



AN EXPLORATION OF SUPERVISOR-STUDENT CONFLICTS: IMPLICATIONS ON POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH QUALITY AND COMPLETION RATES

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the inhabited realities of postgraduate supervision within institutions of higher education, exploring the elements that determine how supervisor student approach conflict influence postgraduate completion rates. Postgraduate supervision is a key determinant of the quality of university postgraduate research and accomplishment thus need for positive relationship between the parties. Drawing on the ABC Conflict Triangle as a conceptual lens, this study illuminates how supervisor student approach conflict can cause tensions that ripple through the supervisory process, affecting the quality of research produced and completion. The challenges facing postgraduate supervision in universities are both systemic and deeply personal. Overburdened academics faculty members, unclear supervisor appointment procedures, midway changes of supervisors, conflicting expectations, retirement or leave procedures among others influence postgraduate students supervisory procedures and completion. The paper advocates supportive supervisory relationships built on mutual respect, clear communication channels, and genuine care to transform postgraduate supervision to a dialogical, participatory, collaborative, and humanising process. Institutional policies must evolve to match with present situation, provide frameworks which protect, guide, and empower both the supervisor and student. Continuous professional development programmes to equip them with current knowledge, best practices in postgraduate supervision, mentorship, conflict management, and research ethics. Universities should invest in IT/digital infrastructure and train supervisors and students in the effective use of e-supervision platforms to ease access and provision of timely feedback. In this vision, supervision is not merely about producing graduates, but nurturing scholars, through logical academic inquiry to contribute to knowledge generation and socio-economic development.

KEYWORDS: Postgraduate Supervision, Supervisor Student Conflict, ABC Conflict Triangle, Postgraduate Completion, Research Quality, Supervisory Practices.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Globally, the quality of higher education is critical in the process of providing the foundation for the knowledge economy in any country. The expected quality higher education is a factor of the postgraduate student's supervision procedures. The role of the supervisors cannot be underrated as it influences the quality of research output. By the virtue that universities are envisaged as the architects of the knowledge economy through research, the quality of postgraduate students' research supervision is critical and of prime consideration in any university faculty (Cross, M. & Govender, L. 2021). In postgraduate studies programme, a supervisor is the one trusted, to guide the student in the course of the research work, being held responsible for the quality of work and performance in line with the research guidelines and expectations of Graduate School/Board and the university.

The supervisor's main role as to provide academic and professional leadership and guidance to the student to ensure quality of the thesis, dissertation or project report. Postgraduate supervision is a complex teaching style through research work and is a process faced by many challenges (McAlpine, L. & Amundsen, C. 2021). Conflict in approach by the supervisors is a major impediment to students' completion of postgraduate studies in majority of universities, specifically their incompatibility in views amongst others. The remarkable expansion of postgraduate education across the globe over the past few decades has put supervisory relationship into the spotlight placing it at the heart of urgent conversations about research quality, student wellbeing, and timely completion rates (Taylor & Beasley, 2021).



With the multiplication of postgraduate programmes in both wealthy nations and developing countries alike, the quality of supervision has emerged as arguably the single most decisive factor in determining whether postgraduate students succeed or stumble (Barnes, 2020). Higher learning institutions face mounting pressures to produce many postgraduate students as a measure of national and global ranking, despite this the relationship between supervisor and student remains a challenging and chaotic pedagogical encounter, where clashing expectations, unequal power dynamics, and interpersonal friction frequently ignite conflict (Okonkwo & Adebayo, 2021).

For generations, postgraduate supervision has been conceived as an academic hierarchical relationship perceived as a master guiding an apprentice, knowledge flowing downward from the expert to the novice which might not be the case in the 21st century where knowledge dissemination is technological. Some contemporary pedagogical thinkers have increasingly challenged this model, advocating instead for approaches that are dialogical, participatory, collaborative, and deeply humanising to make postgraduate studies impactful. This is backed by Freire's (1970) vision of humanising pedagogy which offers a powerful alternative of imagining supervision as a facilitative process that honours the full humanity of both supervisor and student thus creating space for genuine intellectual exchange rather than mere authoritative instruction.

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a compelling framework for understanding how supervision that supports students' autonomy, sense of belonging, and feelings of competence can ignite motivation, protect wellbeing, and accelerate timely completion (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Despite this theoretical approaches the reality of postgraduate supervision often falls woefully short. Studies from South Africa reveal that the old apprenticeship model persists, with supervisors replicating the very practices they experienced which require some intellectual blending to operate successfully. In Iran, low-quality, hierarchical relationships have become so normalized within higher education raising serious ethical concerns whether research practices are being humanized or dehumanized (Hassan, et al., 2022).

