

The Challenges Facing Masters Students in the College of Education in Dammam

Adel Al-Dhuwaihi^a, ^aDepartment of Educational Administration, College of Education, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia.

This study aims to identify the challenges faced by masters students at the College of Education at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University in Dammam, from the students' point of view. The study population, from which the study sample was chosen, comprises all 220 masters students in the College of Education in Dammam. A random sample of 69 male and female students was chosen to achieve the goal of the study. The researcher used the descriptive survey method and designed a 47-item questionnaire focused on four dimensions: administrative challenges, technical challenges, financial challenges and academic challenges. The results indicate that participants' average responses on the study dimensions ranged between 3.22 and 4.50, indicating a medium to high degree of agreement; financial challenges ranked highest, followed by academic challenges, administrative challenges and finally technical challenges. The results show no statistically significant differences due to gender, academic level or scientific department between the arithmetic means for the challenges facing masters students, in all fields of study, from their point of view.

Key words: *Challenges, Masters students, College of Education.*

Introduction

As higher education is considered one of the most important forces influencing the advancement of education, universities need to take responsibility for achieving the objectives of educational policy. The scientific research that underpins graduate studies programs is also the core from which the different fields are launched to keep pace with the rapid changes that we are witnessing in the modern era.



Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University in Dammam is pursuing its educational path to keep pace with international universities through its keenness to develop graduate studies programs and its interest in scientific research, as well as the use of educational methods to develop all fields, including educational, medical and economic fields, to achieve the goals of the Kingdom's Vision 2030, the national transformation plan (Imam University Abdulrahman bin Faisal, 2019a). Given the university's interest in developing graduate studies, it must continue to identify challenges and find effective solutions for them, as these challenges affect the course of graduate studies with its various components: students, academics, study programs and the diverse methods of scientific research. Many studies, such as Salem's (2017) have aimed to identify the challenges facing graduate students, revealing technical, administrative and financial challenges that affect graduate students to varying degrees; this reflects the need to pay attention and develop solutions to these challenges so students can keep pace with everything new while acquiring the knowledge and research skills to perform the roles and tasks required of them in their community.

The researcher is interested in identifying the challenges facing masters students at the College of Education in Dammam and from this developing a vision and solutions that contribute to developing the learning environment for these students, in order to raise their level of knowledge and research. Such efforts are reflected positively in the development of the educational process and the level of motivation students have. Raising the quality of services provided them increases their performance, knowledge, awareness and involvement in the learning and teaching process (Gautam, Lowery, Mays & Durant, 2016; Wolfe & Freeman, 2013). Given the scarcity of studies dealing with the challenges facing masters students in the College of Education in Dammam, this study's main goal is to identify those challenges and find the best possible solutions to address them.

Research Problem and Questions

Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University is considered one of the emerging universities among its counterparts in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It has given great attention to graduate programs, including dozens of programs in graduate studies for various scientific and humanities specialisations, and continuously strives to create and develop quality programs to raise its scientific level through the application of international quality standards and programmatic accreditation (Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, 2019b). Accordingly, highlighting the challenges facing masters students in the College of Education in Dammam becomes an important part of achieving the university's goals to reach local and international academic excellence, which is the most important pillar of the educational process for postgraduate studies. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges facing masters students at the College of Education in Dammam, from their point of view?
2. Are there statistically significant differences (at the $\alpha \leq 0.05$ level of significance) in participants' responses to the study variables (gender, academic level, scientific department)?

Study Objectives

This study aims to achieve three research objectives, which are summarised in the following points:

- 1- To identify the most important challenges facing masters students at the College of Education in Dammam from their point of view;
- 2- To disclose the statistically significant differences in participants' responses to the challenges facing masters students at the College of Education in Dammam, due to the variables of gender, academic level and scientific department; and,
- 3- To provide some recommendations for developing solutions to the most important challenges facing masters students at the College of Education in Dammam.

