



## Strategies for Managing a PhD Student-Supervisors Relationship at Nigerian University

<sup>1</sup>Aliyu Umar Abubakar, <sup>2</sup>Ismail Suleiman, <sup>3</sup>Ayuba Ibrahim Gezawa

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Education,  
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria,

<sup>2</sup>Department of Educational Foundations and Curriculum,

<sup>3</sup>Department of Science Education,  
Faculty of Education,  
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

### ABSTRACT

Besides the admission qualifications and academic intellect, a post-graduate student need to have good psychological behaviours, developed faculty of reasoning and political managing behaviour with which they can see, think and manage all kind of relationships. Almost all supervision exercises in Nigerian universities are a team. The teamwork that joined two or more supervisors with the same or different discipline and experience is difficult to manage especially for a new inexperienced supervisee to manage, due to different interests, goals, task assignments and attitude or manner of approach of the supervisors. Therefore, this paper spells out and dwelled well on some strategies for managing individual supervision relationships or collective relations with all of them. Following these strategies abated the unnecessary delay, disappointment and puzzling circumstances that academic go-slow, academic standard retardation, over-stayed student, amnesty cases for graduating half-baked students, frustrated uncompleted programs and social and economic crises among others. The paper considered all the differences we have in Nigeria in terms of location, culture, and ethnicity, religion in drawing out these strategies. Therefore grafting a policy from one university to another would not be harmful to the student or in running the program or to the university in any way unless they are lacking good personnel, means of electrical power, internet facilities, enough infrastructure, software applications, scientific aid facilities, apparatus and equipment among others. Finally, relationship management is the bedrock of all success.

### ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: July, 2022

Received in revised form: August, 2022

Accepted: September, 2022

Published online: September, 2022

### KEYWORDS

Strategies, Students, Managing, Supervisors, Relationships.

### INTRODUCTION

Joint supervision affects the psychological nature of students. All students have some psychological nature at the beginning process of their PhD. Mostly, students are sure of their emotional competence, managing ability, and perpetual utilization of time and recognize their intellectuality for them to set goals and achieve them within the established deadlines. A newly undertaken postgraduate researcher begins to have full enthusiasm, though the enthusiasm would gradually diminishes

especially when he lasts for a longer period without achieving his goals. Referenced different responses from many postgraduate students that were interviewed on the flavour experiences they lasted and felt at different stages of the PhD period, they reported that their enthusiasm decayed, diminished, detached, totally remote, lost, wipe away and some said: at a time when their mind was completely occupied by many contradiction, ideas and work directly from their different supervisors, especially when the deadline is approaching and time constraint, the



work becomes so monotonous, boring and the enthusiasm would completely be degraded (Roach et al 2019). Even though in another perception, the supervisor's conflict of ideas might be an avenue for the student to begin to open up and organize his thought and widen his horizon in that area of research. (Benmore, 2016)

Secondly, in joint supervision, many students experienced disappointment in managing the supervisors due to the scandalous treatment they are receiving or in the amount of their work done after a reasonable period. (Laufer, and Gorup, 2019). Therefore it gets to the extent some students are illustrating their experience in words or utterances such as: I don't think I have got the gap up to now, I don't feel I have got anywhere after two years, I don't feel I have gotten very far after a year, I have missed the focus, I am frustrated at not making a reasonable progress, I hope but don't know when, It is difficult to say when to finish, The output is meaningless, The input I am putting doesn't yield any output, I am working day and night very well but progressing really slowly, I am doing the work but I realized the time to communicate with my supervisors is artificial, No matter what effort I will put will not avail me, because the conversation with many supervisors is just political, The boldness is no important but politeness, The quality and amount of joint supervisors interaction was dissatisfied one and my commitment in the personal isolated reading room is by far better than to listening to any supervisors among others which finally led them to isolation. According to Roach and Sauermann, (2019) this eventually might lead to having no intellectual stimulation or any exchange of ideas with his peers or supervisor; which later eroded the interest of the student completely or slowed down programmed and time to a standstill. Along the same line, the effect becomes more harmful when concerning staff in training under the university, the joined supervisors affect their primary assignment and their academic progress. In general, regardless of university, discipline, or topic, most postgraduate students found it difficult to manage socially the joined supervisors in almost all circumstances which in turn might dampen the initial enthusiasm of the student. (Cyranoski, 2011)

