

Effective supervisory leadership and followership for graduate students fulfilment in saudi arabia's higher education

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Abstract

Many studies emphasized that effective academic supervision has a significant impact on the graduate student's outcome; and vice versa.

Examining supervisors' leadership and understanding the expectation of students and supervisors of the effective supervisory activities increase the chance of students' achievement and resilience in graduate studies. There is limited research that focused on supervisor leadership and its impact on graduate students. Thus, this study aims to investigate effective supervision leadership and relationship from the lens of graduate students' and supervisors' perspectives in higher education in Saudi Arabia. A qualitative approach was used with the use of interviews as a tool to acquire genuine perspective regarding the study's questions. The findings indicate that graduate students value the characteristics and practices of empowerment, approachability, caring, and abstaining from the added hurdle. Whereas, supervisors value graduate students who have the character and practices of accountability, commitment, integrity, and abstaining from the hustle.

Key words: Supervisory leadership, Graduate students, Fulfilment, Higher education, Effective leadership.

Introduction

There are significant neurological links between feeling, thoughts, and actions (Paul, 2017). The quality of leadership supervisory has a significant impact on the experience and the success of graduate students. Many studies emphasized that effective academic supervision has a significant impact on the graduate students' outcome; and vice versa. Fragile leadership supervisory affects graduate students negatively. Supervision not only accelerate student achievement of degrees requirements, yet it has a longer impact on

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student development and future decision (Pyhalto, Vekkaila, Keskinen, 2015). Effective supervision is an essential process at universities worldwide (Manyike, 2017). Students' effective fulfillment and success resulted from various elements; one of the essential elements is a student-supervisor relationship (Breunig & Penner, 2016).

Supervisors are in the role of leaders who are expected to influence and drive the students to accomplish their research and earn their degrees. Before the previous role, supervisors are an essential component for knowledge dissemination and students' innovation (Krishnamoorthy, 2020). They are expected to provide supervisory guidelines to generate quality graduate students in a certain time. In today's technology invasion besides the increase of distance learning which is resulted from many factors such as the pandemic of COVID 19 to name one, communication has not been restricted to face-to-face meetings. Distance supervision has not been an add-on approach, rather a necessity for the flow of the supervision process.

Graduate students usually visit students' affairs with concern regarding ungiven or undirecting feedback or other issues such as supervisor being unavailable. Furthermore, students' ignorance of universities' rules, regulations and working without giving guidelines affect them negatively. For instance, it is found that many students in their early academic years experience imposter syndrome (American Psychological Association, 2015).

Although the process of supervision is an essential component of graduate students' success and degrees completion, there is insufficient focus on the supervisory leadership from the point views of supervisors and graduate students (Pyhalto, Vekkaila, Keskinen, 2015). Examining supervisors' leadership and understanding the expectation of students and the supervision of supervisors, increases the chance of students' achievement and resilience in graduate studies. Considering what has emphasized the significance of supervisory in graduate students' journey beside the fact that supervision does not exist in a vacuum as Pyhalto, Vekkaila, and Keskinen. (2015) articulated, considering the context is essential for understanding and promoting supervisory leadership as this study presents.

Research Problem

Although supervising leadership is an essential element for students' success, the literature lacks focus on training, strategies, or understanding the need or the expectation for the two parties. In addition, there is limited research that focused on supervisory leadership and its impact on graduate students. Much of the work on

this was given as advice in magazines or universities' websites on how to increase student retention and shorten degree completion (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). In addition, Garnder & Barnes (2014) emphasized that few academics receive training in student s supervision. In his study of supervision at an open distance learning, Manyike (2017) asserted that graduate students need intensive guidelines during the research journey. Further, students are not fully aware of the expectation of their supervisor and what creates effective supervision relationships. In his study of the challenges that face graduate students, Kanan (2018) found that the relationship between supervisors and graduate students is at the top of the challenges. Hence, this study aims to investigate effective supervision leadership from the lens of graduate students' and supervisors' perspectives on graduate students as followers to better understand the proper dynamic of graduate supervision from the perspective of those who are involved in the supervisory process.