Research Procedures

To answer the research questions, the researcher followed several steps. First, the researcher reviewed existing studies related to the challenges facing masters students at the College of Education, in order to build a theoretical framework that reflects the fundamental variables in the current study. Next, after reviewing the literature and previous studies, the researcher built a research tool to reveal the most important challenges facing masters students at the College of Education in Dammam from their point of view, while ensuring the validity and reliability of the tool. Finally, the researcher conducted statistical data processing and made recommendations and proposals based on the results obtained. The application of the study tool was limited to the College of Education at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University in Dammam, Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia. This study was applied during the 2018–2019 academic year.

Theoretical Framework

The quality of the academic programs for the various academic stages offered by universities in general, and Saudi universities in particular, plays a fundamental role in developing the field of scientific and educational research and its educational tools, especially masters programs, which are considered the main turning point in a student's university life. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is currently witnessing an abundant era in the transformation of

educational policy, shifting toward expanded postgraduate programs of various levels and specialisations that society needs. Consequently, Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, represented by the Vice Presidency for Postgraduate Studies and Scientific Research, is seeking to develop its educational system and quality of the programs presented in its postgraduate studies, to ensure a quality of education and improve the services provided to all parties involved in postgraduate programs (students, university professors, curriculum writers; Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, 2019b).

While reviewing studies related to the challenges facing university graduate students, such as those by Al-Anzi (2014), Al-Obaidan (2018), Al-Shibl (2012) and Al-Zoman and Al-Arifi (2016), the researcher found differences in the way they each addressed the challenges facing graduate students with different study variables. Some studies dealt with challenges according to specific fields, such as the academic, organisational and administrative fields, others addressed the challenges from the perspective of teaching staff, and still others examined them from the students' perspective, with the researchers conducting a general survey of the most prominent of these challenges, which are classified in the following subsections.

Academic Challenges

Academic challenges are a set of obstacles or difficulties facing students that prevent their academic progress and their acquisition of knowledge, that prevent the achievement of the desired goal and also affect their degree of academic, social, and psychological adaptation inside and outside the university environment. They are also reflected in the individual's ability to interact with academic attitudes as a result of the interaction of several factors, such as mental ability, achievement ability, educational tendencies and attitudes toward the educational system, as well as the psychological state of the individual (Al Khraisha, 2009).

Much of the literature on academic challenges has addressed several factors that have both direct and indirect impacts on the creation of these challenges. For example, the Centre for Psychological Services at Cincinnati University in America has identified these factors as: the lack of clarity of vision and goals for the student to join the college; the choice of a specialisation to achieve parents' or colleagues' satisfaction; the students' deficiencies in how to manage time; poor academic skills, and; psychological difficulties and challenges facing students, such as anxiety and stress (Al-Azmi, 2013). Researchers agree that the factors that help the emergence of challenges can be classified into two main areas:

- subjective factors belonging to the student him-/herself, such as: limited experience; lack of previous knowledge of the university system; the level of the student's intelligence, physical and psychological state; lack of clarity in the general goal of enrollment at the

university; poor selection of specialisation; poor self-confidence; certain psychological difficulties; weak academic skills, and; a lack of success in managing and organising time, and

- organisational factors belonging to educational institutions, such as: increasing student numbers, and thus attention to quantity rather than quality; a lack of student guidance; neglect of social activities; poor financial potential, and; poor management (Gouda & Zayed, 2012).

Financial Challenges

Many restrictions face researchers. Lack of funds can prevent them from accessing the university libraries because they cannot afford it, or else impeded access to references and studies related to their specialties can lead to wasting time and effort to search for the information and data necessary for scientific research. There is also a lack of funding for scientific research, as what is devoted to scientific research usually does not exceed more than 2% of an organisation's budget. This situation has led some researchers to fund their research from non-academic bodies, which negatively affects the quality of the research and its scientific credibility (Al-Mughrabi, 2012).

