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Understanding Doctoral Struggles: A Multi-Disciplinary Case Study of Methodological and Institutional Challenges

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Abstract:

Doctoral students across disciplines frequently encounter methodological difficulties that can delay progress, affect research quality, and contribute to attrition; however, empirical, cross-disciplinary studies that explain why these challenges occur and how they are shaped by institutional contexts remain limited. This study explores the methodological challenges doctoral candidates face across four disciplines: Business Administration (DBA), Computer Science (DCS), Science (DSc), and Arts (DA), and examines how disciplinary norms, supervisory practices, and institutional structures shape these experiences. Using an explanatory multi-case study approach, nine doctoral candidates were purposefully selected to represent diverse disciplinary and institutional backgrounds. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analysis of key research documents and were examined thematically to identify recurring patterns and contextual influences. The findings reveal both discipline-specific challenges, such as differing assumptions about knowledge and research design, and cross-cutting issues, including misaligned supervision, constraints on ethical approval, emotional strain, and limited institutional support. By comparing cases across disciplines, the study highlights how contextual factors contribute to these difficulties and, in some instances, help mitigate them. Based on these insights, the study offers practical recommendations, including clearer alignment of supervisory roles, earlier and more structured methodological and ethical training, and increased access to interdisciplinary research support. Overall, this research contributes empirical evidence to the doctoral education literature and underscores the need for systemic improvements to enhance doctoral students' research experiences and outcomes.

Keywords:
Case Study; Methodology Challenges; Research Methodology.

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Introduction

Although doctoral researchers benefit from rigorous training and greater access to research resources, many continue to face significant challenges in making fundamental methodological decisions that shape the quality, credibility, and impact of their work. Persistent difficulties include selecting appropriate research designs, aligning methods with research questions, and managing institutional and supervisory expectations across disciplines. These ongoing challenges underscore the necessity for a more thorough examination of how research methodology is conceptualized, implemented, and supported within doctoral education.

The contemporary research landscape requires integrating diverse perspectives, ideas, and methodological approaches to produce credible and impactful scholarship. Research methodology is central to this process, providing a structured framework for generating, evaluating, and validating knowledge. Robust methodological choices affect not only the integrity of individual studies but also the overall credibility of academic disciplines. Consequently, research methodology is widely recognized as a foundational prerequisite for academic inquiry across fields.

The importance of research methodology extends beyond individual researchers to encompass academic institutions, including universities, colleges, and business schools. In these contexts, well-defined and rigorously implemented methodological practices advance knowledge, promote ethical research conduct, and improve the quality of scholarly output. Conversely, unclear or inconsistently applied methodological guidance can lead to uncertainty, delays, and diminished confidence among researchers, particularly doctoral candidates.

Understanding the purpose and application of research methodology is therefore essential for addressing these challenges. By developing methodological competence, researchers can strengthen the reliability of their studies and contribute more effectively to their respective fields. Building on this premise, the present study focuses on the case study approach as a widely used yet often contested research methodology. Specifically, it examines the methodological challenges doctoral candidates from different disciplines encounter and explores how these challenges affect their research progress and experiences. By situating doctoral researchers within diverse disciplinary contexts, the study aims to shed light on both shared and discipline-specific

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methodological difficulties, thereby contributing to ongoing discussions on improving doctoral research training and support.

Research Methodology in the Context of Case Study

Case study research remains a valuable and widely applied methodology across multiple disciplines, particularly for investigating complex phenomena within real-life contexts. Its strength lies in its ability to provide an in-depth, contextually rich understanding of events, processes, and experiences that cannot be adequately captured by purely quantitative approaches. When conducted with methodological rigor and supported by comprehensive literature reviews, case studies can generate rich insights and enhance the validity and relevance of research findings (Crowe & Sarma, 2022).

A case study is defined by its intensive focus on a specific issue, situation, or group, enabling researchers to examine phenomena holistically and within context. Key features of case study research include detailed analysis, utilization of multiple data sources, contextual sensitivity, and analytical flexibility. These attributes make the approach particularly suitable for contemporary research problems involving interrelated variables and limited researcher control. As a result, case studies are frequently associated with qualitative inquiry and are increasingly recognized for their relevance in real-world research settings (Patnaik & Pandey, 2019).