Research Questions

How do graduate student perceive leadership characteristics and practises for effective supervisors?

How do supervisors perceive the effective characteristics and practices for graduate students?

Literature Review

A thorough search in the literature on the subject of effective supervision leadership and graduate students' effectiveness indicated that the relationship between students and supervisors is a crucial aspect of educational success and the completion of graduate requirements. In addition, it is found that the graduate students who earned the highest marks used to perceive higher affiliation with their supervisors. A few written works on graduate students and supervisor expectations. The written work was barely on magazines and universities' websites, besides, the focus mostly on doctoral students per se. Also, there is several advice and tips for creating an effective and productive supervisory relationship, yet it was upon personal effort not based on scientific research.

The quality of supervisors' leadership affects the supervisees immensely. In supervisory in the educational context, Pyhalt0, Vekkaila, Keskinen (2015) conducted a study on PhD students' and supervisors' insight about supervision at the University of Helsinki. In total, 1184 students and 431 supervisors completed a survey. Their result asserted that supervisory relationships are an essential

component in supervisory activities. In another context, several studies also examined supervisory relationships with supervisees. For instance, in a study on the impact of supervisors' leadership on job satisfaction in online-driven higher education institutions, Krishnamoorthy (2020) found that transformational leadership has a positive influence. Keulemans and Groeneveld (2020) asserted after surveying 971 street-level bureaucrats and their 203 frontline supervisors that supervisors' leadership works as a role model for public service workers. In addition, they found that supervisors leading behaviours have crucial effects on supervisees' positive attitudes. Madlock (2012) also asserted that when the supervisor shows good leadership skills, it has a profound impact on the performance of the supervisees. His survey of 157 full-time commuters from a variety of organizations in the United States found that supervisors' task-oriented leadership serves as a greater influence for communication satisfaction and job satisfaction.

Gardner and Penner (2016) found that clear and frequent communication, agreement on mutual expectation, aspiration and attitude, motivation and mentoring which is tailored to the need are some elements of student supervisor effective relationship. Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) asserted that faculty specialization is not sufficient for students to select supervisors; they have to consider personalities and communication style. Gin, Tsoi, Sheu and Hauer (2021) emphasized that supervisors trust affects early students' learning and patient care.

For a desirable supervisory, students expect supervisors who provide productive criticism, support, advice, and assistance in developing thinking encouragement (Hemer, 2012). Other research reveals three main elements for supervisory supervision: 1) realistic expectation; 2) mentoring, 3) leveraging the power dynamic (Breunig & Penner, 2016). Whereas, from the supervisory perspectives students' personalities such as self-encouragement, goal oriented and independence are some elements for doctoral student completion of their degree (Gardener, 2009).

In an attempt to correlate supervisors' leadership style and students' achievement, Alfahdi (2021) found that no bond between leaders and students rewards, and bond between supervisory leadership and students rewards. Whereas, Meng and Zhao (2018) conducted a study on academic supervision affecting procedures on educational innovation in China. They tested a mediating leadership mediating model in which supervisors influence postgraduate students' innovation through incentive, expressive thoughts, and expertise. The study was conducted on 815 students from four different universities; the study asserted that academic supervisors' leadership had a

positive impact on students' innovativeness through willingness, innovative thinking, and expertise.

In distinction between the type of leading supervisory leadership, Keulemans and Groeneveld (2020) pointed to the impact of transactional and transformational leadership which is presented by Burns in 1978. In their view transactional leadership can assist students to achieve their work, yet does not contribute to students growth and well-being as transformational leadership.

Theoretical Framework

As human behaviors are affected by complex elements, a variety of theories were developed regarding human behaviors, development, and affairs. One of the theories concerning human relationships is attachment theory which was developed by John Bowlby (Bretherton I, 1992). Although the theory main focus on the need of children for developing relationship for their emotional and social development, it is extended to the similar needs in adulthood in 1980 by Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver, yet with a different form of attachment needs.

