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**The Role of CEDocs and its Effectiveness in Facilitating
Postgraduate Research in Moroccan Universities**

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Abstract

The doctoral journey does not only require working on a research project that might last for six years but it also needs extra research activities, particularly transversal training. Any research, in whatever specialty, requires a certain type of training that contributes to its facility. For this reason, Centres for Doctoral Training (CDTs) provide training in a variety of skills that range from languages, study skills to research methodology and ethics. The purpose of these trainings is to facilitate the research processes and equip the researchers with very basic knowledge and needed skills to fulfil their research objectives. Keeping this in mind, this study seeks to explore the roles of research laboratories and the extent to which the training provided is effective in promoting postgraduate research, for doctoral researchers specialized in different fields and belonging to various Moroccan universities. To investigate this issue, this study uses both

questionnaires targeting doctoral students and interviews with the centres and laboratories' directors. Eventually, the data reveal very interesting findings, particularly, at the level of the compatibility between the perceptions of students and those of the directors.

Keywords: Doctoral studies- Cedocs- Trainings- Research - English Studies

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1. Introduction:

In Morocco, doctoral research is related to various types of trainings that mainly aim at equipping doctoral students with the necessary skills to make progress in their research. The duration of a doctoral program requires three to six years where researchers are required to seriously attend trainings that deal with research methodology, English language proficiency and study skills. These training programs attempt to prepare students to the world of academia where research is cherished.

These different forms of supplementary training are organized at the different institutional or laboratory level in structures having their own resources and belonging to the research centres. These trainings ensure an inclusive research environment where researchers from different disciplines gather in the centres to receive the provided training. Therefore, researchers from humanities, law and science are

all required to attend the same training which therefore promotes an inclusive environment for learning.

For instance, in Mohammed I university, a training program entitled “study skills” aims at teaching researchers time management, stress management and reading skills. Its approach goes in line with team work where each researcher shares their own methods of dealing with time, stress and reading. This helps in creating an environment where all researchers, in spite of belonging to different disciplines, find a common ground of learning and sharing experiences.

Creating a common learning environment is the principle of these research trainings. They do not only facilitate the doctoral journey, but they also promote a learning environment whose principles are exchanged and self-reflected. These principles call for a comprehensive concept of training requiring truly interdisciplinary approaches involving humanities, law, juridical studies and sciences and considering -as far as possible- an assessment of the intended objectives of the training.

With that being said, this paper explores the roles of CEDocs and the extent to which the training they provide are effective in promoting postgraduate research in different Moroccan universities. To collect data, the study uses semi-structured interviews with the Cedoc directors and a questionnaire administered to the doctoral students.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Doctoral students often do not attend the training circles organized by the Cedocs for many reasons. Some of them often claim that the trainings do not meet their research expectations or they are not relevant to their research themes. This research, as mentioned earlier, attempts to examine the contribution of doctoral training programs to the doctoral students and investigates the extent to which facilitate the research process of doctoral researchers, in general, and the research conducted in English, in particular.

1.2. The Purpose, Significance and Scope of the Study

The reason behind conducting this research is to measure CEDocs training programs in some Moroccan universities and to end up with some recommendations that the ministry could take into consideration for a more effective training. For anonymity purposes, the present study does not specify the affiliation of CEDocs directors and students.

1.3. The Research Questions

- A. How do doctoral training programs facilitate the research process?
- B. How can doctoral training programs be improved?
- C. To what extent are these doctoral trainings welcomed by doctoral researchers?
- D. To what extent do doctoral trainings benefit research done in English studies?

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Cedoc And Research Requirements In Morocco

Every student who aims at pursuing his/her postgraduate studies and carries a Ph.D research out in Morocco has to enrol in a Cedoc. The latter is a research pole that runs all research and scientific activities related to Ph.D in Morocco. What is particular about these institutions is that every university has its own doctoral studies center. When a postgraduate student enrolls in a PH.D program s/he has to abide by the Cedoc terms. These terms are designed to structure the relationship between the supervisors and their supervisees as it ascribes their different roles and requirements. According to the Cedoc charter(s), there are a set of criteria that a Ph.D student follows throughout his/her academic journey. The charter(s) states that the doctoral students should abide by “a contract which specifies the conditions deemed necessary for the proper conduct of a thesis, registration, re-registration and defense” (The doctoral Charter, 2016). The charter(s) determines the reciprocal commitments of the doctoral student, his/her thesis director, the director of Cedoc and the head of the research structure hosting the doctoral student. These commitments take into account a variety of particularities that range from choosing an area of research to the different aspects of conducting scientific research. They also list the different rights and duties that organize the relationship between the researcher, the supervisor and the Cedoc.

