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Expectations of Research Students About Online Supervision of Thesis Supervisors: A Case of Virtual University of Pakistan

Abstract

The study aims to explore postgraduate research students' expectations from their thesis supervisors in online postgraduate programs. Particularly it aimed to study their perceptions of the role of thesis supervisor in their postgraduate research work. The study followed survey research design. The population comprised 1118 Postgraduate (MS) students enrolled in nine programs at post-graduation level in spring 2018. Using stratified random sampling technique, a total of 150 postgraduate research students were selected from five programs (MS Computer science, M Phil Educational Leadership and Management, MS Business Administration, MS Mathematics and MS Zoology of four faculties of Virtual University of Pakistan. Data were collected through researcher made scale Expectations of Research Students (ERS) having five subscales and 28 items. Mean, Standard Deviation and ANOVA were applied for obtaining results. Findings suggested that well documented and communicated thesis supervision regulations and including face-to-face interactions with online supervision could make some improvements to the outcomes of online supervision.

Key Words: Expectations, Online Supervision, Postgraduate Research

Introduction

Globalization has brought reforms in the landscape of higher education throughout the world. Similarly, higher education in Pakistan also witnessed many changes with the launch of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan in 2002. HEC's mission was to produce massive quality human resource through higher education and thus pushed Pakistani universities to increase their intake of postgraduates (Pakistan Higher Education Commission Vision 2025, 2017). So, there is observed a substantial growth in the enrollment of the postgraduate students all over Pakistan doing research in Pakistan as well as abroad.

Likewise, since its inception in 2001, the Virtual University of Pakistan (VUP) (first and the only university based on modern Information and Communication Technologies) facilitates people to follow its rigorous degree programs irrespective of their gender, age and geographic locations. Its Federal Charter gets its degrees recognized and accepted all across Pakistan as well as overseas. In a short period of 20 years, its outreach has spread over one hundred cities of the country. More than one hundred and ninety associated institutions provide infrastructure support to the students. In several other countries of the region VUP offers various undergraduate and postgraduate programs twice a year and started offering PhD programs in life sciences since September 2015. The interactive learning management system (LMS) is specialized and comprehensive software that enables the students to do research projects/ thesis, manage the courses, take quizzes, and submit assignments and many more. For getting advice to complete their thesis and other academic activities, students can communicate through moderated discussion boards (MDBs) and participate in discussions through EDOBE and skype.

VUP has also developed "Research handbook" recently which contains such guidelines and regulations that candidates and supervisors are expected to meet but these guidelines are still on infancy stage to be implemented. Research project of three credit hours or alternative course of the

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same credit hours is the compulsory requirement to complete the degree but to pursue further qualification like PhD; research project is a mandatory requirement.

Furthermore, the medium of instructions in these degree programs is English language which demands to complete research thesis or dissertations in English. The students who use English as second language find academic writing difficult ([Wang & Li, 2008](#)). Other than inadequate proficiency of English language of the supervisee, there are other reasons as well i.e. lengthy, complicated process, absence of clear communication and direction by the supervisors through ICT, supervisors' lack of interest as well as inadequate knowledge in the area supervised ([Nakabugo & Ssebunga Maseembe, 2004](#)), too many students ([Vilkinas, 2008](#)), heavy workload including administrative duties, and institutional failure to provide appropriate ICT based student support.

Like other traditional (based on face to face interaction) university teachers' role includes course management responsibilities, administrative assignments, research development etc. In that context, being a supervisor may not be perceived as such a central role as it may for the supervisee ([Kumar & Hueeat, 2011](#)). [Wisker et al. \(2003\)](#) also postulated that graduate research should be understood as a form of learning and graduate supervision as a form of teaching (p. 387). In this scenario, supervisors play a critical role in successful completion of the degree, so postgraduate research supervision has also become a demanding role in open and distance mode of education.

