

**MASTERS STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF RESEARCH SUPERVISION AT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO: TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE**

by

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation **Masters Students' Experiences of Research Supervision at the University of Limpopo: Towards Best Practice** herewith submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of Master of Education in Community and Continuing Education, has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Ramorwalo MP (Mr)

Date 23 April 2022

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my mother, Modidja Ramorwalo who encouraged me to work hard at primary and secondary school levels until I registered for tertiary education. My sincere thanks go to my family – Moyahabo, Kgothatso, Makoma and Matome for their support and encouragement throughout my studies. A special dedication goes to God the Creator of all living and non-living things in heaven and on earth for wisdom and strength.

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## ABSTRACT

This study reports on the exploration of masters students' experiences of research supervision at the University of Limpopo. The key research question was what are master students' experiences of research supervision at the University of Limpopo? The study is aligned with an interpretive paradigm to interact with the participants directly in their natural setting. A qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate, using case study design. Participants were purposively sampled from the Faculties of Humanities, and Management and Law. The study sample was composed of twelve master students and twelve supervisors from the three schools in each faculty. The preferred techniques of collecting data were document analysis, semi-structured interviews and observations. The study has revealed that both master students and supervisors are experiencing challenges with regard to research supervision. Most of the schools apply the traditional research supervision model; there is insufficient printers for supervisors in different schools; supervisors are overloaded with teaching and supervision work and as such students get feedback on their research work after a long time; some supervisors do not sign a memorandum of understanding with students; students' research proposals undergo many levels before they are approved. However, the university supports students financially; workshops and seminars for master students are conducted for knowledge enrichment and skills development and infrastructure for research supervision that includes a library, computer laboratory, a Centre for Academic Excellence and a postgraduate Centre is available. It is recommended that the university introduce a co-supervision model in schools where the traditional model of supervision is still predominant. This will be invaluable in allowing supervisors to share research supervision experiences. Supervisors should be provided with enough printers in their offices. Turfloop Research Ethics Committee should hold regular meetings to approve students' proposals on time. Approval of research proposals should be at school, faculty and Turfloop Research Ethics Committee levels. Master students should sign a Memorandum of Understanding in the early stages of their studies to enhance students' commitment. Supervisors should also be allocated less teaching work to allow them enough time to focus on research supervision.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AODL	African Online Digital Library
AUT	Auckland University of Technology
CHE	Council of Higher Education
CPASA	Code of Practice, Admission, Supervision and Assessment
DBSA	Development Bank of South Africa
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
DRDA	Division of Research Development Administration
FHDC	Faculty Higher Degree Committee
GDI	Global Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HoD	Head of Department
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NRF	National Research Foundation
PBRF	Performance Based Research Funding

PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
TREC	Turfloop Research Ethics Committee
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNISA	University of South Africa
URC	University Research Committee
Wi-Fi	Wireless Fidelity
WPF	Writing Process Feedback
ZOPD	Zone of Proximal Development

## TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Blended group supervision model	47
Figure 2.2	Traditional supervision model	50
Figure 2.3	Supervisory team model	52
Table 1	Sample of the study	56
Table 2	Sample of the study	56

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1	INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2	BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY.....	1
1.3	PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	3
1.4	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	4
1.4.1	Student Engagement Theory.....	4
1.4.2	Andragogy Theory.....	5
1.4.3	Transformative Learning Theory.....	6
1.4.4	Constructivist Theory.....	6
1.5	RESEARCH QUESTION.....	8
	Sub-research questions.....	8
1.6	PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY.....	8
1.6.1	Purpose.....	8
1.6.2	Objectives.....	9
1.7	DEFINATION OF KEY CONCEPTS.....	9
1.8	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	11
1.8.1	Research Design.....	11
1.8.2	Population and sampling.....	12

1.8.3	Data Collection.....	13
1.8.4	Data Analysis.....	14
1.9	<b>TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY.....</b>	<b>14</b>
1.10	<b>SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.....</b>	<b>16</b>
1.11	<b>LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....</b>	<b>16</b>
1.12	<b>ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....</b>	<b>17</b>
1.13	<b>OUTLINE OF THE STUDY.....</b>	<b>18</b>

