

## Difficulty for Students to Complete their Studies for the Licenciante at the Catholic Teachers College, Baucau, Timor-Leste

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### ABSTRACT

*The objective of this research was to analyse reasons why postgraduate students at the Instituto Católico para a Formação de Professores (ICFP) Baucau, Timor-Leste, translated from Portuguese as Catholic Teachers College, Baucau, face difficulties in continuing their studies. This study used the qualitative method for research and analysis. The data collection guidelines involved interviews with different sources, including six postgraduate students, one representative lecturer, and one parent, to make the data valid and credible. The thematic analysis was applied to analyse the obtained data. This research indicates that students need to extend their studies due to various difficulties, such as balancing double responsibilities, academic problems, personal issues, job status problems, financial difficulties, and low motivation. These difficulties become significant obstacles that cause students to prolong their studies. Based on the study results, the research concluded that the problems and difficulties are situational conditions that hinder postgraduate students from completing their studies and obtaining their postgraduate diploma within the appropriate timeframe..*

**Keyword :** Difficulties, Academic Problems, Low Motivation, Extension of Study, Postgraduate Students

### 1. Introduction

In today's millennial era, various developments and competitions stimulate people's attitudes and lifestyles. This is the reality in which tertiary education prepares and forms 21st-century students who can become key to keeping pace with the world's constant change. The university or institution needs to facilitate students in a variety of ways that enable them in their studies because students everywhere react to life in different ways depending on their personal lives, academic demands, and administrative organisation, as well as coping with other challenges.

These difficulties are common phenomena that everyone faces in their everyday life. Higher education students also face various obstacles to continuing their studies for some time after they leave school (Kocsis & Molnár, 2024; Faizuddin & Noor, 2023). At the Catholic Institute for Teacher Training (ICFP) Baucau, Timor-Leste, students who finished their studies with the degree of Bachelor of Basic Education, having graduated from 2006 to 2022, now have the opportunity to continue their Bachelor's studies to Licenciante level. ICFP started this program in 2017 and has continued up to 2023. According to information presented by the administration of the Licenciante program, 68 students out

of a total of 329 enrolments faced different challenges to complete their studies. It can be assumed that these problems also occur in other universities throughout Timor-Leste.

Related to the problems described, this research wanted to know, firstly, why postgraduate students do not complete their studies in the timeframe set by the institution. Secondly, what are the reasons that prevent them from completing their studies? Thirdly, what other difficulties do postgraduate students face in extending their studies? Any difficulties that they face also become an extra difficulty in that they do not finish their studies in the allocated time.

Therefore, the objective of this study was to analyze the reasons postgraduate students fail to continue their studies and to discover the difficulties they face in completing their studies.

In the university world, students come with characters and life stories. Therefore, in the study process, they faced many challenges that made it difficult for them to achieve the learning goals to improve the degree of literary licenciante. There is much research that discusses the difficulties faced by students, such as several

academic difficulties (Abdulkaki, Suhaimi, Alsaqqaf, & Jawad, 2018; Nurcahyani & Prastuti, 2021), personal problems (Lodge, Kennedy, Lockyer, Arguel, & Pachman, 2018; Ahmeed, 2018), work status, finance problems (Laframboise, Bailey, Dang, Rose, Zhou, Berg, Holland, Abdul, O'Connor, El-Sahli, Boucher, Fairman, Deng, Shaw, Noblett, D'addario, Empey, & Sinclair, 2023), and lack of motivation (Mauliya, Relianisa, & Rokhyati, 2020).

Academic difficulties are a barrier that prevents adult students from achieving their study plans successfully. Often, students prolong their studies until they do not complete the literary degree they are looking for because, in the process of studying, there is a human tendency to procrastinate on study activities (Fentaw, Moges, & Ismail, 2022; Husain, Wantu, & Pautina, 2023). Others reported difficulty in managing time and productivity activities (Gallardo-Lolandes, Alcas- Zapata, Flores, & Ocaña-Fernánd, 2020). Other research found there was frustration during students' studies because they did not have strong mental health throughout the study process (de la Fuente, Peralta- Sánchez, Martínez-Vicente, Sander, Garzón- Umerenkova, & Zapata, 2020). Research also identified that students had difficulty in organising assessments effectively and fear of examination and evaluation (Mufida & Siswati, 2020), as well as other influences such as finding it difficult to write a research proposal (Lestari, 2020) and lack of academic support and guidance (Alani & Hawas, 2021).