Effective online supervision required research supervisors to have good knowledge of the functions and tasks of supervision especially in the field of online communication as well as to be skilled and knowledgeable in the field ([Abiddin, Ismail & Ismail, 2011](#)). A well-developed online supervisory system with specific guideline to guide both students and supervisors can address and tackle all the issues related to research supervision. Many universities in the world have developed research guidelines for both supervisor and supervisees. At the beginning of the candidature both supervisee and supervisor sign an agreement to make them familiar with their duties and responsibilities.

Although some studies see research supervision as a bi-lateral complex course that has not set principles and 'right method' ([Exley & O'Malley, 1999](#)). Explaining the reason, [Murphy, Bain and Conrad \(2007\)](#) stated that this is because both parties have different understanding about the acceptable level of guidance and frequency of communication by the supervisee and reasonable extent of autonomy given by the supervisor. Research supervisees have different perspective about supervision and their supervisor ([Amzat, et. al., 2010](#); [Abiddin, Ismail & Ismail, 2011](#)). Similarly, supervisors have their own expectation towards their research supervisees. [Grant \(2005\)](#) speculated that "supervision is a complex process that obscures great diversity in assumptions, beliefs, values, and practices of supervisors and candidates" (p.2). It becomes more complex when students resided on geographical distance and what the supervisor gives as a feedback may be different from what the student wish to receive and how the student understands and recode it. Thus, distance is creating potential distortion in the supervisor-supervisee relationship ([Abiddin, Ismail & Ismail, 2011](#)).

Thus, there is need to establish the right mutual expectations and know responsibilities of both parties functioning in cyber space. According to [Calma \(2007\)](#) the field of research supervision is growing as an evolving field of research among professionals, supervisors, candidates and other stakeholders (p.91). Existing body of literature also indicated that research supervision is a much-explored area in the western world ([Wisker, et. al., 2003](#)) but empirical research evidences on postgraduate research supervision is still limited in Asia, particularly in Pakistan. Moreover, studies about real expectations of online supervisees and extent of mutual acceptance of these expectations in an open and distance mode of education are almost nonexistent.

So, this study pinpointed the necessity of expectations of supervisees in an open and distance mode of education where both the players interact with each other in cyber space. It endeavored to investigate postgraduate research students' expectations about supervision of research theses for completing an MPhil degree in Computer science, Educational Leadership & Management, Business Administration, Mathematics and Zoology through online mode of Education in Virtual university of Pakistan.

Literature Review

Although there exist massive research studies on effectiveness and quality of online teaching and pedagogy related issues of online and distance mode of education, only few studies have been carried out on the online supervision of research ([Marsh et al., 2002](#)). [Pearson and Kayrooz \(2004\)](#) argued that supervision is an important element of candidates' successful postgraduate experience and degree completion, still a theoretical understanding of what supervision encompasses is limited.

[Kandlbinder and Peseta \(2001\)](#) argued that there are three significant components of research supervision i.e. establishing clear objectives, developing collaborations and supervise the research process through regular communication, seminars and meetings. Adding to this discourse, [Sze \(2008\)](#) stated that supervision involves provision of such a highly favourable learning environment to the research student which enable him to create new knowledge stranded in the field and its practice. Though difference exist regarding what supervision is, researchers agree that supervisor's knowledge about his or her role towards the supervisee is the most important things during supervision ([Kumar & Huat, 2011](#)).

[Mouton \(2001\)](#) categorized postgraduate research supervision into four types of supervisory roles, i.e. guidance, advisory, nurturing supportive relationship and quality control. Quality and quantity of feedback is most important element in each dimension of role. Constructive feedback is making supervisory role more process oriented, fostering collaboration in construction of knowledge and developing autonomy among students ([Lee, 2007](#)).

[Thompson et al. \(2005\)](#) identified availability of the supervisors when supervisees require advisory on academic as well as personal matters as the most important characteristics of effective supervision. Supervisors need to provide encouragement, support, time, information, feedback, guidelines and resources for thesis writing to the research students ([Bitchener, Bastrukmen & East, 2011](#); [Engebretson et al., 2008](#)). Adding to this discourse, [Wang and Li \(2008\)](#) believed that supervisors should adopt a well-defined methodical approach to address academic writing problems of the students in the case of especially those students who use English as a second language.

