JRIIE Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education
Center for Research Implications & Practice

Website: www.jriiejournal.com ISSN 2520-7504 (Online) Vol.10, Iss.4, 2026 (pp. 1407 - 1415)

Supervisors' Role in the Management of Postgraduate Programs in Third World Countries

Jane Michael
Moi University, Kenya
Email: janemichael8@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Postgraduate supervision remains inconsistently managed across universities in many third world countries, with weak policy enforcement, overburdened supervisors, and strained supervisor-student relationships undermining timely and quality thesis completion. This study examined the role of supervisors in the management of postgraduate programs in third world countries, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to frame supervision as both an institutionally embedded and pedagogically scaffolded process. A secondary data design was adopted, relying entirely on previously published literature rather than new primary data collection. Data were gathered through structured searches of academic databases and open-access institutional repositories using terms combining "postgraduate supervision," "supervisor role," and "doctoral education management." Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed, recently published, and directly addressed supervisory role, practice, or management across developed, middle-income, or developing-country contexts; sources lacking empirical grounding, focused solely on undergraduate supervision, or unavailable in full text were excluded. Selected sources were analyzed using document analysis, with findings extracted and organized thematically. Findings revealed four recurring themes: weak institutional management and policy enforcement, supervisor capacity and workload constraints, the centrality of relational quality and mentorship, and marked structural disparities between developed and developing systems. The study concluded that postgraduate supervision challenges in developing countries are primarily structural rather than individual, rooted in inadequate institutional support rather than supervisor deficiency. It recommended stronger policy enforcement, supervisor training investment, formalized mentorship structures, and benchmarking against better-resourced systems to strengthen postgraduate program management in third world countries.*

Keywords: *Postgraduate supervision, Supervisor role, Program management, Third world countries*

How to cite this work (APA):

Michael, J. (2026). Supervisors' Role in the Management of Postgraduate Programs in Third World Countries. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education, 10*(4), 1407 – 1415. **https://doi.org/10.59765/nwr59h**

1. Introduction

Supervision is widely regarded as the single most decisive factor shaping the quality, pace, and completion rates of postgraduate research, yet the way this role is defined, managed, and supported varies sharply between contexts. A research supervisor is generally understood as an academic mandated to guide a postgraduate candidate through conceptualization, methodological rigor, and the ethical and scholarly standards expected of a thesis or dissertation, while also serving as mentor, assessor, and institutional gatekeeper of quality (Polkinghorne, Taylor, Knight, & Stewart, 2023). Management of postgraduate programs, in turn, refers to the institutional systems, policies, and resource allocations that structure how supervisory relationships are initiated, monitored, and evaluated across a university's graduate school.

In developed nations, postgraduate supervision has been progressively formalized through structured frameworks, mandatory supervisor training, and institutional codes of practice. In the United Kingdom, for instance, doctoral supervision has moved toward standardized best-practice models that address recruitment, pastoral care, and safeguarding of student wellbeing throughout candidacy (Polkinghorne et al., 2023). Similarly, in the European context, the Bologna Process reforms have elevated doctoral supervision to a strategic institutional priority, with universities such as Universidade Nova de Lisboa embedding supervisory role clarity into broader research area development (Ribau, 2020). These developed-country models are characterized by clearly delineated supervisor workloads, formal accreditation of supervisory competence, and well-resourced graduate schools that actively monitor completion timelines.

By contrast, postgraduate supervision in much of the developing world, including Sub-Saharan Africa, unfolds within institutional environments marked by resource constraints, high supervisor workloads, and inconsistent policy enforcement. In South Africa, supervision of master's and doctoral candidates continues to be hampered by insufficient supervisor training, poor communication, and frequent changes in supervisory arrangements (Mthembu & Ocholla, 2025). A parallel pattern emerges in Sudan, where doctoral candidates report inadequate research background support and a scarcity of structured supervisory guidance throughout candidacy (Albdri & Abdelmoniem, 2023).

