



Effective Graduate Thesis Supervision in Faculties of Education: Constraints and Standards

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Abstract

As a result of the imperative need for uniformity in Nigerian faculties of education standard, the study investigated the level of effective graduate thesis supervision in Nigerian universities as well as variation in standard measures used. It also identified the constraints to proper graduate supervision. The study adopted survey design. The population consisted of all universities (federal and state) in the south-south geopolitical zone in Nigeria. A sample of 60 academics was selected from 3 Faculties of Education in the selected universities in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria (20 academic staff from Faculty of Education were selected using accidental sampling technique from each of the selected universities used in the study). An instrument titled “Graduate thesis Supervision and Uniformity in Standard Questionnaire” (GTSUSQ) was developed by the researchers and validated by two experts in measurement and evaluation was used to collect data. The GTSUSQ reliability index yielded .84 which was determined using Cronbach Alpha technique. The data was collected by the researchers and research assistants and was analyzed using percentages and Relative Significance Index (RSI). The findings of the study among others indicated the need for common standard adjudged by eggheads from universities. The recommendations include among others the need for all the universities to hold conference where best brains should brainstorm and articulate uniform standard for all graduates across the universities that should be followed as models.

Key words: Graduate Thesis Supervision, Faculty of Education, Nigerian Universities, Uniformity and Standard.

Introduction

Education, seen as the bedrock of any nation’s development should ensure the training of the mind and character of an individual leading to change of unwanted behaviour or strengthening and encouraging positive behaviour in the society. It is the process of helping an individual to discover, develop and make use of his inner abilities, potentials and capabilities for successful living in the society (Olubiye, 2009). These capacities in the individual will enable the individual to have control over his/her environment and fulfill his/her potentials. However, the need to have an effective educational system cannot be overstressed, especially in a developing nation like Nigeria. The enormous challenges of growing a literate population in this globally networked world will be meaningful if the issue of quality is adequately considered important by stakeholders in the education sector. Globally, University education is central on human development through the production of skilled high – level manpower, as a forerunner of economic and national development.

This is because governments see universities as engines for change and expansion of prosperity considering its leading role in world class research outputs, (Guri-Rosenblit & Sawyerr; Johann & Waast, 2006). Abiddin (2012) noted that such research outputs act as a core of excellence in prioritized areas of any nation which can generate high impact research publications as well as attract the best brains for teaching and research in producing high standard graduates. Ifedili and Ominnu (2012) defined research as studious inquiry or examination; especially investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws to provide dependable solutions to the problems that challenge human life and human society. Therefore, research being one of the trifocal responsibilities of university education is so crucial because it determines the quality of any higher institution. It constitutes a key criterion for the promotion of academic staff and as such requires high level participation and quality work (Bassey, Akuegwu, Udida and Udey, 2007). It is also a mandatory requirement for graduation of students at First degree, Masters' Degree and Ph.D, to submit an original essay, commonly referred to as project, thesis or dissertation report which is an essential component of the requirements for the fulfillment of the award of a post graduate degree or diploma. The project (for undergraduates and Post Graduate Diploma in Education), thesis (For Masters' Degree in Education) or dissertation (for Doctorate degree) investigates educational changes or developments that are being planned to define the ways of improving the situations. It encompasses many different studies, all of which attempt to better understand and improve the learning and educational processes.

Most importantly, a high quality postgraduate program involves a range of curriculum experiences that include coursework and supervised research with research being the core of any postgraduate education. Postgraduate research is a formal area of study that is recognized in universities (Nyquist, 2002; Rose, 2005; Healey & Jenkins, 2009). However, the nature and quality of graduate research is inseparable from the nature and quality of the graduate education and of future education researchers (Henson, Hull, and Williams, 2010). Hence, postgraduate research constitutes a vital component of a university's research effort and contributes significantly to the institution's standard. The concept of postgraduate education depends upon the system of awarding degrees at different levels of study, and can be traced to the workings of European medieval universities. Postgraduate education or graduate education involves learning and studying for degrees or other qualifications for which a first or Bachelor's degree generally is required, and is normally considered to be part of higher education. Abiddin and Ismail, (2011), specified that a postgraduate study is a growth process by which students, need to develop as scholars under the thoughtful support, supervision and guidance by the institution and the supervisors.