Some researchers viewed supervisees' role as an autonomous researcher whereas some argued that supervisees may be supervisor dependent. Nevertheless, it has also been established that supervisees should be let in the center of independent and dependent continuum by the supervisor ([Sidhu, Kaur, Fook & Yunus, 2013](#)). [Thompson et al. \(2005\)](#) also stated spoon feeding may be fatal for the supervisees' critical thinking and creativity. Supervisors need to act like a guide, facilitator and an intellectual critic by providing intellectual expertise to boost the self-esteem and self-confidence of their supervisees.

[Costea \(2007\)](#) concluded that MPhil students perceived that topic selection and monitoring the activities during the research are shared responsibility of the supervisee and supervisors. MPhil students have more strong expectations than PhD scholars from their research supervisors in terms of initiation of research consultations and writing up. They considered the development of personal relationships with the supervisor as an important factor for successful process of completing research. The study also showed disaccord between the expectations of the MPhil research students and their supervisors regarding initiation of meetings. Unlike MPhil students' expectations who consider it as a supervisors' responsibility, they consider it as a shared responsibility of both. MPhil students perceived that checking and tracking of the writing progress of dissertation is a supervisors' responsibility and working progress of data collection is mainly students' responsibility.

In other studies, conducted by [Whitelock et al. \(2008\)](#), and Calama (2007), students emphasized that their supervisors need to be supportive, approachable and instill in them self-confidence by providing relevant, and constructive feedback as well as encouragement. Thus, it is important to maintain effective relationship throughout the candidature. An effective working relationship may easily be established when students and supervisors are aware each other's expectations and when they feel comfortable while renegotiating expectations throughout the course of research project.

Sidhu, Kaur, Fook, and Yunus (2013) conducted a study and found that postgraduate students were only moderately satisfied with the research supervision. The main apprehension highlighted by the participants was having busy professionals as research supervisors who are a poor academic fit,

least committed and give poor unconstructive feedback. The supervisors do not like difference of opinion and did not like to be challenged. [Attwood \(2009\)](#) also highlighted devotion of insufficient time to supervision as a major factor of students' dissatisfaction with the supervisory practice. Respondent felt it took their supervisor 'ages to provide feedback' had 'limited quality time' and not actively involved and engaged in discussions about their research work ([Woolhouse, 2002](#)).

They also highlighted some personal issues of students as they have limited analytical and academic writing skills and language proficiency. They did not have sufficient knowledge and skills in the areas of research methodology, data collection and data analysis and limited access to resources. They were of the opinion that research students should be permitted to select their own supervisors matched with their field of interest ([Ives & Rowley, 2005](#)). They should have the service of co-supervision, to cover up the issues of deficient knowledge of the area of the student and uncooperativeness.

[Sidhu, Kaur, Fook, and Yunus \(2014\)](#) conducted a study including research students from Malaysia and UK. The students expected that their advisors must be specialized in their field of study as well as knowledgeable and available to provide guidance and knowledge regarding methodological issues and analysis of the data and information. They highlighted that supervisors must be supportive, friendly, respect individual differences and human diversity, give opportunities to the students to make mistakes and flourish as researchers. They also argued that supervisors should monitor students' progress by providing justified time frames and ensure completion of thesis within the mutually stipulated time line.

In summary, the supervisors and the supervisees belong to two different cultures of world of postgraduate supervision. [Scott \(2009\)](#) noted that there exists a gulf in terms of age and functions between both groups. This gulf becomes wider when there are students studying in cyber world of social connectivity and use visual, written and aural communication as compared to the students receive advice in face to face interaction. In order to close the gap between these two worlds, it is maybe pertinent to explore the expectations they both attach to each other which may fill the gap to improve the state of research supervision process.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to probe research students' expectations of the role of thesis supervisor in their postgraduate research work; (a) what they expect from their thesis supervisor in the process of writing research; (b) in terms of arranging schedules and meetings to keep them on track; (c) resources or logistics support (d) working relationship and communication (e) reviewing and giving feedback on students' submitted work.

