

 <p>ISSN NO. 2320-5407</p>	<p>Journal Homepage: - <a href="http://www.journalijar.com">www.journalijar.com</a></p> <p><b>INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)</b></p> <p>Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/16040 DOI URL: <a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/16040">http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/16040</a></p>	
---	--	---

### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### A CRITICAL ANALYSIS TO THE PROCESS OF POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION: EXPLORATION OF SUPERVISEE CHALLENGES

Dr. Solomon Gitonga Mwaniki<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Hellen Kiende Guantai<sup>2</sup>

1. Lecturer, Mount Kenya University P.O.Box, 342-01000, Thika.
2. Lecturer, Kenyatta University P.O. Box, 43844-00100, Nairobi.

#### Manuscript Info

##### Manuscript History

Received: 20 November 2022

Final Accepted: 24 December 2022

Published: January 2023

##### Key words:-

Supervisor, Supervisee, Supervision  
Challenges, Supervisory Competences

#### Abstract

The gist of this study was to analyze the supervision challenges that postgraduate students undergo through in course of doing their thesis or project work supervision in universities in Kenya. The purpose of this paper was to explore the challenges that make the process of postgraduate supervision a nightmare to students, consequently, affecting their enthusiasm to learn and successfully complete their studies as scheduled. The objectives of the study were to; ascertain the perceptions of postgraduate supervisee towards supervisory competences of their supervisors, assess the channels of communications between supervisee and supervisors, and establish the availability of supervisors to the supervisee. The paper used a cross section survey design to capture the views of respondents. The study used a sample size (n= 95) which was derived from a target population (N = 198) consisting of; all masters and doctoral students in the School of Education and School of Business & Economics of Kenyatta University and Mount Kenya University respectively. The study used questionnaires to collect data. The main findings of the study were that; supervisors were found to have established friendly interactions with supervisee but did not embrace ICT in supervision, they did not give prompt feedback to their supervisee; and they were hardly accessible to supervisee. The study concludes that; the process of supervision had main challenge of supervisee not receiving timely feedback from their supervisors who had embraced ICT in supervision. This study recommends frequent re-tooling for the supervisors so that they are able to embrace online supervision and hence assist their postgraduate students complete their studies on time. This study is significant as it may inform both the supervisors and supervisee on the best practices of undertaking the process of supervision for both parties to work harmoniously.

Copy Right, IJAR, 2023,. All rights reserved.

#### Introduction:-

In pursuance of postgraduate academic qualifications, supervision of postgraduate students has been a critical issue of focus among scholars for along time in the universities. According to Core, R.S. (2017) the relationship between supervisor and supervisee is the foundation of the work that will be seen as the outcome of the whole process. Numerous

**Corresponding Author: - Dr. Solomon Gitonga Mwaniki**

Address: - Lecturer, Mount Kenya University P.O. Box, 342-01000, Thika.

studies have documented that the challenges that postgraduate students undergo can be summarized in terms of translating to poor quality of supervision and completion rates (Cranfield & Taylor 2008; Lessing & Lessing 2004; Lessing & Schulze 2002; Van der Westhuizen & De Wet 2003). This is because the process of achieving a PhD is lengthy and complicated; it demands competence, commitment, time, energy and emotion from both the supervisor and postgraduate student (Li & Seale, 2007).

Scholars have also established that having a doctoral degree does not necessarily mean that one has all the competences for supervising postgraduate students (Bitzer, 2007; Du Pré, 2009, Mainhard, VanderRijst, VanTartwijk & Wubbels, 2009; Olivier, 2007). The implication here is that despite supervisors having the academic qualifications needed to supervise the students there are other hidden factors that derail the process. This is exhibited by the low completion rates by the postgraduate students in all specialisations. Specifically, Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf, 2015) observes that there are factors that determine the success of research students in doing their postgraduate programs. Critical among these are the supervisors' conduct and their effectiveness in the whole process of supervision. Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf, 2015) study established three most important attributes of supervisors as: supervisors should be friendly, approachable and flexible; knowledgeable and resourceful; and encourage students to work and plan independently. The extent to which the supervisors had the ability to utilize these attributes to support the postgraduate students was the focus of this study in terms of unearthing the challenges that postgraduate students encounter in the process of supervision. The pertinent question in this study was, were the challenges that supervisees encountered in the process of supervision significantly contributed by their supervisors?

