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Academic Professionals' Perspectives on the Challenges Encountered in Scientific Research at Al Ain University

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the perceptions of academic professionals regarding the challenges encountered in scientific research at Al Ain University. The study involved a randomly selected sample of 600 academic leaders from the university. To fulfill the study objectives, a questionnaire comprising 33 items covering five main areas was developed: challenges related to publishing in accredited scientific journals, financial constraints, difficulties associated with faculty members, challenges related to working conditions and the educational environment, and obstacles in obtaining necessary research documents and information. Following data collection and analysis, the study found that academic leaders perceived the difficulties to be relatively low. Statistical analysis revealed no significant differences, at a significance level of 0.05, in the mean responses of study participants concerning the challenges of scientific research at Al Ain University based on gender. Additionally, no statistically significant differences (at a significance level of 0.05) were observed in the mean responses of study participants concerning research difficulties based on academic rank.

Keywords: *Academic Professionals, Scientific Research, Al Ain University*

INTRODUCTION

Scientific research stands as a crucial facet of universities and higher education institutions, alongside their roles in teaching and community engagement. It is imperative for universities to vigilantly identify and address all barriers and challenges hindering scientific research, striving to surmount them to fulfill their objectives and attain distinguished scientific standing globally. This entails executing their duties and functions with utmost efficiency and effectiveness (Al-Abdul-Ghafoor, 2002; Muhafza, 2000).

Scientific research is a cornerstone of university education and a fundamental contributor to human knowledge. Through research endeavors, humanity has unearthed discoveries and harnessed them for the betterment of society and humanity. It has facilitated the acquisition of technology and knowledge, fostering optimal utilization of available resources and fostering progress and sustainable development (Al-Khatib, 2000). The demand for scientific research is particularly pronounced in many Arab nations, underlining the heightened emphasis on scientific inquiry (Watson, 2005).

Various studies have highlighted the challenges encountered by scientific research in Arab universities, including those in the United Arab Emirates. The main challenges include ignoring researchers' findings, lack of funding, limited access to information, unsupportive scientific atmosphere, absence of clear national research policies, insufficient support from institutions and society, limited time for

faculty research, and administrative inertia neglecting scientific research (Al-Ajez and Banat, 2003; Mcgigan, 2006).

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The Study Problem and Its Questions

The current study aims to explore the challenges faced by academics in conducting scientific research at Al Ain University. It seeks to address the following inquiries:

What are academics' views on the challenges of scientific research at Al Ain University?

Are there statistically significant differences, at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, in the average responses of participants regarding research difficulties at Al Ain University based on gender and academic rank variables?

Study Objectives

To understand academics' perceptions regarding the challenges encountered in scientific research at Al Ain University.

To identify statistically significant differences in the average responses of study participants concerning research difficulties at Al Ain University based on gender and academic rank variables.

Importance of the Study

This study holds significance due to its application within the academic community of Al Ain University. The findings are anticipated to illuminate and pinpoint the primary challenges hindering scientific research at the university. Moreover, the study results can potentially be extrapolated to other Jordanian universities. The study also offers recommendations and suggestions aimed at mitigating the obstacles encountered in scientific research, thereby facilitating its development.

Study Limitations

Objective limitation: The study solely focused on exploring academics' perceptions regarding the challenges of scientific research at Al Ain University.

Spatial limitation: The scope of the study was restricted to Al Ain University.

Temporal limitation: Data collection for the study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2023/2024.

Terminology of the Study

Challenges in scientific research: These refer to the obstacles encountered in conducting scientific research at Al Ain University, as perceived by academic staff. These challenges are assessed based on the collective responses of study participants to the research instrument developed by the researchers for this study.

Academics: For this study, academics refer to faculty members in university colleges, irrespective of their specific job titles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sinani (2019) conducted a study focusing on the challenges encountered by newly appointed university professors during their initial years at the Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at Badji Mahtar University in Annaba, Algeria. The study identified several key difficulties, including challenges in scientific research, the absence of specialized academic conferences, administrative bureaucracy, inadequate physical infrastructure for teaching and research, and difficulties in accessing specialized literature.