In social research methodologies, case study is among the most frequently employed approaches. Its effectiveness is influenced by underlying epistemological assumptions, which shape the selection of case type, data collection strategies, and analytical techniques. However, the role of case study research remains contested, particularly concerning subjectivity, rigor, and generalizability. These ongoing debates have led to divergent perspectives on how case studies can best support theory development and methodological innovation (Priya, 2021).

To address these concerns and enhance the contribution of case study research, scholars highlight the need for clear research design, transparency, and analytical rigor. Critical engagement with methodological debates and the adoption of reflexive research practices enable case studies to function as robust tools for advancing knowledge across disciplines. Within this context, the present study aims to contribute to methodological literature by investigating how doctoral researchers experience and navigate the challenges associated with case study research, thereby providing insights that are both empirically grounded and practically relevant.

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Barriers and Challenges Faced by Doctoral Students

Doctoral study constitutes the highest level of academic training, yet it is often accompanied by a range of academic, psychological, and institutional challenges that may impede students' progress and well-being. Research consistently demonstrates that doctoral candidates encounter significant difficulties related to the complexity and depth of their research tasks (Gardner, 2009). These challenges frequently originate in the selection of appropriate research design and extend to conducting comprehensive literature reviews, achieving theoretical saturation, and upholding academic integrity, including avoiding plagiarism.

Supervisory relationships are critical to doctoral success, yet misalignment between supervisors and students is a persistent concern. Poor communication, unclear expectations, and limited guidance can result in delays and extended completion times (Ives & Rowley, 2005). Although some challenges may arise from students' research approaches, the literature indicates that structural and supervisory factors are more commonly responsible for ongoing difficulties.

Beyond academic challenges, doctoral candidates frequently experience psychological and emotional strain. Feelings of isolation are especially common in self-directed or online research environments and can adversely affect motivation and mental health (Ali & Kohun, 2007). Impostor syndrome is also prevalent among doctoral students, resulting in self-doubt and diminished confidence despite demonstrated competence (Parkman, 2016). Elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression have been reported at rates higher than those in the general population, primarily due to intense academic demands and uncertain career prospects (Stanko & Henard, 2017).

Financial pressures further exacerbate these challenges. Low stipends, limited funding opportunities, and high tuition fees can extend the duration of doctoral study or contribute to attrition (Golde & Dore, 2001). Limited access to essential research resources, including specialized software, laboratory facilities, and academic libraries, also restricts research productivity (Pearson et al., 2008). Additionally, balancing academic responsibilities with employment, family, and social obligations remains a significant source of stress, and time management is a recurring difficulty among doctoral students (Lovitts, 2001; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

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Career uncertainty is another significant concern, especially in academic fields with limited job opportunities and intense competition. These conditions can adversely affect doctoral students' morale and influence their decision-making regarding future career paths (Nerad & Cerny, 1999). Challenges in transferring research skills to non-academic employment further constrain career options and satisfaction (Boulos et al., 2016).

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study design to document and analyze the academic experiences and methodological challenges faced by doctoral candidates. The research focuses on nine participants enrolled in four doctoral programs: Doctor of Computer Science (DCS), Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Doctor of Arts (DA), and Doctor of Science (DSc). Of these, four cases represent the DBA program, three represent DCS, one represents DA, and one represents DSc. This distribution was selected to capture disciplinary variation rather than to achieve statistical representativeness.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their active engagement in doctoral research and their capacity to articulate methodological and institutional challenges encountered during their programs. This sampling strategy enabled in-depth exploration of specific phenomena within each case, while recognizing that the findings are context-specific and not intended for broad generalization beyond the institution under study (Creswell, 2014; Sugiyono, 2017).

Each case details challenges related to time management, financial constraints, access to research resources, supervisory support, and adaptation to virtual or blended learning environments. Through individual and comparative examination of these cases, the study provides contextualized insights into the experiences of doctoral candidates across academic fields. The analysis relies on participants' self-reported experiences, facilitating an in-depth understanding of their perspectives, while also acknowledging the potential for subjectivity and bias.

Although the study lacks a control or external comparison group, the inclusion of multiple cases across disciplines enables internal comparison and identification of recurring patterns and discipline-specific challenges. The researchers recognize that reliance on self-reported data and the limited sample size may affect the reliability and transferability of the findings. Nonetheless,

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the depth of analysis offers valuable insights to inform program improvement and support mechanisms for doctoral education in comparable institutional contexts.