Research consistently points to the supervisory relationship as the most powerful influence on postgraduate students' academic progress, their ability to produce meaningful research, and their overall satisfaction with the graduate experience. Studies conducted across vastly different contexts from Tanzania and South Africa to Kenya, Iran, and Benin reveal a troubling pattern: delayed completion affecting between one-third and one-half of postgraduate students, high dropout rates, and pervasive dissatisfaction with how supervision is experienced (Al-Hassan, A. A., & Ibrahim, M. K., 2021).

In Kenya, for example, roughly 52% of graduate students report that supervisory meetings happen irregularly, if at all. When students receive conflicting advice from multiple supervisors or find themselves at odds with their supervisors over the direction of their research, the consequences are measured not just in frustration but in years of extended study thus low completion rates (Mwangi, et al, 2022). In Uganda, studies

indicate that about 49% of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) candidates take longer than expected to complete their studies, and 37% ultimately withdraw from their programmes altogether (Mwase, 2022).

This implies that the quality of postgraduate research and timely completion are not simply matters of student intelligence or institutional funding; but profoundly shaped by the supervisor-student interactions, nature and frequency of feedback, and supervisor motivation. When supervisor-student relationship is marked by mutual trust, open dialogue, and genuine support, students find their motivation strengthened, their research sharpened, and their path to completion smoothed. But when supervision turns conflictual, characterized by communication breakdowns, power imbalances, or expectations that never quite align, the damage is extensive: research quality suffers, candidature drags on, student wellbeing erodes, and in the most heartbreaking cases, students leave their programmes altogether (Kigen, Rono, & Chepkwony, 2023).

This paper explores the layered, complex nature of supervisor-student approach conflict and its implication on postgraduate research quality and completion. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of humanising pedagogy, self-determination theory, and interpersonal emotion regulation, the paper examines how different postgraduate supervisory approaches shape students' experiences and outcomes. The discussion considers multiple dimensions of supervisory conflict: breakdowns in communication, authority asymmetries, mismatched expectations, and the institutional pressures that constrain supervisory practice. Through evidence from diverse geographical contexts, the paper illuminates both the universal challenges and the context-specific dynamics that characterise postgraduate supervision. The insights will envision how transformation of supervisory relationships from conflict arenas into spaces of nurturing high-quality research and hastening students completion rates.

2.1 THE CONFLICT TRIANGLE AND POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISION

The ABC Conflict Triangle, originally developed within peace and conflict studies, offers a remarkably insightful lens through which to understand the tensions that arise in postgraduate supervision. This framework posits that conflict is not a monolithic phenomenon but rather a dynamic interplay of three interconnected elements: (A) Attitudes; the perceptions, assumptions, and emotional orientations that supervisors and students bring to their relationship; (B) Behaviours; the observable actions, communication patterns, and practices that characterise their interactions; and (C) Contradictions; the underlying incompatibilities in goals, expectations, or approaches that constitute the real substance of the conflict (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2021). The contradiction, the heart of the conflict is shaped and given meaning by the attitudes and behaviours of those involved. In other words, it is not merely that supervisors and students disagree; it is how they perceive that disagreement and how they act upon it that determines whether the conflict becomes destructive or creative.



Postgraduate supervision is a deep human collaboration, a partnership in which supervisors and students walk together, ideally as co-inquirers, toward the shared goal of producing meaningful research and bringing the student to timely completion. This practice unfolds within a context of inherent tension, where two people with different histories, temperaments, and expectations must find common ground. Supervisors bring years of disciplinary expertise, established research practices, and institutional expectations about academic standards. They carry the weight of experience, both the wisdom and the scars of their own academic journeys. On the other hand, students bring fresh perspectives, evolving research identities, and often deeply personal investment in their projects. When attitudes and opinions diverge, in relation to research design, theoretical frameworks, methodological choices, or even the simple question of how fast work proceeds, a triangular conflict dynamic can emerge (Gupta, R. N., & Fernando, L. S., 2022).