They discovered four styles of closeness: protected, uneasy-engrossed, negative-impersonal, and scared-unapproachable. The first is related to the attachment for high achievement, the second represents the attachment to the anxiety to their attached figure, the third is the attachment to the desire for a high level of independence, and the last is the attachment of uncomfortably with closeness.

Another theory is the social capital theory which contends that social relationship is a source that can lead to the development and the growth of human capital (Dubos, 2017). For example, a stable environment promotes educational attainment and reinforces the development of rewarded achievement and skills. The two theories used in discussing the findings of the current study.

Methods

To accomplish this study, a qualitative approach was used with the usage of interviews as a tool to acquire genuine perspectives regarding the study's questions. English (2008) emphasized, "understanding leadership involves more than a simple calculus of behaviors or results" (p. 175). In addition, Merriam (2002) pointed out that quality based researches come up with an aim to understand how meaning is formed, "how people make sense of their life and their experience" (p. 38). To acquire data relevant to the research questions, the participants consisted of two groups: 12 graduate students in their last

year and 8 supervisors whose experience of academic supervision was not less than three years. The specification of the quality of the participants to ensure richness of their experience regarding the study's questions. These sampling is considered nonprobability sampling as Loske (2013) called it, or purposeful sampling as Creswell (2013) named it.

Data Collection

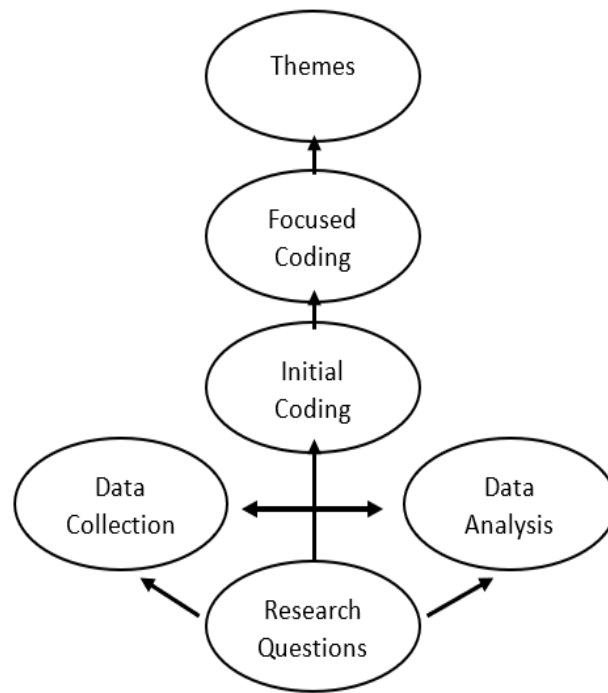
A semi-structured interview was prepared by the researcher. 20 participants were recruited for conducting the study and an arranged interview appointment was arranged at their convenience. The interview was conducted in person face to face to allow clear and deeper information via direct communication with body language observation. Creswell (2013) pointed out that the process of data collection is a series of interrelated activities aimed at acquiring data to answer research questions. Accordingly, an open door is kept between the researcher and the participants for the possibility of acquiring further information or clarification. Each interview took approximately between 30-60 minutes. In addition, throughout data collection and analysis, a memo was used to enrich the process of data collection. The participants were given an overview of the study and its aim; in addition, their right of withdrawing from the study at any stage was kept. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. Two of the participants refused the recording; thus, the researcher wrote the transcript for these participants upon the written note.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis was used to extract themes and categories from the transcripts after labeling them with codes. Before extracting the themes, each participant was given a summary of their interview to ensure reviewing their input and then moving to synthesize it to larger themes. In addition, a research journal that included memos observation, and expression of body language was used to enrich the process of analyzing the data. The use of memos in Birks and Mills (2011) is considered as a lubricant to come in a machine to allow smooth movements. Two stages of coding were used: initial coding and focused coding, in addition to the constant comparative approach. The process of data analysis was done simultaneously with the process of data collection to allow acquiring further information or explanation when it needs it.

