



# A Survey Study of the Opinion of Students and Coordinators of Humanities Graduate Programs at An-Najah National University Regarding Scientific Research Courses and their Need for Development

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**Abstract: Aim:** This survey study aims at identifying the level of scientific research in the academic programs and study plans of the department of Graduate Studies for Humanities at An-Najah National University and the need for developing them based on opinions of program coordinators and students to evaluate the effectiveness of research and its validity for future enhancement for the university status. The study hypothesized weak levels of interest in research in study plans, which negatively affects student research skills and the quality of their research production. **Methodology:** The study adopted the analytical approach using two questionnaires distributed to program coordinators and students via the university portal zajel to identify their opinions with a 100% response rate from all 40 coordinators and 502 responses from students. In addition, study plans for all humanitarian graduate programs were analyzed to identify the level of interest in research and the need for developing them. **Results:** The results of the analyses of program plans and responses of study samples confirmed the study hypothesis and coincide with the researchers' expectations assuring that courses on scientific research present in study plans are insufficient and require further enhancement. **Recommendations:** This led the researchers to suggest a number of suggestions to overcome the weaknesses and enhance the level of research including offering independent scientific research courses, having experienced teachers teach the courses and increasing the amount of required research assignments for each course.

**Keywords:** Scientific Research; Study Plans; Humanitarian Graduate Studies; An-Najah National University.

## دراسة مسحية لرأي طلبة ومنسقي البرامج الدراسات العليا الإنسانية في جامعة النجاح الوطنية حول مساقات البحث العلمي وحاجتها للتطوير

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**الملخص: الهدف:** هدفت هذه الدراسة المسحية إلى التعرف على مستوى الاهتمام بالبحث العلمي، في خطط ومساقات البرامج الإنسانية العليا بجامعة النجاح الوطنية، ومدى حاجتها للتطوير، من وجهة نظر الطلبة ومنسقي تلك البرامج. **منهجية الدراسة:** وقد اتبعت الدراسة المنهج التحليلي، واستخدمت أداة الاستبانة لمعرفة رأي الطلبة ورأي منسقي البرامج، كما عمدت إلى دراسة وتحليل الخطط الدراسية لتلك البرامج لمعرفة مستوى اهتمامها بمساقات البحث العلمي ومدى حاجتها للتطوير والتجويد بهذا الجانب. بدأت الدراسة بمقدمةٍ للتعريف بموضوع البحث وأهميته ومشكلة الدراسة وأسئلتها، ومنهج البحث وأدواته، والدراسات السابقة. وافترضت الدراسة وجود ضعفٍ في حجم اهتمام تلك الخطط ومساقاتها بالبحث العلمي، مما ينعكس سلباً على مهارات الطلبة البحثية وعلى نوعية بحوثهم. ثم تم استعراض تلك الخطط وتحليل محتواها لمعرفة حجم اهتمامها بالبحث العلمي، حيث تم الرجوع إلى الخطط الموجودة على موقع الدراسات العليا للجامعة والتي بلغت أربعين برنامجاً للدراسات العليا الإنسانية لمرحلتَي الدكتوراه والماجستير. ثم تم تحليل استبانتين جرى تصميمهما لمعرفة جدوى تلك الخطط ومدى حاجتها للتطوير في جانب البحث العلمي، إحداهما من وجهة نظر الطلبة، والأخرى من وجهة نظر منسقي تلك البرامج. **نتائج الدراسة:** ثم جاءت الخاتمة التي عرضت نتائج الدراسة، وأكدت صحة فرضيتها بعدم كفاية ما هو موجود في الخطط وتطبيقاتها، وخلصت إلى تقديم توصياتها لتطوير مساقات البحث العلمي في برامج الدراسات الإنسانية العليا في الجامعة. وقد تبين صحة الفرضية التي قام عليها البحث، حيث تبين وجود قصور في اهتمام الخطط التدريسية بمهارات البحث العلمي، وهو الذي انعكس سلباً على بحوث الطلبة. **توصيات الدراسة:** ولتحسين ذلك ومعالجته، فقد أوصت الدراسة بأمور، منها: تخصيص مساقات مستقلة للبحث العلمي ومناهجه ومهاراته المتقدمة، وتكليف أساتذة ذوي خبرة بحثية بتدريسها، وزيادة الواجبات البحثية في كل مساق دراسي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** البحث العلمي، الخطط التدريسية، الدراسات العليا، جامعة النجاح الوطنية.

