



Uninvited office visits: Supervising students in uncharted territories and orphaned contexts

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ABSTRACT

Much of the focus on doctoral success emphasizes the epistemological aspects of the doctoral process that prioritize the doctoral candidate. However, since both the supervisor and the candidate play important roles in the supervision process, more research is needed to recognize supervisors' efforts toward the success of postgraduate students. Therefore, this study examines the perspectives of supervisors who implement effective supervisory practices while guiding PhD students, who often navigate unfamiliar territory and may feel unsupported. The study employed a case study design using a qualitative approach, targeting four doctoral supervisors from a university in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. Purposive sampling was utilized to select these participants. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather their insights, and the data were analyzed through narrative analysis, with responses recorded verbatim following the research questions. The findings indicated that guiding students during supervision is crucial for effective supervisory practices. The study recommends that supervisors actively engage in the supervisory process to foster a positive relationship with their students. Ultimately, it concludes that supervisors need to adopt key practices during supervision, acknowledging the significance of their actions in helping students become knowledge producers.

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ABSTRAK

Sebagian besar fokus pada keberhasilan doktoral menekankan aspek epistemologis dari proses doktoral yang memprioritaskan kandidat doktoral. Namun, karena baik supervisor maupun kandidat memainkan peran penting dalam proses pengawasan, penelitian lebih lanjut diperlukan untuk mengakui upaya yang dilakukan supervisor terhadap keberhasilan mahasiswa pascasarjana. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini memeriksa perspektif supervisor yang menerapkan praktik pengawasan yang efektif sambil membimbing mahasiswa PhD, yang seringkali menavigasi wilayah yang tidak dikenal dan mungkin merasa tidak didukung. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus dengan pendekatan kualitatif, menargetkan empat supervisor doktoral dari sebuah universitas di provinsi Eastern Cape, Afrika Selatan. Sampling bertujuan digunakan untuk memilih peserta ini. Wawancara mendalam dilakukan untuk mengumpulkan wawasan mereka, dan data dianalisis melalui analisis naratif, dengan tanggapan dicatat secara verbatim sesuai dengan pertanyaan penelitian. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa membimbing mahasiswa selama proses pengawasan sangat penting untuk praktik pengawasan yang efektif. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar supervisor secara aktif terlibat dalam proses pengawasan untuk memupuk hubungan positif dengan mahasiswa mereka. Pada akhirnya, disimpulkan bahwa supervisor perlu mengadopsi praktik-praktik kunci selama pengawasan, mengakui pentingnya tindakan mereka dalam membantu mahasiswa menjadi produsen pengetahuan.

Kata kunci: institusi pendidikan tinggi; pascasarjana; penelitian; pengawasan; supervisor

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INTRODUCTION

Research is recognized as a crucial component of innovation and national economic growth. Consequently, research education has become a significant concern for both the government and the public (Butt & Shams, 2020). Doctoral supervision encompasses having to navigate complex relationships and providing support to postgraduate students in their research journeys. This study focuses on the challenges faced by supervisors when guiding students who are venturing into "uncharted territories" (i.e., novel research areas) or those who lack established research group support ("orphans"). These students often demand increased guidance, mentorship, and emotional support due to the inherent uncertainties and potential isolation they may experience. Since 2004, universities and governments have expressed worries concerning the poor graduation rates among postgraduate students (Gautam & Gautam, 2021).

Considering the potential economic benefits of PhD graduates and the increasing academic pressures, supervisors and students are pressured to produce high-quality theses within shorter timeframes (Friedrich et al., 2023; Zaman et al., 2023). Such expectations have led to an increase in enrolments into higher degrees, resulting in postgraduate supervisors having to supervise more research students than ever before (Albertyn & Bennett, 2021). Consequently, the evolving landscape of postgraduate supervision in higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa has become contentious. It remains one of the central academic activities associated with higher education qualifications.

Aspirations by noting that students aim to excel in their studies. Aspirations are defined as strong desires or ambitions regarding the future (Hirschi & Spurk, 2021). The drive to learn often stems from a desire to make parents, teachers, and communities proud. Students envision successful careers, including prestigious roles like the presidency (Amida et al., 2021). For many pursuing a PhD, it represents the pinnacle of academic achievement (van Rooij et al., 2021). There is a growing interest in the postgraduate sector, with countries in Asia and Africa striving for ambitious growth in their higher education systems (Tight, 2022). This goal has led to massification and increased access to higher education, resulting in diverse individuals pursuing studies beyond the master's level (Noui, 2020).

