



Navigating the Academic Odyssey: Exploring the Role of Supervisors in Supporting Postgraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

Postgraduate supervision entails an intensive, one-on-one academic relationship between the supervisor and student. Through this relationship, the supervisor facilitates the student's scholarly development. This study investigates supervisors' roles in supporting postgraduate students from the students' perspective. This study through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 doctoral and masters students at two universities seeks to investigate how postgraduate students perceive and undergo guidance from their supervisors. The factors analyzed include the role of networking and motivational supports provided by supervisors during postgraduate students' research journey. This study explores the ways supervisors provide career mentoring and networking to prepare students for postgraduate careers, and how they inspire and emotionally assist students through inherent research challenges. The findings identify strengths in supervisory support and areas needing enhancement. The findings indicate that many students desire more hands-on help with methodology and writing and career mentoring emerges as an area where postgraduate support falls short of expectations. The study recommends that supervisor trainings be provided for supervisors and intending ones, and such trainings should be focused on writing guidance, networking, advising and motivation. By implementing such programs, universities can empower supervisors to optimally assist students, thereby enhancing experiences and outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Supervision; supervisor; postgraduate students; support; mentoring; postgraduate journey; research.

INTRODUCTION

The realm of postgraduate studies represents an important crossroads for emerging scholars as they transition from being passive consumers to active contributors to knowledge within their respective academic disciplines. At the heart of this transformative odyssey lies the bond between students and their supervisors - a relationship with immense influence over the scholarly, professional, and personal evolution of postgraduates. While effective supervision has always been vital for immediate academic success, its value has compounded in today's complex world of shifting academic landscapes and socioeconomic uncertainty. It is within this evolving context that the multidimensional role of supervisors has rightfully garnered intensified discussion and attention in recent years (Ilgen et al., 2021; Yaghi and Bates, 2020).

Contemporary discourse highlights an expanded role for supervisors, looking beyond the traditional perception of them as mere academic guides and mentors. This expanded role encompasses holistic support across emotional, professional, and scholarly domains (Buirski, 2021; Maritz, 2021; Pather, 2022). This evolution is driven by recognizing that postgraduate journeys, while intellectually enriching, are also inherently challenging. Postgraduates must navigate rigorous academics, gain interdisciplinary skills, and learn to thrive in a competitive job market. Supervisors' influence can be amplified by mitigating these challenges. By examining postgraduate perspectives, this research aims to illuminate the multifaceted student-supervisor relationship. The insights promise to enrich understanding and refine the support structures underlying postgraduate education.

Significance of the study

This study holds significant implications for multiple stakeholders in postgraduate education, including academia, educational institutions, and policymakers. By closely examining and elucidating the intricacies and nuances of the supervisor-postgraduate student dynamic, this research will contribute valuable insights that can inform the development and enhancement of effective support structures within academic institutions. A deeper understanding of the needs and expectations of postgraduate students gained through this study can further facilitate the design of targeted professional development programs for supervisors. This will equip supervisors with the knowledge and skills to fully meet the evolving demands of their critical role in guiding and mentoring students. Overall, the objective of this comprehensive study is to explore and analyze the multifaceted functions of supervisors in supporting postgraduate students across academic, professional, and personal domains. It aims to provide a detailed understanding of this complex relationship through directly capturing the first-hand perceptions and lived experiences of the students themselves. The insights gleaned can help strengthen postgraduate education practices and policies across multiple levels. This study seeks to address the following research questions:

- What are the ways supervisors provide career mentoring and networking assistance to help prepare students for postgraduate careers?

- How do supervisors motivate and emotionally support students through the challenges inherent in postgraduate journey?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The supervisor-student relationship is pivotal in shaping postgraduate experiences and outcomes (Baligidde, 2019; Dzubinski & Sanchez, 2022; Hamid, Abd Rahman & Hamidin, 2021). As postgraduate students navigate the multifaceted challenges of advanced research and degree completion, effective supervision provides critical support (Ismail et al., 2017). This review synthesizes key insights on the supervisor's expansive role in supporting postgraduate students holistically across academic, professional, and personal domains. Contemporary discourse increasingly recognizes that supervision extends beyond pure academics to aspects such as mentoring, career development, networking, and socioemotional support (Pizzolato & Dierickx, 2023). Supervisors are thus expected to guide postgraduate students in building the skillsets, networks, and identities needed for future careers (Bengtson & McAlpine, 2022). However, some supervisors may require personalized training to effectively fill this multifaceted role if the supervisor-student relationship is to succeed.