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

2.1	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.2	<b>SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.3	<b>INTERNATIONAL MASTER STUDENTS' RESEARCH SUPERVISION.....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.3.1	<b>Research Supervision in New Zealand.....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.3.1.1	Research supervision arrangements.....	21
2.3.1.2	Financial support for research supervision.....	22
2.3.1.3	Resources for research supervision.....	23
2.3.1.4	Workshops and seminars for research supervision.....	24
2.3.2	<b>Research Supervision in Australia.....</b>	<b>24</b>
2.3.2.1	Research supervision arrangements.....	24
2.3.2.2	Financial support for research supervision.....	26

2.3.2.3	Resources for research supervision.....	27
2.3.2.4	Workshops and seminars for research supervision.....	27
<b>2.3.3</b>	<b>Research Supervision in the United Kingdom.....</b>	<b>28</b>
2.3.3.1	Research supervision arrangements.....	28
2.3.3.2	Financial support for research supervision.....	29
2.3.3.3	Resources for research supervision.....	30
2.3.3.4	Workshop and seminars for research supervision.....	31
<b>2.3.4</b>	<b>Research Supervision in Tanzania.....</b>	<b>31</b>
2.3.4.1	Research supervision arrangements.....	31
2.3.4.2	Financial support for research supervision .....	33
2.3.4.3	Resources for research supervision.....	33
2.3.4.4	Workshops and seminars for research supervision.....	34
<b>2.3.5.</b>	<b>Research Supervision in South Africa.....</b>	<b>34</b>
2.3.5.1	Research supervision arrangements.....	34
2.3.5.2	Financial support for research supervision.....	36
2.3.5.3	Resources for research supervision.....	37
2.3.5.4	Workshops and seminars for research supervision.....	38
<b>2.4</b>	<b>THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP.....</b>	<b>39</b>
2.4.1	Personal Relationship.....	40
<b>2.5.</b>	<b>ROLE OFTHE SUPERVISOR.....</b>	<b>41</b>
2.5.1	Teaching Role.....	42

2.5.2	Assessment Role.....	42
2.5.3	Pastoral Role.....	43
2.6	<b>THE FUNDAMENTAL RESPOSIBILITIES OF SUPERVOSORS AND STUDENTS.....</b>	<b>43</b>
2.6.1	Supervisors' Responsibilities.....	43
2.6.2	Students' Responsibilities.....	44
2.7	<b>SUPERVISORS AND STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS.....</b>	<b>45</b>
2.7.1	Supervisors' Expectation.....	45
2.7.2	Students' Expectations.....	46
2.8	<b>RESEARCH SUPERVISION MODELS.....</b>	<b>46</b>
2.8.1	<b>Blended Group Research Supervision Model of Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2013).....</b>	<b>46</b>
2.8.1.1	Essence of the blended group research supervision model.....	46
2.8.1.2	Advantages of the blended group research supervision model.....	47
2.8.1.3	Disadvantages of the blended group research supervision model.....	48
2.9.1.4	Summary of the blended group research supervision model.....	49
2.8.2	<b>Traditional Research Supervision Model of Zhao (2009).....</b>	<b>49</b>
2.8.2.1	Essence of the traditional research supervision model.....	49
2.8.2.2	Advantages of traditional research supervision.....	50
2.8.2.3	Disadvantages of the traditional research supervision Model.....	51
2.8.2.4.	Summary of the traditional research supervision model.....	51

<b>2.8.3 The Supervisory Team Research Supervision Model of the University of the Greenwich (2016.)</b> .....	<b>51</b>
2.8.3.1 Essence of the supervisory team research supervision model.....	51
2.8.3.2 Advantages of the supervisory team research supervision model.....	52
2.8.3.3 Disadvantages of the supervisory team research supervision model.....	53
2.8.3.4 Summary of the supervisory team research supervision model.....	52
<b>2.9 CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>53</b>

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

<b>3.1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>3.3. POPULATION AND SAMPLING</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>3.4. DATA COLLECTION</b> .....	<b>56</b>
<b>3.5. DATA ANALYSIS</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<b>36 CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>58</b>

### **CHAPTER 4**

#### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS OF THE STUDY**

<b>4.1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>59</b>
<b>4.2 FINDINGS FROM THE DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS</b> .....	<b>59</b>
4.2.1 Financial Support for Research Supervision.....	59
4.2.2 Workshops and Seminars for Research Supervision.....	61

