their response. In (5), however, 26.5% thought that family responsibilities are holding them down. As for (6), 35.3.% of the students disagreed that their jobs are holding them down and 26.5% chose neutral. In (7), the score of those who feel a pressure from their family to finish their dissertations were 38.2% while 23.5% of the respondents went for neutral. In (8), 23.5% lack commitment and interest to finish the dissertation whilst 47.1% disagreed. In (9), 29.4% agreed that social activities hinder the completion of their dissertation while 38.2% disagreed. Finally,

55.9% strongly disagreed and 29.4% disagreed with the statement “there is not enough support from family to finish the dissertation” as depicted in (10).

Discussion

The study has first attempted to identify the motivations of Libyan students to pursue postgraduate studies. The findings revealed that the majority of students were motivated to join the postgraduate program mainly for better employment and to improve their financial status. These results corroborate Amani et al.'s (2022) paper where MA students were motivated to join the postgraduate program for better salary and to get promoted. Also, in the study of Haq & Shazad (2021), it was found that students joined the postgraduate program for job promotions as well as for better job opportunities in their professions. However, in the study of Al Habahbeh (2013), the most common motive for Jordanian MA students to join the MA program was to seek more knowledge and improve their level of thinking.

The second objective was to explore the challenges that may hinder Libyan MA students from fulfilling their studies and finish writing their dissertations on time. According to the results, the most predominant challenges were institutional since most of its related indicators received the highest scores followed by the personal related challenges in the second place. These findings are in a line with (Amani et al., 2022).

As for supervision, the results showed that students had no problems with their supervisors particularly in terms of communication and feedback. The findings are similar to those which were reported in Emhammed et al. (2020), where students had positive experience with their supervisors: “*for the reasons that, their supervisors were very cooperative specifically in arranging meetings with their students and giving adequate feedback as well as suggesting topics for their graduation projects*” (p. 386). This was also found in Ishak et al. (2021), where most students have indicated

that their supervisors have continually applied various supervisory practices. In other words, students were very satisfied with the feedback that they had received from their supervisors. However, the findings did not concur with previous studies such as El-Freihat (2021), Abu Alyan (2022) and Wanasinghe (2020) where students had problems in dealing with their supervisors in terms of feedback and communication. In this study, however, students had difficulty in meeting their supervisors as revealed in statement (6) : *“there is not a fixed time or day to contact or see my supervisor”* with a mean of 29.4%. Similar results were also reported in the study of Ermiat et al. (2021), where participants have agreed that meeting supervisors was not always constrained by specific time due to the supervisors’ busy schedules. Also, in Abusrewel (2023), students have reported that their supervisors did not always have the time to help or discuss with them any issues related to their proposals.

As for institutional challenges, several obstacles were confirmed by the participants. Most students attributed the incompleteness of their dissertation to the lack of research environment, paucity of library resources and the lack of online facilities. Similar results were established in the studies of Abusrewel, (2023), Amani et al. (2022), Abu Alyan (2022), El-Freihat (2021), Wanasinghe (2020), Matin & Khan (2015), where students’ major problem was finding the relevant literature and access information related to their research. In Safari et al. (2015), it was reported by students that research facilities played an important role in conducting their studies. As a result, most students had to spend most of their valuable time looking for resources, instead of dedicating their time to the writing of their dissertations. These findings were also in accordance with Tiwari’s (2019) study in which the participants expressed similar sentiments by referring to ‘the lack of resources’ as the most challenging hindrance during the writing of their dissertations. Also, in Matin & Khan (2017), the majority of students and supervisors agreed that resources and facilities such

as the availability of IT labs, internet accessibility, modern library, and well-equipped labs will significantly assist students to finish writing their dissertations. Also, students in the present study admitted that there is lack of workshops and training particularly for the use of statistics or tools for data analysis. This finding correlated with Ebadi & Pourahmadi (2019) and Abu Alyan (2022), where students expressed their burning concerns about their limited knowledge of research design such as the use of special software to analyze the relevant data. In Bakhou & Bouhania (2020), it was also reported that the majority of students had experienced difficulties in choosing the research methodology, designing instruments for data collection and analyzing that data statistically. The studies of Safari et al. (2015) and Matin & Khan (2017), suggested that students' research skills can be improved by students' participation in workshops related to research, SPSS, writing papers etc.

Also, the lack of staff for supervision was also another fundamental issue which had received a higher score among respondents in this study. Several staff members in the Department of English have expressed honest opinions about their unwillingness to supervise MA students. This is due to late payment or non-payment that led the majority of the departmental staff to not experience supervision again or never at all. This finding is in agreement with Bushesha et al.'s (2018) study which showed that the supervisors in Open University of Tanzania felt discontent about their supervision fees. They suggested that the "*... current practice is to pay all supervisors at once immediately after the annual graduation of their respective students*" (p.128).

Results of this study also showed that there are no specific guidelines and formats for students to follow when writing their dissertations. This was also reported in Bushesha et al. (2018), Matin & Khan (2017) and Abu Alyan (2022), where the lack of adequate formats and examples of dissertations emerged to be one

of the problems faced by students. The lack of inconsistent formats for dissertation will definitely lead to confusion and frustrations among students. In some cases, it is common to find students experience conflicting ideas from their supervisors, colleagues, and staff members which may cause a significant delay in their progress (Bushesha et al. 2018). Similar findings were revealed in Abusrewel (2023), where students found the guidelines obtained from their supervisors were "*distinctive and contradictory which put [them] in a conflicting situation*" (p. 33).

Finally, concerning personal challenges, results of this study showed that family commitments and pressure from family were also other related challenges. Similar findings were reported in Bakhou & Bouhania (2020). The study showed that students struggled during their writing progress due to the large demands of their family members. Furthermore, students were not able to balance their "*role as a student trying to complete a dissertation and their role as a family member particularly, female married students*" (p.2250). With respect to family pressure, the finding was in an agreement with the study of Mutanana & Pedzisai (2020), which revealed that some students felt some pressure from their parents to finish their studies. They have reported that their parents asked them about the progress of their dissertation every time they have met. Moreover, participants felt that their parents were demanding them to graduate immediately by repeatedly asking when they are going to submit their dissertations.

Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to explore the motivations of Libyan MA students to join the postgraduate program, as well as to identify the causes behind their late completion and submission of their dissertations. The study revealed that the students' main motive was primarily to get better jobs. The findings also showed that institutional challenges and some personal-related challenges had a significant impact on their writing progress. Based on the findings, a few recommendations and proposals could be put

forward as possible ways to minimize these challenges. First, the department is recommended to organize regular practical workshops to familiarize students with all the aspects of research methodology and the different parts of writing dissertation. Furthermore, there is a need for designing specific courses which should be an integral part of the academic curriculum in MA programs to help students in writing their dissertations. Secondly, institutional conditions and policies should be reexamined so that postgraduate students produce good and timely quality results. Also, universities should provide the adequate research and learning facilities (e.g. laboratories, equipment, devices), sufficient supervisors, relevant resources and sources to enhance an effective provision of postgraduate programs. In addition, libraries should also provide ways for students to access online references (books and journals) for free. Moreover, it is essential to ensure all supervisors to follow the guidelines on dissertations formats for consistency as well as not to confuse students. Supervision meetings should be biweekly, and these could be standardized and documented through completing formal checklist forms or reports. Also, there is a need to revise the financial issues related to the expenses of supervisors so they can be kept motivated and encouraged to highly achieve their supervisory and teaching tasks. Finally, future research should examine the challenges faced by MA students from supervisors' perspectives.

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