Research has underscored the important role of supervisors' accessibility, guidance style, and interpersonal traits on students' motivation, efficacy, and satisfaction during the supervision experience (Madan, 2021; Rambe & Mkono, 2019; Razali, 2020). These crucial supervisor-student experiences foster intellectual growth, while discordant dynamics exacerbate stresses and burnout in postgraduate students (Maneechaeye, 2022). The following highlights a holistic understanding of the supervisor-student relationship to strengthen postgraduate support in mentoring, networking, and motivational support as students navigate inherent postgraduate challenges.

Research has highlighted that mentoring and providing networking support for postgraduate students often does not meet student expectations and needs, both during the postgraduate journey and in transitioning to careers. Several studies (Mhlahlo, 2020; Rugut & Chang'ach, 2023; Tamrat & Fetene, 2022) indicate a gap between the career development assistance students hope to receive from supervisors and the actual mentorship and networking provided. Many postgraduate students expect research supervisors to guide them in building professional skills, making industry connections, and preparing for academic job searches (Denicolo et al., 2019; Nerad & Bai, 2021; Waghorne, 2021). However, supervisors often focus predominantly on academic and research aspects. Without career mentoring and networking support, postgraduate students frequently feel unprepared when moving into post-graduation roles (McCallin & Nayar, 2012). Lee (2018) argues that expanding the traditional supervisor role to holistically encompass career advising could substantially improve readiness for varied career paths. This suggests the absence of career mentoring and networking support creates a significant gap in the supervisory experience. Career mentoring greatly benefits students when

supervisors approach advising as encompassing both professional development and research guidance.

Another important aspect of postgraduate supervision is motivational support, which is crucial to the postgraduate journey. Pursuing postgraduate study involves psychological challenges that can negatively impact motivation, self-efficacy, and emotional wellbeing over the program duration (Clarence & van Heerden, 2023; Ferreira-Meyers, 2022; McChesney, 2022). Research increasingly recognizes supervisors who provide encouragement, reassurance, and emotional backing help sustain students through self-doubt, anxiety, or burnout (Ives & Rowley, 2005; Wadesango & Machingambi, 2011). However, many postgraduate learners report lacking adequate motivational reinforcement from supervisors - that is, insufficient sensitivity or understanding of mental health issues arising generally and in crises. Additionally, improving supervisors' ability to compassionately identify problems early and connect students with university support could aid retention (Lekhetho, 2022; Sotiropoulou, 2022). Ultimately, research indicates a psychologically supportive supervisor-student relationship significantly empowers persistence through challenges (Han et al., 2022; Kabanda, 2022). This highlights students need emotional support, not just academic guidance. However, supervisors vary in providing motivational backing and mental health awareness. Focused training to build competency in motivational support is warranted (Wisker et al., 2003). Supervisors should approach their roles holistically, providing encouragement alongside critiques and connecting struggling students with formal support when needed.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore postgraduate students' lived experiences with supervision support at two South African universities. The 12 participants interviewed were current doctoral and master's students, recruited through purposive maximum variation sampling for diversity in discipline, demographics, and study stage. The sample consisted of 8 female and 4 male students ranging in age from 24-40 years old, including 7 Black, 1 White, 2 Colored, and 2 Indian South African students from both middle-class and working-class backgrounds and various disciplines including public health, engineering, education, social sciences, humanities, business/economics. Six were doctoral students in their 2nd or 3rd year while 6 were master's students in their 1st or 2nd year. This cross-sectional approach captured a rich array of student perspectives (Aughterson et al., 2021).