What makes the ABC framework so powerful is its adaptability. Unlike more rigid models of conflict that reduce tensions to simple categories, the ABC Triangle invites us to sit with the complexity of human relationships. It allows the analyst, whether a supervisor, a student, or an institutional leader, to disentangle the tangled threads of supervisory tensions, examining precisely the nature of the attitudes, behaviours, and contradictions at play. For instance, both the supervisor and student should pause and ask themselves their attitude towards the supervisory exercise and reflect deeply and logically (McAlpine, L., & Amundsen, C., 2021). Through reflective expertise, supervisors and students should begin to address the approach conflict through honest reflection and open dialogue, and deliberate adjustment rather than blame or avoidance. The goal is not to eliminate conflict but to transform it from destructive dimension to a creative dimension; because conflict is a natural part of intellectual where differences become opportunities for deeper logical understanding and better research.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

This study employed systematic review research method, which involved collection, evaluation, analysis, and synthesis of findings based on a clearly defined research question. The researcher undertook a logically projected, evident, and reproducible procedure to find and select the studies. Further, the study also used autoethnography, where the researcher systematically studied, evaluated and wrote personal experiences and linked them with the wider social-educational issue under investigation. Reflective research approach was also utilized through the examination of professional experiences of supervisors and postgraduate students and critically analysing them.

4.1 MAJOR AREAS OF CONCERN AND KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

4.1.1 Overloaded University Academic Calendar and Overworked Supervisors

The rapid expansion of higher education in Kenya over the past two decades has brought with it a host of challenges which exerts strain on university faculty members. Student enrolments have been surged driven by government policies aimed at massification of university education, broadening public access, the proliferation of private universities, and the upward demand for postgraduate qualifications has made the academic calendar become increasingly congested. This has profoundly compromised the quality of postgraduate supervision, leaving both supervisors and students grappling with the consequences of an overstretched system. What was once a manageable rhythm of teaching and research has become a frantic race against time, where the very people responsible for nurturing the next generation of scholars find themselves running on empty (Smith, T. E., & Brown, L. M., 2020).

At the heart of this challenge lies a simple but sobering reality: university faculty members are expected to be everything to everyone. They are not just supervisors of postgraduate research, but lecturers managing large undergraduate classes, script examiners, researchers scrambling to meet punishing publication targets, and administrators serving as heads of departments, programme coordinators, or members of countless university committees. In addition, they are human beings with their own families, health concerns, and personal aspirations. This multiplicity of roles creates a relentless workload that leaves little time or energy for the deep, sustained engagement that quality supervision demands. The result is a rushed supervision process, perfunctory, and a neglected dialogical relationship that postgraduate students need and deserve. Students who once dreamed of sitting across from a mentor, debating ideas and receiving thoughtful feedback, instead find themselves squeezed into hurried meetings where their supervisors' eyes are already on the clock, mentally racing to the next obligation (Mwangi, S. K., & Odundo, J. N., 2022).

Danso, K. A & Nyarko, S. K., (2022) allude that the congestion of the university calendar compounds these pressures in ways that are both predictable and deeply frustrating. In many Kenyan universities, the academic year is packed with overlapping activities: teaching semesters bleeding into examination periods, graduation ceremonies interrupting research time, and administrative deadlines that seem to multiply with each passing year. There is little breathing room for the sustained intellectual exchange that supervision requires. Supervisors find themselves caught in a constant cycle of urgency, responding to the immediate demands of teaching and administration while postgraduate students wait, sometimes for weeks or even months, for feedback on their work. This delay in feedback is not merely an inconvenience; it is a critical blow to the quality of supervision. Timely, constructive feedback is the lifeblood of postgraduate research, enabling students to refine their ideas, correct their course, and maintain momentum thus hasten completion.



In different scenarios, as a result of work-related pressure some supervisors impose strict, inflexible deadlines on their students, pushing them relentlessly regardless of the students' individual circumstances or the realistic pace of their research. This rigid approach fails to recognise that postgraduate research is an inherently unpredictable endeavour, which is shaped by the complexities of data collection, analysis, and writing (Shirbagi, N., & Kavehei, S., 2012). Research does not follow a straight line; it has detours, dead ends, and moments of breakthrough that cannot be scheduled in advance. When supervisors set deadlines without regard for the student's unique situation, they create conditions ripe for conflict and, paradoxically, for delay. Students who feel pressured beyond their capacity may resort to cutting corners, producing research of compromised quality, or they may simply become overwhelmed and disengage from the education course.

