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## Voices of Supervisors on Thesis Supervision Practices in Universities in Kenya

*Cornelius Kipleting Rugut[1] & John Chang'ach[2]*

[1]School of education, Moi University, Kenya
Email: rugutc@gmail.com
[2]Department of Education Foundations, Moi University
Email: changach65@gmail.com

## Abstract

In the recent years, there has been a considerable debate over various aspects of postgraduate supervision globally. While a number of studies have been undertaken on thesis supervision in Kenya, only a few have focused on the voices of supervisors and their experiences. This study sought to explore the experiences of supervisors on thesis supervision practices in universities in Kenya. The study employed a qualitative approach within a social constructivist paradigm. Convenient and purposive sampling was used to select 12 academic supervisors from three public universities. Data collection was done using unstructured individual interview with the supervisors. The data was analyzed thematically and results revealed that supervisors play a critical role in the thesis supervision process. However, it was clear that supervisors encounter several challenges with students who derail the supervision process through non-commitment, lack of integrity, poor research skills and disappearing in the process. The findings also revealed that universities are yet to support their work in an optimal way to deal with lack of supervisor motivation, heavy workload and inactive supervision policies.


**Keywords**: *Voices, Supervisors, Thesis, Supervision practices, Universities*

## 1.0 Introduction

Supervisors play the role of developing research students to be independent scholars (Mbogo, Ndiao, Wambua, Ireri & Ngala, 2020). It is expected that a supervisor has accumulated experience in research which is essential for training the research students to gain different research skills (Lee, 2007). The supervisor therefore carries a heavy task of training, empowering and facilitating research students (Ngulube, 2021). Studies show that supervision is a complex pedagogy and supervisors encounter several experiences while carrying out their roles (Hamid, Rahman & Hamidin, 2021; Janssen, Vuuren & Jong, 2021; Grant, Hackney & Edgar, 2014). However, despite the complexity of supervision and the challenges encountered by supervisors there is scanty literature and a few studies that have captured the voices and experiences of supervisors in universities in Kenya. This study endeavored to fill this gap; and the main objective of the study

therefore was to explore the experiences of supervisors on thesis supervision practices in higher education curriculum in universities in Kenya

## 2.0 Literature Review

Supervisors have varied experiences of the thesis supervision process. According to Burns and Badiali (2016) one of the most challenging experiences for any supervisor is adopting a suitable supervision style. Supervisors are often faced with the difficulty of adopting a specific supervision style in supervising their students (Schulze, 2012). There are several supervision styles and a supervisor as the choice to adopt any style as may seem suitable to him/her. However, several supervisors have described that it is not possible to use a specific supervision style due to diversity of the nature of students and the kind of research at hand (Lee, 2008). It appears from the experience of many supervisors that there is no single suitable supervision style that can be applicable in all situations (Burns & Badiali, 2016). As such, a supervisor has the responsibility of choosing at every time, a certain supervision style, depending on the nature of the student, the nature of the study, the mode of study and the stage of the research process (Selemani, Chawinga & Dube,2018).

Supervisors also experience the challenge of supervising students who cannot work independently (Rensburg et al. 2012). The ultimate success of postgraduate supervision, especially PhD supervision, is to develop a sense of agency by guiding the student to be independent (Naidoo & Mthembu, 2015). An achievement that every supervisor celebrates is managing to develop and empower the postgraduate student to take ownership of his or her projects and work as an independent scholar (Wairungu & Maina, 2021). However, supervisors sometimes find themselves working with students who are unable develop their own projects (van Rensburg et al., 2016). These are problematic students who put no effort to learn from their supervisors. Many supervisors go through the trouble of spoon-feeding this category of students who cannot initiate their own ideas or generate new knowledge independently in the research process. This bothers the supervisor even more if the student is a doctoral candidate who is generally expected to be knowledgeable and should work with minimal guidance from the supervisor (Marchan, Delgado, & Stefos, (2017). The supervision process is expected to develop the postgraduate student to be independent.

Supervisors expect that during the mentorship process, students should develop the capacity to become independent researchers and experts in their chosen fields (van Rensburg et al., 2016). A fruitful supervision is where the supervisor trains, natures and empowers postgraduate students to enable them develop self-efficacy; to be students who have confidence in themselves and can do research on their own (Wairungu & Maina, 2021). There are students who take an active role in the research process to develop their own ideas and their own sense of direction within their research (Selemani et al, 2018). However, many supervisors agree that the most problematic students to work with are those who expect to be spoon-fed and are unable to develop their own projects (Litalien, 2015). These are students who have characteristics like lack of initiative,

Email of Corresponding Author:
ugutc@gmail.com
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confidence and self-reliance; they will always look upon their supervisors in every aspect of the research process (van Rensburg et al., 2016). Supervisors appreciate students who are willing to learn and take a bold step of working independently (Wairungu & Maina, 2021; Litalien, 2015).

