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**Issues and Problems in Ph.D. in English -  
Degree Quality Assurance in Pakistan**

**Mian Shah Bacha**

# Issues and Problems in Ph.D. in English - Degree Quality Assurance in Pakistan

**Mian Shah Bacha**

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## **Abstract**

The primary objective of this article is to find out the possible issues and problems in the Ph.D. degree programmes in Pakistan. It also highlights the importance of higher education with special reference to the Ph.D. degree in English in this country.

The reasons given normally for the Ph.D. degree (English) ineffectiveness are the lack of competent faculty members, inadequately equipped libraries, a shortage in the state of the art language labs, insufficient financial support for the given research, unnecessary delays in granting theses, a sense of narrow-mindedness among the language programme supervisors, a lack of the foreign subject specialists, excessive emphasis on the theoretical works, inadequate availability of full time internet access, insufficient collaboration with the foreign universities, and disharmony with overall national needs and requirements. The respondents' agreements with these problems as noted in the survey questionnaire used in this study is quite high than the disagreement ratio.

These discrepancies need to be addressed in order to produce an effective indigenous English Ph.D. programme in Pakistan.

## **Introduction**

Since Dr Atta Ur Rehman has become the chairman of HEC, an emphasis has been placed on research in Higher Education and on the production of more Ph.D.s. New opportunities, in the form of foreign and indigenous scholarships, are becoming increasingly available. More funds for research projects have been specified and research grants have also been offered to present papers in international conferences, workshops and on other international research forums. In addition, HEC has also created opportunities for hiring new faculty in the universities.

As a result of these initiatives, a large number of students are entering into the Ph.D. programmes. Many universities are initiating new Ph.D. programmes in science subjects, social sciences and humanities, etc. Though the intentions of these universities are commendable, without sufficient planning and resources these prominent Ph.D.

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programmes risk losing their effectiveness.

To maintain quality assurance in the Ph.D. and other doctoral programmes, HEC therefore took stricter steps to monitor Ph.D.s in order to upgrade them to the international level. Universities are, therefore, required to adopt the standards set by the HEC for a marked quality assurance in their Ph.D. programmes.

### **Reasons for Failure**

According to Dr. Shahid Sidique (professor and director of the Centre for Humanities & Social Sciences at Lahore School of Economics), the following corrective steps should be taken for all disciplines in general and for English Ph.D. degree in particular:

1. A sufficient number of qualified faculties should be available on permanent basis for all programmes especially for English Ph.D. studies.
2. A well equipped library containing contemporary resources should be provided for comprehensive research.
3. Ph.D. students, particularly English language students should have personal computers with 24 hour internet access.
4. Supervision choices should be made available so that a student has an option to choose his/her supervisor according to mutual interest and expertise and the supervisor should be accessible for guidance when needed.

There are, of course, other problem areas in the English Ph.D. programmes. These may include inequitable grading and marking, course works assessments, lack of foreign subject specialists, insufficient funding for English Ph.D. research, lack of well equipped language labs, lack of harmony between universities regarding English Ph.D. course standards, untimely provision of stipends to HEC scholars, inadequate collaboration with international English Ph.D. awarding universities, lack of subject specific supervisors with an interest in assisting students and above all, the substandard quality of our indigenous Ph.D.s in English.

In many of our indigenous universities, Ph.D. programmes in general, and English programmes specifically, falter most on that what has been mentioned above.

### **The Role of Thesis**

In addition to these problems, in the Ph.D. programme itself, the final research thesis occupies a central place. Therefore, the advisor/advisee relationship becomes a crucial within a quality doctoral programme. Unfortunately, this relationship is not highly productive in many of our universities because supervisors accept a large number of Ph.D. students for the sake of the Rs.5, 000 honorarium given by HEC.

This fosters a very different relationship from that of sponsor, who works with a student because of a motivating interest in the subject, and the student.

In the former case, the scholar takes a research topic of the supervisor's choice rather than a topic which interests the student. Additionally, the supervisor is not available to the scholar because of the heavy load of other supervised students, causing inefficiency and lapses in quality assurance. Such supervisory issues cause an unending delay in students' work on their thesis despite their having finished course work.

### **Student Involvement**

To ensure quality assurance in Pakistan's Ph.D. programmes, particularly for the Ph.D. in English, it is necessary to involve the students when focusing on the following priorities in the selection of subjects which are supposed to be taught:

1. The meaningful subjects within the various English course disciplines should be selected. The most modern methods of research should be used both quantitatively and qualitatively.
2. The most modern methods of teaching of English instruction should be employed.
3. The contemporary communication skills for an effective international interaction should be facilitated.