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## Introduction

Scientific research has become a standalone science with its methods, tools, skills and techniques which require practice to master. Such aspects of scientific research are in continuous change and development; thus, a researcher is obliged to stay updated to what is new in the field. Al-Shaer (2024) defines scientific research as an accurate, structured, experimental, and cumulative process which leads to results through gathering, testing, analyzing and discussing information followed by recommendations with commitment to objectivity and avoiding bias and subjectivity. These demanding skills and methods place a huge responsibility on the shoulders of universities, their graduate study programs, and teaching centers to equip students with them as they are major skills needed for the sake of building research capacities. This imposes on universities designing courses and programs, allocating a percentage on experimental scientific research homework for each course, training teaching staff and providing them with highly enhanced research techniques and provisioning budgets for research development (Abdulhadi, 2006).

Student's carrying out research contributes to fostering extensive reading habits, developing information, gathering skills, using accurate research writing and referencing rules, and dealing with topics objectively based on critical reading and analysis of texts. Therefore, the role of graduate studies programs is not just that of providing students with as much information as possible, rather their role is to equip students with skills which enable them to individually find and judge information.

Due to the necessity of research in today's world, this study was carried out to identify the level of interest in scientific research in the academic programs of the Department of Graduate Studies for Humanities at An-Najah National University in order to evaluate the effectiveness of research content in these programs and its suitability for enhancing the university. Based on the opinions of students and coordinators of these programs, areas of weakness -if present- can be identified and suggestions for development can be put forth, thus this research can be considered developmental. An-Najah National University evolved from An-Najah Elementary School founded in 1918 to An-Najah College in 1941 which offered diplomas in commercial and academic disciplines. In 1965, it started granting undergraduate degrees in academic fields aimed at preparing and qualifying teachers in education. In 1977, responding to the Palestinian community's need for higher education institutions, the college was transformed into An-Najah National University. Today, the university offers 128 Bachelor degree programs, 78 Masters and 13 PhD, half of which are in the humanities which increases the necessity for analyzing the program plans that reflect on the graduates and research skills they acquire which pave their way to success in societies they reside at and help them stand strong with every competition they face. This case study can be considered an indicator for other humanitarian graduate study departments at Palestinian universities and a call for the evaluation of the level of interest in research in such programs.

### Significance and aims of the study

The significance of the study lies in being developmental research aiming at identifying the level of interest in scientific research in graduate studies programs as a starting point for developing it. Research stands as the cornerstone of the educational process at universities, and a contributor to the development of societies which reflects on the lives of groups and individuals. Since universities are the nurturing grounds

which pump thousands of graduates to societies, it is a necessity to study the effectiveness of their programs for graduates and their societies. The future of nations and educational centers is highly dependable on their ability to comprehend the huge development in the field of scientific research. The status of researchers and universities also depends on their ability to comprehend such huge development. (Elian & Gnaim, 2004; Kandelji, 2008).

This study aims at contributing to the continuous improvement of the university and its graduate programs through the analysis of program coordinators and students' opinions. This will help in identifying program strengths and weaknesses and allocating areas in scientific research which require enhancement whether at the level of the content of the program plans or at the level of the academic staff performance. The study aims at reaching valid results and practical recommendations which contribute to the ongoing development of the university.

### Study problem and questions

This paper addresses the specific issue of scientific research and the level of interest in it in humanitarian graduate programs at An-Najah National University. It is an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of scientific research content present in the program plans, the presence of courses which equip students with necessary research skills, and the extent of teacher and student interest in research. The aim is to evaluate the suitability and validity of such programs and their need for development. To be able to achieve this aim the study aims at answering the study questions:

**Q1.** How well do graduate programs equip students with scientific research skills, according to the opinions of students and program coordinators?

To be able to answer the main question of the study, a number of sub-questions arise. These sub-questions deal with the more specific details related to the graduate programs the study aims at analyzing. The answers to the sub-questions are the path that leads to the answer to the study's main question as some sub- questions deal with the study plans and the presence of courses specialized in research skills, others deal with teacher performance and assessment methods, and others deal with university facilities and incitements. Once these details are all put together, the overall picture of the programs in general becomes more comprehensible, thus allowing the researchers to give a clear answer to the main question. This was achieved by analyzing the answers to the questionnaire which included a Likert scale showing student and coordinator opinions which reflects the status of research at the university. The sub-questions are:

- Do the program plans include research specific courses and are they sufficient?
- Is research methodology integrated into the teaching of all courses, or is the didactic method still dominant?
- Are research courses taught by experienced professionals or any available teacher?
- Do teachers encourage student participation in scientific conferences and journal publications?
- Does the university regularly assess the effectiveness of its plans and strategies to assure enhanced students' research skills?
- Are program coordinators satisfied with current plans or do they suggest improvements?
- Do students feel confident in their acquired knowledge and skills or do they feel disappointed?