Al-Sulaihat (2018) conducted a study in Jordanian universities, revealing that faculty members express dissatisfaction with the emphasis on scientific productivity as the primary criterion for promotion. They perceive the research evaluation process as lacking transparency due to the absence of clear standards. Additionally, the study found no statistically significant differences based on gender or college type in the fields of study but identified a significant effect of academic rank favoring assistant professors.

l-Sharaa and Al-Zoubi (2011) conducted a field study with the aim of identifying challenges encountered in educational research as perceived by faculty members within the educational sciences faculties of Jordanian universities. To achieve their objectives, they developed a questionnaire comprising five areas: research writing, research review, publishing procedures, research teams, and working conditions. This questionnaire was administered to faculty members across four Jordanian public universities. The findings indicated varying degrees of challenges across the five areas, ranging from significant hurdles to minor difficulties. These challenges were ranked in descending order as follows: research teams, working conditions, publishing procedures, research review, and research writing. Additionally, the study revealed that the problem areas of educational research varied based on factors such as years of experience, number of published research papers, academic rank, and university affiliation of the faculty member. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended measures such as enhancing researcher training and qualifications, revising graduate studies programs, and reducing faculty teaching loads to promote research activities. Furthermore, they advocated for fostering collaborative research endeavors and emphasized adherence to publication deadlines set by scientific journals to facilitate timely responses from researchers.

Al-Enezi (2011) conducted a study focusing on the impediments to scientific research within emerging Saudi universities. The study encompassed faculty members across various scientific and humanities disciplines within these institutions. The study sample comprised 160 faculty members exclusively, excluding other groups such as academic leaders or graduate students. Employing a questionnaire comprising 43 items, the study findings revealed moderate levels of academic, economic, social, and administrative barriers to scientific research across all fields. Furthermore, statistical analysis indicated no significant differences attributable to gender or academic specialization variables. As a result, the researcher recommended initiatives aimed at enhancing the efficiency of scientific research and minimizing its obstacles.

Al-Mujaidel and Shammas (2011) conducted a study to examine the challenges encountered by faculty members at the College of Education in Salalah, Sultanate of Oman, hindering their engagement in and completion of scientific research, as well as proposing strategies to overcome these challenges. Employing an initial exploratory questionnaire, the researchers identified the primary obstacles in the field of scientific research, categorized into material, administrative, and personal barriers. The research sample comprised all faculty members at the College of Education in Salalah. The findings revealed that administrative obstacles posed the most significant challenges to faculty members in conducting scientific research. Furthermore, the study found no statistically significant differences between males and females in their experiences of obstacles to scientific research, nor were there differences related to academic specialization.

Al-Sarour and Al-Zoubi (2009) conducted a study to identify academic challenges encountered by faculty members at Al-Bayt University in Jordan. Employing a questionnaire comprising 35 items, the researchers surveyed a sample of 96 faculty members. The results revealed that the most significant challenges were observed in two areas: issues related to promotion and student-related problems. Conversely, challenges associated with university administration were rated as less severe. Additionally, the study found significant differences among faculty members with varying academic ranks concerning scientific research and promotion, with higher-ranking individuals experiencing more favorable conditions. However, no significant differences were observed based on years of experience across all domains.

Similarly, Kassis, Abu Samra, and Jabr (2008) undertook a study to investigate barriers hindering the utilization of educational research in Palestinian colleges of education. Their findings revealed that faculty members perceived significant obstacles to educational research, as evidenced by high overall scores and specific challenges related to the research process.

In another study, Ssesanga (2005) demonstrated faculty dissatisfaction with various aspects of their work, including administrative policies, the work environment, promotion systems, engagement in scientific research, and the absence of training opportunities and conference attendance.

Al-Farij and Al-Shaya (2005) conducted separate studies focusing on challenges encountered by faculty members in humanities colleges in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, respectively.

In Kuwait, Al-Farij and Al-Shaya aimed to identify difficulties faced by faculty members when preparing funded scientific research. Their study included a sample of 100 faculty members from Kuwait University who responded to a questionnaire comprising 29 items related to research preparation challenges. Results revealed that one of the primary difficulties was the numerous routine complications associated with research funding, which hampered faculty motivation. Another significant challenge was the lack of sufficient time for research due to workload pressures.