In addition to the difficulties described, Ahmeed (2018) stated that academic difficulties are also related to students' personal abilities, which are very important in achieving success. Academic skills such as literacy capacity, computing power, information processing, a reflective approach, written communication skills, and assessment and examination. If students do not have these skills, then they face major obstacles in learning. It becomes even more difficult when students do not have the opportunity to express their ideas in speech and writing that they achieved in their previous learning.

In the process of studying, postgraduate students come with complicated private lives and various personal challenges. The significant personal difficulties they face in not completing their studies on time are often caused by difficulty managing private stress (Kaur & Tailor, 2023), not making adequate decisions for oneself (Kümmel & Kimmerle, 2020), difficulty managing personal conflict (Novitasari, Hidayati, & Setyowat, 2020), and inability to manage private time (Fentaw, Moges, & Ismail, 2022), as well as difficulty in balancing private and academic life (Ojo, Paleye, & Akpunne, 2021). Other difficulties include managing relationships (Valenzuela, Codina, Castillo, & Pestana, 2020), feeling worthless (Gillen-O'Neel, 2021), and not searching for alternative strategies to resolve the tendency to procrastinate (Cursi Campos, 2020).

Personal influences were found to diminish creativity and productivity in academic achievement as well as uncertainty and distress (Costaños, Moneva, Malbas 2020; Gallardo-Lolandes et al., 2020).

Another difficulty that prevents postgraduate students during the process of learning to extend their studies is employment status. Employment status is the condition of a student that shows whether a student works full-time, part-time, or not. Graduate students who are researchers often face study challenges because of difficulties in managing time between study and work (Hidayanto, 2021). Their time is limited because they take on greater responsibilities at work and have little time to study. Commitment to study is not high because they give first priority to work rather than study (Angraini & Neviyarni, 2020). High-stress conditions due to high work demands, which make it difficult for students to concentrate on the process of writing and doing assignments (Seaward, 2020; Nurcahyani & Prastuti, 2021). The student who takes on the role of service limits their studies and becomes physically and mentally weak (Drăghici & Cazan, 2022). It is difficult to make a connection between academic concepts and practical experience in the field of work to gain clarity for research (Creswell, 2014). However, other research shows that students feel pressure because they receive less support from colleagues in their workplace (Kaur & Tailor, 2023).

In the world of research, money becomes an essential tool for research students because studies illustrate that students' academic success is related to finance (Triwahyuni & Prasetyo, 2021). When students face financial constraints, they face serious difficulties that prevent them from conducting research until they leave school (Aina, Baici, Casalone, & Pastore, 2022). Limited funding does not help them access resources such as books in online libraries, articles published by scholars, and applications for data analysis (Dev, Abraham, Nair & Ashraf, 2023). The information collected is limited because the researcher has limitations to purchase the tools needed in the data collection process, such as an Android mobile phone. Students are limited to registering names and printing research results for presentation and publication at a specified time. Students face difficulties in their daily lives, as they sacrifice time to focus on basic needs such as food, shelter, or transportation (Lorenzo-Quiles, Galdón-López, & Lendínez-Turón, 2023). Anxious thoughts make students stressed, and mental wellbeing is disturbed (Triwahyuni & Prasetyo, 2021). Project options become limited because students with financial difficulties do not choose a remote location that is rich in data because they cannot accommodate themselves during the data collection process.

In the process of conducting research, motivation is an important aspect for researchers to strengthen and stimulate themselves to organise research activities



according to the target and will of student researchers. Highly motivated students are curious about theories and practices that are relevant to research needs with strong reasons (Tayebi, Gomez, & Delgado, 2021). However, research has indicated that some students extended their studies due to a lack of motivation both internally and externally (Mauliya, Relianisa, & Rokhyati, 2020). The internal motivation that makes it difficult for them is that students do not feel that research is an important part of their study experience that will help and empower them in the real world of work in the future (Angraini & Neviyarni, 2020). If students do not feel confident about how to start research because of a lack of research skills and experience and unclear research objectives, they feel stressed by putting pressure on themselves, physically and mentally. (Kaur & Tailor, 2023). In addition to internal motivation, Tus (2020) states that external motivation also influences students' study performance. Students' willingness to do research is not high due to lack of support and acceptance from supervisors. The student feels that the research efforts are not worthwhile. They also felt that family members and employers were not supportive of their studies (Novitasari et al., 2020). Practical challenges were found, such as less access to research resources, time constraints, and finances, as well as difficulty in organising time (Fentaw et al., 2022).