Once the doctoral student obtains admission to conduct a thesis under the supervision of an associate professor who belongs to a laboratory of research or a research unit at a faculty (all faculties included), s/he signs the charter to approve the charter's requirements. The charter is devised into mainly nine thorough sections: thesis registration, stages and professional project(s), feasibility of the thesis, supervision, duration, defense, results of the research, insertion of the students' thesis and respect of the charter's prescriptions.

2.1.1. Thesis registration

As it is known, at the international level, a Ph.D student must have obtained a master's degree to enrol in postgraduate studies and pursue a Ph.D. What is pertinent about the Moroccan Cedocs is that Ph.D students are required to renew their registration every year throughout the 3-6 year research period. The Cedocs, in order to facilitate the above procedures, have developed an online platform through which the doctoral students, the supervisors and the Cedocs follow realization of the whole research and approve or disapprove its defense.

2.1.2. Stages and professional project(s)

The doctoral students are required to develop a research proposal and submit it with the other requirements of their application. The Cedoc charter advocates that the preparation of a thesis must be part of a personal and professional project. This researcher defines its clear goals and its requirements. It also implies clarity of the objectives and the means implemented carry them out. At the time of registration, the

scientific research project/proposal must be presented in the form of a written report.

Once registered in the Cedoc, the doctoral student has to comply with the set of regulations that the Cedoc lists in the charter. Along with attending the different courses, conferences, colloquia and other training, the students must accomplish a compulsory 200 hour training. For the Cedoc, this 200 hour training broadens the students' disciplinary horizon and facilitates their future professional integration. Doctoral students should know that amongst the 200 hours training, a volume of a 120 hour training is managed and validated by the Cedoc that is why the students are required to attend all the trainings that the Cedoc offers while working on their calendar and deadline for flexible scientific mobility, lab and field work access. For the Cedoc to approve the students' defence application, all the activities of doctoral students must be justified by certificates of attendance or participation.

2.1.3. Feasibility of the thesis

Once registered for a thesis, the doctoral student agrees with the supervisor upon all the details and related specificities to the research argument(s). They also talk over the other complementary activities required to deal with the thesis in context. As for the research argument(s), it must lead to the completion of a work that is at the same time original, feasible and formative with the period of three years that is normally foreseen. Both parties make sure the subject of the thesis is innovative, up-to-date and ensure it fits within a scientific context. With this in mind, both the thesis director and the person in

charge of the host structure define and bring together all the means to be implemented in order to enable the work to be carried out within the predetermined period. Thus, the doctoral student must be fully integrated into his/her host structure and have facilities to accomplish his/her research work. The host structure provides the researcher with scientific equipment, IT resources, documentation, authorizations to attend seminars and conferences and to present their work in scientific meetings.

The doctoral student, upon registration, is committed to a work schedule. The thesis supervisor has a duty to provide information on the difficulties encountered and on the progress of supervisee's thesis who must imperatively show initiative in the conduct of his research.

2.1.4. Supervision

As far as the thesis supervision is concerned and according to the charter of the Cedocs, it cannot be delegated by another supervisor. The thesis director, who should belong to a research structure or a lab, is the only authority competent of supervising the student and administering managerial responsibilities of the doctoral student. However, the thesis director can call on a co-supervisor if necessary on the basis of a contract specifying the conditions of their collaboration taking into account that the doctoral student has the right to personalized supervision from his/her thesis supervisor or co-supervisor.