- Does students' research output reflect the positive effect of programs or does it indicate lack of research skills?

### Study tools

To answer these questions, two questionnaires were designed, one for program coordinators and the other for the students in the programs and were uploaded to their zajel pages which were used for answering both the main and sub study question. Coordinator responses were analyzed manually while student responses were analyzed using SPSS version 2021. In addition, the course plans for the programs were analyzed. The study assumes that program plans and their research courses are not sufficient, and that teachers' recent teaching methods are not effective and do not actually provide students with the necessary research skills. Such assumptions are based on the initial assessment of course plans and students' research production including their theses. When analyzing the questionnaire answers, this will lead to understanding the actual situation of scientific research in the humanitarian programs from students' and coordinators' point of view where higher percentages in their answers indicate agreement with the study hypothesis assuring the need for improving the graduate programs.

### Methodology

The study adopts the descriptive analytical approach. Its tools are two questionnaires; one for program coordinators and one for students, along with the critical analyses of the course plans content. The study sample is limited to students and coordinators of the graduate study programs for humanities at An-Najah National University in Palestine which can be considered a case study with results that can be to some extent applicable to other graduate programs in other Palestinian universities.

The researchers started with the analysis of 40 graduate program plans based on the university official website including 5 PhD programs and 35 Master programs. The aim of the analyses was to examine the proportion and nature of research courses present in the graduate programs; see if there is an independent scientific research course or is it part of another course, and if present, do the program plans include one or more scientific research courses. The analyses helped in answering the following questions: Is the scientific research course required or optional based on the course plan, and how many credit hours does it count for- three as other required courses or only two or one credit hour. Additionally, is there unity in interest in research courses in all programs?

The researchers analyzed students' and coordinators' questionnaires to gather their opinions regarding the study topic based on the actual research reality they are going through. The questionnaires include sections that contribute to the research problem and main question. It was coordinated with the university administration, Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Computer Center to link the questionnaires to student and coordinator university accounts so they can respond to them. 3/4/2023 was allocated as the deadline for accepting responses which ended with 502 responses from students which were transcribed using Google Drive. SPSS version 2021 was used for student response analysis, while 40 responses from all program coordinators were analyzed manually. The researchers then sought to draw comparisons between the results of the two questionnaires and course plan analyses to ascertain the extent of alignment between responses.

It need be added that the decision to study humanitarian programs has great significance as observers believe that they

need quick development to align with contemporary developments in scientific research.

This paper adds up to previous critical developmental research carried out by researchers at An-Najah University and other universities especially in the field of scientific research and its skills which universities need to offer to students mainly in graduate studies as they are based primarily on research and scientific inquiry in their nature.

It needs to be noted that within the questionnaire, the researchers added the aim of the study and assured to both coordinators and students that their identities will be anonymous when answering the questionnaires. The respondents all gave their approval to use their replies for scientific research purposes. Additionally, approval was granted by the university to carry out the study and assess and analyze the content of the graduate study program plans.

### Previous literature

Previous literature dealing with the state of scientific research in various universities was reviewed to benefit from their experiences. The literature included a number of Arab universities and all adopted the descriptive analytical approach, and the majority used questionnaires as a study tool. It needs to be noted that the majority of the studies dealt with challenges facing research or the opinions of faculty members without taking into consideration the opinions of students or study plans in graduate programs; this is what makes our study different.

A number of studies have been conducted to identify the main obstacles facing scientific research production in Palestinian universities. In 2014, Sweileh and others carried out a bibliometric assessment of research production at An-Najah National University within the previous 35 years. After retrieving 791 publications, the researchers concluded that research production was high in certain scientific disciplines but weak in others. The study pointed out some reasons for this including local journals not being indexed, lack of international collaboration and lack of joint research. Neerat and Ilaiwi's study (2021) draw a picture for the reality of research in Palestine with all its challenges. They considered the absence of a unified national policy for Palestinian researchers at universities and scientific centers a main issue affecting research. They also mentioned weak capabilities, lack of support and effort appreciation for researchers, lack of references and resources, and insufficient time for carrying out research due to teachers being busy with the teaching process and its requirements.

Masri (2019) carried out a study that dealt with challenges facing researchers in the municipality of Hebron in specific and how to overcome them. Insufficient financial support was one of the major mentioned challenges along with lack of interest in research, lack of references, and the absence of high-ranking journals to publish in. In his study of 2022, Shaqoor concluded that the greatest challenge facing university students while carrying out research was high academic demands at the expense of research, followed by lack of availability of references and computers.