Postgraduate supervision has evolved from preparing new academics and contributing to knowledge development to accommodate students pursuing doctoral studies for social status, credential inflation, and economic agendas (Friedrich et al., 2023). As a result, South African higher education institutions are seeing an increase in "students in uncharted territory." Research on doctoral experiences is more prevalent than studies on factors contributing to doctoral success (Bekova, 2021). Three key elements related to the 'voice' of postgraduate candidates include the epistemological voice (knowing), practical voice (doing), and ontological voice (being and becoming) (Bakhshi et al., 2022). Most research emphasizes the doctoral candidate's perspective, neglecting the significant role of supervisors in facilitating student success.

Previous research has delved into aspects of postgraduate supervision, such as the experiences of supervisors in gaining or losing students and the development of independent scholars. This dilemma presents a significant gap in understanding the specific challenges and strategies associated with supervising "students in uncharted territory" and "orphans". These unique groups of students often require additional support and guidance due to their specific circumstances, such as a lack of prior research experience or a lack of a formal supervisory relationship. In addressing this challenge, this study aims to address this gap by examining the experiences of supervisors who have successfully guided such students. By focusing on the lived experiences of these supervisors, this research seeks to identify effective practices and strategies that can be used to improve the supervision of "students in uncharted territory" and "orphans." In doing so, this study will contribute to the ongoing discourse on postgraduate

supervision by providing valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with supervising these groups of students.

As highlighted in the introduction, the background is illustrated by the following.

Student X finished her PhD six months before graduation. He emailed it to his supervisor (herein referred to as Supervisor A), who did not acknowledge receipt. X sent several emails to Supervisor A and several phone calls but received no response. Frustrated, X went to Supervisor A's office and, upon seeing X, Supervisor A lamented, "Why do you come to my office uninvited?" X replied, "It is because you have decided to ignore my emails and my phone calls". X is a "student in uncharted territories" and an "orphan."

This paper began with a conversation in which X expressed frustration about his challenges with his supervisor. X is not alone in these grievances. Research findings highlight that the doctoral journey often brings uncertainty and anxiety, leading to tensions between postgraduate students and their supervisors (Butler-Rees & Robinson, 2020; Elliott & Higgins, 2023). This journey is often characterized by emotional challenges, loneliness, and various obstacles (Seemann, 2022). These challenges include supervisors who are too busy to fulfill their roles, differing perspectives within the supervisory relationship, a lack of respect, and inadequate or delayed feedback on students' research work (Bahtilla, 2024). Additionally, some supervisors may lack sufficient knowledge or expertise in the specific field of study (Park & Cho, 2022).

Research is a crucial aspect of postgraduate study and is the main distinction between undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs (Daniel, 2022). Pursuing a doctorate can require several years of intensive work and dedicated study (Guerin, 2020). There is often limited emphasis on research in undergraduate programs, and some universities in developing countries adopt a surface approach to learning (Zarei & Mohammadi, 2022). As a result, the path to becoming a researcher can be overwhelming for many postgraduate students. Those from educational systems where research is not emphasized may face uncertainties and need a solid research background. Consequently, they need to be more familiar with various aspects of research, including the research process and discussions surrounding requirements such as originality and contributions to knowledge (Lim, 2024).

Postgraduate supervision is a complex pedagogical process involving practices that can often be uncertain, misunderstood, and problematic—sometimes impossible (McCulloch & Bastalich, 2023). Supervisors hold significant power in their research studies with their students, and not only do they possess this power, but they are also perceived as influential figures (Trzebiatowski & Triana, 2020). They are expected to lead the research process and act as expert coaches within the supervisor-student relationship. The type of power supervisors wield can be categorized as disciplinary power. This concept, developed, describes the power to enforce punishment based on judgments made through observation and examination (Greenwald et al., 2022). Conversely, students possess what is referred to as "expressive power" or the "power to act." This dynamic creates a relationship characterized by unity and detachment in the discourse between supervisors and students (Bastalich & McCulloch, 2024).