Discussion

Pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) represents a substantial cultural transition for professionals. Candidates frequently encounter challenges that affect their online learning experiences. A primary concern is anxiety related to online communication and technology, which emphasizes the importance of transparency in the context of cultural diversity. Although online courses offer flexibility, many students experience discomfort or reluctance in virtual settings due to technological challenges, such as communication barriers and technical issues, which can hinder engagement. The transition back to academia after extended professional experience is reflected in difficulties with learning, academic writing, and research. Students must manage increased workloads, balance professional and academic responsibilities, and may face obstacles in accessing research materials and meeting academic standards, particularly for non-native English speakers. Furthermore, candidates often come from educational backgrounds that did not prioritize formal research methodologies, which complicates their ability to understand and apply established research practices. These challenges underscore the necessity for accessible support and resources in online education.

Case 1

The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program offers transformative experience for executives by integrating industry expertise with academic research to address complex business challenges. Common obstacles, such as interpreting complex data and balancing executive responsibilities with academic requirements, may be mitigated through targeted workshops, collaboration with statisticians, and the use of data visualization techniques. Ethical considerations and the protection of participant confidentiality remain essential when investigating sensitive topics. Additionally, many DBA candidates face significant time management challenges as they balance demanding professional and personal obligations. Implementing realistic study schedules, flexible work arrangements, and a focus on self-care are effective strategies for reducing stress and maintaining productivity. The transition from a dynamic corporate environment to a theory-oriented academic context also presents unique difficulties. Executives accustomed to rapid

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decision-making may find the slower pace of academic research and the demands of scholarly writing particularly challenging. This paper analyzes these challenges and proposes practical solutions for navigating them effectively.

Case 2

Pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) represents a substantial cultural transition for professionals. Candidates frequently encounter challenges that affect their online learning experiences. A primary concern is anxiety related to online communication and technology, which emphasizes the importance of transparency in the context of cultural diversity. Although online courses offer flexibility, many students experience discomfort or hesitation in virtual environments due to technological challenges, such as communication barriers and technical issues, which can impede engagement. The transition back to academia after years in professional roles is reflected in difficulties with learning, academic writing, and research. Students must manage increased workloads, balancing professional and academic responsibilities, and may struggle to access research materials or meet academic standards, particularly non-native English speakers. Furthermore, candidates often come from educational backgrounds that did not prioritize formal research methodologies, which complicates their ability to understand and apply established research practices. These obstacles underscore the necessity for accessible support and resources in online education.

Case 3

The Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) program demands significant investments of time, intellectual effort, and resources to bridge the gap between theory and practice, with graduates typically advancing to high-level leadership roles. However, DBA students encounter multiple persistent challenges. Chief among these is balancing professional, academic, personal, and family responsibilities. Most applicants are mid-career professionals employed full-time, which complicates the allocation of time for study, research, and literature review. This balancing act often results in considerable stress and fatigue, negatively impacting academic performance. Research-related obstacles are also significant. Generating original, industry-relevant insights that meet academic standards is difficult, and misalignments between students and supervisors can further complicate the research process (Maceviciute & Wilson, 2018). Additionally, students

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frequently face limited access to essential academic resources, including databases, journals, and research software such as SPSS or artificial intelligence technologies. These barriers hinder research quality, especially in rapidly evolving fields that require up-to-date tools and methodologies. Financial pressures are also substantial, as tuition, registration, materials, and technology fees accumulate, often without transparent disclosure. Candidates may experience financial insecurity due to reduced work hours dedicated to study (Kearney et al., 2024). The lack of scholarships or employer sponsorships makes the DBA pathway inaccessible for many. To address these multifaceted challenges, institutions should implement robust support structures. Flexible scheduling options, such as evening, weekend, or online courses, can help candidates manage their time more effectively. Academic support should include training in time management and prioritization to help students navigate competing demands. Beyond foundational research methods courses, exposure to the work of leading scholars and their theoretical frameworks can enhance intellectual engagement. Mentoring programs that pair students with academic or industry mentors offer tailored guidance for research development. Improving access to resources is critical; libraries and research centers should provide training in data analysis, academic writing, and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and statistical software. Enhanced journal and database subscriptions will promote higher-quality and more equitable research. Peer communities' foster collaboration, reduce isolation, and enrich the doctoral experience. Financially, institutions should adopt transparent pricing models and offer flexible tuition payment options. Scholarships and corporate sponsorships for DBA students can help mitigate financial barriers and broaden the pool of prospective candidates. These measures not only support student recruitment but also retention and success. In a participatory case study, fellows voluntarily shared reflections on their doctoral challenges, with ethical considerations addressed through consent to publish their names, backgrounds, and affiliations. The findings highlight the intersecting professional, academic, and personal pressures that intensify the demands of the DBA journey (Kearney et al., 2024). The selection of research topics and insufficient supervisory support pose additional challenges that can be mitigated through mentorship programs (Maceviciute & Wilson, 2018). Limited access to digital tools and academic resources further impedes progress in rapidly changing disciplines.