Globally, research work is the core value of any postgraduate education; however, the developing countries are not exempted. In Nigeria, post graduate education programmes require research work, (Federal Ministry of Information, 2012). In the research works, postgraduate students have the obligation of searching for problem to be solved, that is worthy of investigation from a chosen field, which will contribute to existing body of knowledge. Yet, the student cannot do it all alone, but with close guidance of his or her supervisor. Research supervision is a specialized and formal process of training students that is recognized as the highest form of teaching and learning in universities globally (Knowles, 1999; Morrison, Oladunjoye, & Onyefulu, 2007). Abiddin, Ismail & Ismail, (2011) posited that supervision is an intensive two-way process of engagement between students and their supervisors during the process of research that culminates in the writing of a dissertation. The authors contend that this involves a close one-to-one relationship that expects both parties to interact with each other openly, honestly and professionally. Mentorship forms the key ingredient in the process of research supervision, in order to effectively steer students towards their ultimate goal (Chan, 2008; Harris, Freeman, & Aerni, 2009; Ku, Lahman, Yeh, & Cheng, 2008; Noonan, Ballinger, & Black, 2007; Persichilli & Persichilli, 2013). Mentorship entails the careful and purposeful attachment of a student under training to a senior, more skilled and experienced tutor with the aim of inculcating knowledge, skills and competencies in the trainee (Afferro, Abiddin, & Hassan, 2011; Jowett & Stead, 1994; Taylor, 1995).

Moreover, Postgraduate research is a form of apprenticeship taken under the supervision of senior faculty members. Research supervision is one of the major avenues for sustaining students' satisfaction with the programme, preparing students to be independent researchers and effectively initiating students into the academic community (Agu & Odimegwu, 2014). The faculty member involved in the supervision of post graduate research must have the in-depth knowledge of research methodology with right proficiency to play the role of mentorship/supervisor for adequate and meaningful supervision. Conversely, the supervisor/ mentor with in-depth knowledge of supervision this goes beyond ordinary thesis supervision but has variegated roles to be played in the mentorship of the postgraduate students.

Various authors have highlighted the diverse roles and responsibilities of the supervisor. For example, Fraser and Mathews (1999 and Hockey (1994) identified three main components of the supervisor's role: to lend expertise in the research area, support the student and balance creativity and critique. *This* was in tandem with what Gwarinda, (2010) and Wakefield (2011) said. The duties of a professional supervisor are multifarious, these may include: guiding students to realize their aspirations – the supervisor is a facilitator not a barrier; utilizing the students' accrued

knowledge; encouraging candidates to pursue what they want without jealousy or disdain; taking cognizance of the candidates' problems and counsel them; monitoring the progress of the research and to ensure that the student is mastering the appropriate research skills that the thesis/dissertation is likely to come to a successful conclusion; Serving as a good role model of what a professional researcher does; Developing a good working relationship with the student, with the supervisor providing encouragement, personal support and guidance at all stages; and Initially functioning largely like a tutor, providing much training and help. Subsequent stages might find the supervisor operating more like a coach, building up skills and confidence, and then finally acting more like a colleague and equal. Above all, supervisors should provide information and advice, coaching, exposure and visibility: making connections, sharing personal stories and humor, responsiveness, validation, providing feedback, and reciprocal relationships.

