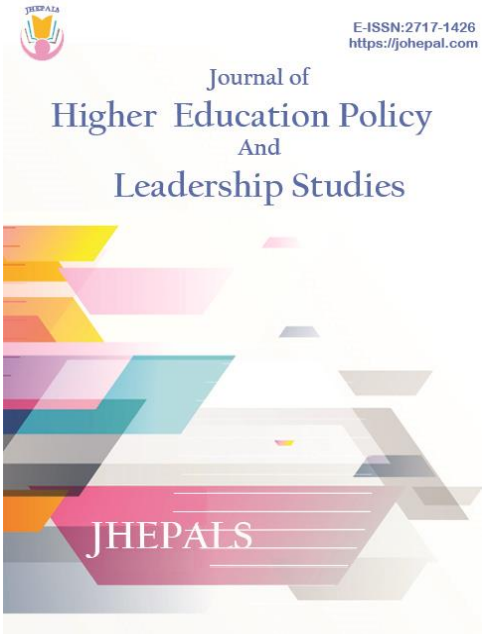
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Doctoral Education in Uzbekistan: Challenges and Opportunities

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Highlights

- Doctoral education in Uzbekistan, a two-tier system consisting of PhD and DSc (Doctor of Science) programs, relies on self-directed learning and a single supervisor program with limited support and guidance from higher education institutions in issues directly related to research and needs significant structural reforms.
- A study based on a questionnaire conducted among 1st, 2nd, and 3rd-year PhD students of Uzbekistan in the field of Humanities reveals the necessity of structural doctoral education in Uzbekistan with mandatory and elective courses that will guide PhD students in their research work and equip with theoretical knowledge and practical implementation.
- Lack of necessary mandatory and elective courses for PhD students which would equip them with certain knowledge and skills in writing their dissertation reflects in low quality of dissertations and sometimes even in not being able to complete the dissertation.

Keywords: Ph.D. Students; Doctoral Education; D.Sc.; Challenges; Solutions; Higher Education in Uzbekistan

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Introduction

Doctoral education is a vital part of education. It is the linking stage that leads young specialists to the world of scholars (Corcelles et al., 2019; Yağan & Çubukçu, 2021; Deem, 2022; Gerber, 2006; Håkansson Lindqvist, 2018; Leijen et al., 2016; Shapiro et al., 2015; Skakni, 2018). By obtaining more knowledge and experience in certain fields young scholars are becoming the core element of the development. Doctoral education is the last stage of education which should equip PhD students with theoretical knowledge and help them to put it into practice. Half of PhD students don't complete their degree due to several challenges (Studebaker & Curtis, 2021) such as lack of experience and guidance (Hurtado et al., 2024), lack of communication with peers, lack of academic writing skills (Tremblay-Wragg et al., 2022). These gaps can be filled with the introduction of structured doctoral education which will engage PhD students in dissertation writing and nurture students' ability in research writing (Ciampa & Wolfe, 2019).

Doctoral Education in HEIs of Uzbekistan: Challenges and Solutions

The postgraduate sector of higher education in Uzbekistan is one of the fastest-developing fields in education. The government of Uzbekistan strongly emphasizes improving the quality of doctoral education and conducting research. Doctoral education in Uzbekistan is a two-tier system. It consists of PhD and DSc (Doctor of Science) programs. The PhD program represents the foundational phase, serving as a prerequisite for candidates to advance to the DSc program upon successful completion and attainment of a PhD degree. The Doctor of Science degree is regarded as the highest academic degree in Uzbekistan. Both the PhD and DSc programs have a duration of three years. Upon completion of these three years, doctoral students are obligated to follow the prescribed procedures for defending their thesis. It takes six years to complete the doctoral program and obtain the highest academic degree (Doctor of Science). Doctoral education in Uzbekistan is an individualized process focused on writing a thesis under the supervision of one supervisor. The doctoral student designs the doctoral dissertation according to the plan developed by the supervisor and individual students. Before obtaining the thesis approved and proceeding to the oral defense, a PhD student undergoes an examination on subjects determined by the Supreme Attestation Committee. However, DSc students do not take any examinations before the defense process. DSc students have significant research experience in their field as they have completed their PhD degrees.

PhD students in Uzbekistan work independently under the guidance of their supervisors, with limited support and guidance from HEIs in matters directly related to research. The main focus of the doctoral education process in Uzbekistan is primarily on writing the doctoral thesis. HEIs in Uzbekistan do not offer any modules or training to PhD students on how to conduct research. The involvement of HEIs in doctoral education is limited to providing documents. As for theoretical and methodological courses that are designed by PhD students and their supervisors, they are overlooked and underdeveloped, leaving doctoral students to navigate the process largely on their own. This lack of support and guidance in the research process and the absence of core modules for PhD students poses significant challenges to PhD students' development as researchers and scholars and reflects on the quality of their theses. Moreover, most of the PhD students intend to stay in

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academia after the defense due to the lack of support from HEIs in guiding and preparing PhD students for diverse career paths.

