# Students' Experiences with Postgraduate Research Cohort Supervision: A Qualitative Enquiry

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## Abstract

Much has been written about research supervision models relevant to other academic disciplines within the higher education sector. However, the literature search in this paper has noted that there is potential for developing a more robust discussion on research cohort supervision experiences of postgraduate students engaged in a full-research qualification within the Health Sciences faculty of the selected university. The aim of this paper is to share insight, research findings and discuss key issues related to this type of supervision model. A qualitative, exploratory, descriptive research design was used to collect data through in-depth one-on-one interviews with the Faculty of Health Sciences' students across all departments to identify benefits and challenges in the facilitation of postgraduate research cohort supervision workshops. Findings were analysed using Tesch's method of data analysis and revealed that while research supervision can be complex for all concerned parties, the traditional one-on-one supervision needs to be complemented by other strategies, like the cohort supervision approach. The

study also noted that cohort sessions supplemented the support offered to them, allowing them to draw on the expertise of other experienced and novice supervisors. In addition, students benefitted from the guidance provided by their cohort peers as they navigated the various phases of the research process.

**Keywords:** Higher education institution, postgraduate student; research cohort supervision; South Africa.

## Introduction and Background

Bitzer and Albertyn (2011:874 - 888) note that in recent years, transformation in South African Universities has seen an increase in the number of Postgraduate (PG) students enrolling for Masters and Doctoral research programmes, as access and educational opportunities have been widened. Findings from the same study report that academic and scholarly research has become a priority of academic institutions' strategic plans and visions to promote capacity building and knowledge base among staff and students alike. According to Manathunga and Goozee (2007:306), the road to successful completion of Masters or Doctoral degrees are often strewn with many obstacles and can be an arduous journey. Pour, Ghoreishinia, Zare, and Arbabisarjou (2017:76-82), note that human knowledge and educational advancement have resulted from learning over centuries from other scholars to improve teaching and learning in the modern world. The same study has concluded that the identification of the multiple factors affecting learning processes in any higher education institution was very important in fixing problems and deficiencies inherent in these educational systems. Student supervision in higher education can take the form of a mentor/mentee relationship and has long been regarded as an essential component in nurturing and developing early-career academics, allowing them to grow into confident, competent, scholarly teachers. Dhunpath, Matisonn, and Samuel (2018:78 - 105) note that this so-called mentoring facilitates learning for students who come from increasingly diverse social, cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds and add that higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa play a central role in determining the processes of PG supervision. A study that discussed the future of Higher Education in South Africa noted that although students of

the current generation insist on having the right to know and wanting to act immediately on this knowledge, they still displayed a sense of societal mistrust in support of their ideas and actions (Dhunpath, Amin & Devroop 2018:2). Recent years have seen education institutions engage in partnerships that have embraced and diversified research and research supervision practices, thereby influencing the delivery and facilitation of research outputs. Naidoo and Sibiya (2018:352 - 353) note that these research outputs, influenced by sound research knowledge and supervisory practices such as research cohort supervision, have emerged globally as a salient feature of the higher education landscape, building, developing, and strengthening institutional research capacity. A study by Dhunpath and Narismulu (2011:9 - 10) that explored transformation and student experiences in Higher Education alluded to the 'master-apprenticeship' model of research supervision as a possible cause of South Africa's under-producing of postgraduate doctoral students. Bitzer and Albertyn (2011:874-888) agreed and pointed out that it was evident that little research in South Africa currently existed on what contributed to the successful completion of a quality doctoral study within a prescribed minimum period of time. The authors also noted that an understanding of postgraduate students in research supervision was vital to highlight perceived challenges that may seemingly be contributing to low throughput rates and poor-quality products in South African universities

While Dhunpath and Narismulu (2011:9 - 10) found that a re-conceptualisation of the existing supervision models used by Higher Education institutions was necessary, they also proposed alternate models of research supervision like the research cohort supervision model to accelerate the rate of doctoral graduations. Wadee *et al.* (2010:9) agreed by noting that HEIs' research practices in South Africa have indicated that PG supervision, such as research cohort supervision, is pivotal to the successful completion of a postgraduate programme.