Administrative Challenges

The administrative challenges can be summarised in the following main challenges identified in the research:

- Difficulty in obtaining the information and statistical data necessary for the research
- A lack of modern scientific references specialised in the field of educational research
- A lack of effective planning of scientific missions and external scholarship, despite the large costs incurred by the government
- A lack of specialised research centres that help students and direct them to write research papers and theses correctly
- Failure to create an educational environment for graduate students that motivates them to achieve creativity in the field of scientific research (Ashkar, 2019)

Previous Studies

Vehviläinen (2009) conducted a study aimed at identifying the difficulties facing students in choosing the study problem and the role of the academic supervisor in its implementation, revealing graduate students' perceptions about the problems associated with formulating the research problem. The study sample consisted of 36 male and female students in universities in Norway. The researcher used interviews to obtain students' responses. The results indicate

that most participants suffered from the problem of finding a research idea; students also believed that their supervisors did not provide feedback to help them to write their theses.

Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) identified the challenges facing graduate students as being with supervisors of their research. Their study adopted a qualitative research methodology, and data were collected through interviews. The sample consisted of 40 postgraduate students from universities in Cape Town and greater South Africa. A questionnaire was used to obtain students' feedback. The results indicate that a small number of students were satisfied with their supervisors while 75% were not satisfied with their supervisors' comments on their research work, due to insufficient knowledge in their fields of study or changes in their supervisors when they transferred to other institutions. The researchers recommended training supervisors on scientific theses at the university, especially concerning the methodology of scientific research, in addition to providing constructive criticism and feedback and addressing ethical concerns.

Al-Shibl (2012) aimed to identify some organisational and academic problems facing students in the masters' program in educational specialisations at Imam Muhammad bin Saud University. The study tool was applied to students, and the results indicate that the organisational problems facing students are the lack of full-time study, a weak awareness of the regulations governing studies, a lack of clarity of program regulations and systems, and an increase in the number of admitted people. The results also show that the most important academic problems facing students are the weak activation of the university's academic guidance, as well as the use of traditional teaching methods and poor evaluation methods. There were no statistically significant differences in organisational and academic problems facing students related to personal characteristics, except for the presence of statistically significant differences in organisational problems attributable to work and gender variables.

Al-Anzi (2014) aimed to identify the administrative and academic problems facing graduate students at the University of Tabuk from their point of view, as well as the impact of each of the variables of specialisation, gender, employment status and academic level. The study sample consisted of 100 randomly selected students. The researcher used a descriptive survey method and applied a 46-item questionnaire distributed equally among two dimensions: administrative problems and academic problems. The results show that the most prominent administrative problems were the absence of an academic advisor, the high costs of studies, and the absence of the department's administrative role in pursuing graduate studies programs; the most prominent academic problems were the lack of references and resources in the university's library and the lack of academic freedom for students to choose their professors. The results of the study show statistically significant differences at the 0.05 significance level between the arithmetic means for the level of administrative and academic problems, attributable to the variables of the level of study and specialisation.

Al-Zoman and Al-Arifi (2016) sought to identify the problems facing postgraduate students in the College of Education at King Saud University, as well as the differences in graduate students' responses according to the study variables. They also proposed solutions that might contribute to reducing academic problems facing female students. To achieve the goals of the study, the researchers used the descriptive-analytical approach. They used a questionnaire to collect study data by distributing it to a random sample of 148 female masters and Ph.D. students enrolled in the regular program at the College of Education at King Saud University. The study found no statistically significant differences between the averages of participants' responses toward the academic problems they face related to the variable of the academic program, except for the problems related to faculty members. In addition, the most important solutions contributing to reducing academic problems facing female students are to continuously develop new courses and provide modern references in the library.