As for Al-Atrash and Assaf (2021), they surveyed Palestinian university faculty members and identified university administrations as the main obstacle facing research production, along with the absence of support for scientific research, difficulty in balancing between teaching and research, and obstacles related to faculty members themselves. As for southern West Bank universities, Bhais and Katalo's study (2019), based on opinions of 60 university faculty members, identified lack of time, insufficient financial support and administrative obstacles as major obstacles.

More case studies were carried out in Jordanian universities. In 2020, Aldeeka and Olimat aimed at understanding the role of university administration in developing research at the universities of north Jordan from 144 faculty members' perspective. The analysis of the study questionnaire showed that the role of administrations was intermediate and their financial support was insufficient. Olimat and Ashour (2000) surveyed the status of research in Jordanian universities in general. In addition to obstacles concluded in the above-mentioned studies, they added the issues of weak quality of produced research, divergence in standards and principles from one researcher to another, and the absence of qualitative research associated with community development strategies. Tareef and Twissi (2017) dealt with the status of research at The

University of Jordan from graduate students' perspective. The study identified a number of obstacles facing graduate study students; they noted that the same obstacles face graduate students in other regions in the Arab world. Research being separated from the society and practical fields; low financial support, absence of data bases and recent references, not having strategies and developmental plans for developing skills of both researchers and graduate students all were mentioned as obstacles in this study. Darawshah (2018) studied the challenges that face Educational Sciences graduate students at Jordanian universities. Based on a questionnaire and interviews with 432 students, the researcher concluded that students face great challenges whether related to research or students themselves. Research related challenges included difficulties in publication in journals, weakness in extracting data from previous research, and weakness in knowing how to implement research methods and techniques.

As for Saudi Arabia, Al-Shammari (2012), he aimed at suggesting ways for connecting teaching with scientific research at universities based on the opinions of faculty members at Hail University. Based on the analysis of a questionnaire, it was clear that the bond is weak.

Karima and Alhaj (2016) analyzed the reality of research at Algerian universities and proposed strategies for developing it. These strategies included the need for leadership with strategic vision, planning, and distinguished scientific competencies equipped with the necessary research environment and financial support. They also included the need for having a balance between academic duties and research, and achieving partnership between universities and community sectors to benefit from the results of research.

Omran (2021) stated that university expenditure on research in developed countries can exceed half its budget, while in Arab countries mainly Syria, universities lack financial support, motivation for research, data services and libraries and face the problem of university bureaucracy. The study points out an important point that university theses are disconnected from the needs of the community and only deal with theoretical sciences ending up on shelves. The researcher calls for shifting the teaching process from didactic to dialogue based, discussions and seminars, and for developing libraries and references and connecting them to teaching curricula. Mohammad (2016) measured graduate student satisfaction with the research process at the Department of Sociology at Tishreen University in

Syria. Again, the study revealed student dissatisfaction due to a number of challenges including the absence of a nationwide policy for research, lack of time, and administrative obstacles.

Moving to Egypt, Sulaiman (2009) studied the reality of research in Egyptian universities. Once again, the study focused on the lack of financial support which is less than 1% indicating that the majority of research product is university theses and research for promotion purposes, not for society development. The same obstacles mentioned in the previous studies were also concluded in this study including high teaching loads, difficulties in publishing, and the absence of support from the private sector. Again, insufficient financial support, and the lack of a plan for research organization are identified as the main obstacles facing research in universities in the study by Saudi and Megahed (2019) with Ain Shams University as their case study. The researchers suggest formulating specialized plans for research, offering digital libraries, and developing the content of course plans away from the didactic teaching methods.

Almuhammad (2011) carried out a study on scientific research in Kuwait University from faculty members' perspective. As in previous studies, administrations, focusing on teaching at the expense of research, and produced research being mainly graduation or promotion projects were identified as a major obstacle. An additional obstacle in this study is the problem of politicizing appointments.

In 2022, Mohajir and Abu Masha studied research challenges facing faculty members at the Open University of Sudan. Based on staff opinions, the study mentioned a number of challenges among which are teaching loads, lack of knowledge of foreign languages, low income which prevents publication due to required fees and disappointment due to having no party showing interest in research results. Mohammad (2017) studied the case of 600 research papers published by faculty members from 6 Iraqi universities. The study identified obstacles which correspond to those present in all previous studies mentioned above. Alhaj (2000) offered a number of solutions for developing research in Yemen assuring the necessity of assigning experts to put forth a clear vision for the goals of research and their implementation as tasks and duties.