### **Objectives**

Objectives of this article are to:

- identify effectiveness, strengths and weaknesses of English Ph.D. degree program,
- find out the causes of its failure,
- high light ways to make Ph.D. program effective.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the most common problems of English Ph.D. degree programme in Pakistan?
2. What are the possible reasons for the substandardness of English Ph.D. degree programme in Pakistan?
3. What are the steps necessary for establishing quality assurance of the English Ph.D. degree in Pakistan?

### **Literature Review**

Universities around the world are restructuring their Ph.D. departments in order to position themselves for greater global competitiveness (Knight and De Wit, 1997; Scott, 1998; Marginson, 2001). There is a great impetus to review the traditional activities of

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universities in their teaching, research, skill development, knowledge enhancement and management in order to be in full compliance with the rapidly changing world of today. The Ph.D. degree has always held an important position in academic circles as a mark of advanced study and excellence in the research methodology and a key element for a new knowledge.

Recently, however, the Ph.D.'s position of eminence has come under scrutiny due to a number of factors. These factors include declining numbers of candidates, concerns about limited relevance to the economy, uncertainty in academic labour markets and reduced confidence in the career benefits to individuals (e.g. Royal Academy of Engineering, 2002). Therefore the traditional role of Ph.D.s is now being challenged; it is being evaluated for its research training strength, its supervision authenticity and or its quality and standards.

Numerous critical reviews of Ph.D. programmes have been published by academics and students in which they have questioned the quality of the learning experience of a

doctoral degree (Delamont et al, 2000; Hoad, 2000; Hoddell et al, 2002; Lewis, 2002; Murray, 2002; Plomin, 2001a, 2001b; Tinkler and Jackson, 2002; Wakeford, 2000,2001).

Quite recently the fitness of the doctoral qualification has been questioned in the United Kingdom and other countries by students and the employers. Increasingly, governments, funding bodies and higher education institutions (HEIs) are also criticizing aspects of doctoral programmes (Anon., 2002). The Roberts Report (2002) agrees that institutions are not adapting quickly enough to the changing experiences of existing students or preparing students for careers beyond the academy.

The changing time has caused different perceptions of the doctoral degree. For a student it can be an “academic passport with international reciprocity” (Noble, 1994), a license to teach at degree level, and an apprenticeship in “proper” academic research (Armstrong, 1994) and for the university the Ph.D. students are “the army of research ‘ants’” and as Mitchell (2002) calls them, which keep the research mission moving forward while many academics are overloaded with responsibilities.

The debate over the relevance of the doctoral degree is not new, nor is it confined to any specific country. The issues of doctoral programmes are raised from time to time in even the most developed countries of the world. Cude (1987) sees many of the North American doctoral programmes as being inflexible, cumbersome, restrictive and wasteful. He has more recently noted that doctoral programmes in various disciplines have become traps for candidates and sinkholes for intellectual resources” (Cude, 2001).

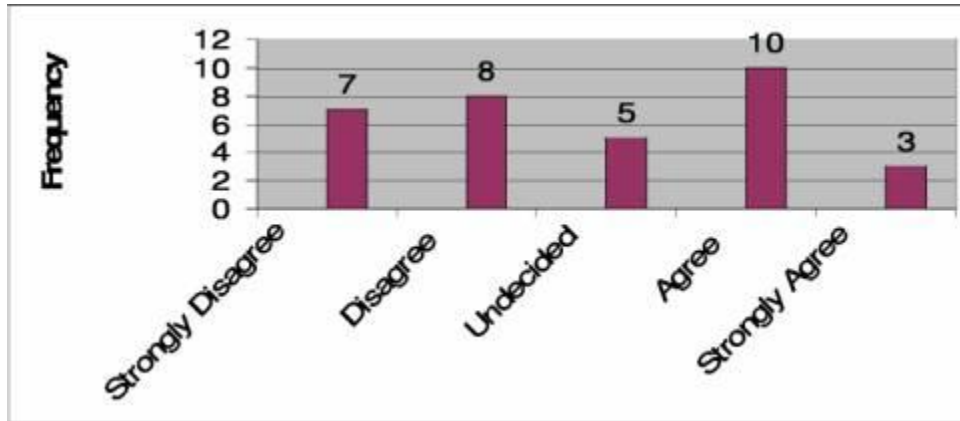
## **Methodology**

In order to assess the shortcomings of the English Ph.D. programme in Pakistan, a questionnaire of ten questions was developed which recorded the responses of MS Leading to Ph.D. students of applied linguistics at the University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore.

