ALGERIA: A postgraduate's lot is not a happy one
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Postgraduate education is often below the standards expected by students who are subjected to a multiplicity of problems including lack of equipment and books, overcrowding, exclusion from study trips, and effects of corruption and nepotism, claims *La Tribune* of Algiers in a series of articles.

Masters and PhD students faced "herculean obstacles" in carrying out their research projects, with programmes for the postgraduate *magistère* professional qualification overloaded and lectures 'botched', the **Tribune** reported. Students at the end of their studies who had to present their dissertations suffered most from these 'vicissitudes', it said.

"It's a drag. I should have made my presentation nearly six months ago but the deficiencies in our laboratory and the lack of research equipment have disrupted my course," Amine, studying for a masters in biology at the University of Science and Technology Houari Boumedienne in Bab Ezzouar, told the *Tribune*. "This degree is turning into a real nightmare for me."

There was a shortage of books in the university library and it cost a fortune to buy them, Amine said, "But above all it's the quality of teachers that has disappointed me. They are themselves not sufficiently trained to teach to a high standard."

Sara, a postgraduate studying linguistics at Bouzaréah, also expressed her frustrations to the paper. "I didn't choose my research subject. Here, the teachers impose their choice of subject on you. I have to say that when a theme is beyond their competence, they do everything to make you do another one. It's not fair."

She claimed teachers saw the students as a 'supplementary bonus'. "For each *magistère* thesis, a teacher pockets 10,000 dinar (US$140). So to scoop the jackpot they take on the maximum number of students. They couldn't care less about the quality of your dissertation or your research project."

Grants and study visits abroad were regularly awarded to teachers "often on short-term contracts, while students who need these trips for their research work are excluded", Sara said.

Documentation was the major problem facing Leila, preparing a *magistère* in francophone literature at the Ecole doctorale de français in Algiers, the **Tribune** reported.

"The library...is quite well stocked, especially for those specialising in Algerian or Maghreb literature, but for those working on contemporary or foreign authors, there's a real problem," she told the paper. Students fell behind in their work, and tried to catch up via the internet, ordering books from abroad if they could afford it or, if not, making do with what they had.

Students complained to the paper about the "contemptuous attitude" of some academics. Djamil, in his second *magistral* year in a subject he did not disclose for fear of being identified, told the *Tribune* he had been "chasing my supervisor for months for her to correct my work".

La Tribune also highlighted the problems of favouritism and nepotism, which it said cast doubt on the competitive examination for access to the *magistère*.

Samir Azzoug wrote that the post-independence ideal of the Algerian university had been democratising access to education, including higher education. But the job market demanded a university degree and now a bachelor's was no longer enough.

"But postgraduate places are limited. Covetousness emerges, meaning the forceful entry of the national sports - corruption and nepotism," wrote Azzoug. Places are expensive. Those happy ones who are chosen are, in the majority of cases, known in advance."

He said the numerous *magistère* candidates did not know what to think as their school and university education was called into question: "Reality cools their enthusiasm. Not only are the paths of knowledge difficult to penetrate but those leading to work are even more complicated.

"The epilogue of a studious career is often brutal; it no longer depends simply on the will or ambitions of the young. Why make yourself excel when the dice are loaded?"