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Financial hardship remains a significant concern. Exorbitant fees, hidden costs, and potential lost income render the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) a risky path for many applicants (Kearney et al., 2024). Without institutional reforms in funding and support, the program risks excluding qualified professionals and making only a negligible impact. While the DBA offers a rewarding route to senior leadership and applied research, systematic changes are necessary. To enhance candidate experience, institutions should offer flexible course delivery, enhanced academic support, mentorship, greater access to resources, and expanded financial aid. Addressing these challenges will enable schools to prepare DBA graduates who can drive innovation and serve as leaders in today's complex business environment.

Case 4

In the fourth case of the DBA analysis, the distinctive circumstances of DBA students are demonstrated. They are full-time professionals and PhD students who must balance the demands of both their jobs and their studies. Time management becomes a paramount issue—not only scheduling, but also establishing boundaries with patients, prioritizing tasks, and avoiding burnout. Selecting a research topic is a challenge for many DBA students. Because the DBA is applied, the dynamics of this involve ongoing reflection on the extent to which theory aligns with emerging industry practice. It is also about isolation. Many DBA courses are self-managed, with little interaction or communication with fellow students or tutors, which often results in confusion and low morale. This lack of passion can hinder research. Moreover, access to research resources remains a persistent obstacle. Students without scholarships often struggle to access critical academic databases or industry data. Even when resources are available, they may not align with the specific research needs of individual students. Time management, especially, is critical for DBA learners. Without it, they may fall behind and go numb. As Bryman and Bell (2022) note, poor planning often leads to low productivity and disjointed processes. A strong research emphasis is also essential as DBA studies require students to synthesise academic theories with practical problems. This continual dialogue between theoretical and practical understanding helps to keep the research both credible and influential (Bryman & Bell, 2022).

Isolation can undermine both motivation and research quality. Creswell and Creswell (2017) emphasize that limited feedback constrains the depth and rigor of doctoral work. Furthermore, isolation restricts students' exposure to diverse perspectives, which is essential for

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effective problem-solving and innovation. The lack of access to up-to-date records and academic resources further weakens the research foundation. Saunders et al. (2009) note that students facing these constraints may struggle to produce meaningful or applicable research findings. Implementing a structured yet flexible planning approach can address these challenges. Creating a timetable that breaks the dissertation into manageable tasks provides focus and reduces feelings of overwhelm (IC1, IC2). Leithwood et al. (2020) demonstrate that students who use task chunking and goal-setting experience lower stress and achieve better outcomes. Building communities of practice is also critical. Opportunities to attend conferences, webinars, and academic forums facilitate collaboration, feedback, and inspiration (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Institutional support remains vital, though increasingly difficult to secure. Access to library resources, research staff, and mentorship can strengthen research quality and accelerate progress (Silverman & Patterson, 2021). Engagement with industrial partners through case studies, consulting, or cooperative research and development further enhances the dissertation's relevance and impact. Yin (2017) argues that focused case studies can connect academic inquiry with practitioner problem-solving, benefiting both domains. In summary, the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) journey is complex, marked by strict time constraints, problem identification, and significant resource demands. Nevertheless, with intentional planning, robust support systems, and a balanced integration of academic and industry collaboration, these challenges can be transformed into opportunities for growth. The following section presents the second treated category of patients, specifically the second group of DSC candidates, along with their respective single-case analyses and tailored solutions.