The aim of this study was to therefore explore students and supervisors' experiences regarding the PG research cohort supervision workshops in the Faculty of Health Sciences at a University of Technology in the Kwa Zulu-Natal region. However, this paper concentrates only on the findings from a student's perspective. It is hoped that the findings will identify benefits and impediments that may be used to spawn future research as well as shape existing and future research cohort programmes. Although

literature search has yielded information about research supervision regarding PG students in general, the experiences of PG students within the Faculty of Health Sciences have not been explored nor understood within the existing body of related literature. It was, therefore, imperative that the authors of this article explore student experiences of cohort research supervision to address this area of unmet need by enumerating the dynamics of success and challenges as perceived by the participants' lives and in their personal stories.

Therefore, this article suggests recommendations to overcome the identified challenges and exploit emerging opportunities to improve the research cohort supervision practice from the student's perspective. This study intends to contribute to the field of teaching and learning in the South African higher education sector, which may improve the practice of research cohort supervision.

As a point of departure, the authors are of the opinion that the reader has to understand the model of cohort supervision and, secondly, the relationship between supervisor and supervisee and its impact on the academic throughput rate of the student. This understanding will facilitate the discussion of the international and national findings on the topic of inquiry.

## Literature Review

Samuel and Vithal (2011:76) agree that the pedagogy of the Masters and Doctoral programmes is deeply infused and underpinned by a democratic philosophy of teaching and learning. In recent years, transformation in South African Universities has seen an increase in the number of PG students enrolling for Masters and Doctoral research programmes, as the access to educational opportunities has been widened. However, new forms and models of PG programmes, supervision, and research may challenge the existing institutional boundaries. According to Choy, Delahaye, and Saggers (2015:19 - 34), supervision capacity is severely challenged due to the increase in the number of PG students not meeting with a corresponding increase with competent supervisors. To meet this demand, lecturers without any supervision experience have had to start supervising. These challenges have created the opportunity to explore how institutional stakeholders such as supervisors and students relate and respond to such challenges. Another

study described challenges that faced early-career academics in higher education pedagogies, such as supervision of students and the development of scholarship in learning and teaching, revealed that although there were mentoring or supervision opportunities, the perceived challenges of identifying appropriate mentors or supervisors were real (Dhunpath, Matisonn & Samuel (2018:78 - 105).

Today, supervision is about integrating research management and support systems for a diverse national and international student population (Rodwell & Neumann 2008:65 - 76). Models of PG supervision differ from discipline to discipline. While the cohort research supervision model exists in various guises within higher education, it is increasingly used in university faculties internationally to enhance teaching and learning. One such model is cohort supervision, which is known to provide a creative way to decrease supervision challenges and reduce the pressure on research teams to increase the number of PG students while improving the university's throughput. Cohort supervision was originally developed as an alternative to the traditional Apprentice Master Model (AMM) in response to concerns about completion rates and the quality of research supervision. Subsequent cohort models of research emerged from the benefits of cooperative or community learning and were founded on the concepts of collaboration and collegiality amongst researchers (Choy, Delahaye & Saggers 2015:19 - 34). The authors of this study explained that the main feature of the cohort model was a three-way relationship, where learners drew on and contributed to three primary sources; individual self, supervisor, and cohort members. It was further noted that this was done while allowing students to engage in a common series of learning experiences and form networks of synergistic learning relationships that were developed and shared amongst its members. Cohort supervision refers to the practice where one or more lecturers supervise groups of students. This implies that cohort supervision is not a new phenomenon and that the primary purpose was not to increase supervision capacity but rather to improve supervision quality (Van Biljon, Van Dyk & Naidoo 2014:1444). Van Heerden and Le Roux (2009:259) attributed the following additional benefits to cohort supervision: peer support, networking, shared resources, motivation, and creating responsibility. Challenges to Cohort supervision were factors such as students working at different paces, time inefficiency, and additional organizational requirements (Van Biljon & De Villiers 2013:1443 - 1445).

Role clarity and responsibility between student and supervisor are further discussed as this aspect is vital for the successful relationship between student and supervisor.