The cardinal aim of mentorship and good relationship between supervisor and supervisee is to produce a good and quality research output that will stand the test of time in the face of criticism. However, there is a need for quality in the thesis supervised. The demand for quality in Postgraduate thesis has, therefore, become imperative and must not be over-estimated; this calls for the joint effort between the institution, supervisor and the supervisee. Olabanji Obadara and Abayomi-Alaka (2013) defined quality as "the ability or degree with which a product, service, or phenomenon conforms, to an established standard, and which makes it to be relatively superior to others." In other words, good quality refers to demonstration of conformity to established standards and principles. With respect to postgraduate thesis, quality assurance measure has to be in place to enhance the quality of thesis supervised by supervisors. Contrariwise, quality is about consistently meeting product specification or getting things right. Equally, quality assurance implies the ability or degree with which an educational system conforms to the established standard and appropriateness of the inputs available for the delivery of the system (Fadipe, 1999; Thomas, 2010). However, the quality of postgraduate thesis in Nigeria has to conform to the standard; this standard has to be from the interrelationship between the institution, supervisors and the students. Any challenge faced by any of the three can compromise the quality of post graduate thesis supervised by the supervisors. However, issues surrounding the poor quality of post graduate research supervision have attracted the attention of many scholars (Duze, 2013; Okebukola, 2002; Oredein, 2012).

Summarizing the factors that contributed to this poor quality, Okebukola (2002) listed the following; lack of research skills in modern methods; lack of equipment for carrying out state-of-the art research; overloaded teaching and administration schedules which leave little time for research; difficulty in accessing research funds; diminishing ability of seasoned and senior researchers to mentor junior researchers due to brain drain. Specifically, Obi and Agbo (2002)

found that graduates of Nigerian universities rated supervised practical work and quality of academic advice received as very poor. Poor quality of research work is an indication of a deficiency in students' research skills. This deficiency has often been traced to the quality of research training the students receive (Agu & Odimegwu, 2014; Olokoju, 2002). It is common to find postgraduate students who have abandoned the programme alleging frustration and victimization among other reasons (Duze, 2010). This calls into question the quality of research supervision offered to the students and how the students characterize the mentoring they receive from their research supervisors. As a result of this, the study intends to determine the level of effectiveness in graduate thesis supervision in faculties of education in Nigerian universities as well as the various constraints faced by supervisors when supervising graduate thesis which affects their effectiveness. Hence the study, the study seeks to:

1. Determine the level of perceived effectiveness in graduate thesis supervision among academics in selected faculties of Education
2. Identify the constraints to proper graduate thesis supervision among supervisors in selected faculties of Education.
3. Investigate the various standard measures adopted during graduate thesis supervision in selected faculties of Education.

Research questions

- i. What is the level of perceived effectiveness in graduate thesis supervision among academics in selected faculties of education?
- ii. What are the various constraints faced by supervisors when supervising graduate thesis in selected faculties of education?
- iii. What are common various standard measures adopted for graduate thesis supervision in selected faculties of education?

Methodology

The study adopted survey design. The population consisted of all government owned universities (federal and state) in the south-south geopolitical zone in Nigeria. A sample of 60 academics was selected from 3 faculties of education in the selected universities in south-south geopolitical zone in Nigeria, (20 academic staff from faculty of education were selected using accidental sampling technique from each of the selected universities used in the study). An Instrument titled "Graduate thesis Supervision and Uniformity in Standard Questionnaire" (GTSUSQ) developed by the researchers and validated by two experts in measurement and evaluation was used to collect the data. The GTSUSQ reliability index yielded .84 which was determined using Cronbach Alpha technique.

The data was collected by the researchers and research assistants who are also academic members and were analyzed using percentages and Relative Significance Index (RSI).

Results and discussion

Research Questions one: What is the level of perceived effectiveness of lecturers in graduate thesis supervision in Faculties of Education in South-south Nigeria?

Table 1: The perceived effectiveness of lecturers in graduate thesis supervision in Faculties of Education in South-South Nigeria

Perceived Level of Effectiveness	Frequency	%
Low	0	0
Moderate	28	46.7
High	32	53.3

From Table 1, it can be observed that the perceived level of effectiveness of lecturers in graduate thesis supervision in Faculties of Education in South-South Nigeria was found to be high (32, 53.3%). Also, 28(46.7%) of the lecturers have a moderate perception of effectiveness in graduate thesis supervision. However, 0(0%) of the lecturers have low perception of effectiveness in graduate thesis supervision.