The Codex recommends that joint supervision is an agreement that must be part of a predetermined framework between the two

universities. Still, the thesis director reporting to CeDoc has effective responsibility for the scientific supervision. S/he is the only one who undertakes to regularly monitor the progress of the thesis work and to discuss with the doctoral student new directions that could be taken in view of the results already acquired throughout. S/he also has the duty to inform the doctoral student of the positive assessments and the possible objections and criticisms that his/her work could arise, particularly during the defense. Besides, both supervisors and supervisee set up regular, if not annual, meetings to check the work's progress.

2.1.5. Duration

A thesis is an integral step in a research process. This must respect the planned deadlines, in accordance with the spirit of the doctoral studies and the interests of the doctoral student. It also states that the period may be extended for a fifth registration; it is the head of the host institution who approves the extension after consulting the thesis director and the director of the Cedoc. In order for the student to have a gap year or benefit from an extension year, s/he has to submit a formal request joined with documents that supports the case so as both the Cedoc and the host institution have proof for taking a fair decision that serves the student. This said, the student has to apply for annual renewal that complies with the planned schedule of the host institution.

2.1.6. Defense

Defending a thesis in front of a defense jury is the final stage in a doctoral research every doctoral student aims at. The head of the Cedoc grants the students an administrative authorization to defend the thesis after submitting an application for oral examination. The charter states that prior to the oral defense, the candidate's thesis is sent to the examination by three or four reviewers among higher education professors or associate professors, or to other researchers from public research establishments having the status of research supervisor or research director appointed by the head of the Cedoc. The charter also advocates that at least one examiner/reporter must belong to another university (external examiner). The student is granted the authorization to defend his/her work only if at least two reports are favourable. In this case, the reports are communicated to the director of CEDoc. The thesis summary/abstract is distributed within the university and to all national universities at least ten days before the public defense of the thesis. After being defended and admitted, the thesis is disseminated by the CEDoc to the entire university community and to the national center for scientific and technical research. Exceptionally, doctoral students must take into account the remarks of the jury in a time limit before submitting the final work with all modifications to the administration to issue a Ph.D diploma for the newly admitted doctor.

2.1.6. Concluding Remarks

Noticeably, there is a scarcity of studies that have dealt with PhD training programs; the existing studies have not questioned the

Cedocs' contribution to the doctoral journey within Moroccan universities. For instance, a study entitled "Competency-based assessment for the training of PhD students and early-career scientists" conducted by Michael Verderame et al. (2018) found that universities should go beyond formal assessment of PhD programs and adopt a competency-based approach to verify whether the students have achieved the core scientific competencies or not. It also suggests including professional training to prepare students for the job market they are seeking. Additionally, the study called for an inclusion of a specific-career based training which does not entirely rely on academic training but mixes both research training with professional one.

In a similar vein, Conor O' Carroll et al. (2012) in "The PhD in Europe: Developing a System of Doctoral Training that will Increase the Internationalization of Universities" examined the shift from responding to academic needs to answering the needs of employers outside academia in Europe. Given the fact that the majority of PhD graduates "do not remain in academia or research positions [...]" it is critical that the doctoral training ensures they are properly qualified for the broader employment sector" (O' Carroll et al., 2012, p.4) Here, the writers highlight the importance of thinking of internationalization while creating doctoral programs because the principle of mobility is what characterizes the current age.

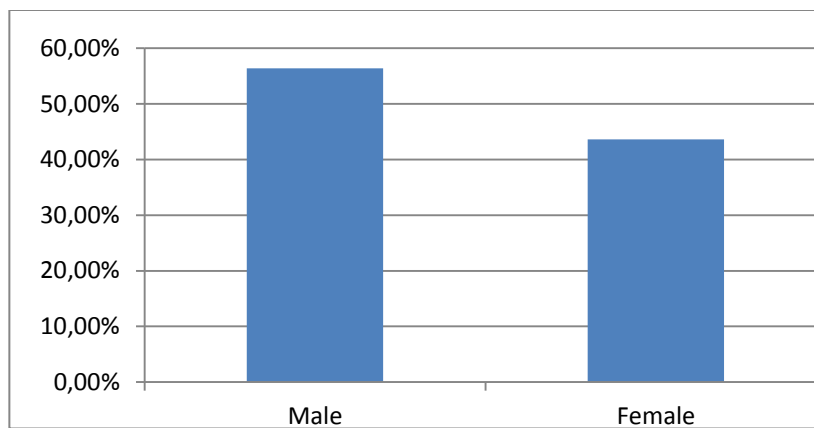
As explained, the previous studies focused basically on the relationship between doctoral training programs and the job market. Little attention is given to how these training equip doctoral