The questionnaires were given to 40 students (both male and female) in the English department. Only 33 questionnaires were returned. The aim of the questionnaire was to identify these students’ perceptions about the quality and problems of Ph.D. English degree in Pakistan. Majority of these students were teachers in different colleges and universities and who had themselves faced some of the problems inherent in the Ph.D. programme after joining the English department at the University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore.

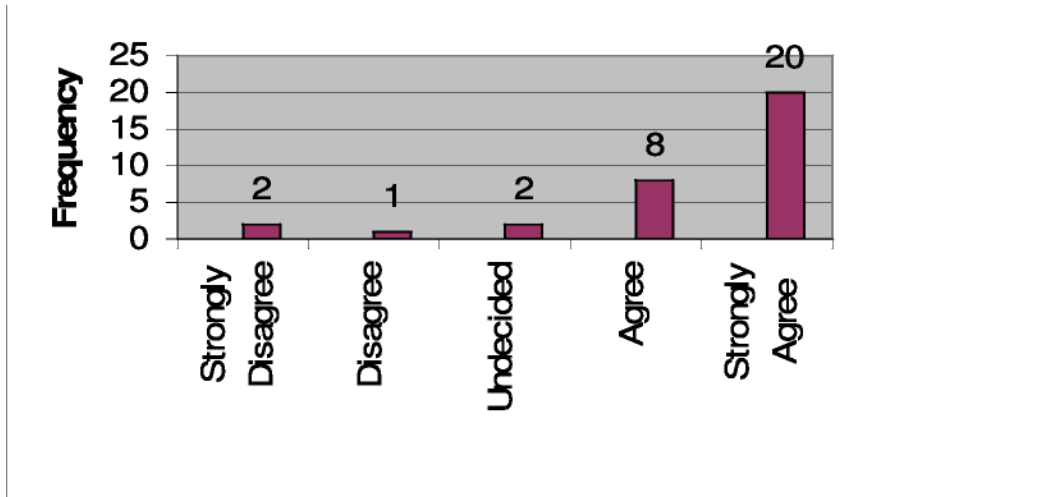
## **Analysis of data**

**Figure 1: Ph.D. compatibility with the Rest of the World**



As mentioned earlier, a questionnaire (given in the appendix) of ten questions was given to the MS leading to Ph.D. (English) students to record their perceptions regarding the Ph.D. programme in general and Ph.D. in English in particular in the Pakistani context. Figure 1 shows the frequency of the agreement and disagreement of the respondents to indicate clearly how compatible our Ph.D. programme is with Ph.D.s of other countries. Ten out of 33 respondents agree that our Ph.D. is compatible but it is only slightly higher than the disagreement statement, which means that we still need significant improvement to come to achieve international quality.

**Figure 2: Well-equipped libraries**

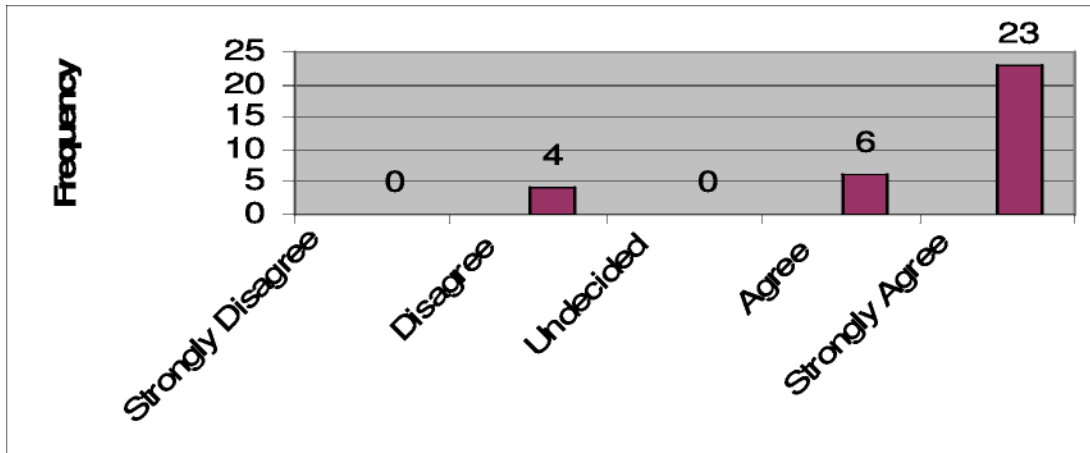


On the question of well-equipped libraries' role in an effective Ph.D. programme and especially for a Ph.D. in English, 20 out of 33 respondents strongly agreed that an adequate library was vital to the programme's success. 8 out of 33 also agreed that well-