In Kenya this management gap is well documented. Supervisors themselves report heavy workloads, weak institutional motivation structures, and largely inactive supervision policies that leave much of the responsibility for effective mentorship to individual goodwill rather than systemic support (Rugut & Chang'ach, 2023). Complementary evidence indicates that Kenyan universities have yet to institutionalize the capacity-building programs and support structures needed to strengthen supervisor knowledge and skills at scale (Kipleting & Kisilu, 2023). Students, for their part, describe delayed feedback and limited accessibility from supervisors who have not fully embraced available communication technologies (Mwaniki & Guantai, 2023). Collectively, these findings point to a persistent disconnect between the managerial expectations placed on postgraduate programs and the institutional support extended to the supervisors tasked with delivering them, a gap that this study sought to interrogate further.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite increasing enrolment in postgraduate programmes, many universities continue to experience challenges related to delayed thesis completion, prolonged candidature, low graduation rates, inadequate research output, and high postgraduate student attrition. Although these challenges are associated with institutional, financial and student-related factors, the role of supervisors in the effective management of postgraduate programmes remains a critical concern. Supervisors are expected to provide academic guidance, monitor research progress, offer timely feedback, facilitate methodological development, and ensure that postgraduate students meet the required academic standards. However, inadequate supervisory capacity, high student-to-supervisor ratios, inconsistent consultations, delayed feedback, limited research mentorship and weak accountability mechanisms undermine the effective execution of these responsibilities.

Although universities have established postgraduate policies and supervisory guidelines, the extent to which supervisors effectively fulfil their management responsibilities remains uneven, particularly in resource-constrained higher education institutions in developing countries. Consequently, postgraduate students may experience inadequate academic support, uncertainty in research direction, repeated thesis corrections and unnecessary delays in completing their studies. Furthermore, limited empirical evidence on how specific supervisory practices influence management and successful completion of postgraduate programmes constrains evidence-based institutional interventions. Unless these challenges are adequately addressed, universities in third-world countries may continue to experience inefficiencies in postgraduate training and research productivity. It is against this background that this paper sought to examine the role of supervisors in the management of postgraduate programmes in third-world countries, focusing on supervisory practices, institutional challenges and their implications for postgraduate students' academic progression and timely completion.

1.2 General Objective

The general objective of this study was to examine the role of supervisors in the management of postgraduate programs in third world countries, with a view to understanding the institutional, relational, and structural factors that shape the quality and effectiveness of postgraduate supervision.

1.1.1 Specific Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the institutional management and policy structures governing postgraduate supervision in developing-country universities.
2. To assess the influence of supervisor capacity, training, and workload on the quality of postgraduate supervision.
3. To evaluate the role of the supervisor-student relationship, communication, and mentorship in shaping postgraduate students' research experience and outcomes.
4. To compare the structural and resource disparities in postgraduate supervision across developed, middle-income, and developing-country contexts, in order to draw implications for strengthening supervisory management in third world countries.

1.1.2 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What institutional management and policy structures govern postgraduate supervision in developing-country universities?
2. How do supervisor capacity, training, and workload influence the quality of postgraduate supervision?
3. What role does the supervisor-student relationship, communication, and mentorship play in shaping postgraduate students' research experience and outcomes?
4. What structural and resource disparities exist in postgraduate supervision across developed, middle-income, and developing-country contexts, and what implications do these hold for strengthening supervisory management in third world countries?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Empirical Review

Postgraduate education occupies a central place in the development of research capacity, and the quality of supervision received by candidates is consistently identified as the single most decisive factor shaping their success (Mthembu & Ocholla, 2025). Across both developed and developing contexts, supervisors are expected to balance intellectual guidance with pastoral responsibility for the wellbeing of their students (Polkinghorne, Taylor, Knight, & Stewart, 2023). The demand for doctoral and master's-level training has grown sharply worldwide, placing increasing strain on the institutional systems meant to manage it (Ribau, 2020). Yet supervisory practice remains uneven, with some students receiving structured, well-resourced guidance while others are left largely to their own devices (Lamidi, Ibrahim, Mohammed, Musa, Ali, Ahmed, & Bello, 2024). This unevenness across regions and income contexts forms the basis for examining how supervision is defined, practiced, and managed across a range of national settings (Albdri & Abdelmoniem, 2023).