Case 5

The DCS student encountered a set of closely interrelated issues during the research process, beginning with the challenge of identifying a relevant and manageable research topic in such a complex and rapidly evolving area. Finding a good, open spot in a specific field of research often requires extensive literature mining, a time-consuming and demoralizing task. The further complication of maintaining a focus on a chosen topic for an extended period (three to five years) is introduced, i.e., the necessity of balancing the need for the area under consideration to remain current with the need to allow room for further discovery. This is also compounded by the difficulty in selecting the proper technique for technically advanced problems. DCS candidates are

required to work at a high level of abstraction with tools such as computational models, machine learning, and theoretical models. This level of methodological detail can lead to cognitive overload, uncertainty, and a lack of motivation, particularly when the methodological framework is challenging to integrate with the research purpose. The time crunch only intensifies these challenges. In computational social science, training of thought and processes includes a regular habit of reading, musing, and scheming, sometimes reading through multiple academic papers a day. While planning is essential, it can also lead to analysis paralysis and decreased productivity. The accessibility of resources is also an issue, with limited to no literature, validated tools, and raw data available for niche sectors. Gathering data is often hindered by participants' unwillingness, primarily when the research focuses on sensitive or private matters. There is also an intense feeling of isolation that I know people with doctorates hold, as a lot of it is individual work, and poring over technical shit that weighs heavily on the brain, they expressed further. This leads to tiredness, disinterest, and emotional pressure. To address these issues, the candidate proposed several practical solutions. Developing a centralized repository of research topics might help identify gaps and support future researchers. Supervisors were advised to adopt more flexible and situational approaches, recognizing the heterogeneous methodological demands of computational inquiry. Pushing strict algorithmic templates into areas that don't require them can hinder innovation and advancement. It was also suggested that students be grouped for their research and study the same issues to benefit from peer support and intellectual interchange, and to reduce the isolation that students in this field usually encounter. Taken together, these strategies aim to enhance the quality of research, motivation, and academic performance of DCS candidates.

Case 6

The DCS doctoral student describes the specific methodological and intellectual challenges in the rapidly evolving field of AI. With AI transforming industries and opening new frontiers in technology, computer science doctoral research requires not just academic rigor but also the capacity to engage with professional research trends. The candidate emphasises that research in this field is not only systematic but also a creative process that requires time, patience, and a design-thinking approach. The only thing to lose by haste is the richness and relevance of research, particularly in a field as complex and rapidly evolving as AI. One of the primary concerns is the substantial workload associated with conducting a literature review. Keeping up with AI's

exponential expansion, evolving techniques, and potential applications is a daunting challenge, one that demands both a fundamental technical understanding and ongoing engagement. Finding a research question in this fast-moving context is especially challenging. Moreover, the broader adoption of AI in research workflows raises its own set of challenges, including technical skill requirements, ethical issues, algorithmic bias, and concerns regarding interpretability. Expertise in AI, machine learning, and data analysis tools is necessary, but many researchers struggle to overcome learning curves. The candidate also emphasizes the importance of transparency and ethical standards in safeguarding the trust and credibility of AI-enabled research. In considering these challenges, the candidate calls for a "marathon mindset." Excelling in AI research requires stamina, flexibility, and a steadfast commitment to lifelong learning. On the one hand, researchers need to keep pace with technological developments, but on the other, they must focus on a research question that is manageable and has some significance. In a sector where information is rapidly outdated, flexibility and ongoing upskilling are essential. The importance of patience is also underscored, as is the virtue of resilience, which is crucial for maintaining motivation and achieving positive results.

In response to these difficulties, the candidate advocates a more holistic and student-centred approach to research. Institutions and PIs should honour flexibility and refrain from rating capacity, as some effort cannot be easily measured in terms of time spent, given the profound mode of cognition that sets in during AI research. Self-study schemes and online technology resources can put students in the driver's seat to learn, taking them through key skills in data analysis, machine learning, and AI systems. As machines continue to take over mundane tasks, scholars are encouraged to add value by original thought, creative expression, and theoretical breakthroughs. Instead of fighting automation, scientists should harness it, creating space for more cerebral efforts and insights.