## Role of the Supervisor

In a study discussing student learning styles in a higher education institution, Urrutia-Aguilar *et al.* (2018:19) revealed that lecturers functioned in various roles but remained the main factor in the teaching-learning process that was responsible for training and preparing new generations of learners. The study also noted that despite having the best curriculum, infrastructure, or teaching methods, academic institutions depend on the quality performance of their lecturers for successful student outputs. Very often, the role of the supervisor/teacher is seen as an authoritarian role, and the author asserts that students demonstrate higher levels of intrinsic motivation when they are provided with constructive and informative feedback from their supervisors. However, Singh (2011:1020 - 1030) maintains that the role of a supervisor can be twofold, whereby the supervisor provides technical and emotional support while guiding the student in terms of the research process and methodology. According to Bitzer and Albertyn (2011:874 - 888), the general notion is that the supervisor should have the necessary skills and expertise to pass on to the student so that the student is able to navigate the research journey knowing that an expert is at the helm. The author also states that joint supervision processes not only motivate and encourage the student but also stimulate positivity throughout the student's journey, alerting him/her to different academic requirements and outcomes along the way. As a technical advisor, the role of a supervisor is also to ensure that the student is using the correct academic language and avoiding sub-standard linguistic abilities, which will pave the way for misdirection and wasted efforts. A study that described the challenges of postgraduate students regarding designing of the research proposals noted that there was always the problem of finding the right balance between critique and acceptance (Simelane, Klopper & Lubbe 2018:295 - 315). Therefore, the embracing of personalities and cultures is paramount in forging an understanding and cordial relationship between supervisor and supervisee. Cohort supervision provides the opportunity for students' work to be critically assessed by other supervisors with expertise in the field of study and allows for supervisor

accessibility of at least one supervisor at any given time (Singh 2011:1020 - 1030).

## *Role of the Supervisee*

Any student, despite their status or position within the hierarchy, has to assume the role of a student and conform to maintaining a professional attitude and relationship with their supervisors. The journey to gaining a postgraduate qualification is intellectually demanding for students. Therefore, supervisors are involved in guiding students along the journey (Trafford & Leshem 2009:305 - 316). These authors also note that poor communication between supervisor and supervisee has been identified as negatively affecting the progress of postgraduate studies. Therefore, the student has the additional role of negotiating with supervisors for mutually acceptable arrangements regarding the sequence of tasks to be undertaken, target dates, submission of work, and scheduling of meeting (Wadee *et al.* (2010:62). The obligation of maintaining ethical university processes, attending stipulated research workshops and seminars, and submitting annual progress reports timeously falls within the expanded role-responsibility of the student (Singh 2011:1020 - 1030).

## *A Learning Environment that Promotes Cohort Supervision*

A positive relationship between the supervisor and supervisees during cohort supervision acts as a catalyst for the creation of positive learning. It promotes a safe and peaceful environment where the actual supervision is considered an important focus. This enhances and stimulates the learning environment, making all parties feel valued. Despite having a cordial relationship with supervisors and presenters, Wadee *et al.* (2010:41) argue that sometimes, students are of the impression that modern technology allows the supervisor to be just a click of the 'mouse' away. However, having online sessions and tutorials does not replace the gains of face-to-face contact. Developing independent learning amongst adult learners can be a challenge. Still, it gives opportunities to supervisors to allow their students to initiate and extend their own thinking and learning with a vast amount of critical reflection during this process. Developing independence in the cohort supervision sessions is another way that supports the learning environment. At the same time,

feedback from experts, researchers, and scholars from various research disciplines also contribute to developing a positive learning climate.

## Research Design and Methodology
### Study Design
As the study aimed to explore the experiences of students regarding cohort supervision in PG research, the study utilised a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive research design. The rationale for using exploratory research was to acquire an understanding of a situation and persons in order to gather as much information as possible in understanding the topic of inquiry (Sloane & Bowe 2014:1291 - 1303). This approach was chosen in order to understand the context of cohort supervision (Moser & Korstjens 2018:9 - 18) and describe the experiences of PG students with regard to cohort supervision in PG research (Creswell, 2014; Arambewela & Hall 2009; Hall, Chai & Albrecht 2016).

### Setting
This study was conducted in its natural setting, which is the site where participants experienced the issue or problem under investigation (Brink *et al.* 2012:59). The location was a large multicultural metropolitan university in the eThekwini district, KwaZulu-Natal, where PG students and supervisors who have rich information about cohort supervision in PG supervision are located.