4.1.2 Unclear Guidelines on The Appointment Of Postgraduate Supervisors

The process by which postgraduate students are assigned to supervisors is fraught with ambiguity, creating fertile ground for conflict, resentment, and compromised research quality. In many Kenyan universities, the narrative of lead and co-supervisors heightens the approach conflict gap, as each may seek to assert dominance over the student's research direction. When supervisors disagree on fundamental aspects of the research or fail to maintain regular consultations, students find themselves caught in the crossfire, receiving conflicting advice that undermines their confidence and the coherence of their work. Research from Ghana has similarly documented how co-supervisory arrangements can amplify conflict through power struggles, communication breakdowns, and blurred lines of responsibility (Danso & Nyarko, 2022). The absence of clear protocols for how co-supervisors should interact, share feedback, and resolve disagreements leaves students to navigate tensions that should be managed by their supervisors.

The quality of supervision thrives on a relationship characterized by ease of communication, mutual trust, and respect. Allocation should be based on academic criteria such as subject-matter expertise and successful supervision history which may reduce the probability of future difficulties. However, when supervisor allocation is left entirely to student initiative, students may gravitate toward popular supervisors who are already overburdened, or they may choose based on personality rather than academic fit which leads to problems (Ringo, D. S., 2025). Conversely, in universities where supervisors are allocated without consulting the student, the challenge is equally significant. When there is incompatibility between the student and the supervisor, whether in working styles, expectations, or personality the research process is affected. A poor fit can lead to misalignment of expectations, affecting further doctoral experiences and outcomes, and students who experience problematic supervision may develop negative attitudes toward research, undermining the development of the next generation of scholars (Smith & Miller, 2021).

The challenges of supervisor allocation are compounded by institutional practices that vary widely across universities. In some Kenyan institutions, selection is mainly done by departments with little input from the student, while in some academic departments have students propose their supervisors, with departmental postgraduate faculty scrutinizing concept papers to make informed decisions and ensure equitable distribution based on expertise, teaching load, and gender distribution. Research has shown that to increase students' level of comfort and ownership of their research, some universities allow students to choose their supervisors freely, leading to a moderate conflict doctoral experience, recording greater progress and high completion rates. The informality of the selection process also carries risks, as students may use existing positive personal relationships as a criterion, which may not guarantee academic success (Ringo, D. S., 2025).

To address these challenges, universities need to establish clear, transparent guidelines for supervisor appointment. The matching process should be collaborative, involving both postgraduate faculty and students, and should consider expertise, reputation, teaching and learning style, expectations, and personality. Structured support for informed decision-making can mitigate risks of poor supervision outcomes, calling for policy interventions to promote transparency in supervisor selection processes. Institutions must also invest in training programmes to enhance supervisors' mentoring skills and relationship quality (Danso & Nyarko, 2022). Clear expectations should be set during the first few weeks of contact between supervisor and student, outlining issues such as regular meetings, methodological skills, publication expectations, and timelines for completion. Ultimately, the quality of postgraduate supervision depends on appropriate supervisor allocation that considers both the student's preferences and the supervisor's expertise and availability. When universities fail to provide clear guidelines, conflicts arise, relationships sour, research quality suffers, and timely completion becomes elusive. Conversely, when institutions establish transparent, participatory processes for supervisor appointment, they lay the foundation for the supportive, communicative relationships that postgraduate students need to thrive.

4.1.3 Faculty Change of Supervisors Amidst Research

The phenomenon of changing supervisors in the middle of the research process is a deeply disruptive experience that can profoundly affect the quality of postgraduate supervision and the final research output. Incompatibility between the student and the supervisor whether arising from mismatched expectations, communication breakdowns, personality clashes, or fundamental disagreements about research direction often precipitates such changes (Smith & Miller, 2021). When the supervisory relationship fractures, the consequences are rarely contained within the dyad; they ripple outward, affecting the student's motivation, the coherence of the research, and the timely completion of the degree. Whether the change is initiated by the student or the supervisor, the disruption is significant, and the quality of the research report may be compromised as a result. Students who experience a change of supervisor often report



feelings of anxiety, loss of momentum, and uncertainty about their research direction, all of which can impede their progress and diminish the quality of their work (Danso & Nyarko, 2022).