### **Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of conducting this study was to analyze the process of supervision by exploring the challenges that supervisee encountered in the course of their postgraduates supervision for projects and thesis. This study was guided by the following objectives;

- a) Establish the perceptions of supervisees on the supervisors' supervisory competences
- b) Determine the channels of communication between supervisee and supervisors
- c) Determine the availability of supervisors to the supervisee

### **Problem Statement**

There is evidence from research to demonstrate that the process of supervision among postgraduate students is problematic in most of the universities globally. This is despite the critical role that the process plays towards timely completion of the students' postgraduate studies. The ideal situation is that effective supervision process should lead to faster completion, but the reality is that students have taken long periods to complete their studies despite the many interventions that have been put in place by many universities. Further, there is evidence of undesirable experiences narrated by students about the whole process of supervision that culminated to delayed completion of their respective degrees. Consequently, this study was conceptualized to look critically at the process of supervision with a view of unearthing the challenges that students encounter.

### **Literature Review:-**

#### **Perceptions of supervisee on the supervisor's supervisory competencies**

In an extensive study on supervisor's supervisory competencies, Rahabav, P. (2016) found that academic qualifications of university supervisors need to be always supported with special education and training that are particularly relevant on academic supervision. Based on the supervisors' supervisory competencies, it is always anticipated that supervisees will perceive their supervisors competence and ability to supervise highly so that they are able to create a good working relationship. Ezebilo, E.E. (2012) observes that for supervisee to form positive perception of their supervisors, the supervisors must provide adequate guidance and mentorship to their supervisees. This is essentially because the way a supervisee views a supervisor comes from the ability of the supervisor to deliver on the process of supervision. This might not be the case always because according to Lizzio, Stokes and Wilson (2005); relative to the process of supervision, the supervisees' sentiments and complaints have received little attention and this has affected their morale in the process. The supervisees need to be fully involved in the process and need not be bystanders so that they can work together. In the words of Bernard and Goodyear (2013), the supervision process is evaluative and has three functions that are expected to be concurrent. These include; (1) enhancing the professional growth of the supervisee, (2) monitoring the quality of professional services offered to the clients that she or he sees, and (3) serving as a gate keeper for those trainees who are to enter the particular profession. These functions have the potential to drive the process smoothly but the irony is that the process is complicated and supervisors lack the competencies needed to expedite the process.

### **Communication channels between supervisors and supervisees**

To successfully complete postgraduate studies, a growing number of studies highlight communication as being pivotal factor in determining the relationship between postgraduate candidates and their supervisors (Emilsson & Johnson, 2007; Gill & Bernard, 2008; Green, 2005). This is because effective communication creates a strong bond between the supervisor and supervisee and this is critical to expedite the supervision process. Hein and Lawson (2009) found that supervisee incompatibility arising from poor communication could compromise supervisor feedback by sometimes making it difficult for the supervisor to provide positive or negative feedback to a supervisee. In this regard, the supervisor has a critical role in the process of supervision and hence should be able to initiate the process of effective communication with the supervisee and this will make the process a smooth flow. In the words of Mitchel (2019), as a PhD supervisor, you have the power to make or break your students' career hopes ... your influence is immense, and your role crucial. Supervisors are responsible for providing supervisees with constructive feedback about their progress and this keep the postgraduate students motivated and on track. Communication skills are important because the way supervisors interact with supervisees affects how well they receive supervisor feedback. A supervisor with the capability to communicate instructions and corrections to students clearly, succinctly and in a manner that motivates students instead of alienating them is a more effective in the whole process. Indeed effective communication is the art of driving the whole process.