Al-Obeid (2017) revealed the most important problems facing masters level postgraduate students at Al-Qaseem University, from the viewpoint of female students and faculty members. The study sample consisted of 478 students from all university faculties with graduate programs, and 201 faculty members. The researcher developed a questionnaire with 66 items distributed among four dimensions: administrative problems, academic problems, social problems and suggestions to solve students' problems. The results show that the most important administrative problems for students were the scarcity of periodic meetings held by the deanship of graduate studies. The most common academic problems were students' poor knowledge of the research map of the scientific dimension and social problems—most notably, female students' difficulty moving out of the city in search of references. The results indicated statistically significant differences in faculty members' responses about administrative, academic and social problems facing the students due to the study variables (college, full-time study, marital status, academic degree). The differences favoured faculty members with the rank of assistant professor, and the results reveal the existence of statistically significant differences in participants' responses regarding administrative, academic and social problems facing female students, due to the difference in the sample type in favour of the student sample.

Al-Obaidan (2018) revealed administrative and academic problems facing graduate students at Tabuk University and explored the correlation of participants' responses to academic and administrative problems. The study also examined the presence of statistically significant differences in participants' responses due to the variables studied (gender, specialisation and academic level). The researcher used the descriptive survey method and a questionnaire to collect data. The sample included 332 male and female second and fourth-level students. The results show that participants agreed (average = 3.80 and 4.11, respectively) that graduate students had to deal with administrative problems and academic problems. The results show a statistically significant direct relationship at the 0.01 significance level between the

administrative and academic problem variables, although there were no statistically significant differences regarding academic problems due to gender. Statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level occurred toward administrative problems in favour of females and between administrative and academic problems in favour of educational specialisation.

As these examples demonstrate, multiple studies have dealt with the topic of challenges facing graduate students, suggesting the importance of this topic as a general problem concerning Saudi universities. Some studies (Al-Anazi, 2014; Al-Obaidan, 2018; Al-Shebel, 2012) have agreed that graduate students face administrative, academic, technical and social challenges. Additional studies are warranted to improve the educational process for students pursuing graduate studies. Previous studies have also dealt with problems of graduate students in terms of provided information, ideas and visions, forming an important reference for this study in defining the methodology, designing tools to collect data, and analysing and interpreting the results in light of previous studies.

The current study was similar to previous studies in terms of its handling of the topic of challenges facing graduate students in universities, especially in the academic and administrative fields, but it differed in its handling of the technical field. In addition, it included all educational programs for postgraduate studies offered by the College of Education at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University. In terms of the approach used, the current study generally agrees with all previous Arabic and foreign studies on the use of the descriptive-analytical approach, although the approach differs from Wadesango and Machingambi's (2011) study, which uses qualitative research.

Study Methodology

The researcher used the descriptive survey method, which is consistent with the nature of the study and its goals, by using a questionnaire to collect data.

Study Population and Sample

The study population consisted of all 220 male and female masters students at the College of Education at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University for all scientific departments for different levels of study. The study sample included 69 randomly chosen male and female students. Table 1 shows the distribution of the study sample.

Table 1: Distribution of the Study Sample

Categories	Variable	Number	Total Sample Number
Gender	Male	28	69
	Female	41	
Academic level	First	7	69
	Second	48	
	Third	14	
Scientific Department	Educational Foundations	4	69
	Curricula and Instruction	19	
	Psychology	4	
	Educational Administration	35	
	Special Education	7	

Study Tool

In order to collect information related to this study, a questionnaire was developed, consisting of 47 statements distributed over four dimensions, to achieve the goals of the study. Vocabulary formulation was based on the theoretical literature on administrative, technical, academic and financial challenges facing masters students at the College of Education. The researcher benefited from the studies of Al-Shibl (2012), Al-Anzi (2014) and Al-Obaidan (2018). Participants' responses to the questionnaire statements were constructed according to a 5-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Study Tool Validity

To verify the validity of the study tool, the researcher presented it to several arbitrators and specialists in the field of education. These included faculty members of Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University, as well as those with experience and knowledge from other universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and abroad. They verified the clarity and accuracy of the statements and the extent of belonging and suitability for the dimension in which each statement fell. The arbitrators were also asked to add any new statements, as necessary, or delete any inappropriate statements. The arbitrators' observations and proposals focused on modifying, merging, deleting and adding some statements. The questionnaire was adapted accordingly and distributed to the study sample.