The difficulty of study extension described and explained by various authors illustrates the significant barriers that enable higher education students to extend their studies until they stop studying themselves. However, it is important for students to have a solid study plan, improve mutual communication, and empower themselves to overcome study difficulties with flexibility, perseverance, patience, seriousness, and enthusiasm because there is no problem without a solution.

## 2. Research Methods

In this study, the researcher used Qualitative Method (QM) with narrative design. QM is an academic research approach that focuses on an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon or event that occurs (Prayogi & Pekalongan, 2021; Rahadi, 2020). Creswell (2014) states that QM is an appropriate method to solve problems that the researcher does not know and find out the situation that the participants face. The objective of QM is to explain and understand the context, meaning, and experience of the subject in an integrated manner.

To discover exactly the case that the participants faced for the extension of their postgraduate studies, the researcher used the technique of Purposive Sampling (PS). PS is how the researcher selects people or groups that have characteristics relevant to the research objective (Bakkalbasioglu, 2020; Lenaini, 2021). Therefore, in this research, the researcher selected six ICFP postgraduate students who were studying one of the six units being offered – Mathematics Education,

Natural Science Education, Art Education, Portuguese Language Education, English Language Education, or Inclusive Education. The researcher also chose a lecturer representative from one academic area and a parent representative from the six students.

To collect the data, the researcher used a semi-structured interview technique. Semi-structured interviews are conversations that take place between the researcher and the research subject based on a determined research topic, but with flexibility for the researcher and the research subject to explore more information with unexpected follow-up questions (Ahlin, 2019). The researcher conducted one-on-one telephone interviews using seven designed questions. To make the data valid and credible, the researcher utilised the data triangulation technique. The data triangulation technique is the way used in the process of collecting data from different sources, both people, places, and time (Bans- Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). Thus, the data collected came from different people, including students, lecturers, and parents. In the triangulation process, the data from the participants was confirmed. Data collection of this was made with thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method used in qualitative research, used to identify, analyse, and report themes within data (Campbell, Orr, Durepos, Nguyen, Li, Whitmore, Gehrke, Graham, & Jack, 2021; Miles, Humberman, and Saldaña, 2018; Morgan, 2022). This technique helps the researcher organise and describe the data collected in detail after interpreting various aspects of the research topic with flexibility and transparency. Therefore, in the process of data analysis, the researcher familiarised and grouped similar data, searched and examined the theme, defined the name of the theme, and reported or named all the data obtained by the researcher in a structured manner.

Part of the research process used to achieve its purpose is ethical considerations, an important step that needs attention. Mirza, Bellalem, & Mirza (2023) stated that ethical considerations refer to the principles and values that guide an individual or group's attitude or decision made during research. Consideration ensures that actions and decisions are morally right, respectful, and fair to the parties involved in the data collection process (Resnik, 2020). Therefore, in this research, the researcher has an obligation to respect the interviewees by dignifying them, recognising their rights, and considering their autonomy to provide information freely. The researcher has to ensure that their language and body language do not harm the respondent's feelings and thoughts. It is important to clearly state the purpose of the research when preparing the consent letter. Finally, the research results obtained from the interviewees are confidential. Protecting the privacy of the respondent by not disclosing their identity and the information that they provided is essential..

### 3. Results and Discussions

#### 3.1 Results

##### 3.1.1 Dual Roles

Each person or student assumes different tasks are important for them to perform in everyday life in a balanced and meaningful way. The tasks that postgraduate students are expected to complete can sometimes make it difficult for them to finish their studies. Student MM3R (2024) reported, "I extended my studies because I had two roles, as a mother and as a student. Both these tasks are all important to me. I cannot leave my sick child, who has been hospitalised for a year." Student ZBF (2024) also stated, "I cannot continue my studies because people cannot care for my children. Although my parents are there, they cannot care for my child because they have to earn a living to support the needs of my brothers who are in school." Thus, the variety of tasks that postgraduate students face in life becomes a real difficulty, making it difficult for them to finish their studies on time.