Research Questions/Hypotheses

The study aimed to address the following questions

- What are the postgraduate students' expectations of the role of thesis supervisor in online supervision during their postgraduate research thesis?
- Is there any difference among the expectations of postgraduate research students belonged to different disciplines i.e Education, Mathematics, Zoology, Computer Science, and management?

Methodology

The study followed a quantitative approach and survey design. Population comprised 1118 Postgraduate (MS/M Phil) students enrolled in nine programs at post-graduation level in spring 2018. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select a total of 150 postgraduate research students from five programs (MS Computer science, M Phil Educational Leadership and Management, MS Business Administration, MS Mathematics and MS Zoology of four faculties (Faculty of Science and Technology, Computer science and IT, Management and Education) of VUP. Data were collected through researcher developed scale Expectations of Research Students (ERS) having five subscales and 28-items based on five-point scale with 2 open ended question.

For pilot testing, researcher approached for the worthy opinion of four experts to check the validity of questionnaire. There were few vocabulary mistakes and language issues with four of the items that were sorted out at the spot with the guidance of experts. For reliability analysis, overall internal consistency of the scale was computed and value of reliability was found 0.78 and reliability coefficient of five subscales were ranged from 0.68 - 0.89. Two items were discarded due to low reliability 2.38 and 2.56 respectively. 26-item instrument was finalized having five subscales of Support and Guidance in Terms of Actual Thesis Writing, Access to Resources, Schedule of Meetings, Timeliness of Review and Feedback, Working Relationship/ Communication.

After getting the consent from 150 sampled students (30 from each program), the questionnaire was administered online through google docs. Participants were approached through Moderated Discussion Boards, Skype, Emails, EDOBE sessions, phone calls and campus managers of the relevant study centers. In this way 73.3% response rate was obtained. Mean, Standard Deviation and ANOVA were used for data analysis.

Findings and Conclusion

Table 1 Distribution of MPhil/MS Research Students Program Wise

| Discipline | Program | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| Computer Science | MSCS | 16 | 14.5 |
| Education | MPhil Education | 31 | 28.2 |
| Management sciences | MSBA | 28 | 25.5 |
| Mathematics | MS | 20 | 18.8 |
| Zoology | MS | 15 | 13.6 |
| Total | | 110 | 100.0 |

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents' program wise. Total 110 MS/MPhil research students responded the online survey regarding their expectations of research supervision and supervisors. Of which 14.5% were from Computer Science, 28.2 % were from Education, 25.5 % were from Management Sciences, 18.8% were from Mathematics and 13.6 % were from Zoology.

Table 2 Expectations of Students about Expected Online Time from the Supervisor per Week

| Online Time per week in Hours | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| 1-2 | 23 | 20.9 |
| 2-3 | 33 | 30.0 |
| 3 and more | 54 | 49.1 |
| Total | 110 | 100.0 |

Table 2 demonstrates that out of 110 students about 49% expected 3 and more hours per week time for the guidance by the supervisor. 30 % research students expected 2-3 hours and 20.9 % students expected 1-2 hours per week guidance by the supervisor

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of Percentage Responses based on Dimension of Expectations

| Scale | Support and Guidance for Actual Thesis Writing | | Access to Resources | | Schedule of Meetings | | Timeliness of Review and Feedback | | Working Relationship Communication | |
|----------------------------------|--|---------|---------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|---------|------------------------------------|---------|
| | F | Percent | F | Percent | F | Percent | F | Percent | F | Percent |
| Always student's responsibility | 104 | 14.71 | 37 | 9.4 | 56 | 9.24 | 34 | 8.41 | 26 | 8.58 |
| Usually student's responsibility | 134 | 18.95 | 53 | 13.11 | 76 | 12.54 | 63 | 15.60 | 32 | 10.56 |
| Responsibility of Both | 260 | 36.77 | 130 | 32.17 | 229 | 37.78 | 95 | 23.51 | 99 | 32.67 |

