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مجلة إشكالات بحثية  
مجلة علمية محكمة تعنى بالأبحاث والدراسات  
في مختلف التخصصات

## الأزمات الضمنية المرتبطة بتكيف الطلبة المغربية في مرحلة الدكتوراه

Tacit crises associated with the adaptation of Moroccan doctoral students in the doctoral cycle

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### Abstract:

During their university studies in the doctoral cycle, Moroccan doctoral student faces multifaceted challenges. This study aims to reveal these challenges and examine their psychological and academic impacts. An e-mail interview was sent to a sample of 45 doctoral students from different Moroccan doctoral centers. Data was analyzed statically. Results show clearly that the Moroccan doctoral student faces various difficulties related to the conditions of doctoral training, relationships with the supervisor, written skills. Which affects their academic performance and self-esteem.

**Keywords :** Doctoral student, writing skills, perseverance, self-esteem, adaptation

### الملخص:

خلال مساهمهم الجامعي في سلك الدكتوراه، يواجه طلبة الدكتوراه المغربية تحديات متعددة الأبعاد. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن هذه التحديات ودراسة آثارها النفسية والأكاديمية. وقد تم إرسال مقابلة عبر البريد الإلكتروني إلى عينة مكونة من 45 طالب دكتوراه ينتمون إلى مراكز دكتوراه مختلفة بالمغرب. تم تحليل المعطيات إحصائيًا.

وتُظهر النتائج بوضوح أن طالب الدكتوراه المغربي يواجه صعوبات متعددة تتعلق بشروط التكوين في الدكتوراه، والعلاقة مع المشرف، ومهارات الكتابة، مما يؤثر على أدائه الأكاديمي وتقديره لذاته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: طالب الدكتوراه، مهارات الكتابة، المثابرة، تقدير الذات، التكيف.



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## 1. Introduction

Few studies have focused on the physical or mental well-being of doctoral students in Morocco. Generally, the doctoral journey appears worrisome due to the prevalence of depression, stress and thoughts of abandonment before graduation<sup>1</sup>. The doctoral path involves multiple challenges: integration into a university environment with unfamiliar rules, and a research framework largely determined by a thesis supervisor, which can lead to significant vulnerability at this crucial stage of the student's academic life.

In Morocco, universities are traditionally regarded as the most esteemed intellectual institutions. Because many Moroccan families believe that public universities provide a direct access to employment. Consequently, pursuing a PhD represents a dual commitment : an economic obligation to the family, which expects the doctoral student to enhance their Financial situation after graduation, and a moral obligation to the nation, contributing to collective intellectual advancement<sup>2</sup>. However, reality proves to be harsher than expected. These pressures weigh heavily on Moroccan doctoral students, demanding an exceptional level of resilience.

The ability to persevere in doctoral studies, academic performances, and overall well-being, depend largely on student's capacity to adapt to a university environment<sup>3</sup>, which encompasses several

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<sup>1</sup> Beffy M., Fougère, D., & Maurel, A. (2009). L'impact du travail étudiant salarié sur la réussite et la poursuite des études universitaires. *Economie et Statistique*, 422, 31-50.

<sup>2</sup> M. Lamrabet, H. Lam'hamdi. Moroccan PhD Students : From Scientific Research to Job Search. *AME*, 3(3), 722-741. (2012)

<sup>3</sup> R. Baker, B. Siryk. (Measuring adjustment to college. *J. of CounS. Psy.*, 31, pp. 179-189. 1984). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.31.2.179>.



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components: social, academic, and personal-emotional<sup>4</sup>. Successful adaptation requires alignment between personal attributes and academic expectations, fostering stability. Therefore, adapting to a new situation necessitates both personal and social adjustments. Human adaptation, in this context, means adjusting to one's environment while maintaining one's identity in a constantly evolving academic landscape<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, adaptation involves coping strategies, cognitive-emotional, or behavioral efforts the set of cognitive, emotional or behavioral efforts in order to master, reduce or tolerate internal or external demands that threaten or exceed the personal resources or capacities<sup>6</sup>.