Research Question Two: What are the various constraints faced by supervisors when supervising graduate theses in faculties of Education in South-South, Nigeria? Table 2 shows the various constraints faced by supervisors in South-South, Nigeria when supervising graduate thesis using frequency counts of ratings. The result of the relative significant index (RSI) shows that the most prominent of the constraints is “Lack of adequate resources/materials in for research activities” with a 25 (41.7%) and 23 (38.3%) “Strongly agree” and “agree” response respectively by the respondents. This is closely followed by “lack of good relationship between supervisor and a supervisee hinder effective graduate thesis supervision” with a 18(30%) and 32 (53.3%) and “Majority of the graduate students combine work with academic studies making it difficult for them to concentrate on the research thesis writing” with a 16(26.7%) and 33(56.7%) “Strongly agree” and “agree” response respectively by the respondents.

However, the result of the relative significant index (RSI) shows that the least prominent of the constraints is “No proper training on thesis supervision for academic members hinders effective thesis supervision” with a 16(26.7.7%) and 17(11.7%) “Strongly disagree” and “Disagree” response

respectively by the respondents. This is closely followed by “lack of interest in a specific research line hinders effective thesis supervision in such research areas” with a 18(30%) and 6 (10%) and “limited time available for thesis writing affects effective thesis supervision” with a 20(33.3%) and 6(10%) “Strongly disagree” and “Disagree” response respectively by the respondents.

Table 2: Constraints faced by supervisors when supervising graduate thesis in faculties of Education in South-South, Nigeria

S/N	Constraints faced by supervisors when supervising graduate thesis	RSI	RANK
1	Lack of adequate resources/materials in for research activities	0.779	1
2	Supervision of many graduate thesis each session within a short period	0.754	6
3	Majority of the graduate students combine work with academic studies making it difficult for them to concentrate on the research thesis writing	0.767	3
4	Lots of conflicting roles competing with my work as a lecturer affect commitment to proper thesis supervision	0.658	16
5	Due to work pressure, I cannot meet with my supervisee as I ought to	0.675	13
6	Most of the graduate students lack adequate knowledge in research writing	0.763	4
7	During supervision, some of the students do not show sufficient interest in the research writing	0.733	7
8	Lack of additional remuneration for research supervisor hinder effective graduate thesis supervision	0.667	14
9	Lack of proper research fundings hinders effective graduate thesis supervision	0.713	10
10	Lack of adequate knowledge in research writings and methods hinders effective graduate thesis supervision	0.729	8
11	A lot of workload from undergraduate to postgraduate programme in the department affects proper graduate thesis supervision.	0.758	5
12	During supervision, the University library is not well equipped with relevant and up-to-date books/journals for adequate research writings.	0.7	11
13	Limited time available for thesis writing affects effective thesis supervision	0.654	18
14	Lack of supervision bylaws for evaluating supervisory process or supervisors hinders effective thesis supervision	0.679	12
15	Lack of interest in a specific research line hinders effective thesis supervision in such research areas	0.646	19
16	Lack of a properly defined supervisory tasks and responsibilities hinders effective graduate thesis supervision	0.658	17
17	Lack of good relationship between supervisor and a supervisee hinders effective graduate thesis supervision	0.775	2
18	Inadequate allocation of time by the supervisor for guiding the supervisee hinders effective graduate thesis supervision	0.725	9
19	No proper training on thesis supervision for academic members hinders effective thesis supervision	0.631	20
20	Too many graduate thesis supervised at the same time hinders effective thesis supervision	0.663	15

Research Question Three: What are the common various standard measures adopted for graduate thesis supervision in Faculties of Education in South-South Nigeria?