The data was imported to MAXQUDA software for assisting in organizing the codes and analyzing the data. The use of the software promotes the credibility of the study as it reduced the inevitability of human error.

Figure 1 The process of conducting the study



Findings

The findings grouped upon the research questions:

1) How do graduate students perceive leadership characteristics and practices for effective supervisors?

2) How do supervisors perceive effective characteristics and practices for graduate students?

After coding the data and clustering them into categories with the use of the organizing software MAXQUDA four themes emerged in each of the two questions.

For the first question how do graduate students perceive leadership characteristics and practices for effective supervisors? The emergent themes are empowerment, appreciation, caring, abstaining from hurdles (Table 1).

Table 1. Graduate students' perspective of leadership characteristics and practises of effective supervisors.

Themes	Aspects
Empowerment	Sufficient resources
	Up to dated knowledge
	Reinforcing confidence
Approachability	Accessibility
	Continuous feedback
	Flexibility
Caring	Guide and advice
	Listening
	Personal support
Abstaining from hurdle	Putting pressure
	Ignorance
	Emotional biases

Empowerment

The participants perceive that empowerment is one of the essential leading characters for supervisors. E. Q, articulated, "I appreciate a supervisor who is a source of strength for his graduate students, who filled them with energy to succeed not only in their academic work, yet in the way of approaching their lives". Supervisors can empower graduate students by providing sufficient resources and information. For instance, providing resources, facilities, and training courses besides whatever accelerates their success. Further, they are expected to be up to date in their discipline, so that graduate students can rely on their guidance and will be in a state of power as it is known that knowledge is power. The participants also expect empowerment from their supervisors by promoting their confidence. This can be done by believing in their graduate students and trusting them as W. A. indicated, "I feel more confident and energized when my supervisors believe in me and grant me a space and time to show my creativity".

Approachability

The participants emphasized the importance for supervisors as a leader to be approachable. The nature of supervisory necessitates this characteristic whether the communication was face to face or online as the participants indicated. This character allows graduate students to benefit from their supervisors, acquiring continuous feedback and advice. The participants pointed to the kind of feedback that promotes their success such as detailed feedback and instructive feedback. R. S. emphasized, "I like the feedback that adds and improves my work, not parley commenting that my work is good, or keep going!". Flexibility

goes along with accessibility as the research road is not a straightforward bath. Changes and adjustments are inevitable; therefore, supervisors need to be flexible in these cases. In addition, supervisors' flexibility is needed also with regards to graduate affairs and life difficulties by rescheduling duties and being patient if the work was not according to the completion timeline.

Caring

The participants highlighted the significance of supervisors' sense of care throughout the graduate journey. M. M. described his relationship with his supervisors, "The sense of fatherhood that supervisors provide, increase the sense of security on graduate students, and they feel that they have the support they can lean on. This caring can be seen in providing guidance and advice throughout the fulfillment of the academic work. The guidance and support do not parley related to academic work, yet also in general life affairs. For instance, they highly appreciate supervisors who listen, sympathize, and provide proper advice. L. A. pointed out, "During my academic journey, I might encounter academic or psychological difficulties, however, my supervisor has a great role in my psychological and academic wellbeing via his support to overcome such obstacles".

Abstaining from hurdle

The participants pointed to some characteristics and practices that they wish not to confront in their supervisors. Putting extra pressure is one of these aspects. For instance, as the participants pointed out, some supervisors would not follow a plan in working with their students and they provide late feedback that increases the pressure on the students to fulfill the needed amendment according to the late feedback. Another hurdle is supervisors' ignorance of student contact or ignorance in providing sufficient guidance, or even ignorance of the subject under research. The last hurdle is supervisors working with emotional biases. Some issues arise within students' supervision caused by emotional biases in decision making. For instance, issues encountered by supervisors at home, brawls with fights, or traffic jams caused mood swings which might affect their attitudes toward the students negatively.