A research supervisor is generally defined as an academic mandated to guide a postgraduate candidate through the conceptual, methodological, and ethical dimensions of a thesis or dissertation (Polkinghorne et al., 2023). Supervision itself is understood as a sustained, one-on-one academic relationship through which a novice researcher is developed into an independent scholar (Adedokun & Oyetunde-Joshua, 2024, as cited in a Durban University of Technology repository record). Postgraduate management, by contrast, refers to the institutional policies, workload frameworks, and quality-assurance structures that govern how supervisory relationships are allocated and monitored (Rugut & Chang'ach, 2023). Mentoring is frequently treated as a distinct but overlapping construct, encompassing the psychosocial and career-related support a supervisor extends beyond strict research oversight (Japheth, Namubiru Ssentamu, Kyalo Wambua, & Kurgat, 2023). Together, these definitions frame supervision as simultaneously a technical, relational, and administrative undertaking (Mupa, 2023).

Globally, doctoral education has expanded rapidly, prompting many higher-education systems to formalize supervisory training and codes of practice (Polkinghorne et al., 2023). In high-income countries, this has translated into structured supervisor accreditation schemes and institutional research-culture surveys (Ribau, 2020). In middle-income countries such as South Africa and Nigeria, supervision is shaped by rising doctoral enrolment set against comparatively limited institutional capacity (Mthembu & Ocholla, 2025). In lower-income countries, supervision is further constrained by heavy teaching loads, inadequate funding, and weak policy enforcement (Albdri & Abdelmoniem, 2023). These differences across income contexts underscore why a single global model of supervision cannot be assumed to travel evenly across settings (Mupa, 2023).

In the United Kingdom, a best-practice review synthesized the academic literature on doctoral supervision and examined the dimensions of high-quality supervisory practice from recruitment through completion (Polkinghorne et al., 2023). The review found that effective supervision extends well beyond technical research guidance to include structured pastoral care and active protection of student mental health and wellbeing

throughout candidature (Polkinghorne et al., 2023). It further established that UK institutions increasingly require supervisors to undergo formal training and, in some cases, seek national recognition through structured supervision-recognition programmes (Polkinghorne et al., 2023). The discussion emphasized that this entry relates primarily to the UK model, and that supervisory practices in other national contexts may differ substantially (Polkinghorne et al., 2023). Overall, the review positioned formalized, institutionally supported supervision as the defining feature of the developed-country model (Polkinghorne et al., 2023).

In Portugal, a study examined doctoral supervisors' and PhD students' perceptions of the supervision process at a young European research university following the Bologna reforms (Ribau, 2020). The findings showed that the Bologna implementation had elevated doctoral supervision to a strategic priority central to developing the European research area (Ribau, 2020). The study identified supervisory tasks, participation in seminars, and student productivity and wellbeing as key dimensions through which supervision quality could be assessed (Ribau, 2020). It also found that understanding the supervisor's own methodology and expectations was essential to identifying good practices and reducing unproductive supervisory patterns (Ribau, 2020). The discussion concluded that clarifying the supervisor's ideal profile could help reduce time-to-completion and improve the overall doctoral experience (Ribau, 2020).

In Australia, a study investigated engineering doctoral students' satisfaction with supervision at a large Australian university campus using a mixed quantitative and qualitative survey (Helfer & Drew, 2023). The findings showed that a successful supervisor-student relationship was strongly associated with higher levels of student fulfilment and overall satisfaction with candidature (Helfer & Drew, 2023). The study also identified specific positive and negative aspects of the supervision process as experienced by engineering doctoral candidates (Helfer & Drew, 2023). It further determined the qualities students considered most important for a successful supervisory relationship (Helfer & Drew, 2023). The discussion noted that poor-quality supervision carried the risk of extending candidature length, reducing research output quality, and even causing early termination of doctoral studies (Helfer & Drew, 2023).