Table 3: Common Standard Measures adopted for Graduate thesis supervision

S/N	Common various standard measures adopted for graduate thesis supervision	Yes		No		RANK
		F	%	F	%	
1	Supervisee must have completed the prescribed coursework before he/she begins thesis writing	28	46.7	32	53.3	15
2	Supervisees must deliberate with supervisor on the areas of intended research writing	47	78.3	13	21.7	5
3	Supervisee must submit a concept note of intended research title to the supervisor for consideration to show adequate understanding of the research conceptualization	40	66.7	20	33.3	11
4	Supervisee must prepare and submit a research proposal to supervisor for consideration and approval	46	76.7	14	23.3	6
5	Supervisee must present a seminar to the departmental postgraduate committee on the research proposal submitted to supervisor also for consideration and approval	42	70	18	30	10
6	Supervisee must present a seminar/ submit the research proposal to the faculty postgraduate committee also for consideration and approval	36	60	24	40	14
7	A PhD supervisee must be subjected to comprehensive /qualifying examination before commencement of thesis writing	39	65	21	35	13
8	The postgraduate committee provides guidelines for research report writing with expected standards for the supervisee and supervisors	44	73.3	16	26.7	8
9	The supervisor must submit a progress report on the supervisee's thesis to the postgraduate committee	45	75	15	25	7
10	Supervisee must state reasons for delay in completion of thesis before an extension may be considered to enable completion of thesis writing	39	65	21	35	13
11	Supervisee who cannot complete thesis writing after the extension period will have his/her studentship terminated.	41	68.3	19	31.7	12
12	Supervisee who has completed thesis writing shall be required to provide a certification from the supervisor with respect to the completed thesis	49	81.7	11	18.3	3
13	Supervisee who has completed thesis writing shall have his/her thesis subjected for scrutiny by the postgraduate board through post field seminar presentations	49	81.7	11	18.3	3
14	Supervisee who has completed thesis writing shall have his/her thesis subjected for scrutiny by an internal examiner(s) appointed within the University as approved by the postgraduate board	52	86.7	8	13.3	1
15	Supervisee who has completed thesis writing shall have his/her thesis subjected for scrutiny by an external examiner(s) appointed within the University as approved by the postgraduate board	43	71.7	17	28.3	9
16	The postgraduate committee shall submit reports of both internal and external examiners as regards the quality of the thesis to the graduate school for vetting and other considerations before final approval	48	80	12	20	4
17	All structural amendments on the examined and vetted thesis shall be carried out by the candidate as approved by the examiner(s) before final certification by the postgraduate board	51	85	9	15	2
18	The candidate whose thesis was found to be grossly inadequate with respect to the quality of the thesis may be denied the award of the postgraduate degree pursued	3 9	65	21	35	13

Table 3 shows, the various standard measures adopted for graduate thesis supervision in Faculties of Education in South-South Nigeria using frequency counts of ratings. However,

“Supervisee who has completed his/her thesis writing shall have his/her thesis subjected for scrutiny by an internal examiner(s) appointed within the University as approved by the postgraduate board” with (86.7%) is the most prominent standard measure followed by “all structural amendments on the examined and vetted thesis shall be carried out by the candidate as approved by the examiner(s) before final certification by the postgraduate board” with (85%) and “Supervisee who has completed thesis writing shall have his/her thesis subjected for scrutiny by the postgraduate board through post field seminar presentations” with (81.7%). While the least graduate thesis supervision standard measure adopted in Faculties of Education in South-South Nigeria are “Supervisee must have completed the prescribed coursework before he/she begins thesis writing” with (46.7%), “Supervisee must present a seminar/ submit the research proposal to the faculty postgraduate committee also for consideration and approval” with (60%) and “Supervisee must state reasons for delay in completion of thesis before an extension may be considered to enable completion of thesis writing” with (65%).