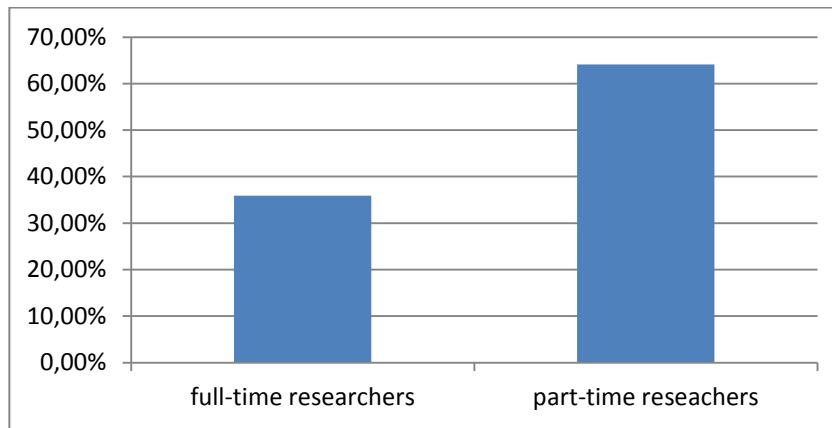
researchers with basic skills to carry on their research and succeed in academia. For this reason, the present study explores the extent to which Cedoc training programs, in Morocco, facilitate postgraduate research.

3. Method

3.1. Sample

A web-based questionnaire was devised and distributed on social networking websites to 39 doctoral students doing research in various fields and enrolled in different Cedocs across Morocco. The following graphs describe the sample we chose for the questionnaires.





As our study relied also on data collected from CEDocs and laboratories' directors, we conducted online interviews with five of them belonging to different universities.

3. 2. Data Collection Procedures

This study draws on both qualitative and quantitative data and employs two research instruments: questionnaires along with semi-structured interviews. On the one hand, the questionnaire was distributed among doctoral researchers using online platforms since it was difficult to meet the students in presence. The questionnaire contains 19 questions that are structured both in a closed and open ended format. The closed ended questions help to draw students' perceptions about the doctoral training programs animated in the faculties they are affiliated to. They also help in statistically measuring doctoral researchers' experiences. As for open ended questions, they help in eliciting doctoral researchers' recommendations and elicit the training limitations. On the other hand, three semi-structured interviews are conducted with both Cedoc and laboratory directors to know more about the training programs

they offer and the extent to which they are beneficial for doctoral researchers in general and those specialized in English studies in particular. These types of interviews encourage eliciting more information from the interviewees without following the orders of questions as more questions can come out of the discussion.

3.3. Data analysis procedures

A thematic analysis to interviews is conducted to interpret and describe the ideas suggested by the interviewees. For the questionnaires, both a qualitative and quantitative analysis is followed to measure the difference between the variables and the relationship between them in doctoral researchers' opinions.

4. Results

4.1. Interviews

The findings that stem from interviewing Cedoc and laboratories' directors could be summarized into seven themes that are categorised as follow:

4.1.1. Organizing Training Programs

What can be inferred from these training programs is that each institution, and more specifically, each lab has its own unique vision of the suitable training programs that match the needs of the enrolled PhD researchers. Yet, one common thing that all the interviewees agree upon is the fact that training programs should answer the needs of the different specialties that a doctoral program embodies. For instance, a Cedoc can offer training that focuses on research

methodologies adopted by researchers in humanities, or offer training that addresses science students and how to write an academic paper as they are recommended to publish two or three papers in indexed journals before they defend their thesis.

4.1.2. The Benefit of Training Programs for Researchers Specialized in Humanities

On the one hand, and according to the interviewees, choosing common training programs that could benefit any specialty is one of the reasons behind the success of these training sessions. On the other hand, integrating researchers in the implementation of these training programs is also crucial since the benefit of these training programs can only be measured if researchers' opinions are taken into consideration. In other words, a yearly evaluation of the relevance of the training programs and their impact on the success of researchers is highly recommended as some surveyed students highlighted in the survey.