### **Availability of Supervisors to the Supervisee**

A study on effective PhD supervision by Abiddin, Hassan, A. & Ahmad, (2009), outlines some of the problems involved in the process of supervision as lack of understanding by the students yet supervision is a student driven process. The presence of the challenges in the process will mean that students will take longer than usual to complete. They also point out failure to communicate by the institution as to the standard of work required for a particular degree as a critical factor that affects the process since many students work without having a clear timeframe of what is expected. This means that students work blindly and waste valuable time that would have been used in their work and this lengthens the period taken by postgraduate students to complete.

According to a study by Ezebilo, E. E. (2012) the success of research by post-graduate students largely depends on the relationship with supervisors. However, Ndayambaje (2017) observes that supervisors are far from being available to the supervisee so as to create the much needed academic and research oriented relationship. This imply that supervisee do not have sufficient time to interact with supervisors in the course of supervision and cannot therefore build working relationships that can lead to enhanced outcomes in terms of supervisee work. An effective supervisor is expected to initiate the process of supervision and sustain it, but the reality is that most students give up after making several attempts to book appointments with supervisors. Lichtenberg (2007) affirmed that for optimal learning to occur, solid working relationship between the supervisor and supervisee must be apparent throughout the duration a postgraduate student is doing his/her thesis or project.

Farizaletal. (2011) affirms that the research process involves personal and professional relationship between students and supervisors. The prevalence of challenges in the process of motivation is likely to derail the process and consequently demotivate the students. Successful research can be achieved if sustainable supervisor-student relationship is attained along the research journey, but the issue is whether the process of supervision is smooth. Supervisors have a significant role to challenge and extend their students' abilities in all areas to ensure their success, but students sometimes disappear and this makes the supervisor to appear not effective and bears the blame. Group supervision is probably the most reliable model practiced by several institutions to conduct research students due to increasing numbers of students as well as demands from academic environment held by supervisor including administration commitments. Most practitioners agree that a positive and productive relationship between supervisor and supervisee is essential if supervision is to be effective (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009; Corey et al., 2014; Henderson, Cawyer, & Watkins, 1999; Kaiser, 1997; Yontef, 1997).

### **Methodology:-**

This study used cross-sectional survey design, which allowed the researchers to collect data in the two institutions, which was then collated to get the congruence. The target population was all masters and PhD students in the School of Education of both Kenyatta University and Mount Kenya University. The sample size (n=95) comprised of master's and doctoral students who have already finished their course work and embarked on their thesis/projects in the Department of Education Management Policy and Curriculum Studies at Kenyatta University and Mount Kenya University in the School of Education and Business and Economics respectively. The study used questionnaires to collect relevant data from respondents. Validity of the instruments was gotten through expert judgment from education

managers to ensure that they solicited the anticipated information. Cronbach alpha was then used to establish the consistency of the research items. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequencies, mean and percentages and presented using tables and relevant figures.

## Results and Discussion:-

### Supervisors' Supervisory Competences

This study sought to find out the perceptions that the supervisee had on their supervisors' supervision competences in the domains of; human, technical and conceptual skills. Hence, the supervisees were required to rank some supervisory skills with: 1-Strongly Agree; 2-Agree; 3-Neutral; 4-Disagree; 5-Strongly Disagree. The results on supervisee responses on supervisors' supervisory competences are as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:-** Supervisee Responses on Supervisors' Supervisory Competences.