##### 3.1.2 Academic difficulties

Academic difficulties refer to the challenges that students face in their educational journey, which prevent them from succeeding and progressing in their studies. MM3R (2024) stated, "I have difficulty with academic problems that I don't understand, especially the way monographs are written. I don't know how to make a quotation or how to do research, how to find and research scholarly ideas for the selected material, or how to write in American Psychological Association (APA) style. I have difficulties in how to find references and how to write in a structured way according to academic standards. Although ICFP lecturers teach with high quality for research studies, I have limited knowledge."

NFSF (2024) shared, "I have difficulty accessing the internet to find references that help my writing. I have forgotten how to quote directly and indirectly. Although I tried to read my bachelor assignments again, I felt confused when quoting the authors' ideas. It is difficult to organise sub-topics and formulate ideas in a structured manner. The difficulties that I face are not because the lecturers' teaching methods do not help me, but because I stopped studying for two years."

JAFR (2024) further states, "Student learning in the first-year unit for academic text writing following the APA model and the relationship with research methods in the fourth year is low. In year 1, students do not learn well, so the capacity to learn, especially to write, becomes minimal. Some students just listen. They don't talk much; they don't read much, so they don't develop their writing skills. Students themselves also do not want to make the effort to find various references to help their writing." Therefore, the significant academic difficulties

faced by postgraduate students prevent them from completing their studies within the stipulated timeframe.

##### 3.1.3 Personal difficulties

Some students have personal problems that make it difficult for them to complete their studies in the stipulated time. NFSF (2024) reported that "my husband did not allow me to go out to consult my lecturer when I was writing chapters 1 to 3 of the proposal for my research because my son was not used to being with anyone else. My mother has leukaemia and needs care. I have to do the housework. I have to take care of my child. I have to make a living because I don't have money. I make ice blocks and fry peanuts so I have money to buy milk for my baby because my breasts hurt so I can't breastfeed, and I still have to meet the basic needs of the household."

ATS (2024) adds that "My husband and I have problems because we have no one to look after our children. My husband and family did not want me to continue my undergraduate studies. We separated, so I looked for a job to earn money to support my needs." JAFR (2024) further stated that "students who have personal problems such as divorce, children living separately, school requirements for marriage, childbirth, a husband who does not give permission for them to continue their studies, and lack of money make it difficult for them to continue their studies."

CASX (2024) as a representative of the student's family added that the student extended her studies because "the children are young. Children are sick and frequently in and out of hospitals and need care and attention, so there is insufficient time to write monographs and lack of time to focus on study." Thus, the personal problems that postgraduate students face in their daily lives become considerable and prevent them from completing their studies for a long time.

##### 3.1.4 Job status difficulties

Postgraduate students who study and teach part- or full-time have difficulty completing their studies on time because of the demands of academic responsibility and professionalism. EDSG (2024) states that "I am a volunteer teacher who has many demands from the school to cover the teaching schedule for third cycle Central Basic Education (CBE) students and Secondary Education (SE) students. I teach from 8:00 to 12:00 for CBE, then continue teaching SE from 13:00 to 17:00. I was worried about the time needed for double the amount of work, so I decided not to continue studying."

ATS (2024) also states that "I work all day to earn money so I can meet my children's needs and buy a laptop for my brother to do his homework. I find it difficult to find time to write at night after returning from work, as I am busy making bread to sell in the morning, which helps



me save money for my studies.” JAFR (2024) further states that “students who come to study at ICFP mostly teach. Because they want to improve their academic standing, they come to study, but they cannot finish their studies on time because the school expects them to do the teaching duties needed. It is difficult for them to manage time properly. The commitment and willingness to write is not high.”

Therefore, students who study, at the same time working at school or in a company and doing extra work at home, find it difficult to manage time, commit and find the will to continue writing their monograph so they cannot finish their studies on time.