4.1.3. Researchers' Attendance and their Interest on the Trainings

The Cedoc and lab directors who were interviewed have emphasized on the flexibility of these training programs and recommend that they should take into consideration the researchers' situation and address their research interests. Therefore, going beyond putting pressure on the part of researchers is one of the ways that make them interested in these training programs. One of the interviewees claimed in this regard that: "the majority of these training programs are organized during the weekend or the holidays."

4.1.4. Training programs that go hand in hand with soft skills

The Cedocs offer a variety of training and workshops on a weekly basis. What is observed is that the majority of these training are either in French and Arabic. English is offered as a language course through a 30 hour term course. With that being said, these are the training programs that frequently take place within most of the Cedocs:

- Training in statistics
- Languages (English, French, Chinese)
- Software manipulation
- Workshops on research ethics and research methodologies

4.1.5 The place of researchers specialized in English studies

There is a difference between centres and labs when it comes to the place of English in the training and whether the benefit of researchers specialized in English studies benefit from such training. One of the interviewees affirmed that: “since half of these training programs are in English, I believe that these researchers are lucky.” Another interviewee asserted that: “I cannot say whether it benefits them or not because it is only since two years that we started welcoming researchers in English studies in our lab which coincided with coronavirus”. A third interviewee added that “ I don’t think students doing research in English or English related research areas benefit from the training as they already have the tools needed to access training online or autonomously improve their own skills, and it is all attributed to their level of mastery of English.” What can be inferred from these entries is that a student who already has an adequate English level is likely to benefit from the training. This is also

confirmed by some students who conduct research in English, for example, literature or linguistics; they have advocated that some of the training offered do not match with our research areas.

4.1.6. Coordination of Cedocs with other labs

Coordination is a key in the success of the training offered by some Cedocs. The interviewees claimed that there is a partial coordination with other labs as each lab has their own objectives. Another interviewee stressed in the new research structure that is being constructed to address all the research areas within the university as a whole. He explained that the Cedoc as a research pole organizes the research activities and manages the flow of training within the other poles.

4.1.7. Challenges faced by labs while organizing these training programs:

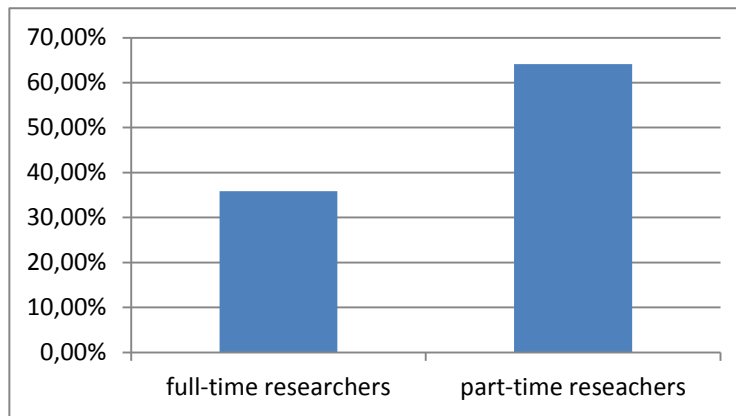
As far as the challenges are concerned, the interviewees have stated that challenges occur from time to time and they are handled accordingly; yet they have highlighted a common problem that is faced during the organization of these trainings which is lack human resources and sometimes reluctance of other researchers and professors in animating a training. As a result, some Cedoc can resort to doctoral researchers to train other researchers in a certain specialty although some Cedocs do not entrust doctoral researchers with this mission.

4.2. Questionnaires analysis

A questionnaire was devised and distributed online through Facebook pages and Ph.D online networks. A total number of 39 students

conducting research in different Cedocs across Morocco filled in the questionnaires. Their responses reveal very interesting results that add to the Cedocs and labs directors' contribution.