Schildkamp (2019) discusses how teachers can use different sources of data for the process of enhancing teaching including research itself. Data based monitoring can help in diagnosing areas of weakness and making suitable decisions for improving both quality and quantity of research.

#### Scientific research courses in humanitarian graduate study plans

An-Najah National University offers 40 humanitarian graduate study programs, 5 PhD and 35 Masters. Following is a summary of scientific research courses found in the study plans of the 40 programs.

#### PhD programs

The faculty offers five humanitarian PhD programs, the following table shows the programs, credit hours for scientific research in each program, and if the course is a specialty requirement or optional course.

**Table (1):** PhD programs and credit hours for scientific research courses.

Arabic Language and Literature	Fundamentals of Religion	Usul Al-Fiqh	Physical Education and Philosophy	Teaching and Learning
0 credit hours	3 credit hours	1 credit hour Required	3 credit hours Required	6 credit hours/ Required 3 credit hours/Optional
No scientific research	Optional and integrated			

Table 1 shows the differences in the level of interest in scientific research among the five programs. Such disparities should not be accepted for a university that strives for scientific and research excellence; it needs to have unified policies that mirror such an ambition.

Some international universities do not include theoretical courses in their graduate programs; all credit hours are allocated for research for thesis preparation. As for An-Najah National University and all Palestinian universities, they have chosen a system which combines specialized theoretical courses along with a thesis. No less than 3 credit hours should be allocated for scientific research to provide students with enhanced skills and assist them with the production of distinct theses. This calls for putting an end to teachers' personal desires to have one or more courses within their fields of specialization at the expense of research courses. Cases of deleting a scientific research course or integrating it or changing it to an optional one have taken place to fulfill these personal desires.

The programs of Usul Al-Fiqh and Fundamentals of religion include 48 credit hours, and the other three programs 54 hours.

### Master programs

**Table (2):** Masters Programs based on research credit hours and statistics.

6 hours	4 hours	3 hours	2 hours	Zero hours	3 integrated hours	Statistical analysis and quantitative research
8	2	16	1	6	2	9
Programs	programs	programs	program	programs	programs	programs

The university offers 35 Masters programs for humanities worth 36 credit hours each.

Following is a clarification of the status of scientific research in these programs:

1. Six programs include zero courses for research. These are: Comparative Literature, Applied Linguistics and Translation, Arabic Language and Literature, Criminal Law, Intellectual Property and Innovation Management, and Islamic Thought and Comparative Religions.
2. Islamic Finance program includes one required scientific research course of 2 credit hours.
3. Sixteen programs include one 3 credit hour required course. These include: Cinema and TV, Migration and Refugees, Financial and Banking Economics, Economic Policy Management, Planning and Political Development, Private Law, International Law and Human Rights, Public Law, Tax Disputes, Psychological and Educational Counseling, History, Business Intelligence and Data Analytics, Women's Studies, Accounting, Finance, and Geomatics.
4. Two courses include two 4 hour required research courses. These include: Business Administration and Educational Administration.
5. Eight programs include two 6 credit hour required courses including: Physical Education, Public Relations, Gifted Education, Methods of Teaching Mathematics, Methods of Teaching Sciences, Methods of Teaching English Language, Sports Management, and Curricula and Teaching Methods.
6. Two programs include scientific research integrated in a 3-credit hour required course, these are Fiqh and Legislation, and Usul al-Fiqh. Having research principles and methods integrated in another course and not being taught as a separate and specialized course does not assure that students receive what they need to gain the necessary skills of research.

This makes it easy to add 3 credit hour required courses for scientific research in all programs. As for Arabic Language and Literature, research topics are integrated within Manuscript Verification which is an optional course. In this case, research could be separated as one independent required course and manuscripts integrated within it since manuscripts are skills integrated in research.

Some consider the scientific research courses unnecessary for PhD students since they study such courses in the Master's degree, which could be acceptable to some extent so as not to get PhD students busy with the basics of research, yet this does not justify the absence of research courses in PhD programs. Research is in continuous development and students need to stay updated with all that is new. Moreover, a PhD degree will include choosing the title of theses and the preparation of a comprehensive proposal and this requires a specialized course on advanced scientific research and thesis preparation. It is also important that these courses be taught by highly experienced teachers specialized in research.