### Population and Sampling
According to Brink *et al.* (2012:131), the target population is the entire group of people or objects that meet the criteria which the researcher is interested in studying. The target population for the study was the PG students who participated in the cohort supervision and are currently registered for their doctoral and master's degrees at DUT in the Faculty of Health Sciences. The sample for this study drew from 26 participants (n=26). This comprised of 5 Doctoral students and 21 Masters students. Since all participating post-graduate students were full-time employed, they were primarily off-campus. They were accessed when they came for consultations with their supervisors

or during seminars and workshops. This sample of students had been in contact with their supervisors several times and had attended approximately 12 to 13 sessions of cohort supervision and was therefore deemed, suitable participants. There were six supervisors for Doctoral and Masters students who participated in the cohort supervision process. Based on the faculty practice, the researchers proposed a minimum of PG students (n=16; 61%) as a sample, using a criterion sampling approach. This sampling allows the selection of the sample based on predetermined criteria (Patton 1990; Moser & Korstjens 2018). There is no rule for sample size in qualitative research. Still, researchers should state the minimum samples based on the reasonable coverage of the phenomenon, availability of resources (Patton 1990), information richness of the data, the variety of participants, the broadness of the research question, data collection methods such as individual or group interviews and the type of sampling strategy (Moser & Korstjens 2018:9 - 18). The inclusion criteria for PG students were all those students who participated in the PG research cohort supervision workshops in the Faculty of Health Sciences at DUT.

## *Data Collection*

Before data collection, the researcher obtained ethical approval from Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC 167/18)[1] and gatekeeper permission. Participants were given a letter of information to read and were

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[1] Trustworthiness is a way of ensuring data quality or rigour in qualitative research (Brink *et al*. 2012). To ensure credibility of the study, the same interview guide was used throughout the study and detailed notes were written immediately after the interview. The researcher ensured dependability of the study by requesting the supervisors to review the data and by developing an audit trail of all original audio records of interviews and discussions on a disc. Transferability was maintained whereby the researcher ensured that the context of the study and the participants are adequately described so that the findings can be applied to other settings similar to the one researched.to ensure confirmability the researcher interpreted and analysed the data through identifying themes and sub-themes which were supported by the use of direct quotations from the interviews in order to eliminate subjectivity and bias.

requested to sign consent before participating in the study. Before collecting the data, the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time from the study if they so wished, that their information would remain confidential, and that they would remain anonymous. In-depth, semi-structured one-on-one interviews using a self-constructed interview guide with open-ended questions by the researchers were utilised for the study. The interview guide further contextualised the supervisory support and guidance received by the students. It focused on the nature of the interpersonal communication between students and the supervisors and the feedback given by supervisors to students.

Data obtained from the interviews were audio-recorded with permission from the participants, while field notes were taken. Interviews were conducted at a time that was convenient for participants and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes long. Throughout the process of the interviews, probes and follow-up questions were added as required to encourage elaboration and clarification in the responses. This study was guided by data saturation and determined the sample size, which was achieved when there was no new information emerging from the participants.

## *Findings and Data Analysis*

A thematic framework categorized findings as they emerged and organized them into themes and sub-themes, allowing the researcher to get both objective and subjective responses from the participants who provided their personal reflections on their cohort supervision experiences. The following discussion arose from the four main themes that emerged from participant interviews. Actual excerpts are used to support participant responses.

## *Theme 1: Supervisor/ Supervisee Communication Challenges*

The findings in this study revealed that despite having a cordial relationship with the supervisors, the delay in communication from supervisor to student was often a major problem stating that some supervisors took very long to respond and were not flexible in trying to accommodate the student. Nineteen participants (n=19; 73%) noted that they had to 'push' their supervisors for realistic deadlines. Some participants (n=12;46%) also expressed a sense of feeling left 'all alone' on their research journey but tended to feel safe during

the cohort sessions, which was in keeping with the findings. They further noted that when on their own, they felt uncertain and unsure of how they should respond to corrections or proceed with their research reports. This finding was in keeping with Choy, Delahaye, and Saggers (2015:19 - 34), who noted that the lack of supervision abilities and capacity amongst supervisors often caused a communication breakdown between both parties. Actual participants' comments that support this finding are reflected below:

*My supervisor does not answer my emails and it frustrates me…I attend these workshops so that I can ask questions that I need to be answered…I need to know if I am on the right track.* Participant 6.

*We were in a safe space during our workshops .... everybody there was on the same journey...and when the sessions were over, we felt as though we were all on our own. Sometimes we just contacted a fellow colleague for moral support.* Participant 9.

Rodwell and Neumann (2008:65 - 76) conclude that Supervision practices today are about integrating research management and support systems such as e-learning for a diverse national and international student population. Participants (n=10; 38%) in the current study were of the opinion that communication challenges were somewhat bridged by the effectiveness of social media platforms and received feedback via Skype and Facebook. Not only did this facilitate learning, but it allowed for speedy access to instructional guidance and correction, enabling effective handling of queries and complaints. This was supported by the following comment:

*As a student having logistical problems, communicating via WhatsApp and Skype helped with clarifying any doubts...sometimes I got answers from our cohort group sooner than my supervisor.* Participant 5.