4.2.1 Academic Status



As the above graph shows, the majority of respondents are part-time researchers. Based on that sample, one can say that finding a suitable time for the training programs could be challenging as not all researchers could make it. Most of the surveyed students exercise jobs and pursue part-time research. Therefore, it is very difficult for them to combine research obligations with other obligations that might sometimes be highly demanding. This is why most of the training witnesses small numbers of attendees although they occur during weekends or holidays.

4.2.2. Specialties

The findings of the study might be very relevant as the participants who contributed to it conduct research in different fields. 41% of the participants conduct research in applied linguistics, 42.2% in

humanities and literature while other respondents do various research areas. Interestingly, this variety of specialties provides pertinent data to the current study because the participants reveal their different perceptions depending on their research areas and interests. For instance, the majority of those conducting research in applied linguistics or literature in English argued that the training offered does not match with their interests, this is a reason enough not to attend them.

4.2.3. Interest in Cedoc training programs

As for the interest, the findings are striking as 92.3% of the participants expressed their interests while 7.7% showed their lack of interest. The reasons why these participants seem interested depend on their research areas and personal circumstances. An explanation could be they are full time students or the offered training addresses their research, a minority might be interested as their Cedoc obliges them to attend the training and attain the 200 hour training which is sometimes mandatory before the defence of the thesis.

4.2.4. Reasons of attendance and relevance of the training programs

As for the researchers' opinions regarding the relevance of the Cedoc training, 59% of the respondents agree on the pertinence of the offered training programs and courses. Only 20% are enticed by the mandatory nature of these programs. What can be concluded is that some of the programs meet their objectives which lie in equipping researchers with the necessary knowledge needed in their doctoral journey. According to the findings of the study, 41 % of the survey's

respondents expressed their disagreement and believed that the training sessions offered are not interesting or they are already available online. However, 59% of respondents approve that these training are quite relevant to their research interests. With this result in mind, one might recommend that the research centres should take other disciplines into their planning and offer well-rounded training that meets up with a large enough number of research interests.

4.2.5. The programs offered in the Cedoc

The Cedoc director mentioned that their research institutions offer a variety of training whether on a weekly basis or a monthly basis. From their side, the respondents listed a variety of programs; Research Methodology occupies most of the training according to the survey's participants. There are also other trainings that are related to research ethics, academic writing, publishing papers in scholarly journals and Webinars. These programs are backbone elements of research. Without being familiar with these skills, researchers would not be able to succeed in accomplishing the objectives of academic research.

4.2.6. The place of research skills and methods in the trainings

The new educational reform stresses on the integration of skills within the training offered in the Moroccan educational institutions in general and superior education in particular. The soft skills and research skills are amongst the very important recommendations of the new reform. Yet, according to the majority of respondents, research skills and methods are either absent or partially absent from the designed training programs. This shows that more importance is given to other

training programs and researchers oblige themselves to look for other training online or in other institutions.

4.2.7. Place of English in the Cedoc training programs

Arguably, English is a research tool that most of the researchers use either to publish their research or look for resources. The Cedocs directors believe that English should be given an important place within the given training. They have also explained that the Cedoc offers free English courses to all researchers. Unlike the directors, the respondents have also expressed different views regarding the place of English as a primary research language. 41% of the respondents think that English should be given a prior attention by the Cedocs while 59 % advocate that English is omnipresent in most of the Cedocs training. What can be concluded is that both researchers recommend that the place of English in research should be prioritized since it is a language that is highly needed in research and it bridges the gap for the researchers for further research and professional development.

4.2.8. Contributing to the training programs

The majority of training in the Cedocs all over Morocco do not engage doctoral students in either designing a program or animating it. An interviewed Cedoc director asserted that in most of the training, the learners do not take any part in shaping the offered programs; the director also added that the interaction is most of the time vertical and not horizontal. This means that the students do not contribute to the training in any way. In the same vein, according to the majority of all the respondents, the research training sessions offered are centre-based activities. The doctoral students added that they do not

participate in designing or delivering training workshops to their peers. Therefore, the relationship between the Cedocs and the students is vertical and top-down because the students are rarely given the opportunity to take part in the training as trainers, not as trainees.