Similarly, Al-Shaya (2005) conducted a study at King Saud University to examine the scientific production of faculty members in humanities colleges and identify key obstacles. The study sample comprised 118 male faculty members. Findings indicated that the average annual scientific production per faculty member was 1.25 works, with an average of 0.63 published research per faculty member per year. The study highlighted limited support for attending global and regional conferences, faculty members' external work commitments to improve their financial situation, and inadequate time for scientific research due to heavy teaching loads as prominent obstacles to scientific production.

Al-Samawi's study (2005) sought to examine the relationship between the organizational climate prevailing at the University of Taiz and the scientific productivity of its faculty members. The study encompassed the entire population of 109 faculty members. Findings revealed a low level of organizational climate across all elements, accompanied by low average levels of scientific productivity among faculty members. Moreover, a positive correlation was observed between the prevailing organizational climate and scientific productivity.

In Qatar, Al-Mannai (2004) conducted a study aiming to explore the utility of the Internet in the educational process and scientific research as perceived by faculty members at a university in Qatar, as well as their level of utilization of the Internet for scientific research. The study sample comprised 378 faculty members. Results indicated that faculty members held positive perceptions regarding the Internet's role in scientific research. However, the actual utilization of the Internet for scientific research and in the educational process was found to be low among faculty members at Qatar University.

Saleh (2003) conducted a study aiming to explore the challenges encountered by faculty members in Palestinian universities in conducting scientific research. The study sample comprised 284 faculty members. Results indicated that obstacles to scientific research were primarily related to working conditions, professional development, and management. Overall, the score for obstacles was high, with the field of equipment and facilities obstacles receiving a moderate score, and scientific research objectives garnering a very high score.

In a separate study, Orata (1999) examined difficulties faced by faculty members at Ohio University. Findings revealed common challenges such as a lack of modern references in the library, large class sizes, and low research standards among students due to their inadequate academic preparation.

METHODOLOGY

Study methodology: In conducting this study, the researcher used the descriptive survey method, as it is suitable for this type of study.

Study Population and Sample

The population of this study included all academics at Al Ain University, from whom a random sample of 105 individuals was selected, and Table No. (1) shows this.

Table (1) Distribution of the study sample according to the variable of academic rank and gender.

Variable	Variable classes	Number
Academic rank	Professor	155
	Associate Professor	170
	Assistant Professor	179
	lecturer	96

Total		600
Gender	Males females	293 307
Total		600

Study Tool

To achieve the purposes of the study and answer its questions, the researchers prepared a questionnaire consisted of (40) items divided into five areas. These areas are: difficulties of scientific research related to publishing in scientific journals, difficulties of scientific research related to faculty members, difficulties of scientific research related to material matters, and difficulties scientific research related to working conditions and the educational environment, and the difficulties of scientific research related to the availability of equipment, information, and facilities necessary to conduct research.

Validity of the Study Tool

To verify the apparent validity of the questionnaire, the researchers presented it to a group of experienced female referees from Emirati universities, totaling 13 referees. The referees were asked to provide feedback on the questionnaire's linguistic clarity, paragraph coherence, and relevance to the field. Based on their feedback, the researchers adjusted the wording, deleted certain paragraphs, and added new ones. As a result, the final version comprised 33 paragraphs across the five areas.

Stability of the Study Tool

To verify the stability of the study tool, it was applied to a random sample of (18) faculty members from outside the study sample, using the test and retest method, with a two-week difference between the first and second application, then calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient between the two applications. The researcher also extracted Internal consistency coefficient on the domains and on the tool as a whole by extracting the Cronbach alpha coefficient for internal consistency. Table (2) shows this.

Table (2) Correlation coefficients between the two applications and the internal consistency coefficient for the study tool and its fields

Questionnaire and its fields	Correlation coefficient between the two ions	Internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach alpha)
Difficulties of scientific research related to publishing in scientific journals.	0.88	0.89
Scientific research difficulties related to faculty members.	0.87	0.91
Difficulties of research related to material matters	0.85	0.88
Research difficulties related to the university environment and working conditions.	0.91	0.92
Research difficulties related to the availability of equipment, research sources and facilities for research.	0.89	0.91
The tool as a whole	0.87	

Study Variables

The study included the following variables:

First: Independent Variables

Gender: males, females.