Successful adaptation involves integrating into the academic environment, transforming and assimilating it through strategies that vary depending on circumstances and available resources<sup>7</sup>. The doctoral cycle often involves adaptation challenges. And the success or failure of this adaptation depends on various factors. In a highly demanding and competitive academic environment, research suggests that doctoral students who successfully adapt are less likely to abandon their studies before graduation<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, adaptation plays a critical role in academic performance and student satisfaction<sup>9</sup>. This complex

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<sup>4</sup> M.A. Taylor, D.A. Pastor. A confirmatory factor analysis of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. *Edu. And Psycho.Measu.* **67**, pp. 1002-1018. (2007).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013164406299125>

<sup>5</sup> M. Tremblay. *Human adaptation*. Montreal : Les éditions Saint-Martin. (1992).

<sup>6</sup> SJ-M. Ionescu. *Defense mechanisms : theory and clinic*. Paris : Nathan. (1997).

<sup>7</sup>CS. Carver, MF. Scheier, JK. Weintraub. *Assessing coping strategies : A theoretically based approach*. *Jou. Of Pers. and Soc. Psycho.*, **56**(2), 267-283. (1989).

<sup>8</sup> M. Credé, S. Nichorster. *Adjustment to college as measured by the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire : A quantitative review of its structure and relationships with correlates and consequences*. *Edu. Psycho. Rev.*, **24**(1), pp. 133-165. (2012). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10648-011-9184-5>.

<sup>9</sup> R. Dawis. *Person-environment-correspondence theory. Career choice and development* (4th ed). San Francisco, CA : Jossey-Bass., pp. 427-464. (2002).



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process relies on the compatibility between individual characteristics and the demands of the academic setting<sup>10</sup>. According to Dupont & Ossandon (1986), the success or failure of adaptation depends on multiple factors: environmental, educational, and personal, such as the student's motivation, study habits, and academic interests<sup>11</sup>. De Ketele (1990) estimates that these factors account for 80% of a student's university success<sup>12</sup>.

Adaptation in the doctoral cycle involves managing both academic requirements and personal responsibilities<sup>13</sup>. Taylor & Pastor (2007) identified three primary dimensions of adaptation : social, personal-emotional, and academic<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. Dimensions of Adaptation

### 2.1 The social dimension:

This dimension assesses the doctoral student's interpersonal relationships with colleagues and faculty, communication difficulties<sup>15</sup>. It refers too to the quality of the latter's interpersonal relationships with his

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<sup>10</sup> M. Romainville. Failure in the mass university. Paris : L'Harmattan. (2000).

<sup>11</sup> P. Dupont, M. Ossandon. Rich and less rich... or the reproductive function of the university. Fren. Revi. Of Peda., 77, pp. 17-30. (1986).

<sup>12</sup> J. De Ketele. The transition from secondary to higher education. Vie péda. 66, 4-8. (1990)

<sup>13</sup> R. Baker, B. Siryk. (Measuring adjustment to college. J. of CounS. Psy., 31, pp. 179-189. 1984).  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.31.2.179>.

<sup>14</sup> M.A. Taylor, D.A. Pastor. A confirmatory factor analysis of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. Edu. And Psycho.Measu. 67, pp. 1002-1018. (2007). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013164406299125>

<sup>15</sup> R. Baker, B. Siryk. (Measuring adjustment to college. J. of CounS. Psy., 31, pp. 179-189. 1984).  
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colleagues, and the training faculty, the difficulties of communication<sup>16</sup>, and potential conflicts<sup>17</sup>. Given their role as future scholars and intellectual contributors to society, doctoral students naturally rely on social interactions to facilitate their academic journey.

## 2.2 the emotional dimension: self-esteem

Self-esteem refers to the doctoral student's overall attitude, positive or negative, towards their own identity<sup>18</sup>. Furthermore, it is divided into two key aspects: instrumental self-esteem, based on power, competence, and efficiency<sup>19</sup>. And expressive self-esteem, linked to moral values and personal worth. In this study, self-esteem is associated with doctoral students' satisfaction with university life and their academic performance.