7. In some scientific research courses, the topic is taught as "Research Methodology", while for other courses it is taught in a specialized way as research methods for economics, international relations, developmental studies, or psychological counseling based on the topic of the program. An issue that can arise in courses like these is teachers changing the course to discussion sessions on the specialization of the course instead of teaching research methods. The role of the faculty of graduate studies is to control course plans and assure teacher commitment to the plan.
8. Some programs include both a separate scientific research course and also a 1 credit hour specialized course for the graduation project which includes assigning supervisors for students enrolled in it and faculty sessions are held to discuss graduation projects at the end of the semester which is good practice for students.
9. 2/3 of the programs have one or two required courses for scientific research. The problem is in the other programs with no research courses.
10. Nine programs mention "methods of statistical analysis" or "quantitative analysis" along with scientific research in the course name or in a separate name. Therefore, if there is no leeway or no demanding need for dedicating a course for them as in humanitarian, literature or religious specializations, at least allocating a unit or chapter within the courses of research to provide students with the basics of statistical research and quantitative analysis.

### Program coordinator opinions and extent of satisfaction with scientific research courses in study plans

The questionnaire for coordinators consisted of 13 questions, the first 6 were informational questions about the programs, next 5 were evaluative questions and then two open-ended questions; one on the main obstacles they believe face students in their research and the other on their opinions for research development in the graduate programs.

Following is a summary of coordinator answers:

1. Coordinator's answers to the informational questions were in agreement with our analysis of study plans regarding level of interest in research.
2. All coordinators (100%) agreed on the unreliability of research experiences students acquire from their BA studies. This calls for more focus on equipping students with research skills during the period of graduate studies.
3. 2/3 of coordinators (70.6%) assured the need for devoting an independent course for scientific research, while 29.4% said that an integrated course serves the purpose.
4. Regarding the choice of who teaches research courses, 72.5% of coordinators said that teachers experienced in research are chosen. However, 27.5% said any teacher is assigned the course. These numbers indicate that more than ¼ of those who teach research courses are not chosen based on their expertise in research.
5. Regarding research assignments, almost 2/3 (62.5%) of coordinators said that the focus of teachers is on the content of the submitted assignments rather than the standards of research. As for the remaining 37.5%, they said that teachers assess the standards along with the content. This assures the need for clear instructions for teachers to show higher focus on research standards during the assessment process.

6. 52.5% of coordinators stated that they give students the chance to carry out and publish joint research, as 47.5% said that such a case is rare or absent.
7. Moving on to the open-ended research question on the major obstacles facing students carrying out research, following are the counts for the various obstacles in a descending order:

33 counts mentioned weak research and scientific writing skills, the absence of a specialized scientific research course and the unreliability of skills acquired during undergraduate period. The second obstacle with 16 counts was difficulty in accessing sources and references and the problem of contacting journals. The third obstacle was lack or absence of knowledge on statistical analysis and quantitative research with 7 counts. As for teachers not discussing research assignments with students, insufficient support for research and publishing it, and lack of seriousness of students had a zero count.

This order of counts answers the research study question and supports its hypothesis. The major obstacle is students lacking the required research skills and the statistical table is in agreement with this. This weakness in skills is what prompted coordinators to consider the absence of a specialized scientific research course the main contributor to the problem.

**Table (3):** Obstacles facing students based on program coordinators' opinions.

Number of counts	Obstacle
33 (56%)	Weak research skills
16 (27%)	Difficulty in accessing sources and references and the problem of contacting journals
7 (11.8%)	Lack or absence of knowledge on statistical analysis and quantitative research
1 (1.7%)	Teachers not discussing research assignments with students
1 (1.7%)	Insufficient support for research and publishing it
1 (1.7%)	Lack of seriousness of students

As for the open-ended question on coordinators' suggestions for enhancing research levels in the graduate study programs, the counts came as follows and in a descending order:

Training students and giving them practice on research, and its methods with 20 counts. The second suggestion had 11 counts which is dedicating one or more independent research courses in graduate programs. Then came the call for transition from the didactic theoretical teaching method to teaching associated with research, and in-class discussions with 9 counts. There were 5 occurrences for the third suggestion which was reducing the number of students enrolled in course sections to give room for in-class discussions, while 7 responses called for organizing compulsory workshops on research skills. Encouraging students to publish research and grant awards was represented by a count of 7. Some coordinators (5 counts) even recommended linking graduation to publishing at least one research paper in a peer reviewed journal, while others

suggested encouraging students to publish joint research with their teachers. This came with 2 counts. 2 counts were attributed to offering financial and moral support to students and allocating budgets for research publication. 5 counts advocated for free access to scientific databases.

Training students on statistical analysis and quantitative research came with 4 counts, choosing teachers experienced in research and its publication to teach research courses with 3 counts and one count for organizing training courses on research for teachers.

It can be indicated from the above mentioned that the majority of coordinators consider equipping students with necessary skills, dedicating an independent course and research being an integral component of each course are the top priorities for overcoming research obstacles. These suggestions align with the developmental purpose of this study and its hypotheses, and the previous literature mentioned in the study.