This study explores effective supervisory practices employed by supervisors to guide and support postgraduate students who are new to research and lack adequate support. As a result, the following research question was used as a guide to gain insight and further explore the study: What is it that supervisors who take on "students in uncharted territory" and "orphans" do right during their doctoral journey?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic world is flourishing with literature about postgraduate matters. This body of work covers a wide range of topics, including:

The landscape of postgraduate supervision has evolved significantly, highlighting various factors influencing the supervisory relationship and student success. Research demonstrates that institutional performance contracts, evaluations, and rankings increasingly shape the prevailing narratives surrounding supervision (Soin & Huber, 2023). This institutional framework exists within a complex array of supervisory practices. These practices must balance academic guidance with professional development, especially in South Africa, where resource constraints and diverse student needs create unique challenges. The effectiveness of postgraduate supervision is closely tied to the quality of supervisory relationships and the competence of supervisors. Recent studies highlight that successful supervision goes beyond mere academic guidance, including mentorship, cultural sensitivity, and psychological support (Adedokun & Oyetunde-Joshua, 2024). This comprehensive approach, particularly vital in South Africa, finds social and contextual factors as key determinants of postgraduate experiences (McCulloch & Bastalich, 2023). The research indicates that supervisors must navigate multiple roles, from academic mentor to research facilitator, while being sensitive to their students' diverse backgrounds and needs (Diab & Green, 2024).

The pedagogical aspects of postgraduate supervision have gained significant attention, focusing on enhancing research skills for both students and supervisors. Stressed effective communication and mentorship for successful outcomes (Bastalich & McCulloch, 2024; Marshall et al., 2022). Effective supervision must balance structured guidance with promoting independent research, particularly among students from diverse backgrounds. Challenges such as limited resources, language barriers, and varying research preparedness have been (Sari & Nayir, 2020). The "expectation gap" further complicates these issues, especially in South Africa, where historical inequalities affect academic readiness and resources. Supervisors also grapple with the "dual responsibility" of maintaining academic rigor while offering support. This underscores the need for flexible, context-sensitive supervision approaches that accommodate diverse student backgrounds while maintaining high standards.

The landscape of postgraduate education encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions that significantly influence student success and supervisory effectiveness. At its foundation lies the competence ecology of supervisors and the research preparedness of both students and their mentors, directly impacting the quality of academic guidance (Pizzolato & Dierickx, 2023). This supervisory relationship is often complicated by divergent expectations regarding the scope and depth of supervision while being shaped by various models of delivery in postgraduate education (Burt & Wang, 2022; Park & Kim, 2022). The complexity of this educational journey is further influenced by sociocultural factors, particularly the impact of race and gender dynamics, as well as the institutional context, where departments and disciplines play crucial roles in shaping postgraduate experiences (Johnson & Strayhorn, 2023). Adding to these challenges is doctoral students' inherent situatedness and frequent isolation, which can significantly affect their academic progress and overall experience. This multifaceted overview underscores the richness of research focused on various aspects of postgraduate education and supervision, highlighting the interconnected factors influencing postgraduate success and supervisory effectiveness (Butler-Rees & Robinson, 2020).

The literature on supervisory practices highlights numerous complaints regarding unfair treatment by supervisors. Research explores supervisors' experiences in the evolving landscape of higher education and the perceptions of both students and supervisors (Adedokun & Oyetunde-Josuha, 2024). Recent studies have also concentrated on preparing PhD students to become stewards of their disciplines (Barradell, 2023). Developing critical pedagogy within higher education can enhance students' research

literacies and graduate capabilities while clarifying new doctoral study forms (Woodhouse & Wood, 2022). Additionally, a wealth of literature offers guidance on writing journal articles, composing theses, planning a thesis, and academic writing—however, more than this guidance is required from supervisors. Doctoral students still require supervisors and mentors to support them throughout their doctoral journeys, which some authors describe as isolating (Greener, 2021). From the preceding, no study deals explicitly with supervisors' voices regarding how they stick to good supervisory practices to ensure their students' success. It is because of this that this paper is written. The article will contribute to the debate on supervision skills by unearthing practical supervisory tips to enhance postgraduate supervisor knowledge.