In addition, one-on-one interviews were conducted by the researchers in-person when feasible or via Zoom. The protocol included open-ended questions eliciting experiences related to career mentoring, networking support, motivation, and emotional support. Follow-up prompts encouraged elaboration. Interviews averaging 20-45 minutes were recorded with consent and professionally transcribed. Recruitment continued until data saturation, evident when no new substantial themes emerged. Transcripts underwent inductive reflexive thematic analysis to identify common themes. The lead researcher familiarized themselves with the data

through close reading. Initial coding extracted codes using the participants' own language. Codes were iteratively refined into categories, then salient themes related to the research aims were generated. The team verified themes and selected quotations.

Several strategies upheld methodological rigor. Member checking verified accuracy of themes. Peer scrutiny of coding provided an external lens. Data saturation ensured comprehensive theme capture. An audit trail documented procedures and decisions. Researcher reflexivity acknowledged biases. Thick description of findings enabled assessment of transferability. Participant confidentiality was protected through de-identification and aggregated reporting of results. By centering student voices, this study provided invaluable in-depth insights to inform potential improvements in supervision support and training.

Analyzing Postgraduate Students' Perspectives on Supervisors' Supporting Role

This section presents key findings from the thematic analysis of interview data on postgraduate students' perspectives of supervision support relating to career mentoring, networking support, motivation, and emotional support. Two salient themes emerged providing insight into students' supervision experiences, including both positive and negative elements regarding guidance, mentoring, and other supports received from supervisors. The findings are illustrated using anonymous verbatim quotations chosen to encapsulate the essence of each theme. After discussing each theme, connections are drawn to existing literature on postgraduate supervision relationships and outcomes. Comparing the current findings allows identifying areas aligning with versus potentially extending prior research. Based on the study's interview data, the following themes emerged: (i) supervisors' involvement in career development and networking and (ii) supervisors as motivational anchors and emotional support providers.

Theme 1: Supervisors' involvement in career development and networking

The experiences of postgraduate students regarding the involvement of their supervisors in career development and networking activities vary, highlighting a range of approaches and expectations in this aspect of postgraduate supervision. For example, almost all postgraduate students interviewed (PGSTs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11) expressed a common desire for more substantial engagement with their supervisors in matters related to career development, networking, and professional guidance. These students emphasize that their supervisors primarily focus on the core research aspects, leaving a gap in addressing crucial career-oriented needs. Some of their responses are:

'My supervisor seems focused just on research itself - he has not advised me on career matters or networking opportunities. Building professional connections and developing career skills are important to me, so I wish my supervisor saw that as part one of my needs as one of his students' (PGST 2).

'Networking and career development have not been part of our supervision discussions. I wish my supervisor would leverage his connections more, such as by inviting guest researchers to speak with us, his students. I want to believe that making these professional and career connections would be very helpful' (PGST 3).

In the above responses, PGST 2, for instance, they wish for their supervisor to recognize the importance of building professional connections and developing career skills. Similarly, PGST 3 expresses a desire for their supervisor to leverage professional connections more actively, emphasizing the potential benefits of networking with guest researchers. Other postgraduate students such as PGSTs 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 highlighted that while they appreciate job advertisements forwarded by their supervisors, there is a notable absence of substantive discussions on career planning, networking strategies, and other professional development topics. Contrastingly, PGSTs 7 and 12 shared positive experiences where their supervisors actively engaged in their career development. According to them:

'We have discussed my career interests, and my supervisor connected me with recruiters at institutions I am targeting for jobs. Gaining that insider perspective has helped me tailor my CV and interview preparation appropriately. Her career mentoring has been as helpful as her academic guidance' (PGST 7).

'We have discussed my career ambitions, and she connected me with key players in my field for informational interviews. Gaining their insights helped me better position my CV and interview preparation. Her career mentoring has opened doors even before I finished my program' (PGST 12).