Case 7

The pursuit of a PhD presents numerous challenges, and selecting and implementing an appropriate research methodology can be particularly difficult. The maze of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches confounds many doctoral students, causing self-doubt, procrastination, and demotivation (Clark, 2017). A big focus of this group is that students seem to struggle with the confusion of research paradigms and a lack of knowledge (skills) in tools needed

for data collection and analysis, such as SPSS, NVivo, or R (Bryman & Bell, 2022; Saunders et al., 2009). Other obstacles include understanding challenging datasets and coding of qualitative information. Ethical gatekeeping raises additional hurdles, particularly regarding consent, confidentiality, and institutional regulation (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Additionally, some doctoral students struggle to juggle academic demands with professional and personal obligations, particularly given weak institutional support, mentoring, or access to resources (Jerome et al., 2017). From a theoretical point of view, according to Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2011), storage overload, or storage cost, arises when students are provided with a high amount of methodological information, surpassing their processing capabilities to the extent that productivity and the quality of decision-making decline. According to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978), structured mentoring is crucial in guiding students as they navigate the complexities of research. The social constructivist model, as outlined by Lave and Wenger (1991), emphasizes collaborative learning, peer interaction, modeling of behaviors, and mentorship. Secondly, Zimmerman's Self-Regulated Learning Theory (2002) states that motivation, time management, and self-discipline are essential attributes for successful doctoral research. Address these tensions by providing scheduled support through workshops, online modules, and focused training in methodology, ethics, and data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Providing scheduled mentorship, timely feedback, and writing services (academic writing centers, journal submission services) also contribute positively to the development of research skills (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). Such provisions can alleviate feelings of isolation and enhance learning outcomes by creating opportunities for students to network academically, attend conferences, and participate in collaborative projects (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Also, stress and time management wellness workshops could help students manage scholarship and non-scholarship responsibilities.

Mastering research methodology represents a significant challenge in doctoral research. Nevertheless, with targeted institutional support, active engagement, and self-regulated learning strategies, doctoral students can address these challenges and progress toward successful degree completion.

Case 8

DA candidates face personal, academic, and institutional challenges that can hurt their progression. A possible challenge is time management, as students usually have research, teaching,

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or personal commitments. It is all about planning and setting scheduled tasks to meet deadlines and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Academically, posing an original, relevant, and methodologically feasible research question adds yet another layer of challenge. Candidates must also decide whether to use qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both methods, and arrange for participants, which requires careful planning and testing. Isolation, depression, and anxiety are also common and can be pervasive for decades to come." Long hours of individual research, time constraints, and the need for quality, in terms of original contributions, can cause stress, isolation, and burnout. In addition, institutional characteristics, such as revised research policies, restricted funding opportunities, or sporadic supervision, may pose obstacles to progress. Pressure to publish in peer-reviewed journals further compounds this requirement, necessitating a high level of academic writing expertise and significant time commitment. To overcome this challenge, DA applicants are strongly advised to treat their DA work as full-time and to establish clear timelines with interim, manageable goals. Digital productivity tools can be helpful, as can setting aside blocks of time for reading, writing, and revising. Originality should be evaluated: Search for the literature might be performed.) Consult with your supervisors and peers. This methodological rigor can be further enhanced by participating in research workshops, consulting with faculty experts, and pre-testing of instruments. To acquire resources, candidates will use university libraries, databases, and open-access journals, as well as research scholarships. Initiate partnerships with organizations or communities that can facilitate both data generation and cultural relevance. Registering for writing workshops and finding mentors who can provide guidance are also important for your thesis or articles. Breaking down the thesis or other articles into sections and setting deadlines can help prevent stress. Collaboration in writing can also offer feedback, shared responsibility for the work, and raise the quality of students' work. In summary, although DA students' challenges are distinctive and diverse, they can still be minimized through meticulous time management, methodological support, efficient resource utilization, and emotional resilience. Candidates find a way to adjust to authority (in most cases, a doctoral contestation) and complete the process of becoming PhDs, contributing to knowledge in their field with the support of appropriate institutional and peer resources.

