

## Identifying the Research Challenges of Farhangian University Professors in the Field of Humanities (a Phenomenological Study)

Mazhar Babaee<sup>\*1</sup>, Parastoo Salehi<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The present study aimed to identify the research challenges faced by Farhangian University professors in the field of humanities.

**Methodology:** Adopting a critical paradigm with a qualitative approach, this research employed a phenomenological strategy based on Colaizzi's multi-stage model. The participants consisted of 12 male and female professors from Farhangian University in Kurdistan Province during the 2023–2024 academic year. Professors were selected through purposive sampling with maximum variation. Data were collected using researcher-designed semi-structured interviews and analyzed through latent qualitative content analysis alongside an analogical-inductive tactic.

**Findings:** The results revealed two main categories: (1) challenges in the individual domain (mental-ethical and knowledge-skill related), and in the work environment (supportive, organizational attitude, publications, and social factors); and (2) proposed solutions to address these challenges.

**Conclusion:** The findings indicate that the research process in humanities is hindered by multi-dimensional and multi-level obstacles, which threaten the sustainability and future of research in this field. A comprehensive review and reform of the research process in humanities is therefore essential.

**Value:** This study offers valuable insights for policymakers and planners by highlighting both the challenges and potential solutions for advancing research in the humanities.

**Keywords:** *Farhangian University Professors, Research Challenges, Humanities, Solutions, Phenomenological Study*

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1. Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Sciences, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran. (Corresponding Author) [m.babaie@cfu.ac.ir](mailto:m.babaie@cfu.ac.ir).

2. Master's Student in Psychology and Education of Exceptional Children, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

## Extended Abstract

**Introduction:** Research is one of the fundamental human needs for progress, innovation, and continuous learning. In contemporary societies, the advancement and prosperity of nations are closely tied to the quality and quantity of their research output. Advanced societies consider their global standing to be highly dependent on the expansion and deepening of research, and consequently, the role of research in national development is becoming increasingly visible. Countries now measure their scientific growth and developmental progress by research indicators such as the number of active researchers, the proportion of the research budget in national expenditure, the number of articles published in scientific journals, citations received, and the extent of international collaborations. These indicators not only reflect the vitality of the academic community but also reveal the strategic vision of a country toward science and knowledge production. To achieve such goals, the strengthening of the scientific community is crucial. One of the most important steps in this process is fostering a “research spirit” among academics and students alike. The development of a research-oriented culture creates favorable conditions for scientific originality, innovation, and evidence-based knowledge production. This cultural orientation motivates researchers to address practical needs and contribute to the improvement of social, educational, and economic systems. However, despite the undeniable importance of research, the research process in many contexts—including the humanities—faces considerable obstacles. These barriers range from individual-level constraints such as lack of skills or ethical issues, to systemic problems such as insufficient institutional support, lack of funding, or undervaluation of humanities research in broader policy agendas. Professors at Farhangian University, which serves as Iran’s central institution for training teachers, occupy a unique position in this regard. They not only teach specialized courses to a specific group of student-teachers but also bring with them diverse experiences from other universities and higher education institutions. This dual experience provides them with a broader and more comprehensive perspective on the challenges of research in the field of humanities. Investigating their lived experiences therefore offers valuable insights into both the obstacles and possible solutions for strengthening humanities research in Iran.

**Purpose:** The present study sought to identify and analyze the research challenges faced by Farhangian University professors in the field of humanities, and to present solutions based on their lived experiences. The study was guided by the following research questions: According to the lived experiences of Farhangian University professors, what challenges do researchers in the humanities face?

From the perspective of this group of professors, what solutions can be proposed to reduce or overcome these challenges?

By answering these questions, the study aimed to provide not only a descriptive account of existing problems but also actionable recommendations that could support planners, policymakers, and academic institutions in creating more favorable conditions for humanities research.



Journal of  
Knowledge-Research  
Studies (JKRS)

Vol 4

Issue 1

Serial Number 11



**Methodology:** To address the research purpose, the study adopted a critical paradigm and employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological strategy in the tradition of Van Manen. Phenomenology was chosen because it provides a systematic method for capturing and interpreting the lived experiences of individuals. The participants consisted of 12 male and female professors from Farhangian University of Kurdistan Province during the 2023–2024 academic year (1402–1403).

Sampling was conducted purposefully to capture maximum variation and heterogeneity in participants' experiences. This approach ensured that a wide range of perspectives, shaped by different academic backgrounds, professional experiences, and institutional roles, would be included in the study. Data collection was carried out using a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide, designed to elicit deep insights into both challenges and solutions.

For data analysis, latent qualitative content analysis was employed, supplemented by an analogical-inductive tactic to capture both explicit themes and implicit meanings within the data. This approach allowed the researchers to move beyond surface-level observations and uncover the underlying patterns shaping the research environment in the humanities.