Another common experience among supervisors is working with students with poor writing skills (Ondrusek, 2012). It is generally expected that a postgraduate student should have competent writing and language skills (Dietz, Jansen & Wadee, 2006). However, not all students have the necessary skills to write their research despite pursuing a postgraduate degree (Ondrusek, 2012). Many supervisors have to bear with postgraduate students with poor writing skills and they end up becoming language editors for their students (Wang & Li, 2011). Such students with poor writing skills curtail the supervisor's contribution to effective supervision (Wang & Li, 2011). On several occasions, supervisors are often distracted from focusing on important research skills; and instead, they are forced to concentrate on training their students the necessary writing skills to enable them write their theses (Dietz, Jansen, & Wadee, 2006). Even though supervision is challenging, it becomes even more difficult for the supervisor when students join postgraduate degree with limited or poor writing skills (Ondrusek, 2012). A student with competent writing skills makes the work of the supervisor easier and enjoyable; unfortunately, there are not many students with such skills (Ondrusek, 2012).

Supervisors also sometimes find themselves supervising students who are not committed to their research work (Ondrusek, 2012). Most postgraduate students have a lot of other responsibilities which are not related to the research work (Wairungu & Maina, 2021). They are over committed with outside interests like employment (Celik, 2013). This seems to be the most serious shortcoming of postgraduate students' study progress (Wairungu & Maina, 2021). It does not bear any fruits to supervise a Postgraduate student who is not focused to the study since the student is not ready for the guidance (Bacwayo, Nampala & Oteyo, 2017). For a successful research degree completion, the postgraduate student needs to be self-directed, dedicated and focused during the entire course of study (Ondrusek, 2012). The supervisor becomes frustrated when working with a student whose focus and commitment is with different activities other than the research at hand (Bacwayo et al., 2017).

Non-commitment of students also goes with laziness that discourages supervisors (Naidoo & Mthembu, 2015). Many supervisors admit that it is difficult to supervise a student who is lazy and lacks focus (Wang & Li, 2011). A student who is lazy derails the effort of the supervisor; even with the guidance of a strong supervisor, a lazy student would still ignore the best expertise and fail to implement the guidance given (Naidoo & Mthembu, 2015). Lazy students with unsteady work habits make the work of their supervisors difficult (Dietz, et al., 2006). It is extremely challenging for supervisors to deal with students who fail to do their work even after they have been given the required guidance (Wang & Li, 2011). Supervisors end up getting demotivated when supervising such lazy students who cannot drive their project and hence expect results without putting any effort to their work (Dietz, et al., 2006).

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ugutc@gmail.com
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According to Celik (2013), supervisors expect their students to be hardworking and self-motivated. Lack of self-motivation derails the student's effort to work towards the goal even with the guidance of a strong supervisor (Bacwayo, 2017). Such a student would ignore the most important organisational skills that are required of a hardworking student, which include; setting goals, managing time and paying attention to details (Dietz et al., 2006). Supervisors like to work with students who are enthusiastic and organised; these are key ingredients to effective supervision and productive research (Celik, 2013). Unfortunately, some supervisors find themselves with students who have no ability to work consistently and instead expect results without effort (Celik, 2013). It is difficult for supervisors to deal with students who fail to do their work and hence not progress steadily (Marchan et al., 2017). Supervisors expect students to understand that they must drive their project as the supervisor guides (Wang &Li, 2011). Hardworking students with steady and dedicated work habits make the work of their supervisors' easier (Dietz et al., 2006).

Some students rarely communicate with their supervisors during the supervision process (Frick, Brodin, Albertyn, Scott-Webber, Branch, Bartholomew, & Nygaard, 2014). Supervisors appreciate the importance of communication with their students and seek to provide them with valuable feedback and advice (Dimitro, 2016). However, supervisors have described experiences with students who rarely communicate; they want to work with little supervision, or shy away from criticism hence avoid communication and feedback from their supervisors (Frick et al., 2014). Such students isolate themselves and refuse to discuss or interact with their supervisors, and thus, rarely communicate to their supervisors (Celik, 2013). Supervisors expect their students to maintain constant communication with them at all stages of the research process (Lee, 2009). A good communication happens when the student and the supervisor develop a good relationship during the Postgraduate study (Ondrusek, 2012; Celik, 2009). Lack of communication hampers the supervision process and the students' quality of work (Dimitro, 2006).

Despite the challenging experiences that supervisors go through, many supervisors agree that supervising postgraduate students is an enjoyable experience (Hamid, Abd Rahman, & Hamidin 2021). Midwifing a student's career to the highest level is not only an achievement but a fulfilling experience to the supervisor. Supervisors describe the experience of seeing a student grow into an independent researcher as satisfying (Hamid et al., 2021). Even though the achievement is for the student, the supervisor takes credit for mentoring the student to the level of independence. Supervisors working with committed and enthusiastic students enjoy the supervision process (Ngulube, 2021). It is encouraging when supervisors work with students who are eager to learn and explore new areas in research (Radloff, 2010). Most often in a successful supervision process, it is common to find supervisors establishing friendship with the students as well as intellectual companionship.