Supporting the fact that models of PG supervision differ from discipline to discipline and country to country Wadee *et al.* (2010:16), there appeared to be a consensus from all participants regarding the utilisation of 'visiting' presenters during cohort sessions. Participants (n=5; 19%) felt that research material or presentations during supervision workshops should be relevant and suit the South African context. Any international comparability should

take into account the structure of the South African Higher Education and health systems. Even though these visiting academics shared valuable research insight, they apparently confused participants when first-world country research standards were applied to third-world country health and education infrastructure. This is noted in the following comments extracted from the findings:

*... there was too much conflicting feedback from the guest professor from overseas...sometimes we got the impression that she was putting us down, as though we had no standards in our nursing or education ....* Participant 1

*Visiting presenters were not relevant to us....my theoretical framework and application got called rubbish...even though, my supervisors approved and helped me apply it.* Participant 9.

*Supervisors should refrain from pushing students into a topic or research design that they are not comfortable with ... they should not be dictators....* Participant 6.

## Theme 2: Expectations of Cohort Supervision
It should be noted that when the supervisor and supervisee have similar expectations, the research experience is more profitable and pleasant for both parties. While authors Wadee *et al*. (2010:71 - 75) referred to the agreement between the supervisor and the supervisee as a form of transactional leadership, Dhunpath, Matisonn, and Samuel (2018:78 - 105) argue that a single mentor may not embody all the attributes that constitute an academic's work and therefore collaborative mentorship such as cohort supervision models or a multiple mentorship partnership model can seek to impart collective wisdom and expertise to students. In this study, participants (n=20; 77%) reported that cohort supervision helped foster relations between supervisor and supervisee. They also felt that cohort sessions helped spell out the different roles, responsibilities, and expectations of both parties. Other participants (n=18; 69%) expressed that the relationship between both parties was a long-term one. Therefore, it was important to have openness and honesty that helped determine from the onset if the supervisor and supervisee were the right fit. Some participants (n=24; 94%) noted that

cohort supervision made them realise that embarking on the PG research journey can be overwhelming and frustrating for many students. They added that having understanding supervisors who understood the challenges that faced adult learners assisted in making this journey less arduous. The following statements attest to this:

*At the beginning of the course, I was confused and overwhelmed...now that I know what is expected of me, I have grown in my journey and become a stronger person.* Participant 6.

*I was very nervous and did not know what to expect from the course or the supervisors; I was literally terrified after the orientation...but with the scheduled learning opportunities like cohort supervision sessions, I overcame my fears and have grown professionally and have developed confidence in performing my duties.* Participant 10.

## *Theme 3: Support Structures*

Adding to the findings of Van Heerden and Le Roux (2009:259), who stated that increased collaboration and networking were some of the benefits of cohort supervision, the participants (n=25; 96%) in this study verbalized a generally positive opinion in support that was given during cohort sessions. They also felt that this allowed for the development of new possibilities of networking and peer mentorship. Some stated that the support they gained from these workshops was invaluable, and it was only due to the dedicated efforts that they felt they could go forward. The following statement from a participant is a testament to this:

*I now realize the importance of relating to other people who are walking in my shoes... but it would not have been possible were it not for our programme facilitator...there were times I wanted to quit...she basically held our heads above water and continuously motivated us.* Participant 4.

Some participants (n=19; 78%) agreed that cohort supervision sessions helped with skills and guidance, such as guiding them in developing their proposals, academic writing, making correct methodological choices, writing, and publishing their research. Other participants (n=14; 54%) agreed

with the findings of Choy, Delahaye, and Saggers (2015:19 - 34) and concluded that having students from other departments attending the sessions helped to embrace global citizenship and the understanding of multi-culturalism. Participants (n=4; 27%) also expressed a need for an additional short course in research methodology that could supplement their research knowledge. They felt that this was necessary for those that had done research a long time ago. The following response highlights this:

*…. having sessions with other departments allowed us to engage and learn from each other…this also helped for those that did research long ago as our colleagues were able to mentor us a bit….* Participant 8.

*There should be a short research course…, especially on new or latest research trends...that will refresh our research knowledge...besides new research knowledge is always evolving and we learn every day.* Participant 7.