4.2.3	Master Students' Progress Report.....	62
4.3	<b>FINDINGS FROM SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS.....</b>	<b>63</b>
4.3.1	Research Supervision Model.....	63
4.3.2	Support for Research Supervision.....	67
4.3.3	Supervisors' Expectations.....	71
4.3.4	Students' Expectations.....	72
4.3.5	Resources for Research Supervision.....	73
4.3.6	Communication for Research Supervision.....	74
4.4	<b>FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS.....</b>	<b>76</b>
4.4.1	Infrastructure.....	76
4.4.2	Electronic Machines and Furniture.....	76
45	<b>DISCUSSIONS.....</b>	<b>77</b>
4.5.1	Financial Support for Research Supervision.....	77
4.5.2	Workshops and Seminars for Research Supervision.....	78
4.5.3	Master students' Progress Reports.....	79
4.5.4	Research Supervision Models.....	79
4.5.5	Support from Supervisors for Research Supervision.....	80
4.5.6	Supervisors' Expectations.....	82
4.5.7	Students 'Expectations.....	82
4.5.8	Resources for Research Supervision.....	83
4.5.9	Communications for Research Supervision.....	84

4.5.10. Infrastructure.....	84
4.5.11 Electronic Machines and furniture.....	84
<b>4.6 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>85</b>

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

<b>5.1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>5.2 MAJOR CONCLUSION DRAWN FROM THE STUDY.....</b>	<b>86</b>
5.2.1 Conclusion Related to Research Objective 1.....	86
5.2.2 Conclusion Related to Research Objective 2.....	87
5.2.3. Conclusion Related to Research Objective3.....	88
5.2.4 Conclusion Related to Research Objective 4.....	88
<b>5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>89</b>
5.3.1 Research Supervision Model.....	89
5.3.2 Support for Research Supervision.....	89
5.3.3 Supervisors' Expectations.....	90
5.3.4 Students' Expectations.....	90
5.3.5 Resources for Research Supervision.....	90
5.3.6 Electronic Machines and Furniture.....	91
<b>5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>5.5 LIMITATIONS.....</b>	<b>91</b>

<b>5.6 CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>5.7 REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>5.8 APPENDIXES</b>	
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MASTER STUDENTS.....	103
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SUPERVISORS.....	104
APPENDIX C: REQUESTS FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH.....	105
APPENDIX D: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH.....	106
APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR SUPERVISORS.....	107
APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM FOR MASTER’S STUDENTS.....	111
APPENDIX H: DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS CHECK LIST.....	113
APPENDIX I: OBSERVATION CHECK LIST.....	114
APPENDIX: J A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR.....	115
APPENDIX K: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE LETTER.....	116

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the introduction and motivation of the study, problem statement, research questions, purpose and objectives, definition of key concepts, research methodology, significance, limitations and the study outline.

#### **1.2 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION TO THE STUDY**

Globally universities are faced with an increasing demand for postgraduate students where every year the demand for postgraduate courses increase. The growing postgraduate population creates a need for more supervisors who are qualified and experienced in the field of postgraduate research (Kimani, 2014:63). A greater number of postgraduate students affect the availability of supervisors, their energy commitments as well as their time to spend with individual or a group of students under supervision. Supervisors have to double their efforts and go the extra mile for these students and they even adjust their way of supervising, with the intention of accommodating all the individual students (Kimani, 2014:63).

Poor quality supervision also arises where the relationship between the supervisors and students is compromised. In such situations, students experience a lot of problems in their proposals and projects work, as most students are not familiar with research procedures; they lack knowledge about the research methodology (Abiddin & Ismail, 2011: 206). Research suggests that when students work closely and communicate effectively with their supervisors, the quality of their research and their educational experience improve (Swanson & Watt, 2011:05).

In some universities, supervisors are under pressure to make sure that the students finish on time and change the view of graduate work from collaborative relationship to one based on service and production because universities have become dominated by market-driven consumerist mentality (Britzer, Albertyn, Petersen & Morrison, 2015: 01).