Supervision has its rewarding experiences for supervisors (Malfroy, 2005).Regular interaction with different students affords the supervisor an opportunity to grow by expanding his or her experiences in the field of research. The student's research problem is a chance for the supervisor to explore new ideas with the student and get new knowledge (Malfroy, 2005). Supervisors also

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ugutc@gmail.com
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not only oversee students in their specific areas of specialisation, but also co-supervise with colleagues in different departments or faculties; this allows them to widen their knowledge in different fields of research (Halse, 2011; Radloff, 2010). Carrying out joint research with postgraduate students is also an avenue that many supervisors describe as rewarding experience. Supervisors admit that collaboration with their students is an experience that has enable many to explore more in the scholarly world (Lessing & Schulze, 2003). Such experiences include writing joint articles, seeking research funds for different projects and co-presentations in research conferences (Malfroy, 2005).

Co-supervision is a great experience to many supervisors. Some supervisors describe positive experience in co-supervision while others have discouraging experiences (Grossman & Crowther, 2015). Many supervisors express co-supervision experiences as a learning opportunity that has enabled them to learn from colleagues who are more experienced in the research field (Ngulube, 2021). Co-supervision opens the door for continuous development of the supervisor when co-supervising with different colleagues at different time and with different students (Abdulkareem, 2013). It provides a convergence of several minds and creates a greater potential for knowledge sharing (Ngulube, 2021). Other supervisors praise co-supervision because of the sharing of tasks while co-supervising a student (Ukwoma & Ngulube, 2020). For supervisors who can work in harmony, co-supervision provides them a chance to share the workload equally (Ngulube, 2021). Mutual sharing of tasks and responsibilities in co-supervision makes the work of supervisors easier and lighter as compared to the supervisor-apprentice one-to-one mode of supervision (Grossman & Crowther, 2015).

Despite the aforementioned positive experiences in co-supervisors, other supervisors have described unpleasant experiences. Harmonious working relationship is not always the case among supervisors in co-supervision (Ukwoma & Ngulube, 2020). Disagreement between supervisors is a common experience in co-supervision. Some supervisors cannot agree on some issues and they end up giving conflicting advice or feedback to students (Ukwoma & Ngulube, 2020). In some cases, there are interpersonal differences which relate to power differentials among supervisors that affect their working relationship in co-supervision (Olmos-Lopez & Sunderland, 2017). There is also the problem of commitment of supervisors, some supervisors are lazy and less committed, they leave the all workload to their colleagues (Kumar & Wald, 2022).Others cannot sit and share the tasks and one could just relax thinking the other will do (Kumar & Wald, 2022). Unclear roles and responsibilities in co-supervision is an experience that many supervisors have encountered (Ukwoma & Ngulube, 2020). Some supervisors become less effective in co-supervision due to ambiguity of roles, even the most experience become inefficient when there is no mutual agreement on how to work (Kumar & Wald, 2022).

## 3.0 Materials and methods

This was a qualitative study positioned in a social constructivist paradigm. Purposive and convenient sampling was used to select the participants who were academic supervisors from three public universities in Kenya. Unstructured individual interviews were used to generate the data on the experiences of supervisors. The interviews created a dialogue and offered an opportunity for

the researcher to elicit information from participants in order to understand their experiences (Yin, 2015). There was a total of twelve (12) interviews; four supervisors were interviewed individually in each of the three selected public universities. The interview was one-on-one between the researcher and the supervisor. Some interviews were done face to face while others were done through mobile call with the participants who were willing to participate but were not available for face to face meeting. For the success of the interviews, the researcher made every effort to establish a rapport with the participants. The researcher took into consideration the skills suggested by Clough & Nutbrown (2007), which include; listening attentively, pausing and probing where necessary and encouraging the interviewee to be free to respond.

Every interview was recorded, and therefore, the generated data was in the form of audio recordings, which was later transcribed. Exact verbatim transcription was done to preserve the content and the meaning as provided by the participants. The data was then analysed thematically. This started by reading the transcripts several times in order to familiarize with the data (Creswell, 2014). The researcher then took time to write the units of meaning as derived from the data. These were written in the margin of the transcripts. The units of meaning formed the basis to carefully generate the categories. Finally, the categories were used to create and name the themes.

## 4.0 Results and discussion

The participants expressed their experiences which have been summarized in three themes, which include their experiences with the students they supervise (theme 1), the experiences related to the university administration and supervision process (theme 2) and the experiences related to themselves as supervisors (See table 1)

*Table 1. Summary of the findings*

| Theme | | Categories |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Student related experiences | i. | Dependent students |
| | ii. | Absentee students |
| | iii. | Poor writing language |
| | iv. | Non-committed students |
| | v. | Integrity of work |
| 2. Administrative related experiences | i. | Lack of motivation |
| | ii. | Heavy workload |
| | iii. | Supervision not considered part of supervisors' workload |
| | iv. | Inactive supervision policies |
| 3. Supervisor related experiences | i. | Carrying students blame |
| | ii. | Supervisor dynamics |
| | iii. | The ease and burden of co-supervision |
| | iv. | Supervisors' own limitation |

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### *4.1 Theme 1: Student Related Experiences*

These are experiences that supervisors encounter with their students during the supervision process. The participants described their experiences which have been discussed in five categories, which include: (i) dependent students, (ii) Absentee students, (iii) poor writing language, (iv) Non committed students, and (v) integrity of work (see table 2).