The above responses indicate that PGST 7 experienced a significant boost in their career development through valuable career mentoring. This involved not only receiving guidance on how to prepare their CV for specific job targets but also establishing meaningful connections with recruiters. These connections opened doors to potential job opportunities and provided insights into industry trends and expectations. Similarly, PGST 12's career journey went beyond discussing ambitions. They actively engaged in networking opportunities facilitated by their supervisors, leading to connections with key players in their field. These connections not only enhanced their professional network but also resulted in valuable informational interviews. Through these interactions, PGST 12 gained deeper insights into their industry, refined their career aspirations, and strategically positioned themselves on their CV for increased visibility and relevance. In essence, both PGST 7 and PGST 12 exemplify the multifaceted support provided by their supervisors, extending beyond academic guidance to encompass strategic career mentoring and valuable connections within their respective fields. Such holistic supervision appears instrumental in empowering these students' professional development and employability. The supervisors comprehensively supported building critical networking skills, strategically targeting opportunities, and effectively showcasing their expertise to key industry players. This level of career mentoring requires supervisors to be deeply embedded within their professional communities and leverage their networks to open doors for students. It also requires dedication to advising students across the full spectrum of personal branding, communication abilities, industry knowledge, and ongoing professional growth.

In conclusion, these contrasting experiences of postgraduate students underscore the importance of the supervisors' role not only in academic guidance but also in shaping the

professional trajectory of postgraduate students (Griffin et al., 2005; Handour, 2022). Those postgraduate students who establish connections within their supervisors' professional networks and receive career mentoring exhibit a heightened sense of confidence and preparedness for the transition into the professional world. This achievement is commendable, to say the least.

However, the accounts also reveal inequities in students' access to such holistic supervision and career support. Not all postgraduate students appear to benefit from their supervisors' professional connections or receive strategic career mentoring. This deficiency could stem from varied factors - supervisors lacking robust industry networks, being immersed strictly in academia, having limited time, or undervaluing career guidance as part of their role. Nevertheless, uneven access to career mentoring risks disadvantaging those students with supervisors who do not prioritize or excel in this domain.

This suggests that to better equip the next generation of postgraduate students, it is imperative that supervisor training and support emphasizes building competencies, networks, and resources for comprehensive career development mentoring. Esteemed supervisors like those of PGST 7 and 12 who actively contribute to students' professional empowerment should also be highlighted as role models. With greater attention on this vital aspect of supervision, more postgraduate students would enjoy smoother transitions into their chosen careers.

Theme 2: Supervisors as motivational anchors and emotional support providers

The experiences shared by the interviewed postgraduate students highlight the complex nature of supervisors' role in providing emotional support and encouragement throughout the postgraduate research journey. Their responses reveal diverse approaches and outcomes, shaping a nuanced understanding of how supervisor-student interactions impact the emotional well-being of postgraduate students. The responses of the students are captured below:

'When I have felt discouraged by research roadblocks, my supervisor has been very encouraging. He emphasizes that challenges are part of the research process. Our weekly meetings keep me motivated and focused on progressing with my work' (PGST 1).

'During stressful times, my supervisor reminds me that feeling challenged is normal and helps build resilience. Knowing I can turn to him for morale boosts and reality checks helps me continue making progress with my work. His support keeps me focused and determined' (PGST 4).

'My supervisor expresses encouragement when I share frustrations about research challenges. But because our meetings are so widely spaced and short, I don't feel fully supported in managing the stresses of this program' (PGST 5).

'My supervisor is typically encouraging and expresses concern when I am feeling overwhelmed. Knowing I have his emotional support each time I feel like giving up helps me manage stress and find motivation to continue with my work' (PGST 6).

The above postgraduate students (PGST 1, PGST 4, PGST 5 PGST 6) indicate that their supervisors reassured them that research challenges and stress are normal experiences that

build resilience. Furthermore, their narratives indicate that in the face of research challenges and stress, these supervisors are depicted as sources of reassurance, consistently conveying the message that such difficulties are not only normal but also integral to the postgraduate journey. PGST 4's mention of "reality checks" provided by their supervisor adds depth to this narrative, suggesting that the supervisors are not merely offering encouragement but are also grounding their mentees (postgraduate students) in the reality of academic pursuits. This perspective implies that students find value in the acknowledgment that struggling is an anticipated aspect of the postgraduate experience. In doing so, supervisors contribute to a sense of validation, letting students know that their difficulties are not unique or insurmountable.