Thirdly, conflict joint supervision diminishes the intrinsic interest in work no matter what self-confidence and independency the student has. Ideally, a student that can grapple with research problems is expected to interpret results without supervisors' concern or involvement. (Gould, 2015). If supervisors are demanding with a negative perspective, the student must request more time and attention to finish his work or rounded off his schedule of work not within the stipulated time or spam period of work. In addition, some supervisors are too silly and chaffy instead to supervise and make a positive contribution rather than blame without any reason. Similarly, if students are not admiring the pattern of the department or supervisors, they become irritated and finally lose interest in the work especially if they don't give regard and autonomy to the student. (Golde, 2000)

Fourthly, sometimes joint supervision hindered students from becoming self-centred, and independent, opting to dig up their research and cope alone even if can grapple with problems across their research. This is happening when the supervisors have a different perspective on the work, therefore some might give positive comments, and some criticize or interpret the work wrongly and it then becomes an issue that lessens the effort of the student and led to the transfer of his work dependency to one of his supervisors convinced more with. And it finally causes an argument between them and degenerates or decelerates the progress of the student. Even though it is understandable when the topic of the research is provided by one of the supervisors, he will dependently have more focus and ideas to get and achieve its end mark result. (Horta, 2016). But despite that, that may not block the chances of the peer of the supervisors and the student to have insight better than the topic provider. Similarly, postgraduate students learn software when dealing with a computer program or other new equipment that haven't used before gradually. At this time student, of course, turn to his supervisor instead to depend on himself because he may feel secure and has no certainty of what he is doing. But with time as he began to have some tangible feedback or meaningful outcome, the students are expected



to abstain from asking questions and become confident and self-dependent. The student then works at his own pace relaxes and has more pleasure in doing the work. Note that, his productivity is what enables the supervisors to evaluate his progress. Indeed it simultaneously gives confidence in the mind of the supervisors. Therefore they allow him to work independently. This happens in joint supervision because of the different motives they have concerning the student and the work as well. A spoon-feeding PhD graduate has limited ideas, views, autonomy, foresight, and knowledge, and hard to train others. Therefore in summary supervision guidance does not mean dependency duties. Supervisor rights mean not superhuman rights and discard student dependency. (Jung, 2018)

Fifthly, it was observed that most postgraduate students under multi-supervision are tempted to withdraw from doing a PhD program after they have gone far. As a result of several interviews conducted with some students with a similar situation, it was found that in the PhD program there is a stage or period in which the postgraduate student tends to get confused, stacked, and fed up as if in a syndrome of getting nowhere. Mostly, some harsh supervisors push students into boredom with their square wordings. Example: You guy, you have only five weeks to cross the sticky patch, for one to remain as your supervisor, I get tired of this your plodding and churning results without thought, Your work is too boring to go and correct and bring it back after a year, Don't you see it's always darkest before dawn, therefore, you have to stand upright, I already lost interest in your work; I have no challenge anymore but depend and free yourself in the viva room. Indeed PhD journey is supposed to encompass learning, disciplining, and patience for a student to achieve it but it is not a yardstick for supervisors to use this opportunity to squash the work or life of their student. (Kidman, 2017)

Sixthly, some among the team of supervisors ask the student to pursue digging about new ideas that follow up the results of the main work, which give a new avenue for more topic or increases the scope of the work. Instead, to allow the student to concentrate on his work to its completion, the supervisor pushed him to

sidetrack new ideas that emanate along the way of his research which is frustrating. So these common feelings, demand habits and equal and opposite reactions when kept moving repetitively the student would be frustrated and leave the work. Merely, this rarely happens in mono-supervision which is a bread-and butter-relationship. Even though sidetracking would widen the perception and then create more space in the faculty of reasoning for the student but it is still seemingly as irrelevant research that can lead to frustration in the aspect of economic, social, academic and spiritual. Therefore student are advice to not allow frustrations to deviate their mind from the focal line. The postgraduate supervision pattern has now had open loose ends, which need to be retied in order to have high-quality postgraduate product. (Wisker, 2005)

#### **STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING STUDENT-SUPERVISORS RELATIONSHIP**

According to Mainhard, Van der Rijst, Van Tartwijk, and Wubbels, (2009), Managing supervisors' relationship is crucial that cannot be leave to chance. Student should consider vital series of strategies to ensure the relationship is handled properly in order to avoid unnecessary misfortune. This can only be achieve if the student understand all inside information without his supervisors and what they are expecting from his concerning skills, consultation, communication, timetable plan, deadline , promise among others. Mostly an inside information help students to develop all necessary skills and sustain his relationship with supervisor with or without limited communication barriers up to the time of completion of his program and finally they got the mutual benefit of the write up, thesis or project. The independency of student is assumed to be the number one strategy. Therefore a good student should put more and continuous emphasis toward achieving the aim and objective of this write up. Similarly, the style must be in conformity with what the university and global academics policies agreed upon. Incase in the need for publication, presentation, book chapter among others, the writing style is vehemently important. (Kimani, 2014),