When a new supervisor is appointed in the middle of a research undertaking, the challenges are immediate and multifaceted. The incoming supervisor must familiarize themselves with the student's work, reading drafts, understanding the research design, grappling with the theoretical framework, and assessing the data collected thus far. This process is time-consuming, and during this period of transition, the student may receive little guidance, leaving them to navigate the research process largely on their own (Anderson, J. L., & Williams, K. M., 2021). Moreover, the new supervisor may have different expectations, methodological preferences, or philosophical orientations from the previous supervisor, leading to significant revisions that can set the research back by months or even years. Students may be asked to reframe their research questions, adopt new theoretical lenses, or collect additional data demands that extend the research timeline and strain the student's resources and resolve. Even when the change is handled with sensitivity and professionalism, the disruption to the research process is unavoidable, and the quality of the final thesis or project may suffer as a consequence.

According to Smith, R. H., & Miller, J. J., (2021) the underlying circumstances of the supervisor change are critical in determining its impact on research quality. When the change is necessitated by circumstances beyond anyone's control, such as a supervisor's retirement, sabbatical leave, illness, or death, students often receive institutional support to ease the transition. In such cases, the new supervisor may be chosen with care, and handover processes may be established to ensure continuity. However, when the change arises from conflict or incompatibility, the emotional toll on the student is considerably greater. The student may feel rejected, unsupported, or blamed for the breakdown of the relationship, eroding their confidence and their sense of belonging in the academic community. Research has shown that students who experience a change of supervisor due to conflict are more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression, and they are at greater risk of withdrawing from their programmes altogether. The psychological burden of navigating a fractured supervisory relationship, coupled with the practical challenges of rebuilding a research project with a new mentor, can be overwhelming (Barnes, 2020).

The decision to change a supervisor should never be taken lightly, and when it does occur, it must be managed with utmost care and transparency. Universities need to establish clear policies and procedures for supervisor changes, ensuring that the process is fair, timely, and supportive of the student's needs. Students should be involved in the selection of a new supervisor, and the handover process should be structured to minimise disruption to the research. Communication between all parties; the outgoing supervisor, the incoming supervisor, the student, and the relevant postgraduate coordinators should be open and collaborative, focusing on the student's wellbeing and research progress (Anderson, J. L., & Williams, K. M., 2021). While a change of supervisor may sometimes be necessary to rescue a

faltering supervisory relationship, it remains a disruptive intervention that carries significant risks to research quality and completion. Institutions must work proactively to prevent the circumstances that lead to supervisor changes by ensuring appropriate supervisor allocation, providing training for supervisors, and establishing mechanisms for early identification and resolution of supervisory conflicts.

4.1.4 Professionalism Between Supervisors and Students

The quality of supervision and successful completion of Master's and PhD projects and theses depend significantly on maintenance of professionally acceptable levels of friendship and interaction between students and supervisors. Research from the White Rose Doctoral Training Partnership emphasizes that supervisors and postgraduate researchers should treat each other with professionalism, respect, and courtesy at all times, establishing clear expectations for how students can navigate relationships with academic staff. When boundaries between the professional and personal are not clearly defined, they can undermine the entire supervision process and compromise the quality of research produced (White Rose Doctoral Training Partnership, 2023). The challenge lies in striking an appropriate balance, maintaining a cordial, supportive relationship that facilitates open communication while avoiding the pitfalls of over-familiarity that can blur professional judgment and create conflicts of interest (Halse, C., 2021).

Supervisors must devise professional mechanisms for dealing with students' personal challenges and problems that may cause delays in completing research work. Research conducted at the University of Helsinki found that some supervisors viewed friendships with students as "fraught with difficulties, time-consuming and often unhelpful to both mentor and mentee". A supervisor quoted in the study noted, "being a therapist and a close friend to your supervisee just isn't appropriate". Yet the same study revealed that students often hoped for and expected their supervisors to be concerned about them as persons in both personal and work-related ways. This divergence in expectations creates a tension that supervisors must navigate with control and wisdom. When supervisors draw clear boundaries between academic and private responsibilities and demonstrate genuine concern for student wellbeing, they create a supportive environment without compromising the professional nature of the relationship (Löfström, E. and Pyhältö, K., 2021)

The boundaries between supervisors and students must be deliberately and explicitly articulated from the beginning of the supervision exercise. Available literature suggests that clear articulation of expectations, commitments, responsibilities and challenges is a vital step as it provides direction and aids in solving issues related to boundary management. Studies from Chinese University of Hong Kong identified two ideal types of student-teacher relationships; friendship and professional relationships. Importantly, the research revealed that these two types are not mutually exclusive but complementary thus mutual respect facilitates research at a professional level, while close guidance leads to a long-lasting friendship for future academic activities. Effective supervisors establish a balanced relationship



where they can advise and guide students in their research while also engaging with them as individuals. This balanced approach requires supervisors to be intentional about defining how far they will engage with students' personal lives while maintaining the professional standards necessary for rigorous academic work (Chiu, H., 2026)