4.2.9. The students' recommendations for better Cedoc trainings

This study, in its scope, aims at investigating the role of the Cedocs and their contribution to research in higher Moroccan education. Scrutinizing both the students and the directors' perception towards the role of the Cedocs, this study draws the following recommendations that, more importantly, seek to improve the quality of the offered trainings and vary them:

- Research trainings should not be mandatory
- Online trainings are more preferred over traditional ones
- English needs to be given a prior attention equal to the attention given to French and Arabic
- Research trainings should be designed to meet the students' needs.
- More emphasis needs to be given to research methods and statistical analyses
- Further trainings need to be provided regarding literary and cultural studies
- More soft skill-based trainings need to be scheduled.

5. Discussion

Trying to figure out what, why and how doctoral training program function in a number of Moroccan universities, this study showed that the results of both the directors and the researchers are complementary. Starting with the intervention of laboratories in the organization of training courses for the benefit of researchers, we noticed that there is a lack of collaboration between the laboratories. This impacted the achievements of the researchers who should be open to all disciplines to ensure a fruitful learning. The fact that there is no collaboration between laboratories means that researchers do not go beyond the area of their specialty. Also, we should bear in mind that these researchers are not only trained to be university professors. They could be enrolled in different work places that require their openness to different disciplines. Hence, training programs should also address the issue of employability as found by Conor O' Carroll et al. (2012). So, we believe that collaboration between laboratories could be an enticing force that upgrades the level of the training programs to include various disciplines. This collaboration, we believe, could also be extended to include job markets. For instance, it has been found in a study entitled "Research training in doctoral programs: What can be learned from professional Doctorates?" that encouraging doctoral education through enacting a professional doctorate programs to sustain collaboration between universities and industry is a must (Erica McWilliam et al., 2002). This shows that doctoral courses should go beyond research level and include professional development courses as well.

Tough there is a partial collaboration between laboratories, the training programs prove to be beneficial according to both the directors and the researchers. However, researchers express that sometimes the training program does not answer their needs. We believe that this challenge could be overcome if an inclusive decision paradigm is adopted. That is to say, if researchers are included while discussing the relevancy of certain training program, their academic as well as professional needs will be fulfilled. Also, what would make the training program beneficial as well is enticing researchers to contribute to its success by allowing them to train each other based on their discipline. This would develop their autonomy and prepare them to the workplace. Also, it would solve the major challenge faced by laboratories directors which is lack of human resources.

For a more adequate training program, soft skills should be highly valued. The results show that laboratories directors are already paying attention to this new necessity. For instance, critical thinking skills and creativity are of paramount importance in research as they help researchers come up with original dissertations which is one of the requirements of doing a PhD in Morocco. Also, English language is crucial for organizing training programs and would help researchers stay in touch with different resources which are most of the time published in English.

6. Implications, Recommendations and Conclusions

The study has scrutinized the relevance of the trainings offered by the Cedocs to Moroccan doctoral students. It has departed from the premise that students often do not attend these trainings, and if they do

so, they do because it is mandatory as a requirement for their doctorate defence. In order to validate, or refute, the above premise, the study interrogated both students and Cedocs directors. The purpose of this interrogation is to assess the relevance of the trainings from both sides. Interestingly, both participants, in the study's sample, have revealed interesting perceptions and views. Both the interviews and the questionnaires have sought to, in thoroughgoing manner, to shed lights not only on the nature of the trainings offered but also on other research requirements such as: research methods, research ethics, soft skills, writing thesis, academic writing along with the place of English in the trainings. Therefore, the study postulates that the findings of the study are encompassing as they come up with contributing recommendations.

Thus, based on the findings of this study, improving the offered trainings in the Cedocs is a recommendation. Both the directors and the doctoral students' perceptions shed light upon the necessity of engaging each part in the construction of the training programs. Besides, the findings of the study invite Cedocs directors, researchers, trainers to develop further training that are up-to-date and give English a prestigious place not as a course but as a language of instruction. Collaborative work between the doctoral students and the trainers for further and comprehensive integration of the two parties in designing programs, reflecting on previous one and highly paving the students path towards successful academic and research journey that would, definitely, contribute not only to the doctoral students reputation but also that of the doctoral studies centres.

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