Academic rank: It has three levels:

Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor.

Second: The Dependent Variable Is

Degree of difficulties in scientific research at Al Ain University

Criterion for Judging The Results

The researcher adopted the second statistical criterion to judge the results when presenting and interpreting them:

-4.50 – 5.00 Very high degree

- 4.49-3.50 great degree

-2.50- 3.49 Average degree

- 2.49 – 1.50 Low degree

- 1.49- 1.00 Very low degree

RESULTS

First: Results of the First Question

What are academics' perceptions about the difficulties of scientific research at Al Ain University?

This question was answered by extracting the arithmetic means and standard deviations of academics' responses to each area of the tool and to the tool as a whole. Table (3) shows this.

Table (3)

Arithmetic means and standard deviations of academics' responses about the difficulties of scientific research on the tool as a whole and on each of its fields, arranged in descending order.

Rank	Tool fields	SMA	standard deviation	Class
1	Difficulties of scientific research related to academics.	3.96	0.512	High
2	Research difficulties related to the university environment and working conditions.	3.77	0.61	High
3	Difficulties of scientific research related to publishing in scientific journals.	3.73	0.58	High
4	Research difficulties related to the availability of equipment, research sources, and facilities necessary for research.	3.64	0.639	High
5	Difficulties in research related to personal and material matters.	3.25	0.49	Medium
	The tool as a whole	3.63	-	High

It is noted from Table No. (3) that the field of scientific research difficulties related to academic leaders and faculty members came in first place, with an arithmetic mean of (3.96) and a high score, while the field of "scientific research difficulties related to the university environment and working conditions" came in second place on the tool. ", with a arithmetical average of (3.77) and a high score rating, and also ranked third on the tool in the field of "difficulties related to publishing in peer-reviewed scientific journals," and with a arithmetical average of (3.73), and a high grade rating, and also ranked fourth in the field of research difficulties related to the availability of... Equipment, research sources, and facilities necessary for it, with a arithmetical average of (3.64) and a high-grade rating. In last place, and in fifth place, was the field of "subjective and material difficulties of scientific research," with a arithmetical average of (3.25) and a medium grade rating. As for the overall arithmetical average for the tool as a whole, it reached (3.63), which is a great rating. Below is a detailed presentation of each area of the tool.

The following is a presentation of the paragraphs of each agency field:

First: The difficulties of scientific research related to academics

Table No. (4)

Arithmetic means and standard deviations for the relevant field items. The difficulties of scientific research arranged in descending order

Paragraph number	Paragraphs	SMA	standard deviation	Class
28	Weak availability of scientific research skills among academics at the university	4.30	0.785	High
29	Weak interest of faculty members and academic leaders in scientific research and not giving it priority.	4.13	0.743	High
30	Lack of academics' knowledge of new discoveries, publications, and research developments.	4.12	0.879	High
31	The purpose of conducting scientific research among university academics is mostly for promotion purposes.	4.15	0.791	High
32	Weak academic interest in field problems that serve the community and the university.	4.07	0.590	High
33	Lack of coordination between academics in matters related to scientific research.	3.28	0.791	Medium

Table No. (4) indicates the arithmetic means and standard deviations for the items in this area of scientific research difficulties as perceived by academics. The table indicates that Paragraph No. (28) "Weak availability of scientific research skill among academics ranks first, with an arithmetic mean of (4.30) and a score of Large, followed in second place by Paragraph No. (28) "Weak interest of faculty members and academic leaders in scientific research and not giving it priority" with an arithmetic average of (4.13) and to a large degree, while Paragraph No. (33) came in last place, which stated "Lack of coordination between academic workers." "In matters related to scientific research," the average score was (3.28) and an average grade rating.