| Scale | Support and Guidance for Actual Thesis Writing | | Access to Resources | | Schedule of Meetings | | Timeliness of Review and Feedback | | Working Relationship Communication | |
|-------------------------------------|--|-------|---------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------|-------|
| Usually supervisor's responsibility | 112 | 15.84 | 94 | 23.06 | 125 | 20.62 | 107 | 26.48 | 73 | 24.09 |
| Always supervisor's responsibility | 97 | 13.72 | 90 | 22.26 | 120 | 19.80 | 105 | 25.99 | 73 | 24.09 |

N = 110

Table 3 reflected that 33.66 % students were of the view that support and guidance in terms of actual thesis writing i.e. selecting research topic, taking decision about theoretical framework and methodology, information about sources of literature, ensuring the current research literature has been identified and read, analyzing and collecting the data and writing thesis is student's responsibility. 36.77 % respondents reflected that teaching and learning skills of actual thesis writing is responsibility of both supervisor and supervisee. 29.56 % respondents were of the view that support and guidance in terms of actual thesis writing is the responsibility of supervisors

Table 3 also depicted that 22.51 % respondents' expectations of access to resources i.e. developing an online network of fellow students and professionals, introduction to the facilities and appropriate services provided by the department/ university, resources to fulfill knowledge deficiencies like get admissions in online courses to cover research related conceptual deficiencies is students' responsibility. Total 32.17 % respondents believed that provision and arranging the resources is responsibility of both parties. 45.36 % students believed that provision of resources is supervisor's responsibility.

21.78 % respondents believed that to arrange the meetings i.e. develop timetable for different phases of research, check regularly that the student is on track, organizing the amount of online and face to face meetings, planning meetings is students' responsibility. 37.78% students reflected that to arrange the schedules of meeting is the responsibility of both parties. 40.42 % students believed that to arrange schedules of meetings (developing timetable for different phases of research, checking regularly that the student is on track, organizing the amount of online and face to face meetings) is supervisor's responsibility.

Table 3 also showed that 24.01 % students were of the view that timelines of review and taking feedback is students' responsibility. 23.51% students were of the view that timeliness of giving and taking feedback is responsibility of both supervisor and supervisee. 52.47 % students believed that to review all drafts of work, provide detailed written commentary on all written manuscripts, within 2 weeks from time of submission is the responsibility of supervisor.

Table also reflected that 19.14 % students were of the opinion that developing supportive working relationship, setting aside his/her personal difficulties, and looking elsewhere for seeking emotional support and guidance is students' responsibility. Out of 110 research students, 32.67 % students were of the view developing supportive working relationship is responsibility of both supervisor and supervisee. 48.19 % students were of the view that that developing supportive working relationship, helping in students' in personal difficulties, and providing emotional support and encouragement to the student is supervisors' responsibility.

Table 4 Mean Distribution of Each Dimension of Expectations from the Supervisor

| Dimension of Expectations | Mean | SD |
|--|-------|-------|
| Support and Guidance in Terms of Actual Thesis Writing | 20.64 | 3.941 |
| Access to Resources | 13.46 | 2.726 |
| Schedule of Meetings | 19.75 | 3.609 |
| Timeliness of Review and Feedback | 13.84 | 3.212 |
| Working Relationship/ Communication | 19.34 | 2.613 |

N = 110

Table 4 depicted that research students have most strong expectations about support and guidance in terms of actual thesis writing, Schedule of meetings and working relationship/ communication having Mean Value (M = 20.64, SD= 3.94), (M = 19.75, SD= 3.61), (M = 19.34, SD= 2.61) respectively and least expectations about access to resources (M= 13.46, SD= 2.73)