## 2.3 The academic dimension

This dimension reflects the doctoral student's commitment to research, academic work, and the effectiveness of their efforts. Unlike undergraduate programs, doctoral studies focus on acquiring research skills that contribute to scientific progress. Doctoral students must master theoretical and methodological foundations within their field of expertise. Successful adaptation to academic life involves both academic

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<sup>16</sup> M. Briley, C. Moret. (2002). Improvement of social adaptation in depression with serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors. *Neuropsych. Disord. And Treat.*, **6**, pp. 647-655. (2002).

<sup>17</sup> JM. Mestre, R. Guil, PN. Lopes, P. Salovey, P. Gil-Olarte. Emotional intelligence and social and academic adaptation to school. *Psico.*, **18**, pp. 112-117. (2006).

<sup>18</sup> M. Rosenberg, C. Schooler, C. Schoenbach, F. Rosenberg. Global self-esteem and specific self-esteem : Different concepts, different outcomes. *Amer. Socio. Rev.*, **60**(1), 141-156. (1995). Doi : <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2096350>

<sup>19</sup> V. Gecas. The self- concept. *AN.REV.OF. SOCIO.***8**. 1-33. (1982).



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and social integration, developing research competencies while fostering relationships with faculty and peers. A well integrated doctoral student is more likely to make progress, find meaning in their work, and maintain a strong connection to the academic environment<sup>20</sup>.

## 2.4 The supervision

Supervision includes all the conditions contributing to the success of doctoral studies, developing intellectual, scientific and professional autonomy. Supervision consists of two main components: administrative-institutional and intellectual-relational<sup>21</sup>. The integration into the research philosophy of the graduate student, as an apprentice researcher, depends mainly on the supervisor who is an experienced researcher.

The relationship with the supervisor, judged important, based on his career and having supervised several study projects. supervisor presents himself as the reference point, towards which the student PhD undertakes a back and forth throughout his research path, and encourages his perseverance by discussing the different ways of setting up favorable conditions for writing and ensures his constant commitment<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> B. Lovitts. Leaving the ivory tower : the causes and consequences of departure from Doctoral study. New York : Rowman & Littlefield. (2001).

<sup>21</sup> F. Jutras, J. Gabin Ntebutse, R. Louis. Supervision of dissertations and theses in educational sciences : issues and challenges. *Inte. Rev. Of Hig. Edu.* **26**(1). (2010).

<sup>22</sup> R. Murray. Writing in Social Spaces : A Social Processes Approach to Academic Writing. London : Routledge. (2015).



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## 2.5 writing skills

Scientific writing is the most daunting aspects of doctoral studies. Writing a dissertation requires high-level writing skills, for which many students are inadequately prepared, making it a major source of anxiety and stress. Doctoral writing differs significantly from undergraduate-level academic writing, necessitating mastery of specialized conventions and standards<sup>23</sup>. Writing skills encompass adherence to prescribed formats, linguistic proficiency, and a structured writing rhythm. Many doctoral students struggle with writing due to structural, methodological, and strategic challenges<sup>24</sup>. Consequently, familiarity with scientific writing from an early stage ideally during master's studies would significantly improve doctoral students' ability to complete their theses successfully<sup>25</sup>. In the doctoral cycle, the thesis allows the apprentice researcher to demonstrate the acquisition of intellectual and theoretical capacities relating to the training course.

## 3. Research Questions

1. What are the different facets of the tacit crises affecting the adaptation of Moroccan doctoral students ?
2. Does resilience play a role in doctoral students' adaptation?
3. Is support from colleagues and supervisors crucial for effective adaptation?

## 4. Participants and Data Collection

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<sup>23</sup> S. BourkKadi. Scientific Writing Keys to Success. (2020). Doi: [10.13140/RG.2.2.33749.78564](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.33749.78564)

<sup>24</sup> G. Belleville. Promoting perseverance among students in writing a dissertation or thesis. Table, 1-6. (2017).

<sup>25</sup>R. Paturel. The methodological choice of doctoral research. Rev. De l'Entrep., **3**, 47-65. (2004).