In the United States, a study examined mentoring practices predicting doctoral student outcomes among a biological sciences cohort using survey data on advisor-student interactions (Debray, Dewald-Wang, & Ennis, 2024). The findings revealed that graduate students from minority backgrounds reported lower levels of support from their advisors and research groups than their peers (Debray et al., 2024). The study also found that working with an advisor from a similar demographic background substantially improved both productivity and wellbeing for these students (Debray et al., 2024). Frequent one-on-one meetings, empathetic feedback, and peer or faculty mentoring relationships were identified as practices that positively predicted student success and sense of belonging (Debray et al., 2024). The discussion argued that graduate education needed to be reoriented toward retention rather than recruitment alone in order to prepare students for successful scientific careers (Debray et al., 2024).

In South Africa, a study reflected on the challenges of supervising master's and doctoral students within a developing-country higher-education system informed by knowledge-creation and ecological-systems theory (Mthembu & Ocholla, 2025). The findings identified insufficient training and support for supervisors, poor communication between supervisors and students, and frequent changes in supervisory arrangements as recurring problems (Mthembu & Ocholla, 2025). The study also noted that rising doctoral graduate numbers had intensified pressure on institutions without a corresponding increase in supervisory capacity (Mthembu & Ocholla, 2025). It further highlighted power imbalances between supervisors and students and the absence of clear institutional policies and guidelines (Mthembu & Ocholla, 2025). The discussion concluded that these challenges extend beyond South Africa and carry broad relevance for postgraduate education across other developing regions (Mthembu & Ocholla, 2025).

In Nigeria, a study examined the nature of supervision and its relationship to the duration of producing PhD degrees across Nigerian universities (Lamidi et al., 2024). The findings showed that an increased demand for PhD training had raised the number of students assigned per supervisor, reducing the quality time and attention each candidate received (Lamidi et al., 2024). The study also found that some doctoral students were allocated to supervisors with limited familiarity with their specific research focus or methodology (Lamidi et al., 2024). It established that supervisors were expected to guide topic selection, remain accessible for consultation, and provide constructive feedback on submitted work (Lamidi et al., 2024). The discussion concluded that misalignment between supervisor workload and student needs was a key driver of prolonged completion times in Nigerian PhD programmes (Lamidi et al., 2024).

In Kenya, a study explored supervisors' own experiences of thesis supervision practices across Kenyan universities through in-depth accounts of their work with postgraduate candidates (Rugut & Chang'ach, 2023). The findings

revealed that supervisors frequently encountered students who derailed the supervision process through non-commitment, poor research skills, or disappearance during candidature (Rugut & Chang'ach, 2023). The study also found that universities had not adequately supported supervisors' work, leaving problems of low motivation and heavy workload largely unaddressed (Rugut & Chang'ach, 2023). It further identified inactive or poorly enforced supervision policies as a structural weakness within the system (Rugut & Chang'ach, 2023). The discussion concluded that strengthening institutional support structures was essential to improving the consistency of supervisory practice in Kenya (Rugut & Chang'ach, 2023).

In Kenya study, researchers explored perspectives of postgraduate students and supervisors on how research supervision could be strengthened across public universities in the country (Kipleting & Kisilu, 2023). The findings showed that supervisors required capacity-building programmes to develop the knowledge and skills needed for effective candidate guidance (Kipleting & Kisilu, 2023). The study also identified a need for both physical and online structures to support the supervision process more consistently (Kipleting & Kisilu, 2023). It further revealed that students needed a comprehensive mentorship programme alongside a more constructive supervisor-student relationship (Kipleting & Kisilu, 2023). The discussion recommended that Kenyan universities invest specifically in supervisor skills development and in improving the broader supervisory environment (Kipleting & Kisilu, 2023).