Of course, the unwinding student-supervisor relationship problems of some postgraduate student started from the day the supervisor perceived that he is one among those that think obedience is what help to have the PhD degree not independence. Most of such kind of student always ask their supervisors what to do next because such students lacks original thought and they suppose to learn all necessary structure for thesis organization by attending some lectures seminars/workshops but not by requesting a direction from their supervisor or advice from his college in the department. In order of not have any negative perception against them. Sincerely, PhD is your work and you need not someone to stand over you or monitor your work closely. Indeed the student responsibility includes research problems, identification, plucking up enough courage to face his work from the beginning to conclusion. (Kwan, 2013). Therefore, relying on supervisor can lead to so many disappointments.

The legibility in writing is another strategy that makes student-supervisors relationship so strong and gives a slight sense of achievement. (Lee, 2008). Many students thought that the supervisor have no mercy and courtesy when they rejected their thesis submission for its not legible, which is not at all. Therefore, a good student should preferably type his work professionally by himself so as to close all room for comments and unnecessary excuses from his side. Strategically, student should learn and seek for an advice on every step of his work from others not his supervisors. The student can contact his friends that are in same discipline or Youtube and other social media for academia in order to optimize his knowledge and be self reliant and authoritative in the eyes of his supervisors. Student dependency in academic is irritating and detracting the concentration of the supervisors from the line of argument or even skipped some major point in write up even if the student attempted to justify. Therefore, the student complained that the supervisor read his work superficially and cursory. Based on such scenario that it was encouraged and sometime mandated to all PhD student to present at least two papers from their work in either an interim or international conference, colloquium or local or

international journal before the final submission of their thesis. Thereby, the student would have a valuable comments, ideas or reward or dissatisfaction from the editor that help him to perfect his work. In turn, it would reduce the arrangement with his supervisors, constructs and suggestions. In addition, the presentation would make him to understand if other cares about his work or understands/comprehend what he had wanted to express in the paper. Certainly, he may get to know how to handle his relationship with his supervisors rather than blaming them unjustly. Subsequently seek information from outside of supervisory team would help student to mutually relates to some significant people and makes him humbled and self-conduct. Even though, on the other hand has opening room to others to discuss on your work may likely be a risk by allowing other to snapped away some of your original ideas or by boosting their morale of a reading culture. It opened a door for criticism and challenges that delay the progress until it become boring and frustrating. In this case, student must be careful and selective in given out his work to others for comment and discussion. Therefore he needs to select a person who knowledgeable and coherently able to contributes or sophisticatedly trimmed the work to the level of satisfaction. (Li and Seale, 2007)

Another strategy for managing student-supervisors relationship is the established a well principle, plan and climatic regular meeting timetable that is satisfactory for both the student and supervisors. (Hockey, 1994). Most supervisors want to have meeting or tutorial presentation with their students in every four to six weeks for discussion. The periodic meeting augur well to both student and supervisor to strategize, prepare and make a research on similar topic before the D-day of the meeting or tutorial so that nobody will be lag behind. In case a student want to confirm that the scheduled time is in order in order or postpone, it is advisable to text him via other social media ( Whatsapp, Email, Instagram and so on) because is more reliable and supervisors like it most than any other means of communication. For a student to win the mind of his supervisor with different perception about the work or moving with different velocity or they have some personal