METHODS

This study is a qualitative study that used a narrative inquiry research approach using an interpretive paradigm. Narrative Inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences narrated by those who have lived them. We have thus highlighted what we can learn about the lived experience by focusing on narrated lives. Narrative Inquiry may be used in different ways. It may be used with a minimal number of participants (one, two, or three), and these are selected because they are judged to be typical of a much larger culture-sharing population. Narrative Inquiry is a strategy generally associated with small, purposive samples because of its intensive and time-consuming nature. It is likely to generate large amounts of data in the form of interview transcripts (Popa, 2022). Thus, individual, face-to-face, in-depth interviews were used to collect participant data. The target population included ten doctoral supervisors in a selected Eastern Cape province, South Africa university. A non-probability, purposeful sampling technique was used to select the chosen four participants because they could provide the best information based on their renowned supervisory practices. Data was analyzed thematically, and all ethical considerations were adhered to.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In the case of “orphans” and “students in uncharted territory,” supervisors are offered students or are approached by students who have not been able to be in the hands of another supervisor for several reasons. The first few questions in this study sought answers to whether S1, S2, S3, and S4 have taken on a student whom another supervisor previously supervised; whether they have supervised students who had been transferred to them; what circumstances led to these changes, and what happened preceding and during the initial transfer and how contact was initiated.

What are the experiences of supervisees and supervisors within the supervision process?

This theme explored the phenomenon of "orphans" postgraduate students who have been transferred to a new supervisor. The research investigated how these transfers occur, their reasons, and the experiences of the "orphans" and the supervisors who take them on.

Supervisor 1:

"I consistently receive student inquiries due to their established reputation. They often encounter students who have experienced mistreatment or neglect from previous supervisors".

Supervisor 1 described instances of supervising students from other departments, sometimes leading to friction with colleagues.

Supervisor 2:

"I generally accept students who approach them and align with their area of expertise (Organizational Behavior)."

Supervisor 2 acknowledged the challenges "working students" face, who may require more flexibility and support.

Supervisor 3:

"I think students hear about who I am from other students. Word gets around that I am a supportive and effective supervisor".

Supervisor 3 attributed their frequent student inquiries to their reputation as a good supervisor, emphasizing the importance of word-of-mouth among students.

These responses indicate that supervisors are crucial to student success, and their reputation significantly influences student choices. "Orphans" often experience a lack of supervision, inadequate support, and a mismatch with their previous supervisor. These transfers can create tensions between supervisors. In addition, many students entering postgraduate studies lack research experience, clarity in their research expectations, and confidence in their research abilities. Finding and choosing a suitable supervisor is a critical but often challenging process for students.

How did you feel when this happened? Did you have any concerns?

This theme delves into the complexities of supervising postgraduate students, particularly students who experience difficulties. Thus, we focus on "orphans" students transferred from other supervisors and how they navigate "uncharted territories." This theme explores the emotional and practical experiences of both supervisors and students. By examining the supervisors' perspectives through questions such as "How did you feel when this happened? Did you have any concerns?" this study aims to understand the anxieties, frustrations, and rewards associated with guiding students through unfamiliar and often challenging academic journeys.

Supervisor 1 indicated that he took over the 'orphans' because he felt they deserved to be treated fairly. He said, "I simply ignored whatever was happening; I *just went on doing my work as I should*" (Supervisor 1)

Supervisor 2 mentioned how supervisors feel empathy and responsibility towards participants by saying that;

Supervisor 1:

"As Supervisors, we often feel a sense of responsibility towards "orphan students" by acknowledging their emotional and academic challenges.

Supervisor 3 expressed concerns about building trust and confidence amongst their students in their supervisors by mentioning that;

Supervisors 3:

"We supervisors may have concerns about rebuilding trust with "orphans' students" who may have experienced negative experiences with their previous supervisors. I, for instance, worry about such students' confidence in their research abilities to deal with the challenges they face in their studies".

Supervisor 4 mentioned the dilemma they face in supervising "orphans' students and students in uncharted territories" by saying,

Supervisor 4:

"Supervising students in uncharted territories can be both exciting and anxiety-provoking. We supervisors often experience uncertainty about the research direction, potential challenges, and the availability of resources.

Supervisors experience diverse emotional challenges during the supervision process. Some feel a strong responsibility towards "orphan students" facing emotional and academic difficulties. Others emphasize the necessity of rebuilding trust with postgraduate students who have had negative supervisory experiences. These challenges can significantly affect students' educational journeys. Additionally, anxiety and uncertainty often accompany the supervision of these students, highlighting the difficulties supervisors encounter in offering adequate support.