In Sudan, a study assessed the state of postgraduate supervision by examining its strengths and weaknesses from the combined perspectives of students and supervisors across Sudanese universities (Albdri & Abdelmoniem, 2023). The findings showed that supervision remained a major challenge within Sudanese higher education despite being recognized as a key element of doctoral success (Albdri & Abdelmoniem, 2023). The study identified inadequate research background preparation and insufficient supervisory guidance as persistent obstacles for candidates (Albdri & Abdelmoniem, 2023). It also drew on a recent questionnaire of students and supervisors to assess the current state of practice across different institutions (Albdri & Abdelmoniem, 2023). The discussion concluded that improving the quality of postgraduate supervision required by addressing both individual supervisor capacity and broader institutional gaps (Albdri & Abdelmoniem, 2023).

In Tanzania, a qualitative study explored the barriers and facilitators affecting research supervision in postgraduate medical education (Abeid et al., 2025). The findings showed that delayed feedback from supervisors had become a significant and recurring problem for postgraduate medical candidates (Abeid et al., 2025). The study identified specific institutional and interpersonal factors that either supported or hindered effective supervisory relationships (Abeid et al., 2025). It also highlighted how time constraints on supervisors directly affected the quality and timeliness of guidance provided to students (Abeid et al., 2025). The discussion recommended structural changes to feedback processes as a means of improving postgraduate medical training outcomes in Tanzania (Abeid et al., 2025).

In Uganda, a study examined the strategies used for effective research supervision in the completion of postgraduate studies across selected universities, with particular attention to the period during COVID-19 lockdowns (Japheth et al., 2023). The findings showed that research supervision had been repeatedly implicated in delayed completion of postgraduate studies at both master's and doctoral levels (Japheth et al., 2023). The study identified team supervision, continuous re-tooling of students and supervisors, and the establishment of research coordination offices as effective strategies (Japheth et al., 2023). It also proposed flipped supervision approaches in which supervisory spaces and roles were varied to improve engagement (Japheth et al., 2023). The discussion recommended that Ugandan universities develop structured courses on the pedagogy of postgraduate supervision to improve completion rates (Japheth et al., 2023).

Across the wider African continent, a study explored the challenges faced by PhD supervisors and candidates in the social sciences using focus group discussions with supervisors drawn from multiple African countries (Mupa, 2023). The findings revealed that many African universities experienced poor mentorship and reduced interaction between supervisors and students (Mupa, 2023). The study also found that prospective doctoral candidates were frequently underprepared for doctoral-level research, with limited research skills and inadequate academic writing capacity (Mupa, 2023). It identified supervisor-related, student-related, methodological, infrastructural, and policy-related challenges as the major themes shaping supervisory experience (Mupa, 2023). The discussion recommended intensive supervisor training and structured workshops from the very start of candidature to address these compounding weaknesses (Mupa, 2023).

2.2 Theoretical Underpinning

This study was anchored on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which conceptualizes human development as shaped by nested layers of environmental influence ranging from immediate interpersonal settings to

broader institutional and societal structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Applied to postgraduate supervision, the theory frames the supervisor-student relationship as a microsystem embedded within a wider mesosystem of departmental policies, an exosystem of university-level resourcing and governance decisions, and a macrosystem of national higher-education policy and funding priorities. This framing is particularly useful for examining the management of postgraduate programs in developing-country contexts, since it explains why a well-intentioned supervisor operating within an under-resourced institutional exosystem, characterized by heavy teaching loads, weak monitoring structures, and inadequate funding, may still preside over poor student outcomes despite personal competence. The theory has previously been applied directly to postgraduate supervision research in developing countries, where it was used to explain how challenges facing students and supervisors are shaped as much by institutional-level forces as by the immediate supervisory dyad (Mthembu & Ocholla, 2025).