This above dynamic creates a supportive environment where students feel acknowledged and motivated to persevere through challenges. By framing obstacles as opportunities for growth and skill development, supervisors contribute to a mindset shift among students, reinforcing the idea that resilience is built through overcoming difficulties (Eley and Jennings, 2005; Holmes et al., 2019; Lee, 2007). This suggests that this mentorship style fosters a positive and constructive atmosphere, instilling confidence in postgraduate students and enabling them to navigate the rigors of postgraduate studies with a more resilient and determined approach.

Another ingredient that emerges as pivotal for motivation for postgraduate students is "regular meetings". PGST 1 cites weekly discussions keeping them encouraged, while PGST 5 notes that "...because our meetings are so widely spaced and short, I don't feel fully supported in managing the stresses of this program". This indicates that the infrequent meetings limit their supervisor's ability to provide sufficient emotional support. This suggests consistent check-ins are critical to help students manage stress. To Perminus and Kinuthia (2023), Adeyemi and Oredein (2023), and Sanmugalingam (2021), frequent check-ins serve as a mechanism for supervisors to gauge the well-being of their students and provide timely encouragement. This suggests that emotional support is not solely dependent on the supervisors' willingness but is also contingent on the frequency of their interactions with students. Furthermore, regular contact sessions will create opportunities for supervisors to address emerging issues promptly, offer encouragement, and provide guidance on managing stress. This insight implies that a proactive approach to mentorship involving regular and scheduled check-ins is essential for creating an environment where students feel supported and equipped to handle the pressures of their academic endeavors. This also indicate that the consistency in communication not only fosters a stronger mentor-mentee relationship but also ensures that emotional support is woven into the ongoing fabric of the student's postgraduate experience. It highlights the role of sustained engagement in not only academic but also emotional mentorship ultimately contributing to the overall well-being and success of the students.

In contrast, the negative impact of rushed meetings on the provision of encouragement is brought to the forefront in the experiences of PGST 2 and PGST 11. PGST 2 feels hurried agenda items by their supervisor restrict their ability to ask questions, thus creating a

discouraging dynamic. Similarly, PGST 11 describes meetings often being cut short, restricting extensive discussion. In their words:

'My supervisor tries to offer encouragement, but our meetings feel quite rushed. He is always in a hurry to get through our agenda, so I don't feel I have time to ask all my questions. This is quite discouraging but live goes on' (PGST 2).

'My supervisor offers encouraging words when I'm feeling overwhelmed. But our meetings are often rushed, with him needing to take other calls and attend other meetings. I think more extensive discussions would help me feel fully supported emotionally' (PGST 11).

This limitation in interaction implies a hindrance to the depth of mentorship and support these two postgraduate students could receive. This curtailed interaction suggests a lack of adequate time for the supervisor to delve into the nuances of the students' concerns. The common thread in these postgraduate students' experiences suggests that the rushed nature of meetings not only restricts the flow of communication but also contributes to a perception of inadequate support. This further implies that students may feel unsupported when supervisors cannot dedicate sufficient time to address their queries and concerns thoroughly. This insight emphasizes the importance of allowing for meaningful and unhurried interactions during supervisory meetings, creating an environment where students feel valued and supported in their academic journey. In the same vein, PGST 3 and PGST 6 specifically cite their supervisors' belief in their potential as crucial for motivation during challenges. According to them:

'My supervisor communicates a strong belief in my potential, which motivates me to keep pursuing this demanding work. During tough times when I feel discouraged, I reflect on his reassuring words about my capabilities as a researcher' (PGST 3).

'My supervisor is typically encouraging and expresses concern when I am feeling overwhelmed. Knowing I have his emotional support each time I feel like giving up helps me manage stress and find motivation to continue with my work' (PGST 6).