grudge or misunderstanding between themselves should borrow the following conduct even if naturally he hasn't it. The student must be seriously curious and excited about his research work, because supervisors are not responsible for arousing and stimulating students' interest, enthusiasm and excitement toward his work. Indeed is your responsibility to pull in infact your supervisors and other members of the department to become interested and animated in your work. Of course from there the student will have more support and some encouraging advice that add value to the work and recognition to the student and the supervisor. Similarly, the entire work when published will invigorate the university by raising its status in the university ranking system and by increasing the numbers of citations. Consequently, besides attracting the mind of your supervisors and people around the globe, it will still give a head-start and light direction in how to manage his relationship with the supervisor. (Lindsay, 2015). Most of the time, most supervisors expect their postgraduate students to follow and observe the rules and regulations provided by the university in the handbook for student guides and laws or advice. (Bøgelund, 2015). Ideally, most of these rules are simple, common and reasonable expectations but surprisingly we can't imagine how often the student contravene or afoul these laws. Indeed, it is painful for a supervisor to produce or graduate a student that is not submissive and obedient to all university rules. (Pasztor et al 2018) Because the award of honor degree is based on both the academic and good moral approach and conducts. Secondly, it reflects the image and quality of the supervisor in the eyes of other staff and world academicians. Therefore supervisors are always expecting their students to express themselves in both written and babbly in a simple language and to use romantic literatures of some lead papers written by well known scholars, authors and other writers in his area of study. Not to rely on a specific writer or a similar specific work done in different location or country. (McCallin, 2012)

Remember dear student, an honest supervisee is one who respect his supervisor to the extent that he will never tell him lie by saying everything is in order or fine about progress

report or absent himself from the schedule meeting with flimsy excuse or by drafting a written text message that he cannot make and need more time. Nevertheless, some student push their supervisors to stew due to their habit of appearance and disappearance, talks too much about their research in hand, well furnished with new ideas, logistics steps, nature of practical work and graph and even the turn over output of the experiment results but they never submit anything that is tangible. The worth among the students is one who fret and walk out on the supervisor at the point of advice or suggestion given on how to correct the work. There on the student reports to the management that the supervisor hates him, so he wants an intervention or change of supervisors. A wise student is one who surprises and be fun with his supervisor by knowing and identifying the research gap in a short period of time, as soon as the student becomes expert in the area of his research topic, the supervisor would closely relate to him in anticipation to have more and good results. Mostly, the supervisors are becoming more developed and expertise when the students pull out the hiding gold and pristine to a shorter depth of the research ideas. Therefore, supervisors constantly expects their students to surprised them by feeding them ideas, approach, information and evidences on how to carry out the research and be fruitful. One of the steps to manage students-supervisors relationship is to steer the course between shocking and surprising. One of the easier ways to achieve it is to conform to code of conduct of professionalism and abide by moral and cultural approach of the supervisors especially when students are from different region or tribes. Perhaps, students might think why shall he make research presentation fun, indeed is too much? No it isn't, rather advising students to established good relationship with people around him so that they like him before liking his work. Even though ideally, people will like him and become more interested in his work when the write up encamped knowledge of their general area of interest and individual concerned. (Bastalich, 2017)

Secondly, for a student to have make his work so fun, there is need to have liberty,





right of selecting a research topic and the supervisors himself rather than to assign a specialist or relevant academic to him as a supervisor after he has been given an admission into postgraduate study. This will help to avoid sudden or instant dislike of a supervisor and to have a continuous emotional and intense experience over long period of time ever after graduation. In case where supervisor are assigned by department, the students are advise to be well intolerable so as to ignore some minor interpersonal irritant, which might appear at his first meeting with the supervisors. There on he is advice to not be judgmental based on the surface constant and not allow the irritation to be exaggerate to the extent or level of distortion. This advice is also applicable to the supervisors, not to be grieved or lost confidence in their students at first contact. Consequently, the time supervisors spent enjoying with his student will in return payoff the student too in many occasion. Remember dear student, you are not asked to spend time with your supervisors entertaining them in novel ways like sending an ingenuity message to evoke him laugh or doing some imitational acts or telling him caustic remark because of your verbal skill to witticisms him, instead to concentrate on your research work, merely, the livelong student-supervisors relationship is relatively one that is cautiously established based on these strategies. (Shin et al, 2018)

## CONCLUSION

The paper concluded by covering up most of the unnecessary problems we have in post-graduate programs in almost all federal and states universities of Nigeria. Following the achievement of this paper, many joint supervision flaws were fiddled and reduced the imaginary academic go-slow. The successful ending in post-graduate study lies on these step by step managing strategies. Furthermore, a well constructive and successful study plan for any post-graduate program in Nigerian university most require adhering to these managing strategies of managing supervisors-supervisee relationship before, within or after the program. Despite that, the join-supervision was like having more ideas from, many experienced supervisors