**Table (4):** Coordinators' developmental suggestions.

Number of counts	Developmental Suggestions
20 (28.5%)	Training students on scientific research skills
11 (15.7%)	Offering one or more independent courses dedicated to research
9 (12.8%)	Transition from didactic theoretical teaching methods to teaching associated with research, and in-class discussions
7 (10%)	Encouraging students to publish research and participate in conferences
5 (7.1%)	Linking graduation to publishing at least one research paper in a peer reviewed journal
5 (7.1%)	Reducing the number of students enrolled in course sections to give room for in-class discussions
5 (7.1%)	Free access to scientific databases
4 (5.7%)	Training students on statistical analysis and quantitative research
3 (4.2%)	Choosing teachers experienced in research and its publication to teach research courses
1 (1.4%)	Organizing training courses on research for teachers

### Student opinions and extent of satisfaction with scientific research courses in study plans

A questionnaire including 6 informational questions on the student's graduate study program, followed by 15 evaluative

questions on their opinions was prepared. Table (5) shows students' answers to the evaluative questions (7-21).

**Table (5):** Evaluative questions and students' responses (%) (Appendix included).

Evaluative Question	Highly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Highly disagree	Sum of agree and highly agree	Sum of disagree and highly disagree
Having an independent research course is a necessity	49.2	9	1	.8	0	98.2	1.8
1 or 2 credit hours for research in the plan is insufficient	30.5	9.4	3.6	3.9	.6	79.9	16.5
Having an integrated course is ineffective	33.9	9.4	5.8	.6	.4	83.3	11
Research being merged with other topics is ineffective	33.9	7.8	4.6	0.8	3	81.7	13.8
Equipping students with advanced research skills is a faculty responsibility	52	4.2	1.6	1	1.2	96.2	2.2
Study plans lack required research skills	19.3	34.9	9.4	30.9	5.6	54.2	36.5
Teaching method does not contribute to equipping students with required research skills	21.5	57.2	6.2	12	3.2	78.7	15.2
Assignment focus is on scientific content more than research standards	18.7	3.8	10.8	14.5	2.2	72.5	16.7
Undergraduate degree provides insufficient research skills	34.1	53.4	5.4	5.2	2	87.5	7.2
Developing students' research skills is not the responsibility of the student	35.9	45.8	7.2	7.8	3.4	81.7	11.2
Teachers encourage students to participate in conferences	7.8	44	15.5	26.1	6.6	51.8	32.7
Teachers allow students to carry out joint research with them	5.6	42	17.1	27.1	8.2	47.6	35.3
Having an independent scientific research course is a necessity	33.1	63.3	2.2	1.4	0	96.4	3.6
It is necessary to have two research courses in the study plan	34.5	37.1	7.6	15.7	5.2	71.6	20.9
Recent research course does not comprise enough research activities	30.7	40.4	10.2	16.3	2.4	71.1	18.7

The following points can be derived from the analysis of the data in table (5):

1. 87% of students believed that the skills they acquire from their undergraduate studies are unreliable.
2. 81% stated that research skill acquisition does not rely on students themselves; 96.2% consider it a faculty responsibility.
3. 71% consider research activities in the recent research course insufficient, and 54.2% consider it lacking necessary research skills.
4. 96.4% responses went for considering having an independent course for research a must, while 71.6% called

for having two courses. 79.9% considered a 1 or 2 credit hour course insufficient.

5. Merging research within other topics of a course was considered unproductive by 83.3%, and unbeneficial by 81.7%.
6. As for the adopted teaching method, 78.7% of responses believe it to be ineffective in equipping students with research skills, and 72.5% of respondents assured that research assignments focus more on content not research standards.

According to 51.8% of respondents, teachers encourage students to participate in conferences, and 47.6% stated that they carry out joint research with students. These results confirm the study hypothesis on the insufficiency of present

research courses in graduate program study plans assuring the need for implementing necessary solutions including an independent course devoted for research and its skills and choosing experts in the field of research and publishing to teach such courses.

Additionally, the results of the students' questionnaire coincide with those of the coordinators', with mild differences in percentages. For example, a significant 100% of coordinators went for the unreliability of student skills acquired during their undergraduate degrees; this counted for 87.5% in students' response.