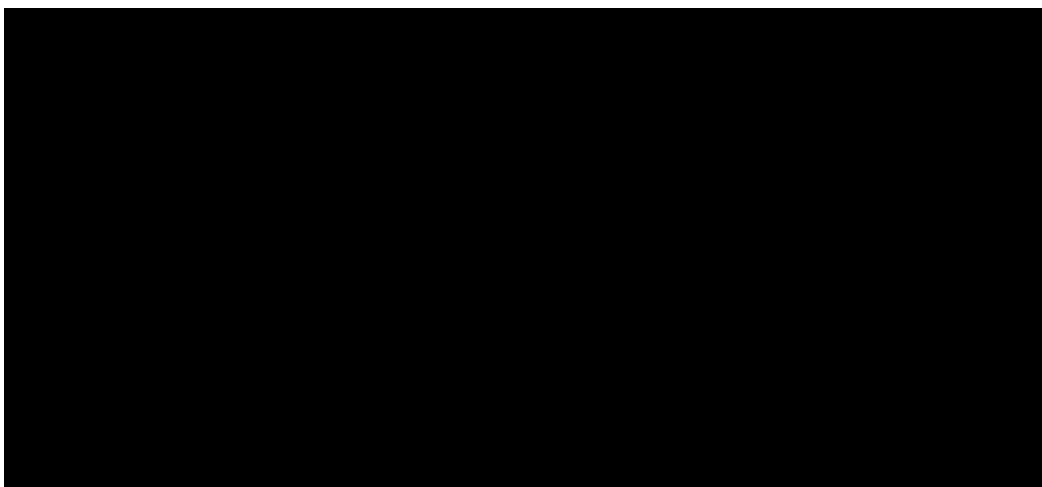
libraries are important with just one respondent disagreeing. Only two respondents strongly disagreed that well-equipped libraries are needed. The responses clearly indicated the perception that without adequate libraries, our Ph.D. programmes are in jeopardy.

**Figure 3: Availability of twenty four hour internet facility**



The perceived importance of the internet in the success of any Ph.D. programme is abundantly clear in the responses to the questionnaire. Twenty three out of 33 respondents agreed that the internet must be made available to scholars for meaningful research. Only 4 respondents disagreed and none out of the 33 respondents strongly disagreed, indicating that adequate internet connections are perceived as being vital for Ph.D. programme.

**Figure 4: Requirement of full time Ph.D. faculty members**



The questionnaire also indicated that there is a strong perception that full time permanent faculty members are required for any successful Ph.D. programme .Eighteen respondents

out of 33 strongly agreed that full time permanent are needed and 7 out of 33 agreed

clearly indicating the perception that competent faculty is important in maintaining a high standard in a Ph.D. programme.