In the context of PGST 3, the supervisor's strong communication of belief in the student's capabilities is noted as a motivating force. This implies that when students receive such positive affirmations regarding their potential, it contributes significantly to their resilience and determination in the face of challenges. Similarly, PGST 6 echoes this sentiment by noting that the supervisor's encouragement and expression of concern during overwhelming moments serve as a source of inspiration. This underscores that the recognition of the supervisors' belief in their potential as a motivational factor suggests that emotional support goes beyond mere encouragement - it involves a personalized acknowledgment of the student's strengths and capabilities. This individualized approach to mentorship, wherein supervisors actively convey their confidence in the postgraduate students' abilities creates a supportive framework that empowers students to confront and overcome challenges in their postgraduate journey. It also

exemplifies the profound impact that positive reinforcement from supervisors can have on the motivation and determination of students (Martin et al., 2011; Muda, et al., 2020).

In summary, postgraduate students' feedback on the role of their supervisors in providing emotional support highlights the critical nature of tailored assistance. Postgraduate students depend on supervisors as guides during challenging research phases, seeking wisdom and confidence boosts. Insufficient engagement poses a barrier to this vital support. Thus, the significance of regular encouragement cannot be overstated, playing a crucial role in strengthening student resilience, dedication, and overall progress.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study offer valuable perspectives on the diverse and crucial contributions of supervisors in assisting postgraduate students in academic, professional, and personal aspects. The findings reveal the heightened importance of supervisors providing career mentoring, networking assistance, motivation, and emotional support to enrich the student experience and empower outcomes.

In particular, the accounts of postgraduate students underscore their desire for more robust career development support from supervisors during their studies, echoing the findings of McEvoy et al. (2018) which also highlighted the need for greater career guidance from supervisors. Many students expressed needing more hands-on guidance leveraging professional connections, strategizing job applications, understanding their industry, and building experience. This suggests potential gaps in this domain and is consistent with the study by Martin et al. (2023) which found students reported low levels of satisfaction with career support from supervisors. Equipping students with insider perspectives, networks, interview skills, and strategic career positioning appears instrumental for smooth workforce transitions later on. As trusted mentors, supervisors are ideally positioned to provide that vital professional enrichment and prepare postgraduate students more holistically for post-study life. Hence, purposefully incorporating career discussions and networking opportunities could become a more central and valued aspect of supervision, as advocated by Molotsi, (2016).

The desire for enhanced career support aligns with the "new deal" proposed by Barnes and Randall (2012) which argues doctoral education should expand focus beyond narrow academic training to encompass transferable skills and industry connectivity to equip graduates for diverse career paths. Perhaps outmoded perceptions persist that careers outside academia represent failure, as critiqued by Manathunga et al. (2009), perpetuating inadequate career development support. Hence supervisor mindsets may need adjusting, embracing their role as career coaches. certainly, studies underscore student dissatisfaction regarding career guidance (Pyhältö et al., 2012; Watts, 2010), yet evidence shows purposeful supervisor career mentoring enhances employment outcomes, self-efficacy and career resilience (Baker & Pifer, 2015). Hence, increased career mentoring could constitute an impactful area for enhanced supervision practice.

The findings regarding how students perceive supervisors providing motivation and emotional support to help them navigate the challenges of the postgraduate research journey indicate that postgraduate students heavily relied on supervisors for wisdom, reassurance, and motivation during difficult times align with postgraduate studies. This supports McCray & Joseph-Richard (2020)'s findings that emotional support was critical in reducing student stress and isolation. The findings also reveal that validating difficulties as normal can build resilience in postgraduate students, while communicating belief in their potential inspires perseverance (Murshid et al., 2019). However, rushed meetings have been found to limit the ability to provide in-depth assistance to postgraduate students, which is consistent with Baker et al. (2023) study.

In the same vein, the study found that the role of regular encouragement by supervisors to their postgraduate students cannot be overemphasized, as it is vital for student wellbeing and overcoming hardships associated with postgraduate studies, echoing Hazell's (2021) conclusions. The findings also place a premium emphasis on the active role of supervisors in providing emotional support to postgraduate students through consistent check-ins and positive reinforcement. This corroborates with Allen et al. (2022) advocating that supervisors regularly validate students' stresses and provide uplifting guidance to foster emotional self-management.