### *Table 2. Theme 1 and its categories*

| Theme 1 | Categories | |
|---|---|---|
| Student related experiences | i. | Dependent students |
| | ii. | Absentee students |
| | iii. | Poor writing language |
| | iv. | Non-committed students |
| | v. | Integrity of work |

### *4.1.1 Dependent students*

Dependents refer to relying on another person to do something for you or to support you in a certain way. In this instance, it refers to postgraduate students who rely entirely on their supervisors in order to progress in their research work. The supervisors expressed their views on how students depend so much on them without making an effort to do things on their own. This is evident in the following quotations:

> *"Students come with the mentality that the supervisor should provide everything and they forget their responsibility…"*

> *"Students are not ready to go an extra mile and find out how to do things…they wait for the supervisor in everything"*

> *"Students fail to take charge of their studies and expect the supervisor to do entirely everything"*

> *"There are only a few students who can work independently with little guidance from the supervisor…many expect you to even do a paragraph after another for them...they cannot write on their own…"*

The participants seem to express their experiences of supervising students who cannot work on their own. Marchan, Delgado and Stefos (2017) agree with the participants' references in this study. They argue that there are students who wait to be spoon-fed. They cannot initiate their own ideas or create new knowledge independently in the research process (Marchan et al., 2017). This

can be a more frustrating experience to the supervisor, especially if the student is a doctoral candidate who is generally expected to work independently with minimal guidance (van Rensburg et al., 2016). However, Najarkolai, Beigzadeh, Motlagh, & Sabzevari (2015) believes that supervisors can influence how students work depending on the supervision approaches they use. Supervisors should embrace the approaches that are student-centered with the aim of teaching the research student to work independently (Najarkolai et al., 2015). Student-centered approaches can be more demanding but it saves the supervisor the frustrations of working with dependent students who cannot stand on their own (Najarkolai et al., 2015). Apart from the experiences of working with dependent students, supervisors also find themselves supervising non-committed students as described in the next category.

### 4.1.2 Non-committed students

Research projects require commitment where the student is fully dedicated to the research work. However, students sometimes lose focus and fail to commit themselves to their research projects. Participants in this study described their experiences of supervising non-committed students. Some supervisors who were interviewed portrayed situations where postgraduate students fail to prioritize and focus on their studies and hence give little attention to their work as can be seen from the following responses;

> "*Supervision can be very frustrating, you sometimes have students who are not committed and you end up doing nothing for a whole year with such students…imagine a whole year!*"

> "*You can get a student who is very lazy, you tell him or her to do something and he takes ages to do it*"

> "*Students delaying to graduate on time is mainly their own make, you can supervise a student who shows no seriousness at all.*"

> "*There are many students who are just jokers, they put no effort in their work and they stay for years in the system with no progress.*"

The above responses define experiences of supervisors working with students who are not focus in their work. Naidoo and Mthembu (2015) found that there are students who focus on other activities more than their research work. This is common among students who are on employment in different sectors and they are unable to balance their daily work and their research work (Naidoo and Mthembu, 2015). Such students put little effort on their work hence making the work of the supervisor more difficult. The participants in this study described that these students do not meet the deadlines set, or even sometimes, they fail to do the work assigned to them by the supervisor (Marchan et al., 2017). It is frustrating to the supervisor because these students do not take charge of their projects and they expect the supervisor to always remind them what to do and when to do it (Marchan et al., 2017). Students who are not committed in their research work may sometimes end up disappearing for years without any communication with their supervisors; this is elaborated in the next category.

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### *4.1.3 Absentee students*

Absentee students in this study refer to students who are not consistent in their study and they sometimes take a break from their studies even for years. Once a student begins working with a supervisor it is expected that they both maintain regular contact and meetings as they work on the research project. However, this is not always the case; the participants in this study described the experiences of working with students who disappear during the process of their studies without any communication with their supervisors. This was evident when the participants responded as follows:

> *"There are some students you give them some corrections and you never hear from them again, you don't know if they got stuck or they stopped pursuing the program"*

> *"You begin with a student well, you do a few things then they disappear… others would come back when you have even forgotten their names and what their study was about"*

> *"You can have a list of fifteen students you are supervising but only five are active in their studies…"*

> *"When you have students working on full time employment, they are not even available for guidance, they are just in the list of students you supervise but you don't see them… "*

From the quotations above it is evident that supervisors go through experiences of being supervisors to absentee students. Research students ought to take responsibility of their research work, but on the contrary, some students concentrate on other activities during their study period and they forget about their research work (Wairungu & Maina, 2021). Several studies show that many postgraduate candidates disappear in the course of their supervision (Mbogo, Ndiao, Wambua, Ireri & Ngala, 2020; Wairungu & Maina, 2021). It is a challenge to supervisors as one participant pointed above that a supervisor could have a list of fifteen students and only five are active in their studies. According to Bacwayo et al., (2017) students disappear because research work is too demanding and requires much commitment of energy and a lot time and concentration. Although some students who disappear from the program would come back to continue with their studies as stated by one participants above, many others would discontinue their studies completely (Mbogo et al., 2020). The next category describes the experience of supervisors on how students write their work.