Study Tool Reliability

To confirm the reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach's alpha equation was used to find the internal consistency coefficient of the dimensions. The values of the coefficients ranged between 0.503 and 0.888, which are acceptable for purposes of reliability in this type of study. Table 2 summarises the results.

Table 2: Internal Consistency Coefficient Values for Study Tool Dimensions

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Administrative challenges	0.843
Technical challenges	0.793
Financial challenges	0.888
Academic challenges	0.503
Total score	0.756

Statistical Analysis

To answer the study's questions, the researcher used several statistical methods. To answer the first question, arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated. To answer the second question, a *t*-test and one-way ANOVA test were used. To calculate the relative weights of each statement and the relative weight of the dimension, the arithmetic mean was calculated, as follows:

arithmetic mean = sum of product of each occurrence in corresponding dimension ÷ number of sample

The relative significance of each term (statement) was interpreted using the 5-point Likert scale for arithmetic means.

Results and Discussion

First Question: What are the challenges facing masters students at the College of Education in Dammam from their point of view?

Arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated for the dimensions (administrative challenges, technical challenges, financial challenges, academic challenges) from students' point of view, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations for Responses to Questionnaire Dimensions

Study Dimension	Arithmetic Mean	Dimension Order	Degree
Administrative challenges	3.275	3	Medium
Technical challenges	3.224	4	Medium
Financial challenges	4.50	1	High
Academic challenges	3.68	2	High
Overall average	3.67		High

To answer the first research question, arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated for the dimensions of the study as a whole. The arithmetic averages for the four dimensions ranged between 4.50 and 3.224 (between a medium and high degree), with the arithmetic mean of financial challenges being the highest (4.50) and technical challenges being the lowest (3.224, medium degree). The total arithmetic mean for these dimensions was 3.67, indicating a high degree of agreement. Thus challenges facing masters students in the College of Education at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University exist in the financial, academic and technical fields. The arithmetic means and the standard deviations for each separate dimension were calculated with the statements related to it, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Arithmetic Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranking for Dimension Items of Challenges Facing Master's Students

Statement	Degree of Agreement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
First: Administrative Challenges									
1	There is a lack of supervisors for theses	5.8	14.5	15.9	27.5	36.2	3.74	1.256	3
2	There is high teaching load on faculty members	7.2	13.0	23.2	31.9	24.6	3.54	1.208	6
3	The commitment of the supervisor to office hours is weak	21.7	29.0	20.0	13.0	15.9	2.72	1.371	11
4	The scientific supervisor is busy travelling and attending conferences and seminars	21.7	36.2	23.2	14.5	4.3	2.43	1.118	13
5	The faculty members'	11.6	23.2	23.2	14.5	27.5	3.23	1.384	9

	cooperation with the need to arbitrate the student's thesis is weak								
6	There is a lack of time allocated by the supervisor during the supervisory meeting with the student	10.1	26.1	24.6	18.8	20.3	3.13	1.294	10
7	The cooperation of library staff with the need to facilitate library services provided to the student is weak	18.8	53.6	20.3	2.9	4.3	2.20	.933	14
8	There is a lack of supervisor interest to help and guide students when needed	26.1	31.9	14.5	13.0	14.5	2.58	1.385	12
9	There is an absence of an administrative role in the department to pursue masters programs	13.0	23.2	13.0	18.8	31.9	3.33	1.462	8
10	There is an unclear view of the college's graduate agency	4.3	15.9	17.4	30.4	31.9	3.70	1.204	4
11	There is a lack of places for students to rest	2.9	5.8	7.2	15.9	68.1	4.41	1.048	1
12	There are an insufficient number of administrators supervising the classrooms	7.2	21.7	13.0	24.6	33.3	3.55	1.345	5
13	There is poor continuous communication between students and the department	8.7	24.6	15.9	20.3	30.4	3.39	1.374	7
14	There are no permissions for students to participate in scientific conferences and seminars	4.3	13.0	26.1	56.5	26.1	3.91	1.326	2
Total Arithmetic Mean		3.275							