For the second question: How do supervisors perceive the effective characteristics and practices for graduate students? The emergent themes are accountability, commitment, integrity, abstaining from hurdles (Table 2).

Accountability

Supervisors' perspective of graduate students' characteristics and practices emphasized highly the sense of accountability. S. S.

articulated, “graduate students have to realize that they are the main responsible of their academic work, and the role of their supervisors is lightening the road whenever it gets dark by providing recommendation”. The participant's supervisors listed graduate students’ responsibilities in understanding and executing institutional rules and regulations, ethical consideration in conducting research, defending their thesis satisfying academic and administrative requirements for degree completion.

Commitment

Another emphasized personality for graduate students is commitment. The participant's supervisors emphasized that without this character graduate tasks cannot be fulfilled. Commitment is a necessary character throughout the research vases and academic vases. According to the participant's supervisors commitment has to be vivid in organizing academic work according to the agreeable timeline, commitment in regular meeting with supervisors, commitment in learning and updating search and knowledge, and commitment in addressing supervisors feedback. Graduate students are also expected to show passion in their learning and research topic.

Integrity

The participant's supervisors pointed out that graduate students are expected to be trustworthy throughout their research conduct. A. M. explained that “since graduate students are given the privilege to add to the knowledge, they are expected to be honest in every step of their studying and research journey”. Respecting their supervisors along with appreciating them are other forms of integrity the participants pointed at. For instance, L. W. pointed, “some graduate students exceed their supervisors in some subject; however, although they power be exceeding, yet their respect, appreciation and modest have to be vivid during their work”.

Abstaining from hurdles

Some obstacles that hinder graduate student accomplishment are procrastination, dishonesty, and laziness. The participant's supervisors asserted that procrastination is a fatal character that hinders graduate students' progress. E. A. articulated, “Nothing impairs graduate students as procrastination!”. The second harmful aspect that affects graduate students’ fulfilment negatively is dishonesty. For instance, plagiarism, misconduct ambiguity in the research process are some aspects of dishonesty. Graduate-level necessitates perseverance; thus, laziness is not an acceptable act for graduate students besides it is hinder their achievement.

Table 2. Supervisors’ perspective of graduate students’ characteristics and practises for effective graduate experience.

Themes	Aspects
Accountability	Main responsible
	Understanding rules and regulations
Commitment	Organization in work
	Passion in learning
Integrity	Trustworthiness
	Respect
	Appreciation
	Modesty
Abstaining from hurdles	Procrastination
	dishonesty
	Laziness

Discussion

Students’ supervisory relationship is one of the crucial relationships that leverage students' success and genuine scientific contribution. The feature of this relationship is can be evolving bond. Supervisory leadership type plays a significant role in the quality of this relationship. Accordingly, both students and supervisors need to be trained and aware of the expectation of one another for the cultivation of students’ progress and effective scientific contribution. As supervisory is an arena that is mediated by discipline and contextual traditions and norms, the current study provides an understanding of supervisory in the context of Saudi universities. The participants from the two views: supervisors and students asserted what was written in the literature that the quality of supervisory relationship affects graduate outcomes. This correlation was emphasized by Pyhalto, Vekkaila, Keskinen, 2015; Krishnamoorthy, 2020; Keulemans and Groeneveld, 2020.

For the first question, how do graduate students perceive leadership characteristics and practices of effective supervisors? The emergent themes were empowerment, appreciation, caring, abstaining from hurdles. The need for empowerment can be presented in a different form. For instance, Gardner and Penner (2016) and Hemer (2012) pointed to providing motivation which provides a form of empowerment. Whereas, leveraging the power dynamic is a form of empowerment for Breunig and Penner (2016). Influence graduate students’ creativity and empowerment can be achieved with the help

of willingness, expressiveness, and academic expertise as Meng and Zhao (2018) suggested.