#### 3.1.5 Finances

In postgraduate studies, money is a significant necessity that facilitates students' studies by accessing resources such as books, tools such as laptops, and opportunities that directly benefit the quality of study work. Student JBX (2024) said that “I do not have enough money to buy a laptop or to buy books that support me when writing a monograph.”

ATS (2024) also stated, “I do not have enough money to buy a laptop that would enable me to write a monograph at home.” NFSF (2024) stated, “I do not have enough money to access important study resources, especially money to pay for internet packages to search for academic articles and books on the internet that would support my writing.” ZBF (2024) also stated, “I have written the proposal for chapter I-III, but I had to discontinue my studies because the money I had to pay for the bus to and from ICFP was not enough.”

#### 3.1.6 Low motivation

Motivation is an important condition for all postgraduate students' academic achievement, but students who lack internal or external motivation find it difficult to succeed in their studies. MMR3 (2024) confirmed that “I did not finish my studies on time because I did not motivate myself. I didn't try on my own. My family is not supportive, and so the spirit to study is not high.” JBX (2024) said that “my interest in continuing my studies decreased because the money saved from work to buy a laptop and books to help my writing was used for family members who died.”

NSFS (2024) states that “I feel unmotivated to continue my studies because my father cannot support me financially. I thought about this a lot because my father worked hard in the hot sun until he became sick. In addition, my personal motivation is not great to continue my studies because my husband does not support me by helping with our child so I cannot go to ICFP to write my monograph.” JAFR (2024) added that “students lose the will and feel resistant to writing because they need to write according to the rubrics of writing, they need to

compare ideas, and the way ideas are presented in each chapter. In addition, students are less motivated because they do not understand the guidance of their mentors to repeat their advice.” CASX (2024), a family representative, said that “in the study process, motivation becomes less because study is difficult.” Thus, the feeling of discouragement that students have from themselves and from family members becomes a significant challenge that leads them to make decisions so they do not complete their work in the given time frame.

### 3.2 Discussions

The data reported above illustrate that students do not finish their studies on time because they experience various difficulties such as duplicate roles, academic challenges, personal problems, problems with service status, finance problems, and lack of motivation during their studies.

Students who take on various responsibilities and duties at home, school, and in the community have difficulty balancing work and study. They have difficulty managing time and less study focus. According to Brodowicz (2024), academic demands often result in the neglect of other priorities and responsibilities. In order for students not to abandon their responsibilities, it is important to have a personal schedule that helps them to balance each task in order to achieve academic goals. In this study, one student said that she had two important roles in life, namely the role of mother and student. She added that she could not leave her sick son, who had been hospitalised repeatedly for a year, to focus on her studies. From this evidence, it shows that although academic requirements require students to finish their studies on time, but students who are mothers cannot ignore their motherly responsibilities. It is important for them to manage their time with each task so that they can finish their studies to reach the academic goals they hope to achieve.

Academic challenges are significant obstacles that students do not overcome to achieve their dreams of study. Itzkowitz, Murdock, Dimino, and Novarro (2023) reported that students who have weak academic performance, inadequate study skills, and insufficient academic support create impediments to the reach of graduation. Related to this report, the research results indicate that although students study a unit for learning to write academic texts according to the APA model and a unit on research studies in their fourth year as well as receive guidance during the writing process, they still

have weaknesses and academic limitations. Their understanding of the lessons learnt and academic articles read is not high. But this does not affect the ability to write according to APA rules. They prefer to listen to information rather than read a lot to get ideas for expressing ideas orally and in writing. It is true that the author and the results of the study presented play an important role in the extent of students' study.

Postgraduate students face complicated private problems. Almousa, Al-Shobaki, Arabiyat, Al-Shatrat, Al-Shogran, & Sulaiman (2022) demonstrated that the main problems that students face during their studies are poor time management, health problems, and balancing multiple tasks, such as community service and home commitments. Gallego, Cobos, & Gallego (2021) added that students with unstable budgets have increased difficulties that influence academic studies and well-being. In addition, students who experience isolation or lack of support do not allow them to study effectively. According to the experts, the data collected often show the student's family members do not allow them to leave to continue their studies and consultations. They must take care of children, care for sick family members, and look after things in the house. If there is no money, a student needs to earn a living, such as making and selling ice blocks or frying peanuts to buy milk because of breast pain so breastfeeding is not possible, nor is it possible to work outside so you can earn money to meet the basic needs of the household. Based on the literature review and other research studies, students have many problems that make it difficult for them to achieve their studies in a limited time.