An electronic interview was conducted via courriel, ensuring participant anonymity. The study involved 45 doctoral students from various doctoral centers, including 7 females and 38 males, aged between 28 and 51. Among them, 60% were married, and 51% traveled long distances (over 120 km) at least once a month to attend courses. Regarding professional status, 57% were employed, while 43% were full-time students.

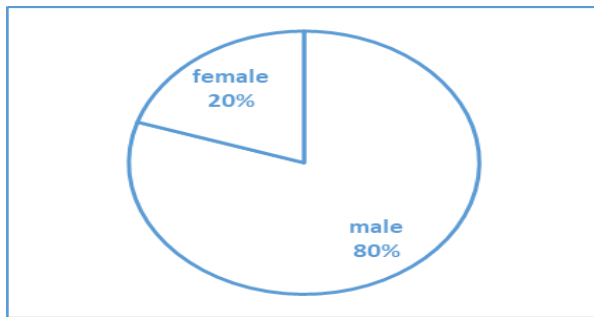


Fig.1 : Gender of participants

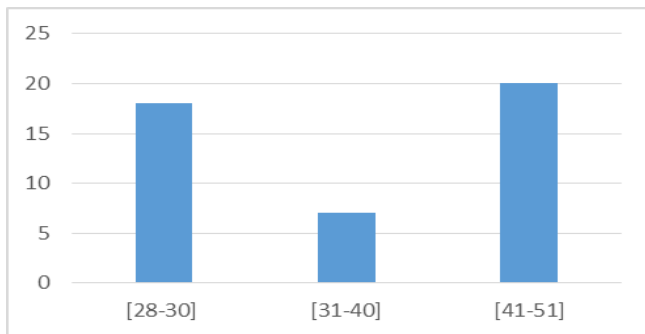


Fig. 2: Age of participants

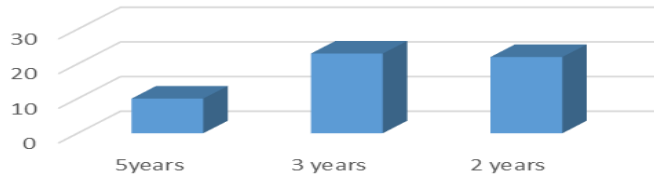


Fig. 3 : number of years in the doctoral cycle

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Support from colleagues and supervisor

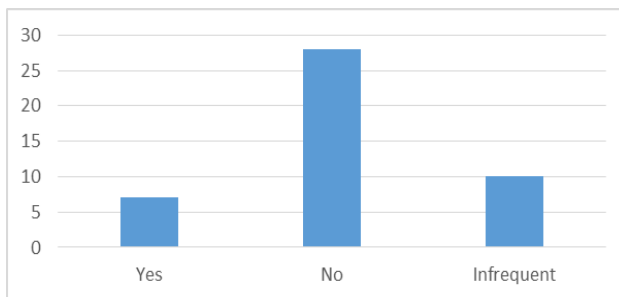


Fig.4 : Support from colleagues and supervisor

Results indicate that 84% of doctoral students feel unsupported by their colleagues and supervisors. While independent research is a fundamental part of doctoral training, novice researchers often perceive this autonomy as neglect, leading to frustration. Early-career researchers require significant guidance to navigate their academic journey. Support plays a crucial psychological role, reinforcing the doctoral student's sense of belonging and academic motivation.

In addition, some respondents indicated that there is a kind of discrimination among research students. Due, according to them, to the nature of social capital, which varies between students. The research student

who has old relationships with the supervisor, or who knows someone in the institution, is more informed, and has enough flexibility to manage his academic affairs, unlike the research student who enters the institution for the first time, where he spends most of his time finding the right path and remains on the sidelines for a while.