It can be observed from the research finding that the perceived level of effectiveness of lecturers in graduate thesis supervision in Faculties of Education in South-South Nigeria was found to be high. The result further shows that “Lack of adequate resources/materials available for research activities, Lack of good relationship between supervisor and the supervisee hinders effective graduate thesis supervision are some of the constraints faced by supervisors when supervising graduate thesis in faculties of Education in South-South, Nigeria. This is in line with the research conducted by several studies that have underpinned the importance of good supervisor-student relationships in ensuring student success in their research work (Abiddin, et al., 2011; Ellis, 2001; Hockey, 1996; Knowles, 1999; Ives & Rowley, 2005; Mapesela & Wilkinson, 2005; McAlpine & Weiss, 2000; Seagram, Gould, & Pyke, 1998; Sheehan, 1994; Smith & West-Burnham, 1993; Whittle, 1999). Undeniably, McAlpine and Weis (2000) posited that as time progresses, as the supervisor and his students more familiar with each other, the relationship becomes privatized and personalized and students often become their supervisors buddies. Contrariwise, Malfroy (2005) found that students are often exasperated by the poor relationships prevailing between them and their supervisors. Spear (2000) believes that good relationships are predicated on: “communication, communication, and communication.” Donald et al. (1995) found that the factors that hinder effective communication include personal ego, age differences, language disparities and different work ethics.

Furthermore, “Majority of the graduate students combine work with academic studies, making it difficult for them to concentrate on the research thesis writing” this is in line with Obot, (2014) that reported that most of the students are working and at the same time pursuing their postgraduate programme, this also corroborates the findings of Zoysa, (2011) who reported that, 60% of the respondents were University employees and two third were directly involved in

academic careers, these were also seen as factors that delay the completion of their postgraduate programmes. This implies that most of the postgraduate students are working and at the same time pursuing their graduate programme, it shows that most of their energy will be spent on their job than the academic work for fear of losing their jobs, which will affect their finances. Thus combining work with academic studies makes it difficult for the students to concentrate on their studies.

More so, the least constraints identified being that “No proper training on thesis supervision for academic members hinders effective thesis supervision” was contrary to the findings made by Ghadirian, Sayarifar, Majdzade, Rajabi & Yunesian (2013) that reported that lack of knowledge and skills in some faculty members and insufficient familiarization to research methodology and paper writing as major hindrance towards thesis supervision. Conversely, this implies that poor skills in conducting research could delay supervisee’s completion of thesis work on time. This findings shows that although the academic members in Nigerian faculties of education have proper training, but they may need to be well developed in several skills which will favour starting and completing a thesis work. For instance, the ability to guide the supervisees to formulate viable objectives, write good methodology, analyse and interpret results could help the students in the timely completion of their thesis.

Finally, the result with respect to various standard measures adopted for graduate thesis supervision in Faculties of Education in South-South Nigeria shows that supervisee who has completed thesis writing shall have his/her thesis subjected for scrutiny by an internal and external examiner(s) appointed within and outside the University as approved by the postgraduate board, all structural amendments on the examined and vetted thesis shall be carried out by the candidate as approved by the examiner(s) before final certification by the postgraduate board and supervisee who has completed thesis writing shall have his/her thesis subjected for scrutiny by the postgraduate board through post field seminar presentations.

Conclusion

It was concluded that despite a high level of perceived effectiveness in the supervision of graduate thesis by the lecturers, lack of adequate resources/materials for research activities and good relationship between supervisor and a supervisee hinder effective graduate thesis supervision. However, the subjecting of thesis for scrutiny by an internal and external examiner(s) appointed within and outside the University as approved by the postgraduate board in which all structural amendments on the examined and vetted theses shall be carried out by the candidate as approved by the examiner(s) before final certification by the postgraduate board as approved by the university senate remains a prominent standard measure adopted to ensure quality research writing.

Recommendations

- The study also recommended in line with the recommendations of Fraser and Mathews (1999) as well as Hockey (1994), that the supervisors during graduate thesis supervision should lend expertise in the research area, support the student academic enquiries and balance his/her creativity and research critique.
- The postgraduate schools should endeavour to monitor the various activities of supervisors and ensure strict adherence to all the set standards for thesis supervision.
- Furthermore, the study also recommended that universities should try as much as possible to make available research support materials/resources for supervisors. This will go a long way in reducing inefficiency on the part of the supervisees and the supervisors, as well as endeavour to also organize staff development program regularly in order to improve the supervisory capacity of academic staff members both in teaching and research.

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