**Figure 5: Foreign faculty hiring**

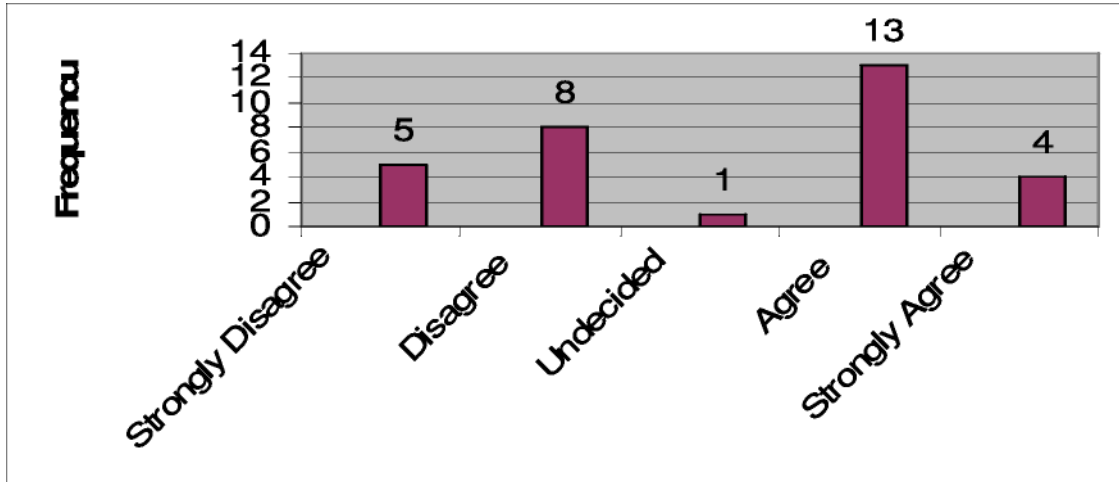
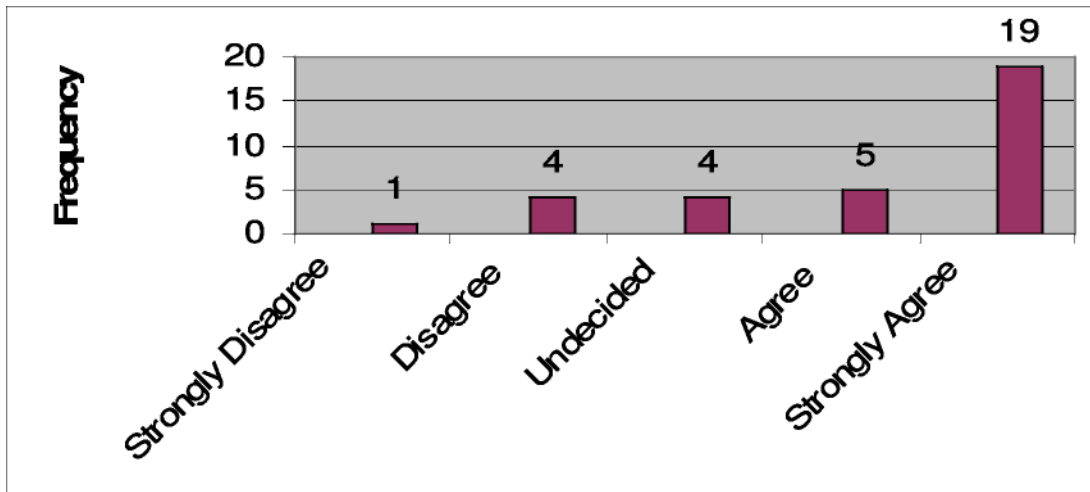


Figure 5 indicated the perception that foreign faculty is needed to maintain quality in the Ph.D. programmes, especially in English Ph.D. degree programme. Thirteen out of 33 agreed while 4 strongly agreed and the remaining 8 and 5 disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively with one undecided. These responses indicate the perception that the initiation of Ph.D. programmes need foreign faculty to ensure the degree’s credibility both abroad and inside the country.

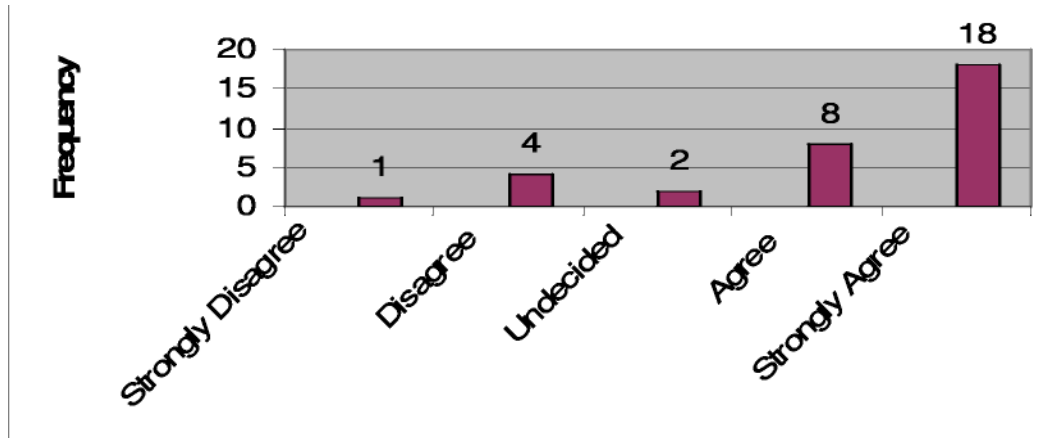
**Figure 6: Relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee.**