The study was further underpinned by Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Learning, particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, which holds that a learner's potential is best realized through guided interaction with a more knowledgeable other rather than through independent effort alone (Vygotsky, 1978). In the postgraduate context, the supervisor occupies the role of the "more knowledgeable other," tasked with scaffolding the candidate from dependent learning toward independent scholarly capability, while progressively withdrawing support as competence develops. This lens draws attention to the relational and pedagogical dimension of supervision, that is, the frequency of interaction, the quality of feedback, and the deliberateness with which a supervisor calibrates guidance to a candidate's stage of development, as a decisive factor in research outcomes. Where supervisory contact is inconsistent or where supervisors lack the training to scaffold effectively, as documented across several of the developing-country studies reviewed in this paper, the zone of proximal development remains inaccessible to the student, leaving candidates to navigate complex research processes largely on their own. Taken together, Bronfenbrenner's ecological framing and Vygotsky's sociocultural lens provide a complementary theoretical basis for this study, situating postgraduate supervision simultaneously within a systemic institutional context and within the intimate pedagogical relationship between supervisor and student.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a desk-based qualitative research methodology, relying exclusively on secondary data obtained from existing scholarly publications and publicly accessible institutional documents. Desk research involves systematically identifying, retrieving, evaluating and analysing information that has already been collected, documented or published by other researchers and institutions. Its main characteristics include reliance on existing information, the use of multiple documentary sources, systematic literature searches, critical evaluation of source credibility, thematic organisation of evidence and comparative interpretation of documented findings (Cheong et al., 2023; Fleischer & Khalil, 2024). The approach was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to examine postgraduate supervision practices across different national and institutional contexts without collecting new primary data.

Data were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, published research reports, university postgraduate policies, doctoral supervision guidelines, UNESCO publications, World Bank reports and institutional research repositories. Relevant materials were identified through structured searches of academic databases and open-access repositories using combinations of keywords such as "postgraduate supervision," "supervisors' roles," "doctoral education management," "research mentorship" and "postgraduate completion rates." Priority was given to recent publications, while foundational studies were retained where they provided relevant theoretical and methodological insights.

The selected documents were subjected to systematic document analysis, involving examination of their credibility, relevance, methodological quality and contribution to understanding postgraduate supervision. Information was extracted on research designs, study populations, supervisory practices, institutional challenges and reported outcomes. The evidence was subsequently organised thematically and compared across developed, middle-income and developing countries to identify common patterns, contextual differences and gaps in postgraduate programme management (Bowen, 2009).

The methodology offers advantages such as reduced research costs, time efficiency, access to a wider geographical range of evidence and opportunities for cross-country comparisons (O'Connor, 2020; Cheong et al., 2023). However, it is limited by the availability, quality, relevance and possible publication bias of existing information. The researcher also had no direct control over the original data collection procedures. These limitations were addressed through source evaluation, comparison of evidence from different publications and transparent interpretation of documented findings. Consequently, the conclusions represent a synthesis of existing evidence rather than findings generated from newly collected primary data.

4. Results and Discussion

Findings, discussions, and interpretations are organized below into four thematic areas that emerged consistently across the literature reviewed.

4.1 Institutional management and policy gaps in postgraduate supervision

Across the studies, a recurring finding is that postgraduate supervision is often left to individual goodwill rather than being anchored in enforceable institutional policy. In Kenya, supervisors reported that universities had not adequately supported their work, and that supervision policies existed but were largely inactive in practice (Rugut & Chang'ach, 2023). A related Kenyan study similarly found that universities lacked the physical and online structures needed to support supervision consistently, recommending stronger capacity-building programmes at the institutional level (Kipleting & Kisilu, 2023). By contrast, the UK case showed that formal supervisor accreditation and national recognition schemes have measurably professionalized the supervisory role (Polkinghorne, Taylor, Knight, & Stewart, 2023). Read together, these findings suggest that the presence or absence of enforceable management structures, rather than supervisor goodwill alone, is a key determinant of consistency in the supervision experience. This points to an interpretation that strengthening postgraduate program management in developing contexts requires formal policy enforcement mechanisms rather than further guidance documents alone.