Enhanced emotional support could help address the mental health crisis in academia (Levecque et al., 2017), with studies finding over 30% of graduate students at risk of developing psychiatric disorders (Evans et al., 2018). Indeed, Benouadah Senouci (2023) found emotional intelligence training for supervisors reduced student anxiety and isolation. Hence, supervisors consciously incorporating compassionate communication, validation and encouragement into their mentoring could yield significant wellbeing benefits.

In conclusion, the study highlights the diverse role of supervisors in supporting postgraduate students, emphasizing the need for comprehensive guidance beyond academics, as supported by prior research. It underscores the importance of integrating career development discussions and networking opportunities into supervision. Additionally, the study emphasizes the critical role of supervisors in providing motivation and emotional support, advocating for a holistic approach to enrich the postgraduate experience. With thoughtful enhancements, supervision could be further leveraged as a protective factor, nurturing not just research skills, but also the career, resilience and wellbeing of the next generation of scholars.

Limitations and recommendations

Acknowledging the valuable insights gained from this study, it is essential to consider certain limitations that might influence the robustness of the findings. The reliance on self-reported accounts from postgraduate students could introduce a potential subjective bias given the inherent variability in individual perceptions and experiences. A more inclusive examination, incorporating the viewpoints of both students and supervisors would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the supervisory relationship.

In response to these limitations and recommendations, several practical steps can be taken by universities and academic departments to enhance postgraduate supervision. First, mandatory training programs should be implemented by research institutions for new supervisors to build essential skills in providing career development and emotional support. These programs should incorporate interactive workshops and roleplaying exercises to teach best practices for giving constructive feedback, holding regular check-ins, assisting students with goal setting, and managing student expectations. Training should also cover identifying warning signs of student distress and techniques for providing encouragement. By equipping supervisors with these tangible skills, training can cultivate more effective and supportive supervisory relationships.

Second, annual reviews between students and supervisors should become a standard practice. These confidential reviews would provide a formal venue for students and supervisors to openly discuss progress, expectations, communication styles, and any concerns. Students should also be given the opportunity to submit anonymous feedback on their overall supervision experience. This mechanism for regular two-way feedback would help identify issues early and prompt timely improvements in the supervisory relationship.

Third, research institutions can promote collaborative supervision models that incorporate multiple mentors, such as committee-based or co-supervision structures. This distributed approach would alleviate sole reliance on the traditional one-on-one supervisor-student relationship by providing students with a diverse support network. Group supervision sessions would also reduce student isolation and foster peer learning. Widening the supervisory circle in this way can mitigate interpersonal conflicts and enhance objectivity.

Fourth, academic departments should host interactive workshops that bring together faculty and students to cultivate a culture of transparent communication. Workshops facilitated by neutral mediators could allow supervisors and students to voice their respective challenges and demystify the supervisory role. Breakout discussions can delve into practical issues like maintaining work-life balance, navigating power dynamics, and setting boundaries. By promoting open dialogue in a low-stakes environment, these workshops can surface constructive solutions for both groups.

Fifth, research institutions can publish clear standards and expectations around the responsibilities of supervisors and advisory committees. Defining the specific advisory and mentoring duties at each stage of candidature will help minimize ambiguity. Providing checklists of key milestones and sample timelines would further clarify the supervisory process. Enhanced transparency around supervision policies and procedures will empower students to proactively manage their academic progress.

Finally, institutional research offices should expand support services to fill gaps left by faculty supervisors in areas like scholarly writing, research methods, and career planning. Specialized workshops, bootcamps, peer writing groups, and mentorship programs tailored to postgraduates' needs would provide supplemental professional development and technical

training. Strengthening campus support infrastructure in this way would ensure students have access to well-rounded guidance as they navigate advanced studies. Through the above proactive measures, research institutions can foster more rewarding and effective supervisory experiences for postgraduate students and faculty alike.

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