## Theme 4: Group Cohesion

All participants (n=26; 100%) stated that they valued the support they received from fellow students. They also stated that the home-like environment at times increased group morale and added to their confidence and abilities. According to Naidoo and Sibiya (2018), physical settings such as the ambiance, layout, facilities, and infrastructure of an educational facility play an important role in influencing student satisfaction. Participants (n=16; 62%) in this study also stated that working in groups fostered a 'family-like' feeling that helped them overcome the loneliness they felt when they embarked on their research journey. Their cultural oneness allowed them to remain connected, and stronger academic students would assist by explaining concepts in their home language to overcome language barriers to learning. Participants (n=13; 50%) stated that the friendships and relationships that were forged during the cohort supervision sessions remained strong despite some of them coming to the end of their research journey. Participants (n=21; 81%) welcomed the many different and interesting approaches to research-based learning and found it useful to have others with research experience sharing their research knowledge with them

and finding ways to include each other in research activities. Participants (n=19; 73%) also stated that having the support to develop the skills to carry out their research encouraged them in higher degree studies. The quotes below confirm this:

*I learned so much about research from my colleagues ... that even though I am an educator and research student myself...I now utilise the same styles of research supervision with my students.* Participant 5

*... we were from different backgrounds and different disciplines but grew close ... my friend was my pillar of strength...she shared my anxieties, awkward situations, frustrations, moments of confusion and doubt.* Participant 1

*... we helped each other stay positive...and we needed that group support. Otherwise we would never have made it.* Participant 3

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The contemporary world has seen research increasingly recognised as vital to innovation and national economic and knowledge growth. Increased emphasis has been laid on the efficiency and quality of the supervisor and supervision practices and the topic of interest and its links to the international research community. This paper is based on the findings of a cohort of PG Masters and Doctoral students within the Health Sciences Faculty of a large urban university. Results from this study have shown that research supervision and learning through self-awareness are vital to managing oneself, the student, and the entire supervisory process. With different student topics, cohort supervisors have had to extend their understanding of the nature of the research topic and alter supervisory practices in order to deal with variations in these learning and career goals of different students. Other findings revealed that factors such as student barriers to learning, linguistic abilities, student satisfaction, adequacy of resources, and attention to the effectiveness of supervision, have to be taken into consideration. The relationship with a supervisee should be viewed as the merging of two academic minds working on a related research project as this would allow for differences of thought and ideology between both parties but at the same

time build communication and trust and allow for mutual understanding and respect. This study also concluded that although it is the supervisor, who assists and provides access to resources, expertise, and learning opportunities, which are critical for student learning or academic progression, there has to be a willingness and acceptance by both parties to enter into an amicable agreement. This often assumes mature awareness by both supervisor and student and creates a strong, trusting, and lasting relationship that can extend beyond academic supervision, mentoring, or coaching.

According to Dhunpath, Amin, and Devroop (2018:1 - 11), the Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF) acknowledges the power relations that are sometimes inherent in a mentor/mentee relationship, is noticeably silent about formalizing programmes that can socialize emerging academics into the culture of the university. However, the findings of this study also noted that supervisors need to foster the role-taking aspect of being a supervisee. This includes impressing upon them the need to work independently and creatively, bearing in mind that they are jointly equally responsible for the success of the research journey. The findings of this study add to the existing body of knowledge by emphasising that the student is an important factor that directly influences the success or failure of PG supervision. Despite the different supervision models and different learning and teaching styles, the collaboration between both parties remains a critical ingredient in effective research supervision. Both parties should, at the outset, clearly state any expectations, set milestones, and communicate relevant policies and protocols pertaining to supervision arrangements. Bearing in mind that there is no 'right way' to supervise, but there are certain fundamental principles that both supervisor and supervisee should be cognisant of. The supervisor should have a good knowledge of the subject area and, in particular, the research process. While the choice of supervisor must be to the student's satisfaction, it should also be noted that the central role of research supervision is to nurture and develop the student to become an independent researcher. Despite the academic support to their students during the process of supervising dissertations, the critical issues for supervisor and supervisee are setting and adhering to priorities and time management. These are important factors for the successful completion of any research output, but they have to be seen in the wider context of professional development for both parties. Whatever practice either party

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adopts, the important outcome would be the development of an adaptable, flexible supervisory approach based on an awareness of the broader issues and complexities of being a self-directed adult learner.

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