How did you manage these issues in practice and with supervising the student? What were your experiences?

This theme focused on the practical strategies supervisors use to mitigate the challenges they encounter supervising "orphan" students and uncharted research territories. The themes explore how supervisors manage challenges such as lack of student preparedness and the need to foster trust and guidance for novel research. The theme aims to gain insight into how supervisors deal with complexities and support student success in their postgraduate studies.

Supervisor 1 noticed that there could have been reasons why the previous supervisor did not fully engage with the 'orphans'. He said,

Supervisor 1:

"At times, some 'orphans' proved my hypothesis right - that they were probably not well-prepared for the doctorate...but hey, that is what I do best, I take such 'orphans' and mold them into great doctoral students".

Supervisor 2 mentioned how he tries to understand students' previous experiences by saying that;

Supervisor 2:

"I focus on building rapport with 'orphan' students by understanding their experiences. I provide clear expectations and regular feedback and encourage peer support and mentorship".

Similarly, supervisor 3 emphasized how he uses honest communication to provide a supportive environment by saying,

Supervisor 3:

"I prioritise open communication and create a supportive environment for students to share their concerns. I provide tailored guidance and resources to help them overcome obstacles and regain confidence."

On the contrary, supervisor 4 said,

Supervisor 4:

"Supervising these students in uncharted territories requires supervisors to use a collaborative approach. I usually engage in discussions, explore various research methods, and evaluate findings together. I often stress the importance of flexibility and encourage students to embrace the unknown and learn from their experiences".

Participants' responses emphasized a multifaceted approach to supporting postgraduate students' research. Most of the key strategies used by supervisors to address gaps in knowledge of "orphan" students included fostering strong rapport and trust and building a supportive environment. Supervisors acknowledged that guiding students in uncharted research territories requires a collaborative approach

emphasizing flexibility and independent exploration, which is key to successful supervision. As noted by participants, these strategies indicate the importance of showing empathy for students and fostering support and guidance for improved student outcomes.

Were there any issues and any difficulties? Moreover, if so, what did you do to cope with these?

This theme explores the challenging nature of the supervisor-supervisee relationship. It focuses on the experiences of supervising "orphaned" students and those navigating uncharted research territories. It also focuses on strategies that supervisors can employ to provide the needed assistance to these students, analyze the effectiveness of their interventions, and understand students' resilience and adaptability in the face of unexpected challenges and circumstances.

Supervisor 2 mentioned the challenges he faces with supervision by saying that;

Supervisor 2:

"There were some expected challenges in the sense that the new supervisor-student relationship had to be managed carefully."

Supervisor 3 asserted that challenges are expected when managing the expectations of students. He said;

Supervisor 3:

"Yes, I have experienced several challenges when I manage students' expectations, and I ensure that I provide consistent support for all of my students."

Supervisor 4 expressed a contrary view by mentioning that;

Supervisor 4:

"While student referrals are essential, I have experienced several situations where the demands of students do not always meet with the style of supervision or expertise."

Participants' responses focus on the diverse and challenging nature of the supervisor-supervisee relationship. They acknowledged the importance of fostering a productive working relationship, emphasizing the necessity of effectively managing this dynamic. Additionally, participants highlighted the need to align their expectations with those of students and provide necessary support for navigating difficulties in postgraduate research. Some participants recognized the need to address the misalignment between student expectations and the supervisor's expertise and supervisory style. However, contrasting perspectives among participants underscored the importance of adapting supervisory roles, demonstrating flexibility, and understanding students' expectations and needs.

Discussion

The findings reveal diverse emotional responses among supervisors working with "orphaned" students. Some supervisors, like Supervisor 1, expressed a strong sense of duty to provide a fair and supportive environment for these students to succeed. Others, such as Supervisor 3, expressed concerns about rebuilding trust and addressing potential confidence issues from negative experiences. These findings highlight supervisors' emotional burden in supporting students who have faced significant challenges in their academic journeys. Furthermore, supervisors reported experiencing anxiety and uncertainty when guiding students in uncharted research territories. These findings underscore the inherent complexities of

the supervisory role and emphasize the importance of supporting the well-being of both students and supervisors.