Table (5)

Secondly - the field of scientific research difficulties related to the university environment and working conditions. Arithmetic means and standard deviations of academics' perceptions on items in the field of scientific research difficulties related to the university environment and working conditions

Paragraph number	Paragraphs	SMA	standard deviation	Class
4	Lack of sufficient time to conduct scientific research	4.27	1.041	High
1	Increased workload and teaching load at the university.	4.12	0.62	High
7	Complexity of upgrade procedures and requirements.	3.95	0.977	High
2	Large numbers of students in one class.	3.74	0.797	High
5	Weak incentives and university encouragement for employees to conduct scientific research.	3.70	0.988	High
3	Lack of loan opportunities and exchange of experiences with research and scientific centers.	3.30	1.17	Medium
6	Poor scholarship opportunities for workers to attend specialized scientific conferences in other universities.	3.25	0.822	Medium

Table No. (5) shows the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the study members' responses to the items in the field of scientific research difficulties related to the university environment and working conditions. Paragraph No. (4), which states "lack of sufficient time to conduct scientific research," came in first place, with an arithmetic mean. (4.27) with a high rating. In second place came Paragraph No. (1), which stipulated "increasing the workload and teaching load at the university." It received an arithmetic average of (4.12) and a high rating. In last place came Paragraph No. (6), which stipulates "weak opportunities for

scholarships for employees to attend specialized scientific conferences in other universities," and it obtained an arithmetic average of (3.25) with an average rating.

Third - Difficulties related to publishing in peer-reviewed scientific journals:

Table (6) Arithmetic means and standard deviations Perceptions of academics. The difficulties of scientific research related to publishing in peer-reviewed scientific journals, arranged in descending order according to arithmetic averages

Paragraph number	Paragraphs	SMA	standard deviation	Class
27	Prior knowledge and personal relationships between researchers and those to whom the research is sent for evaluation.	4.09	0.981	High
23	Lack of adequate and acceptable publishing alternatives at the university.	3.83	0.911	High
24	The university's low interest in publishing faculty members' research.	3.81	0.509	High
25	Slow procedures for evaluating research from scientific journals.	3.43	1.09	Medium
26	Weak follow-up of research sent to scientific journals.	3.41	1.051	Medium

Table No. (6) shows the arithmetic means and standard deviations for items in the field of academics' perceptions of the difficulties of scientific research related to publishing in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Paragraph No. (27), obtained the highest arithmetic mean in this field, reaching (4.09), while it came in last place. Paragraph No. (26) with an arithmetic average of (3.41) and an average grade rating.

Fourth - Research difficulties related to the availability of equipment, research sources, and facilities necessary for research:

Table (7) Arithmetic means and standard deviations of academics' perceptions of the difficulties of scientific research related to the availability of equipment, information sources, and facilities necessary for research, arranged in descending order according to their arithmetic means.

Paragraph number	Paragraphs	SMA	Standard Deviation	Class
12	The lack of a consulting and statistical analysis center at the university to assist faculty members in analyzing their research data.	4.15	1.09	High
8	Lack of modern sources and books in the university library.	3.89	1.337	High
11	Weak Internet network and frequent outages.	3.82	1.07	High
9	The library lacks specialized scientific periodicals	3.72	1.13	High
10	Lack of availability of CDs in university libraries.	3.65	1.039	High
13	Lack of specialized scientific journals at the university to facilitate the publishing process.	3.19	1.26	Medium
14	Lack of availability of devices and tools to conduct scientific research.	3.05	0.819	Medium

It is noted in Table (7) the arithmetic means and standard deviations for the field paragraphs related to the difficulties of scientific research related to the availability of equipment, sources of information, and facilities necessary for research. Paragraph No. (12) stated, "The absence of a statistical consultation and analysis center at the university to assist faculty members in analyzing... "Their research data" came in first place, with a arithmetical average of (4.15) and a high rating, while Paragraph No. (8), which stipulates "the lack of sources and modern books in the university library," came in second place, with a arithmetical average of (3.89) and a high rating, while paragraph No. Number (14) is ranked last, with a mean of (3.05) and an average rating.

Fifth: The personal and Material Difficulties of Scientific Research

Table (8) Arithmetic means and standard deviations of academics' perceptions of subjective and material research difficulties, arranged in descending order according to their arithmetic means.