which contribute to student an apparent understanding of the subject matter of his concerned. But it was proved that in another perspective contribute much more failure like unsuccessful graduation used to embeds many post-graduate students till he/she becomes hopeless and heedlessness in their researches and in turn degrades or decays all of their enthusiasm. The paper is also a booster to gear up our post-graduate student in equipping themselves with an emotional competencies, original thought, perpetual time utilization, intellectual recognition, order of presentation, deadline target, stead fasting, endurances for scandalous treatment, well-planned research chart, promise fulfillment, manner of approach in communication, boldness in presentation, humbling and politeness, good listening before executions and full assimilation. By experience, these strategies cleared most of post-graduate students' problems that usually emerged as a result of joint-supervisors in many of the Nigerian universities. Of course, managing joint-supervision, especially in academic context is very difficult and crucial but yet aren't supposed to leave it to chances. Relevant and realistic information was provided here to remove or avoid such unnecessary misfortunes which in turn cause much damage in the academic sector and to this nation in general. The information is an intended scientific plan, art of action and systematic warfare conducts that supervises, adopts and apply during their period of study in order to accomplish a specific objective within the time frame.

## REFERENCES

- Bastalich, W. (2017), "*Content and context in knowledge production: a critical review of doctoral supervision literature*", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 42 No. 7, pp. 1145-1157.
- Benmore, A. (2016), "*Boundary management in doctoral supervision: how supervisors negotiate roles and role transitions throughout the supervisory journey*", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 41 No. 7, pp. 1251-1264.
- Bøgelund, P. (2015), "*How Supervisors perceive PhD supervision: and how they*



- practice it*", *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, Vol. 10, pp. 39-55.
- Cyranoski, D., Gilbert, N., Ledford, H., Nayar, A. and Yahia, M. (2011), "Education: the PhD factory", *Nature News*, Vol. 472 No. 7343, pp. 276-279.
- Golde, C.M. (2000), "Should I stay or should I go? Student descriptions of the doctoral attrition process", *The Review of Higher Education*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 199-227.
- Gould, J. (2015), "How to build a better PhD", *Nature News*, Vol. 528 No. 7580, p. 22.
- Hockey, J. (1994), "Establishing boundaries: problems and solutions in managing PhD supervisor's role", *Cambridge Journal of Education*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 1-13.
- Horta, H. and Santos, J.M. (2016), "The impact of publishing during the PhD on career research publication, visibility, and collaborations", *Research in Higher Education*, Vol. 57 No. 1, pp. 28-50.
- Jung, J. (2018), "Learning experience and perceived competencies of doctoral students in Hong Kong", *Asia Pacific Education Review*, Vol. 19, pp. 187-198.
- Kidman, J., Manathunga, C. and Cornforth, S. (2017), "Intercultural PhD supervision: exploring the hidden curriculum in a social science faculty doctoral programme", *Higher Education Research and Development*, Vol. 36 No. 6, pp. 1208-1221.
- Kimani, E.N. (2014), "Challenges in quality control for postgraduate supervision", *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education*, Vol. 1 No. 9, pp. 63-70.
- Kwan, B.S.C. (2013), "Facilitating novice researchers in project publishing during the doctoral years and beyond: a Hong Kong-based study", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 207-225.
- Laufer, M. and Gorup, M. (2019), "The invisible others: stories of international doctoral student dropout", *Higher Education*, Vol. 78, pp. 165-181.
- Lee, A. (2008), "How are doctoral students supervised? Concepts of doctoral research supervision", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 267-281.
- Li, S. and Seale, C. (2007), "Managing criticism in PhD supervision: a qualitative case study", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 511-526.
- Lindsay, S. (2015), "What works for doctoral students in completing their thesis?", *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 183-196.
- Mainhard, T., van der Rijst, R., van Tartwijk, J. and Wubbels, T. (2009), "A model for the supervisor doctoral student relationship", *Higher Education*, Vol. 58 No. 3, pp. 359-373.
- McCallin, A. and Nayar, S. (2012), "Postgraduate research supervision: a critical review of current practice", *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 63-74.
- Pasztor, A. and Wakeling, P. (2018), "All PhDs are equal but...institutional and social stratification in access to the doctorate", *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 39 No. 7, pp. 982-997.
- Shin, J.C., Kim, S.J., Kim, E. and Lim, H. (2018), "Doctoral students' satisfaction in a research-focused Korean university: socio-environmental and motivational factors", *Asia Pacific Education Review*, Vol. 19, pp. 159-168.
- Roach, M. and Sauermann, H. (2019), "The declining interest in an academic career", *PLoS ONE*, Vol. 12 No. 9, p. e0184130, doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0184130.
- Wisker, G. (2005), *The Good Supervisor*, Macmillan, Palgrave