Skill	Statement	N	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Human Relations Skills</b>	Establish friendly interactions with supervisee.	83	23	21	10	20	9
	Motivate supervisee towards finishing their work.	94	24	16	24	15	15
	Empathize with supervisee	72	10	9	16	22	15
	Inform the students once through with their document	85	20	24	21	14	6
	Understands the student context	75	18	20	15	14	8
<b>Technical Skills</b>	Have specialized technical skills to assist supervisee	84	27	27	13	11	6
	Give objective technical feedback to their supervisee	85	25	30	13	13	4
	Supervisors are competent in their area of supervision	84	29	25	12	15	3
	Supervisors embrace ICT in supervision	83	10	9	15	28	21
	Supervisors are objective when giving feedback	85	13	26	20	16	10
<b>Conceptual Skills</b>	Their verbal feedback is simplified and clear manner	85	24	36	11	11	3
	Their written feedback is clearly understood	82	22	30	10	11	9
	Supervisors demonstrate conceptual clarity of the areas the student is being supervised	85	20	30	16	12	7

Table 1 above shows the masters and doctoral students' views on the supervisors' supervision competences. It is explicit that majority, {23(27%) strongly agreed and 21(25%) agreed} that supervisors established friendly interactions with the supervisees. It is also apparent that most, 22(30%) students disagreed that supervisors are able to empathize with supervisee. This implied that as much as the interpersonal relations between the supervisors and supervisee are good during the supervision process, the supervisors were not able to put themselves in the shoes of the supervisees and consequently empathize with them. Core (2010) posits that, the foundation of a good supervision is the positive rapport between the supervisor and supervisee. Ezebil, E. E. (2012) who observes that the success of research by post-graduate students largely depends on their relationship with supervisors.

Table 1 also shows that majority, {30(35%) agreed & 25(29%) strongly agree} of the supervisees were of the opinion that supervisors gave objective technical advice to the supervisors. However, from Table 1, it is shown that majority, {28(%) disagreed & 21(%) strongly disagreed} of supervisee were of the view that supervisors embraced ICT in supervision. This implies that as much as supervisee regarded their supervisors as having technical skills needed for supervision, this was not manifested in the utilization of ICT in supervision and this could contribute to delays in the students' receiving feedback. This sentiment concurs with, Ndayambaje (2017) who observes that supervisors are far from being available to the supervisee via ICT to create the much needed academic and research oriented relationship.

Further, Table 1 shows that most {36(42%) & 24(28%)} of the supervisees agree and strongly agree respectively that feedback given by the supervisors is simplified and clear; most {22(27%) & 30(37%)} of the supervisee agree and strongly agree that written feedback given to them by their supervisors is clearly understood. Lastly, Table 1 indicates that most {20(24%) & 30(35%)} of the supervisee were of the opinion that their Supervisors had demonstrated conceptual clarity in the areas they were supervising them on. This perspective is ironical since if students get clear feedback, they are expected to complete on time yet this not the case as Lichtenberg (2007) affirms that for optimal learning to occur, solid working relationship between the supervisor, notes it and supervisee must be apparent throughout the duration a postgraduate student is doing his thesis or project.

### Communication between Supervisee and Supervisors

One of the challenges that hinder supervisee from timely completing their research work is poor communications between supervisee and supervisors. Thus, the master's and doctoral students were required to rank the status of the various aspects of communication between themselves and supervisors in course of supervision. The ranking was coded as: 1-Strongly Agree; 2-Agree; 3-Neutral; 4-Disagree; and 5-Strongly Disagree. This is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:-** Status of Communication between Supervisors and Supervisee.

SN	Statement	N	1	2	3	4	5
1	The supervisors' use clear channels of communication.	87	15	26	22	13	11
2	Channels of communication used by supervisors are student friendly	78	9	21	23	14	11
3	Supervisee can always communicate with supervisors without a prior appointment	84	19	20	12	17	16
4	There is no delay in obtaining feedback from supervisors	81	11	12	11	20	27
5	There is always agreement between supervisors' verbal and written communication	88	9	25	11	30	13
6	There is consistency on the feedback given by the supervisors	82	10	19	11	28	14
7	Supervisors always give prompt feedback to supervisee	85	9	15	16	21	24
8	Supervisors are cordial in all channels of communication	81	9	12	24	22	14
9	Supervisors are able to supervise online by tracking their comments	87	11	13	17	21	25