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Case 9

The research, undertaken by a doctoral student in Health Psychology, encountered difficulties in advancing the psychological models within primary care research. These tasks involved formulating a straightforward research question, selecting a suitable methodology, addressing recruitment and retention issues, and handling ethical dilemmas. These are manifestations of broader difficulties in health psychology, where psychological and physiological factors interact in ways that require accurate and sensitive methods to ensure validity and appropriateness. The clarity of the research question was a critical methodological problem. Too general questions often lead to unfocused searching, while too specific ones can limit transferability. Moderation that is restrained is necessary to facilitate functional hypotheses, which guide both study design and conduct. Research questions should be grounded in extensive knowledge from literature (and other sources) to prevent duplication and ensure originality (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). Models such as PICO or PEO are valuable for systematically organizing questions and increasing clarity and specificity. For instance, “In hypertensive adults (Population), does daily meditation (Intervention) versus no intervention (Comparison) result in reduction of blood pressure (Outcome)? Guarantees a focused and testable investigation (Watson & Koers, 2025). Selecting an effective method is another challenge. It is essential to ensure alignment between the research goals and the research process; otherwise, it can yield ambiguous or even deleterious results. Qualitative methods are well-suited for understanding lived experiences; however, quantitative methods are better suited for understanding behavior or prevalence. The issue of sample size estimation is also critical. Small samples can lead to Type II errors in quantitative research, while data saturation is necessary in qualitative research to ensure valid findings. While time and funding limitations often lead authors to settle for such messy compromises. Integrated water resources approaches need to be considered in planning and research design. Recruitment and retention of participants remain difficult obstacles in health psychology, especially for people who are vulnerable or stigmatized. Mental illness, chronic disease, and poverty can limit participation through stigma or practical issues (Olafsdottir, 2011). Participant burden, either in the form of lengthy questionnaires or multiple follow-ups, also diminishes motivation to participate. Longitudinal data attrition can bias estimates when dropouts are not random. Retention is also influenced by competing life demands, language barriers, and access problems. To address these challenges, researchers should consider employing community

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engagement methods. Collaborating with physicians and patient support organizations fosters confidence and encourages involvement (Patino et al., 2016). Providing flexible modalities such as remote surveys, home visits, or telehealth mitigates participant burden. Motivational incentives, such as gift cards or free health screenings, lead to better retention (Olafsdottir & Marcus, 2011). Simple, low-tech strategies, including reminder calls, thank-you notes, or personalized contact, are also effective. For example, Kristman et al. (2004) noted marked improvement in follow-up completion in a smoking cessation trial with personalized intervention contact. Ethical issues are critical in sensitive research. Informed consent, confidentiality, and potential emotional harm are essential considerations. We need research that protects participants' rights and care without sacrificing evidence-based science. Ethical protections, including Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, secure, de-identified data storage, and debriefing with access to referral services, help reduce the risk of harm and engender trust among participants. Ultimately, incorporating inquiry into the psychological aspects of healthcare into research necessitates a nuanced balance of methodological rigor, participant welfare, and ethical accountability. Researchers can address these challenges by developing and aligning strategic plans, working collectively with the community, and sharing best practices with a strong ethical commitment, thereby ensuring that the field of health psychology moves forward.

Discussion

Ethical challenges are especially prominent in research involving vulnerable populations within the health sector, information science, management, and human resources. The sensitive nature of the data and interactions with these groups heightens the importance of ethical considerations. A primary ethical challenge identified in this case study is protecting personal information. Addressing these obstacles through strategic approaches, such as effective time management, mentorship, utilization of institutional resources, and emotional support, enables doctoral candidates to navigate research processes successfully and contribute meaningful knowledge to their disciplines.

Conclusion

Studies of doctoral students in Business Administration, Computer Science, and related disciplines have identified methodological challenges, including complex study designs,

supervisory and ethical tensions, scheduling difficulties, and barriers to institutional access. These challenges are shaped by the specific academic cultures of individual candidates. The findings underscore the significance of adaptable doctoral program structures and reflexive, experience-based research approaches in improving doctoral education, offering important implications for policy development and institutional support.

Recommendations and Limitations of the study

Beauchamp and Childress emphasize the need to select methodologies that align with specific research objectives and contextual constraints. They advocate the use of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches, as well as obtaining ethical approval. The implementation of clear consent forms, secure data storage, and provision of psychological support are identified as essential components of ethical research, particularly when addressing sensitive topics such as trauma or illness.

A comprehensive understanding of methodological principles is essential and can be developed through structured workshops and training sessions. Additional strategies include seeking guidance from research advisors and methodological experts, preparing a detailed research proposal, conducting pilot studies, refining data collection methods, and incorporating secondary data sources.

Studies involving Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) students face several limitations, including limited resources, small sample sizes, selection and response biases, geographic constraints, subjectivity in data interpretation, technological challenges, and confounding variables. These limitations can result in findings that lack statistical significance and generalizability to the wider population, including DBA students in other regions or countries with distinct educational systems and cultural backgrounds.

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