Table 5. Homogeneity Analysis of Respondents' Characteristics regarding Dimensions of Expectations

| Test of homogeneity | Levene's Statistic | df1 | df2 | p |
|--|--------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| Support and Guidance for Actual Thesis Writing | 0.399 | 4 | 105 | 0.809 |
| Access to Resources | 0.885 | 4 | 105 | 0.476 |
| Schedule of Meetings | 1.416 | 4 | 105 | 0.234 |
| Timeliness of Review and Feedback | 0.891 | 4 | 105 | 0.473 |
| Working Relationship/ Communication | 0.265 | 4 | 105 | 0.900 |

Test of homogeneity regarding all five dimensions of expectations (Support and Guidance in Terms of Actual Thesis Writing, Access to Resources, Schedule of Meetings, Timeliness of Review and Feedback, Developing Working Relationship) showed p-value above 0.05 i.e. 0.809, 0.476, 0.234, 0.473, 0.900 respectively which means that variances are equal and that further parametric tests such as ANOVA are justified.

Table 6. Analysis of Variance among Research Students' Expectations Enrolled in Five Programs

| Dimensions of Expectations | Source of Variation | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|--|---------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------|
| Support and Guidance for Actual Thesis Writing | Between Groups | 127.533 | 4 | 31.883 | 2.147* | 0.001 |
| | Within Groups | 1425.635 | 105 | 4.850 | | |
| | Total | 1553.168 | 109 | | | |
| Access to Resources | Between Groups | 81.286 | 4 | 20.321 | 2.948* | 0.024 |
| | Within Groups | 661.764 | 105 | 6.893 | | |
| | Total | 743.050 | 109 | | | |
| Schedule of Meetings | Between Groups | 78.602 | 4 | 19.651 | 1.541 | 0.197 |
| | Within Groups | 1224.210 | 105 | 12.752 | | |
| | Total | 1302.812 | 109 | | | |
| Timeliness of Review and Feedback | Between Groups | 42.603 | 4 | 10.651 | 1.034 | 0.394 |
| | Within Groups | 988.862 | 105 | 10.301 | | |
| | Total | 1031.465 | 109 | | | |
| Working Relationship/ Communication | Between Groups | 12.919 | 4 | 3.230 | 0.463 | 0.763 |
| | Within Groups | 669.635 | 105 | 6.975 | | |
| | Total | 682.554 | 109 | | | |

*p is significant at 0.05

Table 6 reflects the mean difference between expectations of research students belonged to MS/MPhil Education, Management Sciences, Computer Science, Mathematics and Zoology. Analysis of variance showed significant mean difference between the groups on two dimensions of expectations i.e. expectations about support and guidance in terms of actual thesis writing (F= 2.147, p=.001) and access to resources (F= 2.948, p=0.024) There is no significant difference among the expectations of students of five programs regarding scheduling meetings for seeking guidance of the research (F= 1.541, p=0.197), receiving timely feedback (F= 1.034, p=0.394) and developing working relationship (F= 0.463, p=0.763) with the supervisor.

Table 7 Post Hoc Analysis Regarding Mean Difference between Groups

| Dimensions of Expectations | (I) Program | (J) Program | Mean Difference (I-J) | Std. Error | Sig. |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------|------|
| Support and for Actual Thesis Writing | Education | Computer Science | 2.242 | 1.142 | .003 |
| | Management Sciences | Computer Science | 2.142 | 1.105 | .006 |
| | Zoology | Computer Science | 2.942* | 1.212 | .017 |
| | Education | Computer Science | 2.609* | .778 | .001 |
| Access to Resources | Education | Management Sciences | 1.922* | .853 | .027 |
| | Education | Mathematics | 2.105* | .888 | .020 |

**p* is significant at 0.05

Post Hoc analysis in Table 7 showed the least significant difference between five MS/MPhil programs on two dimensions of expectations i.e. expectations about support and guidance in terms of actual thesis writing and provision of resources. There is significant mean difference between Expectations of the students of Education, Management Sciences, Zoology, and Computer Science department. Research students of Education (MD= 2.242), Management Sciences (MD= 2.142), Zoology (MD= 2.942) have higher expectations than the students of Department of Computer Science. There is also significant mean difference between the expectations of the students of Education, Computer Science, Management Sciences and mathematics department. Respondents of Education department have higher expectations than Computer Science (MD= 2.609), Management Sciences (MD= 1.922) and mathematics (MD= 2.105) department in terms of provision of resources by the supervisor.