### *4.1.4 Poor writing language*

One of the very important skills that a research student should have is the writing skills. Poor writing language in this case refers to the work that has not been written in a scholarly way in terms of language use and grammar. The participants in this study outlined their experiences of supervising students with poor writing language. Some of what the participants said during the interview is quoted below:

> *"Students' present work with lots of grammatical errors, they make no effort to learn a scholarly writing…"*

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ugutc@gmail.com
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> *"One biggest challenge in supervision is how students write and present their work, sometimes you are forced to concentrate on correcting the language and teaching the student how to write instead of concentrating on other research skills"*

> *"Some students are very poor in language…In some cases you have to refer the student to someone who can assist in language because the work is poorly written"*

It is clear from the quotations that supervisors have a heavy task while guiding their students to write their work in a scholarly way. One of the key responsibilities of a research student is to learn the fundamental techniques of writing a research paper (Jones, 2013). However, according Abdulkareem (2013) the experiences described by the participants above are common because students do not make effort to learn the writing skills. Many students would struggle with the academic writing throughout their study period (Bacwayo et al., 2017). From the quotations above, it seems that some supervisors would take up the task of correcting the poorly written work while others would refer the student to someone who can assist in language and academic writing. According to Abdulkareem, (2013) there should be forums where students are taught about academic writing and guided on how to do a scholarly writing to produce quality work and reduce the supervisors' burden. Apart from poor writing skills, supervisors encounter dishonest issues with students, this is the focus of the next category.

### 4.1.5 Integrity of work
Integrity is being honest in whatever one does. Postgraduate students are required to be honest in their work. Despite this requirement, some students may present work which they did not do themselves. This is evident from the following quotations;

> *"Students submit work which you can easily tell that it is not their own work… it is copy and paste from somewhere… they copy other peoples work and add a few words to appear different and original"*

> *"A student can sent you some work which is well done but when you ask something about the work, they have no idea, this tells you that it is work done by someone else on hire"*

> *"Some students give money to supervisors so that the supervisor compromises their work or the supervisor does some work for the student. I have seen students who attempt to lead me to this direction but I say No."*

From the quotations above it appears that supervisors go through the experiences of working with dishonest students. Students should conduct their research in a moral way and engage in the right practices during the research process (Idiegbeyan-Ose et al., 2016). Some students are not honest and they plagiarise other people's work and present as their own (Idiegbeyan-Ose et al., 2016). Lack of honesty on the part of the student creates a strained relationship between the student and the supervisor and may negatively affect the progress of the research student (Radloff, 2010). A study by Selemani et al. (2018) found that some students are lazy and cannot concentrate to create knowledge on their own. Some stick on the thesis of others and would reproduce with some changes and claim ownership (Selemani et al.,2018). Plagiarism and other dishonest activities

among research students not only frustrate the supervisors, but also lower the quality and integrity of research in universities (Idiegbeyan-Ose et al., 2016).

Having discussed the experiences of supervisors during the interaction with their students in this first theme, the next theme will outlined the experiences of supervisors that are related to administration of supervision in universities.

## 4.2 Theme 2: Administrative Related Experiences

These are experiences that supervisors encounter with the administration during the supervision process. It could be within the department, faculty or university management. The theme consists of four categories which are: (i) Lack of motivation (ii) Heavy workload (iii) supervision not considered as part of supervisor workload and (iv) Inactive supervision policies (See table 3)

*Table 3. Theme 2 and its categories*

| Theme 2 | Categories |
|---|---|
| Administrative related experiences | i. Lack of motivation |
| | ii. Heavy workload |
| | iii. Supervision not considered part of supervisor workload |
| | iv. Inactive supervision policies |

The theme and its categories are discussed as follows:

### 4.2.1 Lack of motivation

Motivation is the drive to achieve something. When supervisors are motivated they develop a strong desire to succeed in the supervision process, and they work towards achieving the set goals. Participants expressed their experiences of demotivation in the supervision process. This is evident from the following responses:

> *"The payment for supervising a student in my university is too little…it is not worth the problems you encounter with the students… even that little token is sometimes delayed…"*

> *"You see…we supervise our students in the corridors of the university, there are no offices for lecturers and I am expected to meet students for consultations…how now...mmh…this is discouraging"*