Table 2 above shows that most of the respondents, {27(33%) & 20(24%)} strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively that supervisors gave prompt feedback to their students. Further, most of the respondents, 30(38%) disagreed with the opinion that there was agreement between verbal and written feedback given by the supervisors. It is also apparent that most of the respondents 25(29%) strongly disagreed that supervisors are able to supervise online by tracking their comments. These imply that most supervisors are not able to give prompt feedback to their students and that the use of ICT in tracking students' supervision was hardly used. This could be contributing to delayed completion of students research work. These findings agree with Hein and Lawson (2009) who found that supervisee incompatibility arising from poor communication could compromise supervisor feedback by sometimes making it difficult for the supervisor to provide positive (or negative) feedback to a supervisee. The implication in this context would be delayed completion.

### Availability of Supervisors to the Supervisee

Finally, this study sought to establish from respondents the status of accessibility of supervisors to the supervisee in course of supervision period. To achieve this, the master's and doctoral students were asked to rank the various aspects of availability given with 1-Strongly Agree; 2-Agree; 3-Neutral; 4-Disagree; and 5-Strongly Disagree. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table3:-** Supervisors' Availability to Supervisee.

SN	Statement	N	1	2	3	4	5
1	Supervisors are always accessible to supervisee.	89	10	13	24	24	18
2	Supervisee can only meet supervisors on appointment basis.	85	14	19	16	24	12
3	Supervisors give supervisee quality time for feedback.	87	11	27	17	20	12
4	Time spent with supervisors adds value to supervisee's work	80	29	17	10	13	11
5	Duration that supervisors stay with supervisee work is rational	83	10	20	22	18	13
6	Supervisors are just a phone call away from the student	87	11	10	15	24	27
7	Supervisors have specific office hours when they meet the students	83	10	15	12	22	24

Table 3 indicates that most {24(30%) & 18(23%)} of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively with the opinion that supervisors are always accessible to supervisee for consultation. It is also shown that majority {29(36%) & 17(21%)} of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively with the view that time spent with supervisors adds value to supervisee's research work. Most {27(31%) & 24 (28%)} of the respondents strongly disagreed

and disagreed respectively with the opinion that supervisors are a phone call away from supervisee for consultation. Irene 2017 notes that supervisors are far from being available to the supervisee so as to create the much-needed academic and research oriented relationship.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations:-**

In regard to the supervisors' supervision competences, the study concludes that supervisors are friendly to supervisees. However, they are unable to empathize with them. In terms of supervisors' technical competence, it was found that supervisors give objective technical advice to their students, but they had not embraced ICT in conducting supervision. Concerning communication between the supervisors and supervisee, it was established that supervisors do not give prompt feedback to supervisee and there was some dissonance between written and verbal feedback given to supervisee. Lastly, in respect to availability or accessibility of supervisors to their respective supervisee, this study established that, supervisors are hardly available or accessible to the supervisee despite the study establishing that physical time spent with supervisors was found to add value to supervisee work.

Based on the study findings and conclusions, this study makes the following recommendations:

- a) Supervisors in the two schools need to be constantly re-tooled so as to embrace ICT in supervision since this has the potential to expedite the supervision process.
- b) Supervisors need to be prompt in giving feedback to supervisee because this can ensure that students are kept on track and are not using delayed feedback as the reason for the delay
- c) University could enforce the tracking system whenever supervision occurs to expedite the supervision process since this can keep both parties accountable
- d) Supervisors need to increase their accessibility to supervisee because supervision is an interactive process that is mutual.