Understanding personalities type assist in finding better ways for communication between graduate students and their supervisors. Besides it assists in approaching supervisors which the participants perceive as another character for their supervisors-approachability, and this is what Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) emphasized of the benefit of understanding personalities for building better communication. In addition, caring was asserted by the participants for productive supervisory leadership existed also emphasized in the literature in different forms. For instance, Hemer (2012) pointed to effective criticism as a sort of care.

For the second question of how do supervisors perceive graduate students' characteristics and practices for effective graduate experience? The emergent themes are accountability, commitment, integrity, abstaining from hurdles. A commitment that is perceived as a significant character for graduate students is also emphasized in the literature. Gardener (2009) described it as inner motivation, locus of control, and self-direction which are elements for doctoral student completion of their degree.

With regards to the effective type of supervisory leadership, the participant's graduate student leans toward transformational leadership that empowers and leverages well-being and achievement. Keulemans and Groeneveld (2020) pointed out that transformational supervisory leadership has a positive impact on graduate students' fulfillment. Although Alfahdi (2021) found no correlation between servant leadership and graduate student achievement, the current study has some aspects of leadership with regards to the need for caring and personal support.

Investigating the findings in the light of theories, there are various connections and support of the current findings with what the past theories proposed. According to the attachment theory proposed by John Bowlby which was later extended by Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver to involve the need of adulthood for relationships for their well-being and development, the finding indicated also the benefit for such relationship. The participant's graduate students emphasized that their relationship with their supervisors which can be seen in a form of empowerment, approachability, and caring play a significant role in their academic progress. The width and depth of the previous elements affect the extent of the attachment which therefore affects the extent of the graduate students' progress. With regards to the style of attachment as proposed by Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver, the attachments that are related to high achievement and the desire for a high level of independence are compatible with what the participant's

graduate students indicated. They pointed to the significance of high achievement especially with supportive supervision and the value of independence and trust that they are given by their supervisors. Although graduate students seek advice and guidance from their supervisors, they appreciate the space and the trust for searching and discovering on their own without continuous interference from their supervisors.

The second theory is a social capital theory which contains that social relationship is a source that can lead to the development and the growth of human capital (Dubos, 2017). A stable and promoting environment that supervisors provide increases educational attainment reinforces the development of graduate students and increases rewarded achievement and skills.

Students' well-being and capability of doing research are beneficial for the supervisors. For instance, graduate students' achievements reflect their supervisor's effective leading supervision style and reinforce supervisors' reputation in the university. The type of supervisory relationship varies according to the diversity of supervisors' personalities. Understanding personality differences assets in compromising diverse personal interests and alleviating the differences.

Recommendations

- Train the students on how to build an effective and productive relationship with academic supervisors.
- Such training has to be given to master students not only doctoral students, as they experience a new form of relationship.
- Students and supervisors have to set clear expectations through clear and consistent contracts.
- Students and supervisors have to be aware of personality's type differences to select an appropriate approach in dealing and communicating that does not interfere.
- Conducting studies that focused on identifying effective leadership style that increases students' achievements considering the different context.
- Training supervisors to be leaders who support the whole aspect of a person not only the educational growth, yet also personal and professional growth.

- Experienced supervisors can provide workshops and courses to novice supervisors to share their expertise in effective leadership supervision.
- Graduate students have to be aware and adhere to the unwritten/hidden curriculum inherent in their institutions and the supervisory institutional culture.

Conclusion

Graduate students in a vase of mental maturity and independence. Supervisors' leadership plays a significant role in enriching their maturity, independence, and success. The relationship between the two parties plays a significant role in graduate students' academic well-being. There is scarcity in the literature that focused on the effective supervisory leadership type presented by supervisors that aid graduate students' fulfilment. The presented study focused on effective supervisory leadership and for Graduate Students Fulfilment in Saudi Arabia's Higher Education. Graduate students value the characteristics and practices of empowerment, approachability, caring, and abstaining from added hurdles. Whereas, supervisors value graduate students who have the character and practices of accountability, commitment, integrity, and abstaining from the hurdle. Training and setting clear students' and supervisors' expectations reinforce graduate students' experiences and fulfilment.

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