Lack of boundaries can lead to interruption of communication and professional relationships, thus slowing the supervision process and ultimately compromising research quality and completion rate. Studies from Lesotho and South Africa have identified aspects like, cultural dominance, lack of mutual respect, insufficient training, and a lack of professionalism as hindrances to effective communication in postgraduate supervision (Mncina et al., 2024). When boundaries are unclear, supervisors may find themselves unable to provide objective feedback, students may feel uncomfortable raising concerns, and the power imbalance inherent in the supervisory relationship becomes exacerbated. Supervisors should be approachable, set clear expectations early, uphold professional reserve, uphold fairness and objectivity, communicate clearly, observe availability, and maintain proficient restrictions, demonstrate genuine care for their students, and entirely create conditions for effective supervision and timely research completion.

4.1.5 Supervision Mode in Universities and Faculties

The mode of supervision adopted by universities and faculties varies considerably across institutions, with significant implications for the quality of postgraduate research and student completion rates. Some universities allocate both Master's and PhD students a single supervisor, while others employ joint or co-supervision arrangements. The lack of clear policies and guidelines on the preferred mode of supervision leaves both students and supervisors in darkness regarding expectations and responsibilities (University of Auckland, 2023). In faculties without clear policies, the allocation of supervisors depends largely on the discretion of postgraduate coordinators and heads of departments, leading to inconsistent practices that may not serve the best interests of students or the institution. In joint or co-supervision arrangements, a main or number one supervisor is typically appointed, whose role is to moderate the supervision process, oversee the quality of supervision, and ensure the expected research work is produced. However, without explicit guidelines defining the roles and responsibilities of each supervisor, confusion and conflict become almost inevitable (Halse, 2021).

Co-supervision offers practical advantages that can significantly enrich students' research experiences. It exposes students to a wider range of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives, allowing them to benefit from the complementary expertise of multiple supervisors. Students working with co-supervisors gain exposure to diverse theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and professional networks that a single supervisor might not provide. This breadth of input can enhance the quality and depth of research, preparing students more comprehensively for their academic or professional careers. Additionally, co-supervision provides advantageous, if one

supervisor becomes unavailable due to illness, sabbatical, or other commitments, the other can continue to support the student, reducing the risk of disruption to the research process. These benefits make co-supervision an attractive model, particularly for interdisciplinary research projects that require expertise from multiple fields (Halse, 2021).

The reality of co-supervision is often more complex and problematic than its theoretical advantages suggest. Some experiences by students and supervisors have demonstrated that co-supervision and panel supervision can create significant challenges due to conflicts in views and approaches that confuse the student. When supervisors hold divergent opinions on research direction, methodology, or theoretical framing, students find themselves caught in the middle, receiving conflicting advice that undermines their confidence and the coherence of their work (Kálmán, 2022). In some cases, supervisors may strive to gain favour from students by discrediting their co-supervisors, creating a toxic dynamic that damages professional relationships and erodes trust. This results in conflict between the main or number one supervisor and the co-supervisor, which affects the quality of supervision and research and the student's rate of completion. Students in such situations become anxious, feel unsupported, and uncertain on how to proceed, and may struggle to complete their research within the expected timeframe (Kálmán, 2022). To mitigate these challenges, universities must establish clear policies on supervision modes, define the roles and responsibilities of each supervisor, and provide training on effective collaboration in co-supervisory arrangements.

4.1.6 Supervisors and Students Expectations

The partnership between supervisors and students in research is a delicate balance that requires intentional effort to manage expectations. Supervisors often enter the relationship with a clear understanding of their guiding role, emphasizing structure, deadlines, and academic standards. However, students may hold unspoken expectations shaped by personal circumstances, cultural influences, or prior academic experiences. When these expectations remain unshared, the two parties risk working at cross-purposes, leading to misunderstandings and dissatisfaction (McCallin & Nayar, 2024). A critical aspect of the partnership is the supervisor's responsiveness to the student's progress and challenges. Students may feel dissatisfied if they perceive a lack of guidance or support, particularly during complex stages of research. Supervisors, therefore, need to balance providing direction with encouraging independence, ensuring that students develop confidence in their abilities while still receiving adequate mentorship. This balance strengthens the student's academic growth and enhances the overall quality of the research (Barnes, D. R., 2020).