4.2 Supervisor capacity, training, and workload constraints

A second theme concerns the mismatch between supervisor's workload and the training or time available to manage it. In Nigeria, rising PhD enrolment was found to increase the number of students assigned per supervisor, directly reducing the quality of attention each candidate received (Lamidi, Ibrahim, Mohammed, Musa, Ali, Ahmed, & Bello, 2024). The South African case reported comparable pressure, with insufficient supervisor training identified as a persistent structural weakness even as doctoral graduate numbers continued to rise (Mthembu & Ocholla, 2025). A pan-African study of PhD supervisors reached a similar conclusion, finding that candidates were often underprepared for research while supervisors themselves lacked structured training in mentoring (Mupa, 2023). In Tanzania, time constraints on supervisors were shown to translate directly into delayed feedback for postgraduate medical candidates (Abeid et al., 2025). The consistency of this finding across otherwise very different national systems suggests that workload-driven capacity strain, rather than individual supervisor competence, is the more fundamental problem to be addressed through institutional staffing and training investment.

4.3 Quality of the supervisor-student relationship, communication, and mentorship

The third theme is centered on the relational and communicative dimension of supervision. In the United States, frequent one-on-one meetings and empathetic feedback were found to be strong predictors of doctoral student success and sense of belonging (Debray, Dewald-Wang, & Ennis, 2024). In Australia, the quality of the supervisor-student relationship was similarly linked to overall candidate satisfaction and fulfilment (Helfer & Drew, 2023). The Portuguese case reinforced this by showing that understanding a supervisor's own methodology and expectations helped reduce unproductive supervisory patterns and shorten completion times (Ribau, 2020). Taken together, these findings across high-income contexts suggest that relational quality, communication frequency, and mentorship depth function as protective factors against attrition regardless of national setting. The interpretation for postgraduate management in resource-constrained contexts is that even modest interventions targeting communication frequency and feedback structure could yield disproportionate benefits for completion rates.

4.4 Structural and resource disparities across developed, middle-income, and developing countries

The final theme addresses how national income level and institutional resourcing shape the overall supervisory environment. The Sudanese case found that inadequate research background preparation and a general scarcity of structured supervisory guidance were widespread across universities (Albdri & Abdelmoniem, 2023). The Ugandan case similarly linked delayed postgraduate completion to systemic constraints, proposing team supervision and research coordination offices as compensatory strategies rather than relying on individual supervisors alone (Japheth, Namubiru Ssentamu, Kyalo Wambua, & Kurgat, 2023). These developing-context findings stand in contrast to the developed-country pattern, where formalized accreditation and dedicated research-culture surveys already exist as standard institutional practice (Polkinghorne et al., 2023). The clear gradient visible across income contexts, from codified best-practice frameworks in the UK to reliance on informal

apprenticeship-style supervision in lower-income settings, suggests that the challenges facing postgraduate supervision are not primarily about individual supervisor skill but about the differential availability of institutional resources and policy infrastructure. This interpretation reinforces the rationale for examining the management of postgraduate programs, rather than supervision alone, as the appropriate unit of analysis for improving outcomes in developing-country contexts such as Kenya.

5. Concision and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the findings, this paper concluded that the role of supervisors in the management of postgraduate programs cannot be separated from the broader institutional systems within which supervision takes place, since the quality of guidance a candidate receives is shaped as much by policy enforcement, workload allocation, and resourcing as it is by any individual supervisor's competence or goodwill. Supervising postgraduate students emerged consistently across contexts as a demanding, multidimensional task that combines technical research guidance with pastoral care, mentorship, and administrative gatekeeping, and where any one of these dimensions is neglected, students experience delayed feedback, prolonged completion times, or outright attrition. The comparison across developed, middle-income, and developing countries revealed a clear gradient in institutional support, with formalized accreditation and dedicated supervisory training standing in sharp contrast to the informal, apprenticeship-style supervision and inactive policies still common in many developing-country universities, including those in Kenya. This disparity indicates that the challenges facing postgraduate supervision in the developing world are structural rather than purely individual, rooted in insufficient supervisor training, excessive candidate-to-supervisor ratios, weak communication structures, and the absence of enforceable institutional guidelines rather than in any deficit of commitment on the part of supervisors themselves. This paper therefore concluded that meaningful improvement in postgraduate outcomes in developing-country contexts depends on treating supervision as an institutionally managed function rather than as an individual academic responsibility, and that closing the gap between developed and developing systems requires deliberate attention to the management architecture surrounding supervision, not merely to the supervisors who carry it out.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study made the following recommendations