**Findings:** The analysis of interviews revealed a wide range of challenges and solutions, which were classified into two main parts.

#### 1. Research Challenges

Challenges were found at both the individual and environmental levels.

Individual challenges included mental, ethical, and knowledge-skill-related barriers, while environmental challenges encompassed institutional, organizational, publication-related, and social factors.

**Table 1. Research challenges**

Main categories	Subcategories	Concepts
Individual challenges	Mental and moral challenges	Privilege versus utility, Data generation, Unhealthy competition between researchers, Mentioning names not involved in the work, Lack of research interest.
	Knowledge and skill challenges	Ignorance of the basic knowledge of research, Lack of mastery of foreign languages, Unfamiliarity with software, Weakness in teamwork, and Low level of study.
Environmental challenges	Supporting challenges	Lack of financial support, Lack of access to suitable physical facilities, Limited access to scientific resources, Provision of the research budget of one university by another university, Lack of support in the dissemination of findings, The lack of cooperation of the research community with the researcher.
	The challenges of the attitude of organizations and universities to research	Lack of attention to research in the field of humanities, Compulsion to conduct research in universities, Education-orientedness of universities, and Organizations' lack of attention to research.
	Challenges related to publications and projects	Lack of number and variety in publications, Longness of the process of acceptance of articles, The dominance of personal relationships in the acceptance and publication of articles, The lack of competence of reviewers, and the rule of personal relationships in handing over a research project.
	Social challenges	Absence of study and learning culture, Certificate orientation, Undervaluation of research, Emergence of pseudo-researchers.

The findings emphasize that research challenges in the humanities cannot be attributed to a single factor but instead represent a web of interconnected issues spanning personal, organizational, and societal dimensions.

## 2. Solutions to Overcome Challenges

In response to the identified problems, professors suggested a series of solutions at both the individual and environmental levels. These solutions emphasized the need for ethical commitment, skill development, structural reform, and cultural change.



**Journal of  
Knowledge-Research  
Studies (JKRS)**

**Vol 4**

**Issue 1**

**Serial Number 11**



Table 2. Solutions

Main categories	Subcategories	Concepts
Individual solutions	Ethical and mental solutions	Observance of the principles of professional research ethics, maintaining the spirit of research, targeting and applying research, and conducting targeted and applied research.
	Knowledge and skill solutions	Creative and analytical thinking, Increase the level of study of researchers, Familiarity with scientific languages, Familiarity with research software.
Solutions related to the research environment	Supporting solutions	Financial and economic support, Providing suitable facilities, and Access to appropriate information sources.
	Solutions related to the attitude of organizations and universities	Paying attention to the quality versus the number of articles, Assignment of educational matters instead of research work, reviewing the curriculum of the universities, and the Researcher's presence in important decisions.
	Solutions related to publications	Monitoring the process of printing and accepting articles, increasing the number of journals, and double-blinding the method of accepting the research plan.
	Social solutions	Creating the ground for the training of research people, Raising the position of the researcher in the general society.

Together, these solutions illustrate that tackling research challenges requires both **bottom-up initiatives** (individual responsibility and skill enhancement) and **top-down reforms** (institutional support, policy adjustments, and cultural change).

**Conclusion:** The lived experiences of Farhangian University professors reveal that research challenges in the humanities are multidimensional, cutting across individual, organizational, and social contexts. These challenges threaten not only the quality of academic output but also the motivation of novice researchers, many of whom may become discouraged or resort to unethical shortcuts. If left unaddressed, such conditions could undermine the long-term sustainability and credibility of humanities research.

At the same time, the solutions proposed by professors highlight both the responsibility of researchers themselves—to adhere to ethical standards, improve their skills, and cultivate a spirit of inquiry—and the obligations of universities, research organizations, and policymakers to provide structural, financial, and cultural support. Ultimately, strengthening research in the humanities requires a holistic approach: fostering a research culture across society, enhancing institutional capacities, and empowering researchers to overcome obstacles.

**Value:** This study provides a fresh perspective on the research process by systematically examining both challenges and solutions in the humanities from the standpoint of Farhangian University professors. The insights gained are particularly valuable for policymakers, planners, and academic leaders who seek to strengthen research capacity in the humanities. By acknowledging the multidimensional nature of these challenges and implementing comprehensive solutions, it is possible to cultivate a more vibrant, ethical, and productive research culture—one that not only benefits universities but also contributes to the advancement of society as a whole.

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Journal of  
Knowledge-Research  
Studies (JKRS)

Vol 4

Issue 1

Serial Number 11

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Journal of

Knowledge-Research  
Studies (JKRS)

Vol 4

Issue 1

Serial Number 11