Moreover, the research education context in higher education is changing. The focus of postgraduate study is no longer primarily on developing scholars for the academic context. However, it is geared towards developing lifelong researchers who can get involved in the knowledge creation project in their practice in applied work setting (Bitzer et al., 2014:01). Furthermore, some universities and faculties do not allocate supervisors to students, but allow students to choose their own supervisors. The choice made by student results in supervisors being chosen by many students, the result of which is supervisors failing to handle students and subsequently supervision is not excellently practiced (Kimani, 2014). In addition, in some universities supervisors stop supervising certain students because of whatever misunderstanding that has occurred between them. Students and supervisors do sometimes come across difficulties in compatibility and that result in changing the supervisor in the middle of the research process; that unplanned change could impact negatively on the process of supervision (Kimani, 2014: 66).

(Bitzer et al, 2014:04) claim that master students need guidance with regard to the overall planning of the research in terms of the suitable approach to use. Students need a structured way of working with their supervisors regarding submission due dates of their chapters (Mutula, 2009:08). Therefore, students should be provided with supervision guidelines immediately after registering in the programme.

According to Grant, Hacking and Edgar (2014:40), most of the challenges can be overcome if there is a clear and open dialogue on all aspects of the supervision of the projects. As such, there should be a structure in place as to what is expected of the master students as well as a framework for facilitating supervision. Grant et al. (2014: 45) advocate three distinct stages of supervisor's involvement in trying to assist postgraduate students: helping students in choosing a suitable research topic, initiate data collection, monitoring students' progress in their studies and the writing up of their work. Ganqa (2012:03) acknowledges that master students need to be supported when choosing the research topic, methodology as well as writing of research proposal.

On the other hand, the perception at some South African universities seems to be that academics become qualified to supervise postgraduate students merely by virtue of

having obtained PhDs, without undergoing any relevant training. The implication is that master students might encounter challenges by being supervised by such supervisors (Ganqa, 2012:09). Notably for the supervisors to be fully effective and efficient at their work, some sort of workshop is required as an effort to capacitate the newly appointed supervisors in order for them to acquire relevant supervision skills. Abiddin, Hassan and Ismail (2011:84) argue that effective supervision requires supervisors to be knowledgeable, competent researchers as well as skilled in the research field in order to excel in their supervisory work. It is on the basis of this background that this study sought to explore masters' students' experiences of research supervision at the University of Limpopo in order to develop best practices.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The South African Regional Universities Association has noted that there is 60% postgraduate drop out (Mutula, 2009: 07). Though the purpose of higher education, especially postgraduate studies, aims at preparing students to develop skills and acquire knowledge that will make them instrumental in the enhancement of our society as well as economy, there are still drawbacks that need the attention of students and supervisors (Abiddin et al, 2011:79). Master students struggle to cope with their simultaneous academic and professional workloads and experience lack of support and understanding from their supervisors, and as a result they also feel isolated (Abiddin et al., 2011:80). Some students disappear from universities in terms of consultations and provision of timely feedback because they are committed to their private work outside the university (Kimani, 2014:63).

Existing research indicates that there is the issue of mismatch between supervisors and students expectations (Friedrich-Nel & Mackinnon, 2014:02). Some students do not really know the roles and responsibilities and seem not ready to conduct and complete research studies (Ismail & Abiddin2009:361). Due to the increasing demand and the expansion of higher learning, the quality of supervision is compromised because in some universities senior supervisors are overworked with teaching, marking of examinations as well as managing their departments, and as such supervisory work is not at its best (Kimani, 2014: 65). For the universities to overcome these challenges,

they should try to outsource to beef up their Faculties. However, the recruited supervisors show lack of experience and subsequently impact negatively on the students' time of course completion (Kimani, 2014:65). On the basis of the above challenges facing postgraduate supervision, this study sought to explore the experiences of master's students on research supervision at the University of Limpopo.

## **1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is embedded within four theories which served as a lens for viewing masters students' experiences of research supervision at the University of Limpopo. The study adopted Dagar V& Yadav A (2016) Students' Engagement Theory, Knowles (1980) Andragogy, Menzirow (2009) Transformative Learning Theory, as well as Vygotsky's (1978) Constructivist Theory.