Second: Technical Challenges									
15	There is no commitment among students to the college's graduate studies guide for writing proposals and theses	21.7	39.1	14.5	20.3	4.3	2.46	1.170	11
16	The level of achievement of students enrolled in the college's masters programs is low	30.4	44.9	17.4	1.4	5.8	2.07	1.034	12
17	The educational research skills among faculty members are weak	10.1	40.6	15.9	18.8	14.5	2.87	1.259	10
18	There is a lack of masters students' responses to the comments of the scientific supervisor	30.4	46.4	17.4	4.3	1.4	2.00	.891	13
19	There is insufficient time set for the completion of the scientific thesis	11.6	29.0	20.3	11.6	27.5	3.14	1.407	8
20	There are no clear mechanisms for students to choose a research idea	4.3	14.5	17.4	23.2	40.6	3.81	1.240	3
21	The scientific research skills of students are weak	8.7	18.8	33.3	17.4	21.7	3.25	1.242	7
22	Students do not have the ability to determine the research problem	5.8	11.6	40.6	20.3	21.7	3.41	1.129	6
23	There is a lack of availability of scientific references and sources necessary for preparing scientific research	8.7	14.5	23.2	18.8	34.8	3.57	1.334	5
24	There is a lack of students' experience in using the appropriate statistical	2.9	17.4	20.3	59.4	16.2	4.33	.965	1

	methods								
25	There is weak cooperation among study sample individuals when applying the field research	2.9	7.2	34.8	24.6	30.4	3.72	1.069	4
26	There is a delay in obtaining approval from official stakeholders to collect the research data	2.9	21.7	18.8	56.6	44.2	4.29	.909	2
27	The students are weak in using computer applications that help carry out research	8.7	30.4	27.5	18.8	14.5	3.00	1.200	9
Total Arithmetic Mean		3.224							
Third: Financial Challenges									
28	There is no appropriate financial support for masters students	1.4	5.8	2.9	14.5	75.4	4.57	.915	4
29	The high financial expenses have a big impact on the financial situation of the students	1.4	7.2	10.1	11.6	69.6	4.41	1.034	5
30	There is a lack of scholarships for outstanding students	1.4	2.9	4.3	13.0	78.3	4.64	.822	3
31	The cost of computer and library services is expensive for the students	4.3	7.2	20.3	15.9	52.2	4.04	1.194	6
32	The tuition fees for the entry of the paid masters programs are high	1.4	1.4	5.8	8.7	82.6	4.70	.773	1
33	There is no diversification of financial resources for students so that they can cover the academic expenses required of them	1.4	8.7	11.6	78.3	12.1	4.65	.764	2

Total Arithmetic Mean		4.50							
Fourth: Academic Challenges									
34	The time period specified for completing the program is appropriate	10.1	18.8	17.4	26.1	27.5	3.42	1.344	9
35	There is no diversity in offering suitable courses for the program	4.3	15.9	30.4	18.8	30.4	3.55	1.207	8
36	There is a lack of use of educational methods by faculty members	1.4	17.4	23.2	15.9	42.0	3.80	1.208	5
37	The specified time for the courses does not match the course content	8.7	21.7	27.5	21.7	20.3	3.23	1.250	12
38	The dates of the lectures are not suitable for students	7.2	30.4	24.6	11.6	26.1	3.19	1.320	13
39	The number of research assignments assigned to students during the semester is large	1.4	4.3	5.8	18.8	69.6	4.51	.901	2
40	The use of e-learning is poor	8.7	11.6	14.5	30.4	34.8	3.71	1.296	7
41	Current teaching methods are traditional and do not develop students' scientific research skills	4.3	20.3	11.6	26.1	37.7	3.72	1.282	6
42	There is a focus on exams to assess the level of students	4.3	7.2	13.0	21.7	53.6	4.13	1.162	4
43	The students' opinions are taken into consideration when evaluating the offered programs and their courses	13.0	11.6	23.2	26.1	26.1	3.41	1.343	11
44	The time for seminars is suitable for the students	13.0	26.1	21.7	29.0	10.1	2.97	1.224	14