These findings align with existing literature on postgraduate supervision. The evolving landscape of supervision is influenced by institutional pressures (Soin & Huber, 2023). Advocate for a multifaceted approach to supervision that encompasses academic guidance, mentorship, and emotional support (Adedokun & Oyetunde-Joshua, 2024). The study findings further underscore the emotional burden experienced by supervisors, mainly when working with "orphaned" students. The literature emphasizes effective communication and mentorship's significance in achieving successful postgraduate outcomes (Bastalich & McCulloch, 2024). These findings suggest supervisors should prioritise rebuilding strong rapport, setting clear expectations, and fostering an open and supportive communication environment.

Regarding the challenges associated with supervising students in uncharted research territories, the impact of limited resources on student preparedness (Sari & Neyir, 2024). This emphasizes the need for a collaborative approach that is adaptable and context-sensitive. As posited, this approach helps accommodate diverse student needs while maintaining research momentum. However, the findings also reveal specific challenges within the South African context. The influence of historical inequalities on student preparedness and the increased burden on supervisors due to high student-to-supervisor ratios. As highlighted in the literature, these factors require careful consideration to improve postgraduate student performance and enhance supervisor well-being (McCulloch & Bastalich, 2023).

Postgraduate research is not a linear journey. It involves navigating complex processes that require careful planning and structure. Developing a 30-step research framework designed to provide students with a structured roadmap. This framework reflects current research trends and integrates multiple methodologies, simplifying the research process. However, it is crucial to remember that this framework is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Students must often adapt their approach to suit their unique research needs and contexts (Pizzolato & Dierickx, 2023). Adequate postgraduate research supervision is vital in guiding students through this complex journey. Supervisors guide students in thesis preparation, foster essential research skills, and help them integrate into the academic community. Thesis writing is inherently scientific, requiring careful consideration of the subject matter, methodologies, and research tools. However, there are no universal rules for navigating this complex journey (Burt & Wang, 2022). Therefore, institutions must establish clear guidelines and policies to support students and supervisors. Supervisors, in turn, must provide tailored guidance and constructive feedback throughout the research process (Park & Kim, 2022).

The quality of the supervisory relationship is a cornerstone of postgraduate research success. Supervisors must fulfill multiple roles, including guiding students on research structure, addressing methodological challenges, and providing academic and personal support. Adequate supervision requires a nuanced approach, adapting to each student's individual needs and learning styles. This may involve varying guidance levels, from providing strong direction to offering more independent learning opportunities. Supervisory styles vary widely, ranging from high directive to more laissez-faire approaches. The most effective approach depends on each student's specific needs and preferences. Supervisors must self-reflect to understand their supervisory philosophy and adapt their strategy accordingly (Johnson & Strayhorn, 2023).

A positive and collaborative supervisor-student relationship is crucial for successful research outcomes. Open and honest communication is essential. Early discussions on roles, responsibilities, and communication strategies can help set clear expectations and prevent misunderstandings later in the research process (Butler-Rees & Robinson, 2020). Power dynamics can exist within the supervisor-student relationship. Formalized institutional processes can help ensure open dialogue and empower students to voice their concerns without fear of retribution (Adedokun & Oyetunde-Josuha, 2024). By

fostering a cooperative environment, supervisors can create a space where students feel comfortable building confidence, developing critical thinking skills, and challenging ideas constructively.

More collaborative, student-centered approaches are gradually replacing traditional supervisor-centric models. Modern research education emphasizes co-learning and the development of research literacies. The curriculum needs to be managed so that the process of achieving the endpoint can be achieved properly to support student development in a research environment (Mulyadi, 2021). Supervisors must embrace these shifts, offering mentorship and combining structure and flexibility to accommodate diverse student needs and backgrounds (Woodhouse & Wood, 2022). However, challenges remain. Mismatched supervisory styles, student academic preparedness differences, and sociocultural factors such as race and gender dynamics can significantly impact the supervisory relationship. Supervisors must be mindful of these complexities and tailor their approach to address each student's unique needs and challenges (Greener, 2021). Fostering collegial relationships that enhance the student's experience and the quality of the research is paramount (Barradell, 2023).

Thus, adequate supervision is a dynamic and multifaceted process that requires adaptability, clear communication, and a strong commitment to student development. By balancing structure with flexibility and fostering a supportive environment, supervisors can empower students to achieve their research goals and contribute meaningfully to the academic community. Such a supportive environment can be created by adopting the interventions and strategies outlined in **Table 1** (Intervention for Postgraduate Success) below. To improve the supervision of abandoned postgraduate students' research, the study proposes the following interventions that higher education institutions can adopt.