### **1.4.1 Student Engagement theory**

Student Engagement Theory is a framework for technology-based-teaching and learning. Fundamental underlying idea is that students should be meaningfully engaged in learning activities through interaction with others and worthwhile tasks (Dagar &Yadav, 2016: 123).The Student Engagement Learning Theory is based on three basic principles:

- Relate – this involves learning through collaboration, meaning that educational activities must emphasise team efforts that involve communication, planning, management and social skills.
- Create – a creative and purposeful activity is a critical component of engaging students. Through defining, organising and completing their projects, students establish sense of their projects.
- Donate – this third principle identifies the need for projects to have a clear meaningful and realistic focus, and ideally each project has an outside customer who may be a campus group, school, local business, government agency or a needy individual. Through the addition of realistic projects, students can be better prepared when they enter the workforce in a given field (Dagar & Yadav, 2016: 123). In this study the Student Engagement Theory encourages supervisors to

employ supervisory team model where students and supervisors meet regularly in terms of consultation to share ideas, skills and knowledge regarding research projects. The model gives students and supervisors advantages of gaining different skills and knowledge of research. In this process collaboration among students and supervisors is improved.

#### **4.1.2. Andragogy**

Andragogy refers to the art and science of helping adults to learn, which is contrasting with pedagogy “the act and science of teaching children” (Ganqa, 2012:20). Kapur (2015) posits a set of assumptions about adult learning, namely that an adult learner moves from dependency to a self-directed learner; accumulates experiences that become increasing resources of learning; and voluntarily participates in learning programmes (Kapur, 2015:16).

Adulthood ensures that adults become responsible for the most aspects of their lives as learners. They volunteer and they have the power to withdraw from proceedings at any stage, depending on how they perceive the fulfillment of their expectations (Ganqa, 2012: 20). Kupur (2015:25) claim that master students may bring relevant life experiences to the learning situation. Therefore, their experiences can be resources for both themselves and for other students.

On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the supervisors to set the learning climate that will be conducive and comfortable for adults to learn (Ganqa, 2012:22). This then means that master students need to critique and suggest best practice for research supervision. However, a sense of self-worth should be considered. Hence, for Merriam (2009:14) adults need to be subjects of their own learning through what Merriam calls “self-directed learning”. This self-directed learning is said to be a process in which an individual takes initiatives without the help of others in diagnosing his or her needs, formulating goals, identifying human and material resources and evaluating learning outcomes (Merriam, 2009:23).

### **4.1.3 Transformative Learning Theory**

Mezirow (2009:10) notes in his Transformative Learning Theory that self-directed learning is a process in which individuals take initiatives without the assistance of others in planning, carrying out and evaluating their experiences. This Transformative Learning Theory bringing change and equality in adults learning which is a major concern for South African Higher Education Institutions (Council of Higher Education, 2009:13). In addition, Transformative Learning Theory promotes self-directed learning of the Master students who take the responsibility of directing their projects and making their own decisions independently without being pushed by their supervisors (University of Oxford, 2017:33).

Thus, Transformative Learning Theory may be seen as a paradigm shift for individual students, rather than the whole group of students and that an individual student who experiences transformative learning would have a shift in his or her meaning perspective (Mezirow, 2009:18). However, self-directed learning may be very challenging to some master students who are not used to working independently (Taylor, 2018:8). This means that master students who depend on the field or their supervisors and lack responsibilities may find it difficult to direct their learning (Taylor, 2018: 08).

### **4.1.4 Constructivist Theory**

This study is also informed by the Constructivist Theory which was developed by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (1978). The researcher considers constructivism to be one of the bases from which to explore the experiences of the master students' research supervision practice. According to Schulze (2012:23), social constructivist theory emphasises the social context of learning and that knowledge is mutually built and constructed. Supervision should also employ scaffolding methods, which means changing the level of support from direct instruction to guidance over the course of a learning programme (Clark, 2018:182).

In addition, Ganqa (2012:22) states that due to the emphasis on master students as active learners, constructivist strategies are often called student-centered approaches to

learning, which implies that the practice of supervision has to take place from the point of view of students. On the other hand, other educationists describe constructivism as an educational theory that comprises ideas about how human learning occurs and the factors that tend to channel learning. Therefore, ideas about the curriculum should respond to educational purposes and aligned to what is understood about learning (Peggy & Newby, 2013:14). According to Ganqa (2012:22), supervision of master students may assume a student-centered approach by identifying their learning gaps which Piaget and Vygotsky call "*Zone of Proximal Development*". This is the concept which arose from his belief that in order for one to learn, a challenge is needed which will maximize ones' intellectual development. Moreover, students do not achieve a predetermined correct meaning and transfer knowledge from the external world in the memories when learning; rather they build personal interpretation of the world based on their individual experiences and interactions (Peggy & Newby, 2013:12). The implication is that the supervisors should identify students' learning gaps at the early stages of the programme in order to be able to assist them.