> *"Supervisors are poorly paid, there is no reward for the work done, the package they are giving supervisors is peanuts, this is demoralising"*

Email of Corresponding Author:
ugutc@gmail.com
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> *"… the university does not appreciate efforts of hardworking supervisors… there should be some incentives for supervisors who do exemplary work"*

The responses of the participants above describe discouraging experiences that supervisors encounter in the supervision process. The issues raised by the participants in the responses above were similarly raised in a study by Ekundayo and Ayodele (2019) in Nigerian Universities. As seen from the responses above, supervisors get demoralized when the payment for their work is low. Sriekaningsih and Setyadi (2015) argue that motivation plays a key role on the performance of lecturers in universities. Supervisors should therefore be well remunerated; their pay package should be reasonable to motivate them to do quality work (Ekundayo & Ayodele, 2019). It is also important to create a favourable working environment which includes provision of physical facilities that promote service delivery (Ekundayo & Ayodele, 2019). Supervisors are responsible for mentoring postgraduate students to be independent researchers (Meilani, Tan, Murwani, Bernarto & Sudibjo, 2021). Hence low morale and demotivation leads to poor performance, which may negatively influence the students' progress (Ekundayo & Ayodele, 2019). Heavy workload may even demotivate supervisors more; this is discussed in the next category

### 4.2.2 Heavy workload
Heavy workload in the context of this study refers to excessive duties that supervisors have to do in universities. The participants described their experiences of having competing responsibilities which include teaching, supervising students, doing research, marking student scripts and administrative duties. This is evident from the following responses:

> *"But now you have a senior professor, I teach three courses, I have postgraduate students to mentor, I am supposed to do research, I am supposed to attract research funds… you see you are overloading this old man…"*

> *"Supervisors have a heavy task, they have to teach and also supervise…you have so many students to supervise and you have to attend your classes, at the same time some of us have administrative duties"*

> *"Talking about staff turnover, the lecturers are very few and the few are overloaded and overworked"*

> *"We have so many students in the faculty of education… work is heavy, teaching and marking the work, and this takes away the time to concentrate with the student"*

The quotations above describe the experiences of overburdened supervisors. It shows the big workload that supervisors carry in universities. According to Ronguno (2016) most public universities in sub-Saharan Africa are generally understaffed. Some of the staff members are not qualified to supervise research students (Barasa & Omulando, 2018). As noted by one of the participants above the few senior lecturers are overloaded with many students to supervise as well as teaching. Apart from teaching and supervising, lecturers also have to do their own research and publications (Ronguno, 2016). Kimani (2014) argues that the quality of supervision becomes compromised when the supervisor is overloaded with many students to supervise, teaching and

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ugutc@gmail.com
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administrative work. The next category outlines the supervisors' views that supervision is not considered part of their workload.

### 4.2.3 Supervision not considered part of supervisors' workload

Supervision is a pedagogy that involves teaching and active engagement between the student and the supervisor. It is a heavy task that requires the supervisors' availability and dedication. However, the responses of the supervisors who participated in this study painted a picture suggesting that universities in Kenya do not consider supervision as work that should be included in the supervisors' workload. This evident from the following responses;

> *"If you have 15 students you are supervising and you have three units to teach, the university will consider the three units as your workload and not the time you spend guiding the 15 students.."*

> *"...you are teaching 200 or 300 students, you have to mark and you have to supervise also but the university management boards don't consider the supervision to be work, yet this is more work…"*

> *"...the university only considers the administrative and the teaching units to be workload but do not see supervision as workload… I think the workload should be redefined by the commission for university education"*

The quotations above allude to a disappointing experience by supervisors. It is a form of complaint that their efforts of supervising the students is not considered to be work and is not included as part of their workload. Firth and Martens (2008) pointed out that supervision is a specialised form of teaching where the supervisor is allocated specific roles and responsibilities. Consequently, it is a heavy responsibility on the part of the supervisor that requires commitment. From the participants it appears that the work of supervision is more demanding to supervisors than other responsibilities yet it is not factored-in when considering the supervisors' workload. According to Shafiq, Sharif & Jan (2020) supervision is an evolving activity and universities need to look at supervision in a different perspective from the traditional view. There is need to professionalize supervision for achievement of quality research (Shafig et al., 2020); this enables supervision to be considered as an important pedagogical responsibility on the part of the supervisor (Firth & Martens, 2008). The next category discusses inactive supervision policies in universities.