Research Methodology

A quantitative survey method was employed to identify the specific drawbacks, demands, and preferences of PhD students regarding the development of curriculum and syllabi as well as the provision of training aimed at enhancing transferable skills. In January 2024 a comprehensive online survey was conducted among 1-, 2-, and 3-year PhD students within the field of humanities via using Google Forms platform. 98 respondents both female and male participated in the survey. The age range of participants was from 25 to 47.

Results

Table 1 illustrates the results of the questionnaire conducted among 98 PhD students from Uzbekistan in January 2024.

Table 1.
Results of the questionnaire

#	Questions of questionnaire	Yes	No
1.	Should Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Uzbekistan offer mandatory and elective courses for PhD students?	83.7%	16.3%
2.	Do you think the HEIs should organize regular seminars or colloquia to facilitate intellectual exchange among PhD students across different disciplines?	87.8%	12.2%
3.	Should the HEIs provide mentorship and guidance for PhD students in navigating academic and professional challenges?	95.9%	4.1%
4.	Is it essential for HEIs to establish partnerships with external institutions or industries to offer additional opportunities for PhD students?	93.8%	6.2%
5.	Do you believe incorporating interdisciplinary courses enhances the PhD curriculum's understanding of Linguistics and Education?	82.5%	17.5%
6.	Would you prefer a structured curriculum with set courses?	73.2%	26.8%
7.	Should the curriculum include mandatory courses on research methodologies?	85.6%	14.4%
8.	Is it essential for the curriculum to incorporate various software learning into the courses?	84.4%	15.6%
9.	Do you prefer a syllabus focusing on classic texts and existing theories on research methodology?	62.9%	37.1%
10.	Should the syllabus include elective courses to cater to diverse research interests?	87.8%	12.2%
11.	Do you consider it crucial to include courses on academic writing and advanced research methods in the syllabus?	90.8%	9.2%
12.	Do you think workshops on academic writing and publishing are crucial for PhD students?	86.7%	13.3%
13.	Should training sessions on grant writing and funding opportunities be included in the program for PhD students?	94.9%	5.1%
14.	Do you believe workshops on communication skills, including public speaking and presenting research, are essential for PhD students' professional development?	92.9%	7.1%
15.	Should training on interdisciplinary collaboration and team-building be integrated into the program for PhD students?	84.5%	15.5%
16.	Do you believe that organising workshops for PhD students on using different data analysis software for conducting research is essential?	91.8%	8.2%

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Results from Table 1 indicate the strong demand and importance of curriculum development for PhD students in humanities (linguistics and education), prioritizing the need to incorporate interdisciplinary modules, where a significant majority (84.5%) of respondents agreed with the statement. A substantial portion (83.7%) feels the necessity to introduce mandatory and selective courses for PhD students. Evidence shows that the majority (73.2%) of respondents express a preference for a structured curriculum with set modules, emphasizing the importance of a clear and organized framework for doctoral education in these fields.

The data also strongly emphasizes the importance of the need for syllabi for the PhD students that are relevant, flexible, interdisciplinary, practical, and conducive to student engagement. About 62.9% of respondents prefer a syllabus focusing on classic texts and existing theories in the syllabus. The respondents also give importance to the depth in a few specialized areas or breadth across a wide range of topics within humanities and social sciences. A significant portion 90.8% feel the necessity of introducing modules on academic writing and advanced research methods.

The respondents show a keen interest in training to cultivate transferable skills. Data indicates that 86.7% of respondents agree to have training on developing their academic writing and research publications, whereas the majority (94.9%) of participants intend to have training on grant writing and funding opportunities. They also feel the necessity of training on communication skills, including public speaking and presenting research for their academic and professional development. About 84.5% feel the necessity of training in interdisciplinary collaboration and team-building. The data also indicates that the majority (91.8%) of the participants are aware of the demand for learning different data software as transferable skills.

Discussion and Conclusion

The data also shows the importance of introducing a structured PhD program, specifically a doctoral program for PhD students in humanities and social sciences. It shows the necessity of mentorship and guidance for mitigating academic and professional challenges. The data indicates that a significant majority of respondents understand the importance of PhD program to make partnerships with external institutions or industries, thereby providing additional opportunities for PhD students.

The results indicate both the importance of introducing a global PhD program in Uzbekistan and the existing drawbacks of such programs in the university. Understanding the need to address these drawbacks and the present demand for a global PhD program, it is essential to introduce structural doctoral education in Uzbekistan. It will support PhD students by offering core modules that can help them acquire theoretical and methodological knowledge relevant to their research. The inclusion of modules can help fill the gap in terms of theoretical and methodological modules. These modules provide PhD students with a solid foundation in research methodologies and equip them with essential skills for conducting high-quality research.

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Human Participants

Human participants, with their consent, took part in the study. Other ethical guidelines for writing research papers are observed.

Originality Note

The author confirms that the manuscript is their original work, and if others' works are used, they are properly cited/quoted. The work is only submitted to JHEPALS for consideration and publication.

Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies Statement

The author claimed that Grammarly is used in this research just for the purpose of improving the language of the manuscript. No further use of these technologies are also confirmed by the author to write different parts of the research. One native speaker of English is also invited to proof-read the text prior to its online publication.

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