45	There is a scarcity of advisory meetings from the college administration to instruct students	1.4	2.9	18.8	18.8	58.0	4.29	.972	3
46	There is a weakness in offering specialised scientific symposia and meetings in partnership with masters students	15.9	17.4	17.4	10.2	66.7	4.51	.760	1
47	The supervisor provides suggestions for the research idea suitable for students' specialszation	11.6	17.4	20.3	20.3	30.4	3.41	1.386	10
Total Arithmetic Mean		3.68							

Table 4 shows the arithmetic means, standard deviations and ranks of the statements related to the studied dimensions of challenges for the tool as a whole and for each dimension. Statements on the first dimension (administrative challenges) ranged between 2.20 and 4.41. "There is a lack of places for students to rest" ranked highest, with an average of 4.41 and a standard deviation of 1.048. "The time of seminars is suitable for the students" ranked lowest, with an average of 2.20 and a standard deviation of 0.933. The researcher attributes this to the fact that masters students need to have prepared places that provide them with tranquility to rest between their lectures, especially as most of them work in public jobs and join their lectures immediately after completing their daily work. These results support the findings of Al-Obeid (2017).

The arithmetic means of the second dimension's statements (technical challenges) ranged between 2.00 and 4.33. "There is a lack of students' experience in using the appropriate statistical methods" ranked highest, with an arithmetic average of 4.33 and a standard deviation of 0.965. "There is a lack of masters students' response to the comments of the scientific supervisor" ranked lowest (2.00 and 0.891, respectively). The researcher attributes this result to the fact that students suffer from a lack of research experience when it comes to writing research papers and scientific reports, which are considered prerequisites for passing courses in these programs. These results support the findings of Vehviläinen (2009) and Al-Obeid (2017).

Regarding the third dimension (financial challenges), the arithmetic means ranged between 4.04 and 4.70. "The tuition fees for the entry of the paid masters programs are high" ranked highest, with an arithmetic average of 4.70 and a standard deviation of 0.773. "The cost of computer and library services is expensive for the students" ranked lowest, with an average

score of 4.04 and a standard deviation of 1.194. These results likely stem from the high tuition fees required of students enrolled in graduate studies programs in addition to the high cost of requirements related to writing and printing research reports. Meanwhile, the lack of research service centres in the college contributes to students' financial burden. These results support Aqeel's (2008) findings.

Second Question: Are there statistically significant differences (at the $\alpha \leq 0.05$ level of significance) in participants' responses to the study variables (gender, academic level, scientific department)?

Gender. Table 5 shows the results of the independent samples *t*-test of the masters students' responses to the challenges they face that are attributed to gender in the College of Education at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University.

Table 5: Independent Samples *t*-Test Results for Gender

Study Section	Gender	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	<i>t</i> value	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Administrative challenges	Male	46.14	10.182	0.182	58.788	0.856
	Female	45.6	10.34			
Technical challenges	Male	41.0	7.86	0.790	59.629	0.432
	Female	42.5	8.17			
Financial challenges	Male	28.14	2.46	1.783	60.215	0.079
	Female	26.21	5.32			
Academic challenges	Male	50.6	5.74	1.300	61.960	0.198
	Female	52.6	6.38			

Table 5 shows the results of the *t*-test of independent samples for masters students regarding the challenges they face based on gender. No statistically significant differences (at $\alpha \leq 0.05$) were attributed to the gender variable in any of the dimensions. Thus, the challenges facing masters students in different fields of research for both genders (males, females) are similar from their point of view. This may be because they live in the same conditions and educational environment at the College of Education. These results are consistent with the findings of Al-Shibl (2012) and Al-Aqil (2008).