The questionnaire indicated the perception that a strong relationship between the supervisor and supervisee is the crux of any Ph.D. programme. Nineteen out of 33

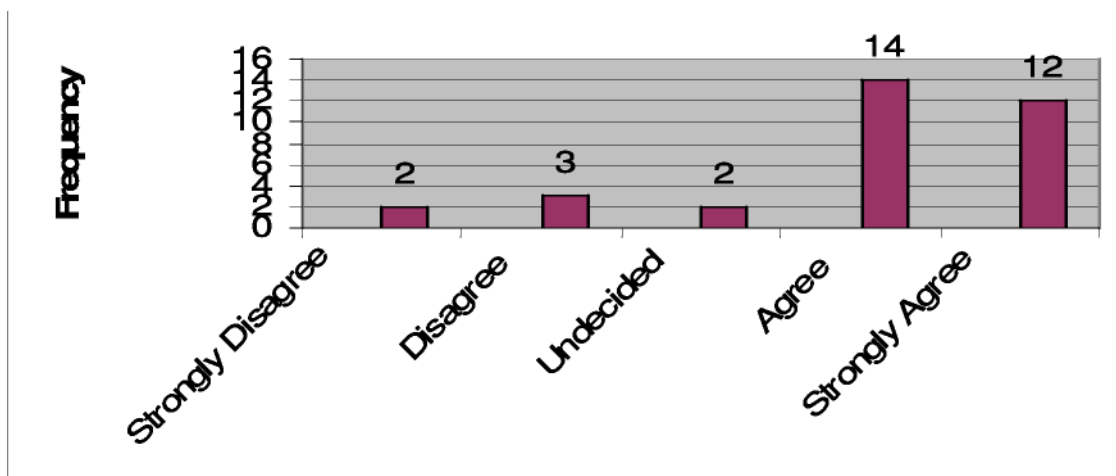
respondents strongly agreed that their relationship certainly affects the Ph.D. standard. Only one out of 33 strongly disagreed while just 4 disagreed with the statement.

**Figure 7: Grants to the Research Scholars**



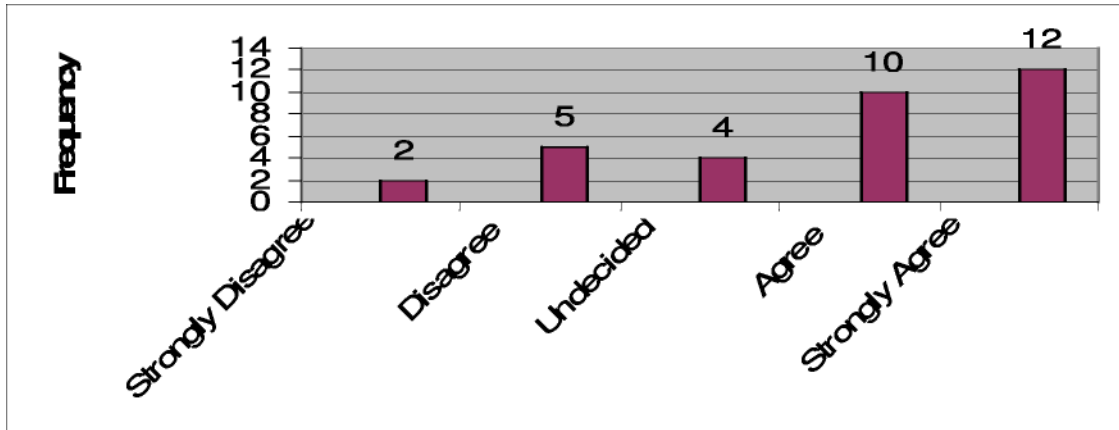
The question concerned itself with the perception of a need for grants or other funds in order to finance doctoral research projects. The figure above shows the strong agreement among the respondents that without such grants or funds, adequate doctoral research is impossible.