Table 1. Interventions for Postgraduate Success

Intervention	Target Audience	Aim
Supervisor Workshops Training	Supervisors	Enhance supervisory skills, including communication, feedback, mentoring, and cultural sensitivity. Address specific challenges when supervising "orphaned" students and those in uncharted territories.
Student Support Programs	Postgraduate Students	Provide access to counseling services, academic skills workshops (e.g., research methodology, writing, presentation), and peer mentoring programs.
Mentorship Programs for Supervisors	Senior Faculty	Offer experienced supervisors the opportunity to mentor junior colleagues, providing guidance and support on supervisory best practices.
Clear Transfer Policies	Department/Institution	Establish clear guidelines for student transfers, including procedures for identifying potential issues, facilitating smooth transitions, and ensuring student well-being.
Research Seed Funding	Students' Territories in Uncharted	Provide financial support for exploratory research, allowing students to pursue innovative research projects more confidently.

Source: Author (2025)

Table 1 above outlines five key interventions that can be adopted to improve the postgraduate supervision experience of students. These key interventions include empowering supervisors with the necessary skills through targeted training workshops, providing comprehensive support services for doctoral students, promoting mentorship among the students and supervisors in the faculty, establishing clear guidelines for student transfers, and providing financial support for exploratory research. By implementing these interventions, institutions can create a more supportive and effective environment for postgraduate study, ultimately enhancing student success and advancing knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion reveals supervisors who successfully guide "orphaned" students prioritise building strong rapport and trust. They actively listen to their students' experiences and acknowledge the potential emotional and academic challenges they may have faced with previous supervisors. Most supervisors recognize the need to rebuild trust and address potential confidence issues arising from negative experiences. They prioritise open and honest communication, creating a safe and supportive environment where students feel comfortable sharing their concerns and seeking guidance. Successful supervisors embrace a collaborative and flexible approach when supervising students in uncharted research territories. Some supervisors encourage independent exploration and critical thinking while providing advice and support. They recognize the inherent uncertainties of novel research and actively engage in discussions with students to explore different research approaches and evaluate findings together. They emphasize the importance of learning from successes and failures, fostering a growth mindset that encourages students to embrace the unknown. Several key strategies emerged as crucial for effectively supervising "orphaned" students and those navigating uncharted research territories. These include building strong rapport and trust, providing tailored guidance and support, fostering resilience and independence, advocating for student needs, and embracing a collaborative approach. The findings of this study have significant implications for improving postgraduate supervision practices. Institutions can play a crucial role by establishing clear guidelines and policies for student transfers and supervisor support, providing professional development opportunities for supervisors to enhance their skills in supporting diverse student needs, creating a supportive network for supervisors to share best practices and address challenges, and prioritizing student well-being by addressing issues such as mental health and workload management. By implementing these recommendations, institutions can create a more supportive and inclusive environment for students and supervisors, ultimately enhancing the quality of postgraduate research. As a result of these conclusions, future researchers can consider undertaking a longitudinal study to understand the long-term effects of supervision methods and their impact on doctoral studies. By tracking the progress of postgraduate candidates over a year, researchers can gain insights into the various factors contributing to doctoral students' completion and throughput rates. Moreover, a comparative study could reveal the effectiveness of different supervisory models across multiple disciplines and university contexts, providing valuable insights into the supervision process. Based on these conclusions, the study proposes that future researchers consider undertaking a longitudinal study to understand the long-term effects of supervision methods and their impact on doctoral studies. By tracking the progress of postgraduate candidates over a year, researchers can gain insights into the various factors contributing to doctoral students' completion and throughput rates. Moreover, a comparative study could reveal the effectiveness of different supervisory models across multiple disciplines and university contexts, providing valuable insights into the supervision process.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The authors of this paper would like to express their heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity provided by this esteemed journal. We appreciate the chance to participate in and engage with the discourses and discussions presented on this platform and contribute our findings and perspectives to the ongoing scholarly discourse. This experience has been instrumental in fostering a greater understanding of the subject matter, and we are honored to be a part of this vibrant academic community.

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