### 5.2 Self-esteem

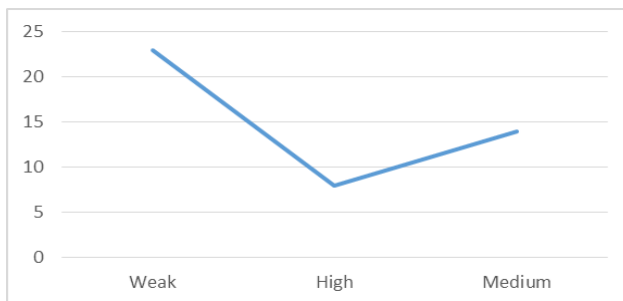


Fig. 5: Participants' level of self-esteem

The results from the Rosenberg self-esteem test, addressed to the participants, show that the self-esteem resulting from good relationships with the doctoral training staff, promotes the development of interpersonal relationships and presides over better subsequent academic performances. Thus it could be associated with a good adaptation of the doctoral student to the university. However, in an environment where the doctoral student feels a kind of neglect, his self-esteem will, without doubt, be under threat. In this study we distinguished two figures of self-esteem among doctoral students. One is based on the dimensions of power, competence and relational effectiveness. The other focuses on morality and value. For doctoral students poorly adapted to the doctoral cycle, their self-esteem is negatively associated with their university social experience ; which translates into a delimitation of relationships with the faculty as well as with their colleagues. In an environment of uncertainty about his academic future, the doctoral student faces a kind of depression and anxiety by asking himself questions obsessively, whose goal is to

find answers that can alleviate the imbalance he feels. In contrast, the other doctoral students, enjoy a network of relationships that protect them, have a strong self-esteem. Because their academic task is facilitated.

### 5.3 Relationship with supervisor

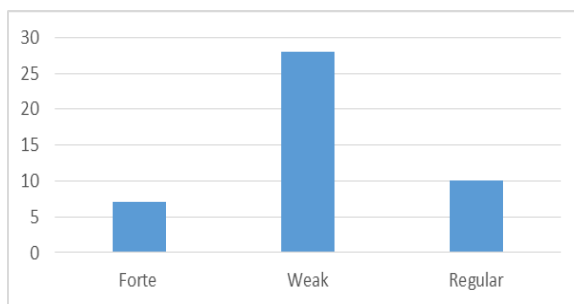


Fig. 6 : nature of the relationship with the supervisor

Even supervision includes all the conditions contributing to the success of studies and the development of intellectual, scientific and professional autonomy. Many participants reported strained relationships with their supervisors, citing a lack of regular meetings, inadequate guidance, and minimal opportunities for professional development.

According to the results displayed above, the majority of participants admitted that their relationships with the supervisor are disruptive. Indeed, the thesis director guarantees the monitoring of the doctoral student's work by transmitting his methodological and scientific skills, and facilitates the integration of the doctoral student into the research unit. In this study, the majority of respondents stated that the supervisor does not provide a quality working environment for them. Either by reviewing their work, or by giving them the benefit of his academic network.

According to the doctoral students, infrequent are the opportunities when the doctoral student is called by the supervisor to participate in a thematic conference, leaving the doctoral student to fend for himself. For the rest of the participants, the relationship with the supervisor varies between normal and strong. In this sense, the participants mentioned that their thesis directors regularly monitor the progress of the work through regular meetings. And demand synthesis work while avoiding any state of stagnation of the research work. This allows the doctoral student to benefit from feedback on their work.

Participants also mentioned the fact of the unavailability of supervisors. For this reason, they found it difficult to inform them of any developments in their research work in order to benefit from their comments and advice with a view to improving the completion of their work.

#### 5.4 Writing Skills

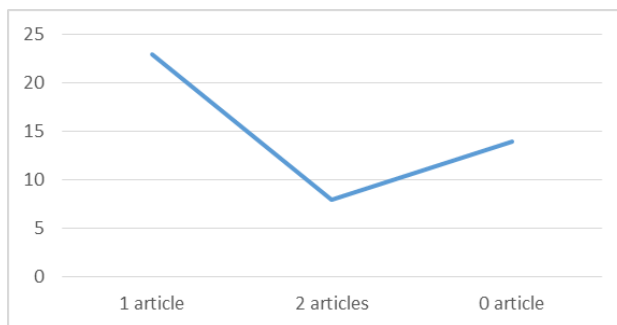


Fig. 7 : Participants' relationship to writing

The relationship to writing considered as the set of relationships and representations that the doctoral student maintains about all writing activities. In this sense, the relationship to writing develops writing skills and contributes to the complexity of thought. Therefore, the production of articles and dissertations requires the development of an author's posture, allowing the mobilization of writing, planning and revision skills.