**Figure 8: Inter Universities harmony**



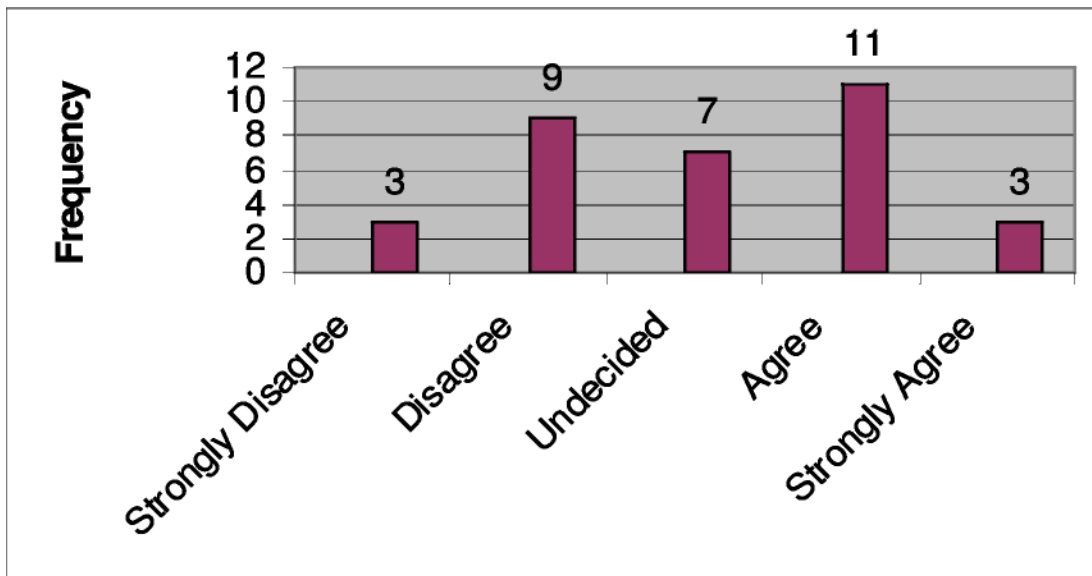
In response to the question of harmony between universities, 14 out of 33 agreed, 12 out of 33 strongly agreed while just 2 strongly disagreed, 3 disagreed and only 2 were undecided. It again points out the perception that Ph.D. programmes must be linked with other universities to produce better results.

**Figure 9: Collaboration with international educational institutions**



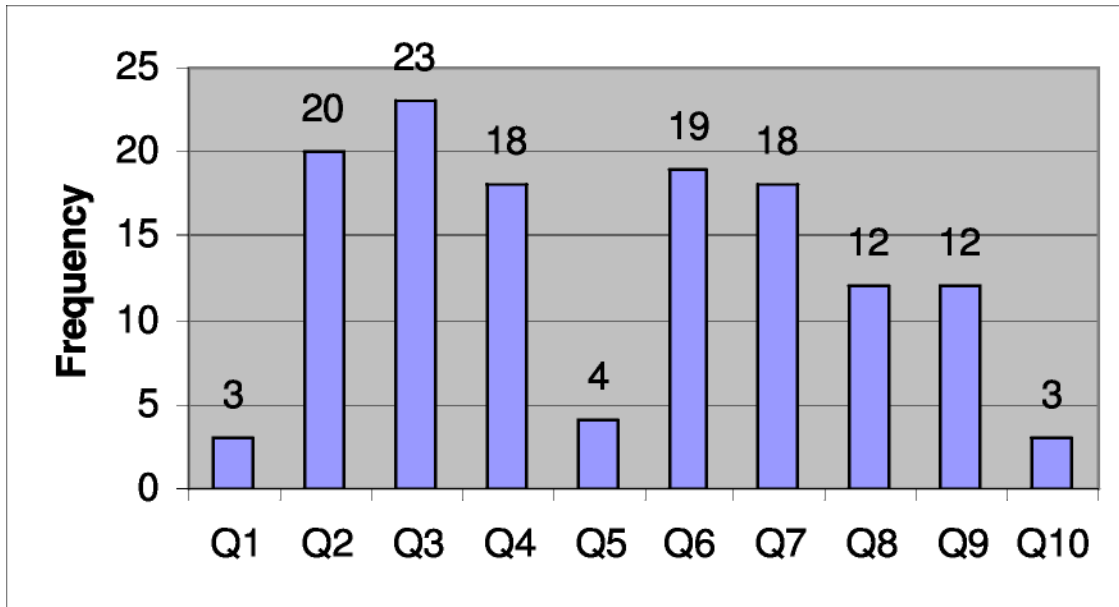
In response to the question of collaboration with international educational institutions, 12 out of 33 respondents strongly agreed, 10 agreed and only 2 strongly disagreed, 5 disagreed. These responses indicate the perception that collaboration with international institutions is necessary in order to produce quality doctoral programmes.