Paragraph number	Paragraphs	SMA	standard deviation	Class
15	Weak university funding for faculty research.	3.90	0.620	High
22	Difficulty for a faculty member to obtain financial support from the university to conduct research.	3.89	0.620	High
17	Lack of annual increases in faculty salaries.	3.80	1.09	High
18	Weak relationship between the promotion system and the quality of research and the level of competence and success in scientific research.	3.57	0.89	High
16	Double the monthly salary of a faculty member	3.40	1.40	Medium
21	There is no budget allocated for research at the university.	2.88	1.90	Medium
20	. The university does not encourage pioneering research ideas.	2.59	0.83	Medium
14	The university does not provide competitive competitions in scientific research	2.44	0.979	Medium

Table No. (8) indicates the arithmetic means and standard deviations for the items in the field of academics' perceptions of the subjective and material difficulties of scientific research. Paragraph No. (15) "Weak university funding for faculty research" ranked first with an arithmetic mean of (3.90), as did Paragraph No. (22), which stated: "The difficulty for a faculty member to obtain financial support from the university to conduct research" ranked second, with an arithmetic average of (3.89), while Paragraph No. (14) ranked last, with a arithmetic average of (2.44) and a rating of medium.

Second - Results of the second question:

Are there statistically significant differences at the level ($\alpha = 0.05$) between the averages of the study members' responses about the difficulties of scientific research at Al Ain University due to the variables of gender and academic rank?

To answer this question, the researchers followed the next steps:

According to the gender variable, the t-test was used for independent samples, and Table No. (9) shows the results of that.

Table (9): Results of the t-test for independent samples to detect differences in the estimates of study individuals according to the gender variable

Variable classes	SMA	standard deviation	Degrees of freedom	value (t)	Significance level
Smart	3.61	0.77	598	1.77	0.189
females	2.65	0.82			

It is clear from Table (9) that there are no statistically significant differences in the estimates of the study sample members about the reality of the difficulties of scientific research due to the gender variable in terms of the value of (t) and the level of significance accompanying it. Perhaps this indicates that the difficulties faced by faculty members are fixed in the university's methodology and management, and therefore the responses of males and females were similar in this regard.

According to the academic rank variable, arithmetic means and standard deviations were extracted, and to reveal the significance of the differences in the means, a one-way analysis of variance (One Way Enova) was used, and Table No. (10) (11) shows the results of that.

Table (10) Arithmetic means and standard deviations of the sample members' estimates of the difficulties of scientific research according to the academic rank variable

Variable	Variable level	SMA	Standard Deviation
academic year	Professor	3.64	0.75
	Associate Professor	3.60	0.84
	Assistant Professor	2.61	0.81
	lecturer	3.55	0.76

To detect differences in the statistical significance of the arithmetic averages, a one-way analysis of variance (One Way Enova) was used, and Table (11) shows this.

Table (11): One Way Enova to detect differences in the sample members' estimates of the difficulties of scientific research, according to the academic rank variable.

Interviewer	Source of variance	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean squares	F value	Significance level
Professor	Between groups	4.206	4	1.051	27.637	0.391
	Within groups	89.294	595	0.150		
Associate Professor	Between groups	0.865	4	0.222	20.676	0.876
	Within groups	55.361	595	0.093		
assistant	Between groups	5.867	4	1.441	56.593	0.088
	Within groups	82.067	595	0.137		
lecturer	Between groups	5.974	4	1.493	57.593	0.654
	Within groups	94.077	595	0.158		
The tool as a whole	Between groups	0.822	4	0.274	23.486	0.334
	Within groups	99.089	595	0.166		

According to Table 11, there are no statistically significant differences ($\alpha = 0.05$) in the level of difficulties encountered in scientific research across various academic ranks. This observation may be attributed to the homogeneity of the university environment and challenges experienced by faculty members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher suggests the following recommendations:

Leaders and decision-makers at Al Ain University should recognize and prioritize scientific research, highlighting its importance.

There should be a focus on allocating financial resources and support to scientific researchers, encouraging them to undertake innovative and exceptional research endeavors.

Faculty members at Al Ain University should be equipped with the necessary skills for scientific research through comprehensive training and preparation, as deemed necessary.

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