To mitigate these supervisor student conflict, communication must be prioritized from the outset. Supervisors and students should share their expectations at the beginning, create an environment where students feel comfortable expressing their knowledge gaps, concerns, preferred working styles, reservations, and strengths. This way students take responsibility for articulating their expectations and seeking



clarification, when necessary, without apprehension. This openness ensures that both parties understand each other's perspectives, reducing the likelihood of conflict and fostering a more supportive research environment (Kigen et al, 2023). Synchronizing goals and expectations leads to a more effective and rewarding collaboration. When both supervisors and students align their objectives, they create a shared vision that promotes efficiency, accountability, and timely completion of research projects. This alignment not only improves the quality of supervision but also contributes to the development of capable researchers who are well-prepared for future academic and professional challenges.

4.1.7 Absentee Postgraduate Supervisors and Students

Absentee postgraduate supervision refers to the unavailability of supervisors to provide timely consultations and feedback to students. This absence often creates anxiety among students, leading to delays in the completion of their postgraduate studies. Supervisors may be unavailable due to commitments outside the university, personal obligations, administrative responsibilities, part-time faculty engagements, or the burden of supervising many students simultaneously. Such circumstances necessitate the adoption of non-face-to-face supervision methods, including email, teleconferencing, phone calls, or platforms like Skype, to maintain continuity in the supervision process (McCallin & Nayar, 2024). The lack of consistent supervision can significantly affect the student's progress and motivation. When supervisors fail to provide timely feedback, students may struggle with uncertainty, lose confidence in their research direction, and experience prolonged timelines.

Universities, therefore, play a critical role in ensuring that supervisors remain accountable by encouraging flexible supervision models that accommodate both the supervisors' commitments and the students' needs. This approach helps reduce the negative impact of absentee supervision and ensures that students receive the guidance necessary to complete their research successfully (Mwangi, et al., 2022). To address absenteeism, universities can implement incentive structures that motivate supervisors to prioritize student supervision. Indirect incentives such as considering successful supervision as a criterion for promotion within university management or administration can encourage supervisors to remain engaged. Additionally, monetary rewards for the successful completion of PhD and Master's theses or projects have been adopted in some institutions as a way of recognizing the supervisors' contribution. These measures help ensure that supervisors remain committed to their responsibilities, despite competing demands on their time (UKCGE, 2024).

Absenteeism is not limited to supervisors alone; students may also contribute to the problem. After completing coursework, some students become lax in maintaining regular contact with their supervisors. Financial constraints, work commitments, and personal demands often reduce their availability for supervision sessions. This lack of engagement negatively affects the quality of the supervision process, as supervisors cannot provide meaningful guidance without consistent student participation.

Consequently, the rate of completion of postgraduate studies is compromised (Rugut, 2024). In summary, absenteeism among supervisors and students poses a significant challenge to postgraduate research, thus both parties must recognize their responsibilities and actively engage in the supervision process. Universities should provide structures and incentives that encourage supervisors to remain accessible, while students must commit to consistent communication and participation, this will advance quality of supervision, leading to timely completion of postgraduate studies and stronger academic outcomes.

4.1.8 Utilization of Information Technology In Postgraduate Research And Supervision

Information Technology has transformed postgraduate research and supervision by offering universities new opportunities to expand globally and accommodate international students. To cope with the increasing demand, many institutions have adopted e-supervision models that eliminate the need for physical, face-to-face interactions. Through use of phones, tablets, laptops, and platforms like HTML-based systems, video conferencing, and collaborative tools students can maintain regular contact with their supervisors. Supervisors, in turn, are expected to familiarize themselves with these platforms to ensure effective guidance and timely completion of research projects (Wisker, 2020).

These innovations have made scholarly knowledge more accessible worldwide, especially through online education platforms. Even research requiring laboratory data collection can be adequately supervised using e-supervision tools, provided there is proper coordination.