Employment status is one of the difficulties that prevents postgraduate students from achieving true academic success. Anggraini & Neviyarni (2020) said that students who work all day and even part-time have limited time for them to focus on their studies. They may have large work loads and not have enough time to study. Commitment to study is less because first priority is to work rather than study. The research results demonstrate that students who are studying and working at the same time cannot finish their studies on time because the school requires them to do their teaching duties. They are obliged to fulfil the hours of teaching that they have been allocated. It is difficult for them to manage time properly. From theory and this research data evidence there is agreement that the status of employment is a barrier that makes it difficult for graduate students to finish their studies within one year.

Finance has a significant contribution to postgraduate students' academic success. For those with economic difficulties, it is difficult for them to reach academic success. Nurmalitasari, Long, & Noor (2023) in their study illustrated that 79 percent of students extended their university studies because of financial problems. The result of this research data shows that graduate students extend their studies because of insufficient money to buy study facilities such as laptops and books to write monographs. Often money is not sufficient to

buy internet packages so as to access academic resources on the internet from home. Sometimes money is not enough to pay for public transportation to travel between home and campus to get writing guidance from lecturers. It is true that financial difficulties are an important challenge that prevents students from completing their studies until they are able to pay for their studies.

Postgraduate students' academic success is dependent on both internal and external motivation. However, because they have less motivation, either internal or external, it becomes difficult for them to achieve their studies so as to finish on time. Mauliya, Relianisa, & Rokhyati (2020) presented that students' academic achievement is poor because they do not empower themselves to overcome the difficulties encountered in studying and in their personal lives. In addition, students do not receive support from their families to resolve study problems and personal problems. These research results also indicate that postgraduate students do not complete their studies because of lack of personal motivation, such as self-motivation, lack of working alone, and loss of hope during their study process. Also, interest in studying is less because of financial problems, family problems, and academic problems. From the literature data and study data in this research, it is evident that lack of internal and external motivation prevents students from studying over a long time.

The study in this research reflects that students prolong their studies because they face the difficulties discussed above. The difficulties that exist are significant and reasonable and harm students' learning. They leave their studies because they cannot see a way to complete their work..

#### 4. Conclusion

While difficulty is a situation or condition that proves a person's capacity, ability, or resistance to maturity in life, in the academic situation of higher education, students also face complicated situations and conditions that make it difficult for them during the study process. The complex challenges they face make them extend their study for a long time. The study in this research showed that ICFP graduate students prolonged their studies because of dual roles, academic challenges, personal problems, problems with work status, budget difficulties, and lack of motivation during their studies. These are considerable and crucial difficulties that prevent students from achieving their study goals within the stipulated time.

Related to the research results, in the future, to assist students to gain strength and power to overcome challenges and complicated problems in study, this researcher would like to recommend that:

1. President of ICFP: Reopen the Champagnat Crèche, which gives the possibility for ICFP students to leave their children for a while so they feel safe and are not confronted by the family to take care of the child



while they are studying.

2. ICFP Executive: Recruit a staff member whose work is to listen to students' difficulties and problems encountered during their studies and provide specific advice that empowers them to overcome study barriers. As well, such a counsellor would work with members of the executive, lecturers, and staff to confidently find solutions to students' problems.
3. ICFP Lecturers: Maintain quality teaching and guidance in the process of writing proposals and monographs so as to enable students' understanding of writing that meets academic criteria.
4. ICFP Students: ICFP students who are currently extending their studies and current students are asked to approach the vice-director of academic affairs and mentors to talk about their academic difficulties so that they can receive help and support that will enable them to overcome their problems. In addition, those who receive financial support from donors should study with full commitment so as not to have financial problems during their studies.
5. School Director and Coordinator: Are asked to support being flexible with teachers who are interested in continuing their studies to obtain a licentiate degree at ICFP. The degrees they earn are not for themselves but contribute to the good of their students, the school, and the nation.
6. ICFP Student Family Members: Give moral, emotional, spiritual, and financial support to members of the family who are studying so they can finish their studies on time.

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