Conclusions and Discussion

The study concluded that half of the research students showed their concerns about infrequent and inconsistent online communication with the supervisors. They were of the view that they should be given more than 3 hours per week online guidance by the supervisor. [Ali, Ullah and Sanauddin \(2019\)](#) also concluded inconsistencies in contact with the supervisor.

More than one third research students were of the view that support and guidance for actual thesis writing regarding i.e. selecting research topic, taking decision about theoretical framework and methodology, information about sources of literature and recent progress in the field, ensuring the current research literature has been identified and read, analyzing and collecting the data and writing thesis is the responsibility of both supervisors and supervisees.

About half of the respondents viewed that provision of resources i.e. developing an online network of fellow students and professionals, introducing appropriate services and facilities provided by the department/university, to fulfill knowledge and research related conceptual deficiencies of the supervisees is supervisor's responsibility.

Most of the students believed that to arrange schedules of meetings i.e. develop timetable for different phases of research, check regularly that the student is on track, organizing the amount of online and face to face meetings, keep on reminding through Email, Skype, the schedule of work and meetings is supervisor's responsibility.

More than half of the students believed that to review all drafts of work, provide detailed and timely written commentary on all written manuscripts, within maximum 2 weeks from time of submission is the responsibility of supervisor.

About half of the students were of the view that that developing supportive working relationship, helping in students' in personal difficulties, and providing emotional support and encouragement to the student is supervisors' responsibility. They reflected that supervisors in online mode must be more flexible, committed and willing to transfer and share their knowledge, take interest in form of holding intellectual discussions involving experts in the field, track students' progress as per mutually agreed time schedule and give them the opportunities to grow as good researchers. [Abiddin, Ismail and Ismail \(2011\)](#) also expressed this view by reflecting that supervision is a two-way communication process between supervisor and the supervisee.

The study found that the research students of online and distance mode have higher level of dependence and more expectations from their supervisors. Results showed that regarding 4 out of 5 dimensions of online supervision (Access to Resources, Schedule of Meetings, Timeliness of the Review and Feedback, Developing Working Relationship), students expected that those were supervisors' responsibility and for only one dimension (Support and Guidance in Terms of Actual Thesis Writing,), they reported that it was responsibility of both supervisor and supervisee. It implies that the students of online mode are dependent learners.

The research students have most strong expectations about support and guidance in terms of actual thesis writing, schedule of meetings and working relationship/ communication and least expectations about the responsibility of supervisor regarding giving access to the resources. [Lee \(2007\)](#) also made the similar assertion viewing supervision as a process based on collaborative association between supervisee and the research supervisor. The supervisee acquires appropriate professional dispositions and competence through supervisor's guidance and consultation. Research students' guidance, through their learning journey, requires serious conceptual and intellectual commitment on the part of supervisor.

Analysis of variance showed significant mean difference between the groups on two dimensions of expectations i.e. expectations about support and guidance in terms of actual thesis writing and provision/ management of resources. Research students of Education, Management Sciences, and Zoology have higher expectations from the supervisor than students of Department of Computer Science. Respondents of Education department have higher expectations than the students of Computer Science, Management Sciences and mathematics department in terms of provision of resources by the supervisor.

Recommendations

VUP need to articulate well-defined regulations and implementation of these policies for supervisory practices. There should be formalized supervisory training university-wide that leads to in-house consecutive training over stretched period for novice supervisors.

Most importantly, there is perhaps dire need of amplification of postgraduate supervision policies and regulations, which encompasses the different roles as both groups have to take on during the course of postgraduate research project.

There is need to conduct more in-depth studies especially in open and distance mode of supervision to help to minimize the gap between supervisees and supervisors. The findings may be helpful for developing more comprehensive and effective mechanisms and models where postgraduate research students can be directed towards professional research community.

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