Another point of agreement is the need for an independent and devoted research course, not integrated and not merged. The responses were 70.6% for coordinators and between 96.4% and 98.2% for students. 62.5% of coordinators stated that the focus of assignments is on the content and not standards of research, this counted for 72.5% for students. This agreement between the responses of coordinators and those of students denotes result integrity in this study.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aimed at identifying scientific research courses within humanitarian graduate studies programs at An-Najah National University and understanding student and coordinator opinions regarding their efficiency. The study is an analysis of scientific research courses in these programs and the reliability of the research skills and methods they offer to students. The opinions of students and program coordinators were the starting point to reaching recommendations for the sake of developing the course plans and remediating weaknesses. The study hypothesized the unreliability of present research courses in providing students with enhanced skills which assure the need for developing them.

Based on the analyses of the recent course plans for graduate programs and the results of the coordinators and students' questionnaires, we can conclude what follows:

1. We cannot rely on research skills students acquired during their undergraduate degree, and we cannot rely on students themselves in dealing with such unreliability; it is the responsibility of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. This calls on the faculty to adjust their programs to achieve that. There is no room for accepting study plans with no scientific research courses or no research strategies and research activities within specialized courses where teaching should shift from being didactic to research based teaching.
2. We cannot rely on research assignments that are part of a specialized course rather than devoting courses for scientific research as they do not offer advanced research skills and teachers will be more focused on scientific content rather than research standards.
3. Scientific research in some graduate study programs does not receive enough attention due to sufficing with a 1 credit hour course in the program or merging it within another topic in the course. Strikingly, some programs include no research courses at all. Undoubtedly, this weakness will negatively affect student research abilities and the quality of their produced research and theses. Therefore, both course coordinators and students in the questionnaires called for devoting an independent scientific research course in all programs.
4. There is a clear contrast in the level of interest in scientific research in various PhD programs, with some devoting more than one course for research and others having none. Such divergence should not be accepted by a renowned university aspiring to achieve innovation and excellence in scientific

research. The university needs to implement unified policies and instructions that lead to achieving its goals.

5. The majority of MA programs showed a high level of interest in scientific research and have one or more specialized courses for it. However, some programs include only a merged research course despite the negative points associated with such a method and its insufficiency in equipping students with required advanced research skills. The problem is with programs with no research courses; this is an issue that must be addressed. Based on the opinions of both course coordinators and students, there is a need for assigning at least a course on research and its skills and methodologies in each program.
6. Some MA programs mention methods of statistical research in the course title or as a separate title. If there is no real need for having a specialized course in certain programs as humanitarian, literature and religious, then it is recommended to have at least a chapter in each course as research in the era of quantitative research and analysis is indispensable.
7. Based on their responses to the questionnaire, all coordinators agreed that skills students acquire during their undergraduate studies are unreliable and the majority of the coordinators considered having an independent course on research a necessity. Additionally, following coordinator responses to the open-ended question, the most frequent response on the greatest obstacle facing students carrying out research was the weak and insufficient skills students acquire due to the absence of an independent scientific research course.

Coordinators' highest recurring suggestion for developing research levels was training students on research methodologies and skills. This was followed by the call for having a specialized course for research and adopting the method of education in the context of scientific research. These suggestions agree with the developmental aim of the study and coincide with the study hypothesis and answer its questions. They are in agreement with the results and developmental suggestions in previous literature mentioned earlier in this paper.

1. Based on students' responses to the questionnaire, it is clear that the skills they acquire at undergraduate degrees are unreliable, assuring that it's the responsibility of faculties to equip students with required skills. A high percentage of their responses consider the recent status of research as inefficient and the merging of research within other study topics, or having a 1 or 2 credit hour course not efficient. Their solution lies in allocating an independent course in scientific research.
2. Commonalities were found between the responses of coordinators and students regarding the majority of the presented issues in the study questionnaire. The responses are in agreement with the results of our analyses of the study plans along with the results of previous studies mentioned in this paper.
3. All in all, the general results answer the research question and confirm the study hypothesis which states that what is included in study plans for humanitarian graduate studies programs is insufficient and inefficient. This calls for proposing necessary solutions including the offering of at least one independent scientific research course along with its advanced skills and choosing experienced teachers to teach such courses.

Finally, the researchers recommend implementing practical changes to graduate study plans and teaching methods adopted



for teaching scientific research courses. This can be achieved by modifying program plans to include one or more courses specialized in scientific research, its methods, skills and most recent developments that assure students keep pace with recent developments in research. It is also recommended that teachers of these courses move away from didactic teaching to inquiry-based teaching. Additionally, a portion of the assessment is to be allocated to compulsory research produced by students for each course. The researchers call for carrying out more critical and analytical studies that analyze scientific research in other graduate study programs and suggesting ways for developing them. Studies that analyze approved theses at An-Najah National University to evaluate their compliance with scientific research standards and suggest methods for developing them are also recommended.

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