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Supervisors' And Postgraduate Students' Supervision Experiences At A South African Higher Education Institution

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Abstract

Successful postgraduate supervision involves possessing research capabilities, being knowledgeable in specific disciplines, understanding interpersonal relations, exercising mentoring/guidance skills and having appropriate knowledge of own institutional regulatory systems for postgraduate studies. On the other hand, postgraduate students are expected to know what the postgraduate journey entails and the elements and requirements of a postgraduate study. This paper sought to explore and analyse the research experiences of supervisors and postgraduate research students at a South African higher education institution. The study was qualitative in nature, and a case study design was followed. The sample was purposively selected and comprised 25 postgraduate students and 20 postgraduate supervisors from a single college of the said university.

The study's findings revealed that there was no clear contract or memorandum of understanding between the postgraduate students and their supervisors. As a result, both supervisors and postgraduate students were, at most, not operating within stringent confines of watertight agreement with clearly defined responsibilities. Both supervisors and postgraduate students complained about the non-availability of postgraduate facilities and resources for postgraduate students. The study found that both postgraduate students and supervisors expressed displeasure with an intermittent practice of matching students to supervisors who were not experts in their field of study, with the students citing this practice as contributing factor to their slow progress. On the other hand, the supervisors were not happy about the commitment of the postgraduate students towards their studies and vehemently complained about several students who could not work independently. Based on the findings of the study, the authors recommended that a memorandum of understanding between a postgraduate student and a supervisor that is mediated by a senior university official might solve some of the expressed challenges. We further recommended a preliminary administrative process that include matching the supervisor's expertise to the student's focus area.

Keywords: Feedback; Mentoring; Postgraduate; Supervisors; Student; memorandum of understanding.