However, challenges remain in terms of whether universities can provide the necessary IT infrastructure and the willingness of supervisors to embrace these technologies. In many developing countries, resistance to moving away from traditional face-to-face supervision, combined with infrastructural limitations, slows down the adoption of IT in postgraduate supervision. The situation is particularly pressing in African countries, where universities face the dual challenge of improving IT infrastructure and meeting the growing demand for higher education. Supervisors must adapt to operationalizing e-supervision to enhance the quality of postgraduate supervision while coping with diverse economic and infrastructural realities. Without adequate investment in technology, students risk delays in research progress, and supervisors may struggle to provide consistent (Kigwilu and Nyonje, 2024)

To overcome these challenges, universities should allocate resources to sensitize and train supervisors on the effective use of IT in supervision. Capacity-building initiatives can enhance supervisors' confidence in utilizing digital platforms and encourage the uptake of scientific advances. By shifting mindsets and equipping supervisors with the necessary skills, institutions can strengthen the quality of postgraduate supervision, ensure timely completion of research, and position themselves competitively in the global academic landscape.



4.1.9 Supervisor Retirement, Sabbatical and Other Forms Of Leave

Supervisor retirement, sabbatical, or other forms of leave can significantly disrupt postgraduate supervision, and lead to students experiencing anxiety and uncertainty about the continuity of their research. This lack of regular guidance can compromise the quality of the research work and delay completion schedules. Since postgraduate supervision is a critical component of academic success, universities must anticipate these challenges and establish mechanisms to ensure that students remain supported during such periods (McCallin & Nayar, 2024). One of the most effective strategies is the appointment of an alternative or temporary supervisor. This ensures that students continue to receive guidance aligned with their area of specialization and stage of research. However, the availability of qualified faculty members to step into supervisory roles is not always guaranteed, in faculties with limited staff, the absence of a supervisor can derail student progress, leaving them without the necessary mentorship to advance their studies.

Wisker, (2020) alludes that the impact of supervisor absence is particularly pronounced in specialized fields where expertise is scarce. Students working on niche research topics may struggle to find replacement supervisors with adequate knowledge, which can affect the depth and quality of feedback. Universities must therefore develop policies that prioritize succession planning and mentorship continuity, ensuring that students are not left unsupported during critical phases of their research. In addition, higher learning institutions must adopt proactive measures such as appointing temporary supervisors, expanding faculty capacity, and creating structured policies to safeguard student progress. This can minimize disruptions, maintain the quality of supervision, and ensure timely completion of postgraduate studies.

5.1 CONCLUSION

The quality of postgraduate supervision cannot be underrated since it impacts to the eminence of research work in all universities globally. It requires the supervisor and the student to work smartly and jointly for quality supervision, quality research work and timely completion. Supervisors ought to devise modes of efficient supervision to match the increasing number of postgraduate students and the demand for higher education globally and fasten the postgraduate completion rates. The graduate school or the unit in charge of coordination and facilitation of postgraduate studies should ensure effective and efficient supervision of the students for quality research work which responds to the identified knowledge/research gap.

Investigative measures should be devised to control faculties or departments with mass failure of postgraduate students as a result of low-quality theses to ascertain the standards of supervision. There is need to have clear regulations, guidelines and mechanisms to ensure quality supervision process. With appropriate policies, sufficient resources, and effective supervision practices, universities can improve postgraduate research quality, increase completion rates, and strengthen their

contribution to knowledge generation and socio-economic development.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study proposes the following recommendations;

- 1) Universities should develop and implement policies and guidelines to govern the appointment, roles/responsibilities, and evaluation of postgraduate supervisors.
- 2) Higher education institutions should maintain a manageable supervisor-to-student ratios to reduce supervisory workload and improve the quality of feedback.
- 3) Supervisors should be exposed to Continuous professional development programmes to equip them with current knowledge, best practices in postgraduate supervision, mentorship, conflict management, and research ethics.
- 4) Graduate schools/Board of Postgraduate Studies should establish clear communication and conflict resolution mechanisms to address supervisors/students disagreements.
- 5) Universities should invest in IT/digital infrastructure and train supervisors and students on the effective use of e-supervision platforms to ease access and provision of timely feedback.
- 6) Supervisor allocation should consider students' research interests, areas of specialization, and possibly students' preferences to promote compatibility, productive supervisory relationships thus raise completion rates.
- 7) Universities should establish progression modalities to ensure continuity of supervision when supervisors retire, take sabbatical leave, or become engaged.
- 8) Higher education institutions should have a postgraduate supervision monitoring tool to maintain quality of research and ensure adherence to institutional standards.
- 9) Universities should provide incentives and recognition for supervisors who constantly exhibit excellence postgraduate supervision, production of quality research work, and timely student completion.
- 10) Postgraduate students should be oriented on their; roles/responsibilities, research expectations, and protocols of communication for effective supervision process and timely completion.

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