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According to the participants, writing articles can be scary. The unlimited number of pages of thesis and the quality standardized by research units represent a very distant and unattainable horizon. Given its complexity, the relationship to writing of doctoral students based on different dimensions. An affective dimension: that refers to all the feelings they have towards writing in general. In this regard, most respondents mentioned that writing an article opens the way to access the world of high-level scientific research. Thus, the participants mentioned a kind of axiological dimension that translates into the fact that writing contributes to the development of the personality and strengthens their roles as an academic personality.

Given the importance of the relationship to writing, during the doctoral course, the participants stated the lack of prior training including the techniques and skills of writing articles during the master's years. Then, the difficulties increase during the doctorate and sometimes block the thesis presentation processes. In this sense, it is appropriate to familiarize students with the writing of scientific articles during the master's training, so that; they can write them easily during the doctoral cycle.

In continuity, writing practices are infrequent among doctoral cycle; Manifested by the lack of support from supervisors who have enough expertise in this domain. However, for the rest of the participants, writing practices remain a responsibility of the doctoral student, who is called upon to provide personal efforts and under the observations of the supervisor.

## 6. Discussion

The aim of this study is to reveal the different facets of the tacit crises, which overwhelm the path of Moroccan doctoral students.



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The results obtained, through the various analyses, showed that the Moroccan doctoral student-researcher experiences crises with multiple dimensions. Indeed, the unstable relationship with the supervisor, represented by the low level of supervision, and the lack of meetings related to orientation and evaluation casts a shadow on his academic performance. The supervision of the student-researcher's work has strong results on the nature and quality of his academic work, by playing an essential role in his solid scientific training, and allows him to produce quality work (Roche, 2007, pp. 1-16. chap.2)<sup>26</sup>. In contrast, the turbulent relationship between the student-researcher and the thesis director plays a fundamental role in student's feeling of indifference, which can push him to abandon his doctoral path.

The social relationships that the student maintains with the different organizations of the research laboratory also play an essential role in psychologically supporting for the student researcher, and giving him a positive self-esteem, which helps him to adapt well and move forward in his research project. While poor self-esteem, resulting from the indifference of others, leads to possibilities of poor adaptation, leaving the student researcher on the sidelines.

As for the Moroccan student-researcher's relationship to written production, the respondents reported the need to train the student-researcher very early in scientific writing, and to accustom him to writing scientific articles when preparing his master's thesis. This would eliminate the obstacles that would prevent him from successfully completing his doctoral research. Scientific writing requires solid training that the doctoral student-researcher follows very early, especially since the requirement of a scientific article considered one of the basic conditions for defending the doctoral thesis. All the respondents confirmed this when they discussed the obstacles to defending the doctoral thesis.

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<sup>26</sup> D. Roche. Writing and defending a successful thesis. Eyrolles. (2007).



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## 7. Conclusion

Moroccan doctoral student faces obstacles with multiple dimensions. most of them are bound to him as a novice researcher, while others related to the research structure through which he is active. The most important is the nature of the academic relationship to the thesis director. An active and positive relationship, represented by flexibility in evaluation and continuous communication, constitutes a solid foundation on which the academic path of the research student is established and allows him to obtain positive results. While the tense and oscillating relationship frustrates student and increases his doubts about his academic path, leading to low self-esteem, which can lead to a premature departure from the doctoral program.

As for the student-researcher's relationship to scientific production, we note a kind of deficiency, most student-researchers suffering from difficulty to publish scientific articles in peer-reviewed scientific journals, and even less in indexed journals. This is due to two direct reasons: The first concerns the student-researcher, who is not used to writing and publishing scientific articles on a regular basis, and making it as one of the conditions of preparation for the doctorate. The second associated with obligation to publish in peer-reviewed journals during master's studies, which motivates the student researcher to make efforts and get used to scientific writing and publication.



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