1. Universities in developing countries should move beyond drafting supervision policies to actively enforcing them, through mechanisms such as mandatory supervision compacts, regular monitoring of candidate progress, and clear accountability structures for both supervisors and postgraduate management offices.
2. Institutions should invest in structured, mandatory supervisor training and capacity-building programs, and should regulate candidate-to-supervisor ratios to ensure workloads remain manageable enough to allow timely, quality engagement with each postgraduate student.
3. Universities should institutionalize formal mentorship frameworks and communication protocols, such as agreed meeting frequencies and feedback turnaround times, to strengthen the supervisor-student relationship and reduce the isolation and dissatisfaction reported by postgraduate candidates.
4. Postgraduate management bodies in developing-country universities should benchmark their supervisory systems against best-practice models from developed and middle-income contexts, adapting accreditation, research-culture support structures, and resourcing strategies to local conditions in order to close the structural gaps identified in this study.

References

Abeid, M., Mbekenga, C., Jusabani, A. M., Kassamali, S. A., Mgonja, M. L., Sibuma, M., Sirili, N., & Noorani, M. (2025). "It's the time they take to give feedback; it has become a problem": Exploring barriers and facilitators for research supervision in postgraduate medical education in Tanzania. A qualitative study. *Advances in Medical Education and Practice, 16*, 685–698.

Adedokun, T., & Oyetunde-Joshua, F. (2024). *Navigating the academic odyssey: Exploring the role of supervisors in supporting postgraduate students* [Repository record]. Durban University of Technology Institutional Repository.

Albdri, M., & Abdelmoniem, A. (2023). The state of postgraduate supervision in Sudan. *ADAB*, (49), 315–330.

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9*(2), 27–40.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.

Debray, R., Dewald-Wang, E. A., & Ennis, K. K. (2024). Mentoring practices that predict doctoral student outcomes in a biological sciences cohort. *PLoS ONE, 19*(6), Article e0305367.

Helfer, F., & Drew, S. (2023). *A small-scale investigation into engineering PhD student satisfaction with supervision in an Australian university campus* (Conference contribution).

Japheth, N., Namubiru Ssentamu, P., Kyalo Wambua, B., & Kurgat, S. J. (2023). Strategies used for effective research supervision in the completion of postgraduate studies in selected universities of Uganda. *The Uganda Higher Education Review, 10*(2), 1.

Kipleting, R. C., & Kisilu, S. A. (2023). Strengthening research supervision in universities in Kenya. *European Journal of Education Studies, 10*(11).

Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques* (2nd rev. ed.). New Age International.

Lamidi, K. O., Ibrahim, U. Y., Mohammed, I. Z., Musa, M. M. A., Ali, A., Ahmed, S., & Bello, M. (2024). Nature of supervision and duration of producing Ph.D degrees in Nigerian universities. *KIU Journal of Education, 4*(2), 40–49.

Mthembu, M. S., & Ocholla, D. N. (2025). Supervising postgraduate students in a developing country: Reflections on the challenges. In *Advances in African Social and Behavioural Sciences* (Vol. 22, pp. 69–84).

Mupa, P. (2023). Exploring challenges faced by PhD supervisors and candidates in social sciences in the African context. *South African Journal of Educational Leadership and Management, 3*(1), 55–65.

Mwaniki, S. G., & Guantai, H. K. (2023). A critical analysis to the process of postgraduate supervision: Exploration of supervisee challenges. *International Journal of Advanced Research*.

Polkinghorne, M., Taylor, J., Knight, F., & Stewart, N. (2023). Doctoral supervision: A best practice review. *Encyclopedia, 3*(1), 46–59.

Ribau, I. (2020). Doctoral supervisors and PhD students' perceptions about the supervision process in a young European university. *Universal Journal of Educational Research, 8*(1), 36–46.

Rugut, C. K., & Chang'ach, J. (2023). Voices of supervisors on thesis supervision practices in universities in Kenya. *The Educator: A Journal of the School of Education, Moi University, 3*(1), 128–149.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.