### **Recommendations for Further Studies**

This study proposes that further studies can be done in the following areas;

- a) Establish the challenges that supervisors encounter in course of supervising postgraduate students.
- b) Determine the role of university administration in intervening to resolve the challenges encountered by supervisors and supervisee of post-graduate students.
- c) To establish the effectiveness of the tracking forms in supporting student completion of their respective programs

**References:-**

- Abiddin, N.Z., Hassan, A. & Ahmad, A.R. (2009). Research Student Supervision: An Approach to Good Supervisory Practice. *The Open Education Journal*, 2, pp.11-16.
- Academy of Science of South Africa (2010). *Consensus Report: The PhD study—An evidence-based study on how to meet the demands for high-level skills in an emerging economy*. Pretoria: ASSAf
- Bernard, J. M., & Goodyear, R. K. (2013). *Fundamentals of clinical supervision* (5th ed.) Boston, MA: Pearson
- Cranfield, D.J., & Taylor, J. (2008). Knowledge management and higher education: AUK case study. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 6(2):85–100
- Core, R. S. (2017). Assessing Global Learning in Short-Term Study Abroad: Population, Environment, and Society in Shanghai. *Teaching Sociology*, 45(4), 399–408. Retrieved from <http://eresources.mku.ac.ke:2060/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ1155779&site=ehost-live>
- Corey, G., Haynes, R. H., Moulton, P., & Muratori, M. (2014). *Clinical supervision in the helping professions: A practical guide*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Emilsson, U., & Johnson, E. (2007). "Supervision of Supervisors: On Developing Supervision in Postgraduate Education." *Higher Education Research and Development* 26 (2): 163–179. Doi: 10.1080/07294360701310797
- Ezebilo, E., E. (2012). Challenges in Postgraduate Studies: Assessments by Doctoral Students in a Swedish University. *Higher Education Studies*, 2(4), 49–57. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/hes.v2n4p49>
- Gill, P., & Bernard, P., (2008). "The Student-Supervisor Relationship in the PhD/Doctoral Process." *British Journal of Nursing* 17 (10): 668–671. Doi: 10.12968/bjon.2008.17.10.29484
- Green, P. (2005). *Supervising Postgraduate Research: Contexts and Processes, Theories and Practices*. New York, NY: SOLTAR.
- Hein, S. F., & Lawson, G. (2009). A qualitative examination of supervisors' experiences of the process of triadic supervision. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 28, 91–108
- Irene, N. (2018). Effect of supervision on timely completion of PhD Programme. *Rwandan Journal of Education* 4(2): 57-70. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/rje/article/view/175133/164520>
- Lategan, L.O.K. (2008). *An introduction to postgraduate supervision*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.
- Lessing, N., & Lessing, A.C. (2004). The supervision of research for dissertations and theses. *Acta Commercii*, 4:73–87
- Lessing, A. C., & Schulze, S., (2002). Postgraduate supervision and academic support: Students' perceptions. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 16(2):139–149
- Li, S. & Seale, C. (2007). Managing criticism in Ph.D. supervision: A qualitative case study. *Studies in Higher Education*, 32(4), 511–526.
- Lizzio, A., Stokes, L., & Wilson, K. (2005). Approaches to learning in professional supervision: Supervisee perceptions of process and outcome. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 27(3), 239-256.
- Pearson, M. (2000). Flexible postgraduate research supervision in an open system. In Kiley, M. and Mullins, G. (Eds.) *Proceedings of the 2000 quality in postgraduate research conference*. Adelaide. pp 165 -177.
- Raffing, R., Jensen, T. B., & Tønnesen, H. (2017). Self-reported needs for improving the supervision competence of PhD supervisors from the medical sciences in Denmark. *BMC Medical Education*, 17, 188. Available at: [http://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-017-1023-z\(5.06.2018\)](http://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-017-1023-z(5.06.2018))
- Rahabav, P. (2016). The Effectiveness of Academic Supervision for Teachers. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(9), 47-55. Retrieved from [www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/29620/30413](http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/29620/30413)
- Van der Westhuizen, P.C., & De Wet, J.J., (2003). The training needs of supervisors of postgraduate students in the social sciences and humanities. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 16(3):85–195.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O., & Knight, N. (1992a). Helping postgraduate students overcome barriers to dissertation writing. In Zuber-Skerritt, O. (Ed.) *Starting research: supervision and training*. University of Queensland: The Tertiary Education Institute.