### 4.2.4 Inactive supervision policies

Supervision policies refer to the written down guidelines, procedures and regulations that guide the process of postgraduate supervision in universities. The participants in this study expressed their views that pointed out to supervision policies that are not adhered to in the universities. They admit that there are laid down guidelines and regulations that could enhance their supervision work, but unfortunately, these policies have not been put to practice as seen in the following quotations:

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ugutc@gmail.com
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*"We always complain in meetings about the things we go through in supervision that are discouraging… but when you see…you will realise that there are clear guidelines and regulations that are ignored…. no one is referring to these guidelines"*

*"The university has policies like; the number of students that a supervisor should have…mmh, progress reports that should be written and other laid down structures that are not followed. If such could be implemented it could really work things out for us…"*

*"We have supervision policies to guide us and make our work better as supervisors but they are there only on paper and no one adheres to…"*

The quotations above show the presence of supervision policies that are not adhered to in the universities. It describes the experiences of supervisors who are operating outside the laid down structures of supervision in universities. According to Daramola (2021) many African universities have properly laid down supervision policies but the application of the policies is yet to be achieved. The responses of the participants above suggest that the application of the laid down policies could positively influence the supervisors' experience and improve the supervision process in universities. Supervision policies are principals of action adopted by universities to guide the supervision processes and should always be used as a roadmap for all supervision activities in departments and faculties (Bacwayo et al., 2017).

Apart from the experiences that supervisors encounter with their students and the administration, they also go through experiences that relate to themselves and the supervision process. This is the focus of the next theme.

### 4.3 Theme 3: Supervisor Related Experiences
These are experiences that are directly related to the supervisor in his or her daily work of interacting with the students, the administration and the content of research.  The theme consist of four categories which are: (i) carrying students' blame (ii) Supervision dynamicity (iii) The ease and burden of co-supervision and (iv) supervisors' own limitation (See table 4)

*Table 4. Theme 3 and its categories*

| Theme 3 | Categories | |
|---|---|---|
| Supervisor related experiences | i. | Carrying students blame |
| | ii. | Supervision dynamicity |
| | iii. | The ease and burden of co-supervision |
| | iv. | Supervisors' own Limitation |

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ugutc@gmail.com
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The theme and its categories are discussed as follows:

### 4.3.1 Carrying students' blame

The participants who were interviewed in this study recounted their experiences where students blame the supervisors for all shortcomings in the supervision process. They narrate that students do not own their mistakes, but instead, blame the supervisors even when they have not done their part of responsibility. The participants described that they always carry the burden of student blame in the supervision process. This is evident from the following quotations:

> *"We carry heavy burdens of blame as we supervise. Students usually blame the supervisor for every failure, few students will admit their shortcomings but many will blame the supervisor"*

> *"On many occasions you critique the students' work or you insist something and they feel like you are pulling them down……they disappear …and they go blaming you always…ooh that bad supervisor…I would have graduated…such like things…"*

> *"When you ask students the reason for taking too long to complete their studies, they will tell you it is the supervisor, but many students don't put any effort in their work…"*

The responses above describe what supervisors go through with their students. It shows the complex issues of supervision that supervisors have to deal with while working with their research students. Turner (2015) argues that even though some comments from supervisors may not go well with the research student, it is important for the student to see the research journey as professional development and as such, they should be ready to work closely with their supervisors for their success. It is clear from the quotations that some students feel that they are being pulled down when corrected by their supervisors. However, Cooksey and McDonald (2019) argue that even though the research work belongs to the student the supervisor is the gatekeeper of the process and is the one who ensures that the student produces quality work. According to Chikte and Chabillal (2016) the work of the supervisor is a challenging task and supervisors should be reinforced through regular in-service trainings and creation of forums for sharing supervision experiences. This is important because supervision is dynamic as discussed in the next category.

### 4.3.2 Supervision dynamicity

Supervision dynamicity means that supervision is not static and keeps on changing with time. Supervisors who participated in this study were clear in their responses about the changing nature of supervision. They narrated their experiences of how supervision has become dynamic and has been changing over time. This can be seen from the following quotations:

> *"You go to international conferences or even attend some of these webinars and you get surprised, supervision is so dynamic, something pops in every other time and you cannot be rigid with your old methods and ways of doing research…"*

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ugutc@gmail.com
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> *"Supervisors are now being compel to embrace technology and new ways of research supervision…which they did not use previously, thus they are learning on the job"*

> *"You cannot compare the kind of supervision that is required now with the way we supervise students ten years ago, a lot as change and we are struggling to catch up….*

> *You see we are not living in a static world, every day we have new innovations and supervision is not exempted…"*

It is clear from the quotations above that supervision is dynamic and supervisors are experiencing changes every other time on the nature of supervision. Existing literature agrees with the responses of the participants that the nature of postgraduate supervision is drastically changing (Hamid et al., 2021; Saeed & Anbareen, 2020; Grossman & Crowther, 2015).   As stated earlier in this study, the nature of postgraduate supervision is currently dictated by internationalization, the moving nature of knowledge and the demands of employers and funding bodies (Hamid et al., 2021). Supervision practices are now determined by continuity and change (Hamid et al., 2021). Many institution of higher learning are currently trying to embrace vibrant supervision practices for achievement of quality academic research (Saeed & Anbareen, 2020). One of the relatively new supervision practices is co-supervision, which is the focus of the next category

### 4.3.3 The ease and burden of co-supervision
Co-supervision is a practice of supervision where two or more supervisors work together in supervising one student (Grossman & Crowther, 2015). The supervisors work as a team in overseeing the research work of the student. Supervisors who participated in this study described different experiences of co-supervision. Some participants praised co-supervision while others described it as a burden. This is evident from the following quotations;