**Figure 10: Lack of effective ways to catch plagiarism**



This question addressed the perception that plagiarism paralyses Ph.D. programmes. This number is only slightly above the respondents who disagree with the statement.

Figure 11: Strongly agreed questions



Looking at Figure 11 above, it is evident that question 2 (Well-equipped libraries are the most important prerequisites for a successful Ph.D. degree programme), Question 3 (Internet facility should be available to the Ph.D. research scholars for 24 hour), Question 4 (Full time permanent faculty members (Ph.D.s in English) are required for a successful Ph.D. programme) Question 6 (The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee affects the Ph.D. standard) and Question 7 (Research grants should be provided to the scholars for their respective researches) are the most strongly agreed statements by the respondents. For Question 1, 20 out of 33, Question 3, 23 out of 33, Question 4, 18 out of 33, Question 6, 19 out of 33, Question 7, 18 out of 33 and for Question 8 and 9 only 12 each strongly agree. All the figures given above clearly indicate the perceptions of 33 MS leading to Ph.D. respondents regarding the possible reasons that there are important issues within Ph.D. programmes in general and Ph.D. in English in particular.

## Results and discussion

The results of this article show that almost all the issues and most probably the existing problems in our Ph.D. programme and most specially in English doctoral programme are confirmed by the students of higher level (MS leading to Ph.D.) themselves. Mostly they have agreed that these ten problems are always creating obstructions for quality assurance in English doctoral programmes. They need to be redressed on quite urgent basis if quality assurance is really desired in the English Ph.D. degree. All of these issues are commonly evidenced in almost all the public and private universities in Pakistan. The Higher Education Commission should not only provide just grants and funds but also should have a strict vigil on the performance of all these universities. The researches of Ph.D. students

must be checked and tested on international forums. They need to be based on our most emergent problems and further this



research must contribute to decrease these problems to ensure academic quality assurance specially in doctoral degrees like Ph.D. in English. Pakistani degree in English can get eminence only if it is brought up to the international standards and levels.

## **Conclusion**

Looking at the results of this study, it is obvious that we do face problems in our Ph.D. programmes especially in the social sciences and humanities and English Ph.D. programme. The English Ph.D. programme seems to be the most affected one in all of the disciplines of the humanities, needing the most aggressive remedial action. This remedial action must be taken not only for a host of problems within the department itself, but to ensure an urgently needed quality assurance within this discipline as well. This article outlines a number of those issues and problems within the Ph.D. in English degree programme in Pakistan. The concept of the traditional Ph.D. is changing and changes are afoot to make it more acceptable to all those who are associated with it in one way or other. HEC is also taking every possible step to upgrade the indigenous Ph.D. programmes. Ph.D. in English can be bettered only if its quality assurance is made sure by overcoming all these issues and problems, it has had always till this time.

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Appendix 1  
Questionnaire

The researcher is interested in knowing the weaknesses, issues and problems of English Ph.D. programme in Pakistan. Your participation in this survey will help the researcher to complete his article. Kindly spare a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire. Your responses to this questionnaire will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely  
Mian Shah Bacha  
MS leading to  
Ph.D. Scholar  
UMT, Lahore.

Concerning your own background, please fill in the following:

1. Sex: Male Female
2. Age: years \_\_\_\_\_
3. Highest academic qualification.  
Master's degree Doctorate degree other; please specify \_\_\_\_\_
4. Teaching experience \_\_\_\_\_ Years

Please tick the appropriate Nos. (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) of each statement **1**Strongly Disagree (SD) **2** Disagree (D) **3**Undecided (U) **4**Agree (A) **5** Strongly Agree (SA)

No	Questions	SD	D	U	A	SA
1	Pakistani Ph.D. degree in English is compatible with the rest of the world.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Well-equipped libraries are important prerequisites for a successful Ph.D. degree programme.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Internet facility should be available to the Ph.D. research scholars for 24 hour.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Full time permanent faculty members (Ph.D.s in English) are required for a successful Ph.D. programme.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Foreign faculty hiring is the only solution for the success of English Ph.D. degree programme.	1	2	3	4	5
6	The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee does not affect the Ph.D. standard.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Research grants should be provided to the scholars for their respective researches.	1	2	3	4	5

<b>8</b>	Inter universities' harmony is very much needed for quality Ph.D. programmes.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>9</b>	Collaboration with the international higher education institutions is much needed.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>10</b>	There are no effective ways to catch plagiarism.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

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