Academic level. Table 6 shows the results of the independent samples *t*-test for academic level.

Table 6: Independent Samples t-Test Results for Academic Level

Study Dimension	Source of variation	Sum of squares	Freedom level	Mean square	F value	Significance level
Administrative challenges	Between groups	228.56	2	114.28	1.100	0.339
	Within groups	6859.26	66	103.92		
	Total	7087.82	68			
Technical challenges	Between groups	193.3	2	96.69	1.521	0.226
	Within groups	4195.2	66	63.56		
	Total	4388.6	68			
Financial challenges	Between groups	40.87	2	20.43	1.024	0.365
	Within groups	1317.12	66	19.95		
	Total	1358.0	68			
Academic challenges	Between groups	22.47	2	11.23	0.289	0.750
	Within groups	2562.77	66	38.83		
	Total	2585.24	68			

As Table 6 shows, there are no statistically significant differences (at $\alpha \leq 0.05$) attributed to academic level in all dimensions. Thus, participants at the same academic level agreed on challenges facing masters students from their point of view. Indeed, more than 70% of participants were from the second level, with the lowest percentage coming from the remaining levels. The second level of masters students is considered the least experienced in dealing with academic, administrative and technical challenges. This result differed from Al-Anzi's (2014) findings.

Scientific department. Table 7 shows the results of the independent samples *t*-test by scientific department.

Table 7: Independent Samples t-Test Results for Scientific Department

Study Dimension	Source of variation	Sum of squares	Freedom level	Mean square	F value	Significance level
Administrative challenges	Between groups	670.3	4	167.59	1.671	0.168
	Within groups	6417.4	64	100.27		
	Total	7087.8	68			
Technical challenges	Between groups	66.82	4	16.70	2.47	0.910
	Within groups	4321.8	64	67.52		
	Total	4388.63	68			
Financial challenges	Between groups	135.4	4	33.85	1.772	0.145
	Within groups	1222.57	64	19.103		
	Total	1358.0	68			
	Within groups	2568.74	64			
	Total	2585.24	68			

Table 7 shows no statistically significant differences (at $\alpha \leq 0.05$) attributed to the scientific department in any dimension, indicating participants' agreement on the problems facing masters students in the same scientific department. This is attributed to the equal treatment and equal administrative, academic and technical procedures by the College of Education for the students enrolled in these programs at various levels of study, from entering the program until its completion and graduation. These results differed somewhat from the findings of Al-Obaidan (2018).

Recommendations

Based on the researcher's findings, the study presents a set of recommendations and proposals through which to develop appropriate solutions to the challenges experienced by masters students:

- The results of the study showed the existence of academic, administrative, technical and financial challenges, with a level of agreement ranging from medium to high. Accordingly, the researcher recognises the importance of activating the role of scientific and academic guidance specified in the list of graduate studies in universities, and of enhancing communication between the college agency for postgraduate studies in the College of Education and the faculty, staff and masters students.



- Regular periodic meetings should be conducted between the college administration and masters students enrolled in graduate programs to help raise their awareness of their rights and duties. Administrative, technical and academic procedures should be organised in the form of a procedural guide to be distributed to masters students.
- The college should provide financial support for masters students through the establishment of several research centres within the college in order to provide research services that would reduce the financial burden that these students suffer, in light of the general educational policy of higher studies in Saudi universities directed toward offering paid graduate programs.
- Scientific references should be provided in both Arabic and English in the same building of the College of Education. Masters students should be able to access these references at any time by increasing participation and cooperation between local, Arabic and international university libraries.



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