> *"This work is not easy, especially when you have other responsibilities like me, but I like when I have someone cooperative to work with, you share ideas when you are co-supervising and you can shape the work of the student very well without much effort"*

> *"Co-supervision has helped us reduce the pressure of supervising students, the other supervisor could be good in something like methodology and you are good in something else, you complement each other…"*

> *"We sometimes work with colleagues who are lazy. Some supervisors ride on the shoulders of their colleagues. They wait for you to read and make comments, then they just make follow up comments or just endorse and take credit for the work he or she has not done"*

> *"….you work with a student without the contribution of your co-supervisor….then he comes late and demeans what you have done by introducing a lot of things which he had not brought at the beginning…"*

The quotations above provide mixed experiences of supervisors in co-supervision. Co-supervision is mean to improve the quality of supervision (Paul, Olson, & Gul, 2014). As stated by one of the

participants above, supervisors in a co-supervision have the advantage of working as a team and complementing each other (Grossman & Crowther, 2015). Olmos-López and Sunderland (2017) agree with the participants' view and points out that co-supervision gives an opportunity to supervisors to offer a blend of ideas and shape the students work to produce quality research. However, it appears from the experiences of the participants above that co-supervision can also be a burden. Some supervisors can be lazy or uncooperative and may not take their part of responsibility in co-supervision. They take advantage of other supervisors and "ride on the shoulders of their colleagues". Even though literature is not clear on the weaknesses of co-supervision, Grossman and Crowther (2015) argue that disagreements can arise between the supervisors in co-supervision. While the responses of the participants in this study do not point to a disagreement, it is clear that they perceive co-supervision as a burden. Laziness and non-cooperation point to supervisors' individual limitations, which is discussed in the next category.

### *4.3.4 Supervisors' own limitation*

This refers to the individual limitations of supervisors as shared by the participants. The participants in this study, who are supervisors in universities, described their experiences while interacting with their students and the research work. The supervisors own up to their limitations as evident by the following quotations:

> *"Sometimes we don't treat the students' work as it should be, we prioritise other activities and the students' work may take even months before you read and give feedback"*

> *"You can be busy and the student needs a feedback, you are forced to just go through the work quickly and give some comments. The risk here is that you can disapprove good work or approve shoddy work for not taking time to read keenly"*

> *"The commitment to students' work…mmh I can say is very little, may be because as a lecturer you have a lot of work apart from supervising the students"*

From the responses above the supervisors describe the experiences of their weaknesses. The supervisors own up to their limitations in the process of supervision. The issues raised by the supervisors is being busy, prioritizing other activities and lack of commitment to supervising students. Postgraduate supervision is an arduous task that requires supervisors' commitment. Nonetheless, some supervisors are lazy and less committed; they leave the all workload to their colleagues (Kumar & Wald, 2022). Some students work with busy supervisors who rarely have time to guide them (Calma, 2014). As stated earlier in the literature section of this study, some students complain of irregular contact with their supervisors (Moris, 2011), while others have to wait for a long period of time before receiving feedback from their supervisors (Ngulube, 2021). There should be laid down mechanisms in universities that could assist in motivating supervisors to be more committed to the students work (Calma, 2014).

Email of Corresponding Author:
ugutc@gmail.com
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## 5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings discussed above, the following conclusions were made; first, it is apparent that students can be a hindrance to their own progress in the research supervision process when they are not focused and committed to the research work. This study recommends that it necessary for universities to develop supervision programs that are more interactive and engaging to keep the students on track and monitor their progress. This could minimize the absentee and non-committed students who lose focus and commitment hence frustrating the supervisors' efforts and the supervision the process. Secondly, it is also clear that the thesis supervision process seems ineffective when supervisors are demotivated and overburden with heavy workload of supervising many students and at the same time carrying other responsibilities like teaching, marking and administrative duties. It is therefore recommended that universities should improve supervisor remuneration and allocate reasonable workload as well as providing other incentives and reinforcements that support the supervisors' work.

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ugutc@gmail.com
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**About the Authors**

*Cornelius Rugut* holds a Master of Education from Nelson Mandela University and is currently a PhD student under DAAD scholarship in the School of Education, Moi University. He has participated in several international

Email of Corresponding Author:
ugutc@gmail.com
https://journals.mu.ac.ke/index.php/edj/

conferences, workshops and research schools. Rugut's research interest focuses on higher education, curriculum development and implementation.

*Professor John Koskey Chang'ach* is dean emeritus, School of Education, Moi University, Kenya. He currently chairs two Adhoc Moi University Senate committees: Chair and Convenor Committee on Developing a Work Plan for Engaging Alumni and Fundraising for the Endowment Fund and review of terms of service for Deans and Directors. He is a professor of history and his research interests are: research methods in history of education and pre-colonial education in Africa.

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ugutc@gmail.com
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