Clark (2018:180) also argue that constructivism helps the students in equating learning with creating meaning from their experiences and that their minds will filter input from the words to produce their own reality. According to Nsamenang and Tchombe (2011:12), for the Master students to be successful and meaningful in learning, learning must include crucial factors such as activity (practice) concept (knowledge) and culture (context). So when students are given work to do, the work should include a practical part, section that needs application of knowledge and the context in which that knowledge should be applied. Anderson and Herbert (1996:20) identify power dynamics in supervisory relationships which they describe as ability of an individual or institution to achieve something by right, control or influence by the other.

According to Schulze (2012: 24), power is also characterised by constraining or enabling human actions. So people use power to prompt other people in a particular action. Ganqa (2012:22) emphasises that power of the master students in a supervision context is usually constrained by the position within the institution and their personal development. For example, some students may personally feel that they can make

changes in their process of research, but their supervisors may have control over what happens because of their legitimate power and as a result students feel helpless. However, supervisors need to balance power between themselves and the students to enable the students to be responsible for empowering themselves (Friedrich-Nel & Macklinon, 2014:04). Schulze (2012:23) further stated that all social relationships are systems of power and that the relationships between supervisors and their students have the same power, since they are capable of acting upon one another. So supervisors should balance the power between themselves and their students in order for the latter to be free to engage fully in the supervision process.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study was intended to answer the following question:

- **What are the Masters students' experiences of research supervision at the University of Limpopo?**
- The following sub-questions were developed to unpack the above research question
- Which resources are available for Master students' research supervision?
- How best can Master students be supported during their research supervision consultation?
- Which supervision models are employed for supervising Master students?
- What guidelines are in place for the best practice of Master students' research supervision at the University of Limpopo?

## **1.6 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

### **1.6.1 Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Master students' research supervision at the University of Limpopo.

## 1.6.2 Objectives

This study was geared towards achieving the following objectives:

- To investigate the supervision resources available for master students' research supervision.
- To identify best ways in which master students' could be supported during their research supervision.
- To examine the research models employed for supervising master students'
- To examine the guidelines which are in place for the best practice of master students' research supervision

## 1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

### 1.7.1 Research supervision

Research supervision implies *“a process of leading a scholarly and personal development of the postgraduate student towards the successful completion of research studies”* (Van der Linde, 2012:03).

Research supervision is *“regarded as an adjunct of research with the assumption that if one can do research then, one can supervise”* (Taylor, 2014:01).

In this study research supervision is a process of guiding, leading and mentoring postgraduate students ethically and professionally in order to complete their research studies successfully.

### 1.7.2 Postgraduates

Postgraduates are referred to as *“students who learn and study for their academic and professional degrees which are undertaken after completion of the undergraduate degree”* (Ganqa, 2012:28).

Postgraduates are *“students who are pursuing their studies at the master's and PhD levels and these degrees are done by pure research”* (University of Witwatersrand, 2012:65).

In this context, postgraduates refer to students who pursue honours, masters and doctoral degrees at universities.

### 1.7.3 Higher education

Higher education is *“the post-secondary or third level of formal learning which occurs after secondary education which includes TVET colleges and universities that provide certificates, diplomas and degrees”* (Higher Education Authority, 1997:03).

Higher education is *“any education offered at the tertiary institutions that is provided on full-time, part-time and distance learning”* (Kruger & Ramadass, 2015:38).

Higher education is education provided by the post-school education institutions such as community colleges, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges, and universities where students are awarded certificates, diplomas and degrees after completion of their programmes.

### 1.7.4 Master’s degree

Master’s degree is *“a postgraduate academic research degree which comprises of research components in the form of dissertation done in a defined scope and limited length”* (Ganqa, 2012:17).

Master’s degree is *“a research based programme that is full dissertation or taught coursework in some universities, and is also offered on full-time or part-time”* (CHE, 2016:33).

In this context master’s degree is referred to as postgraduate qualification which is enrolled after honours degree and involves a full dissertation or course work done on full-time or part-time basis.

### 1.7.5 University

University is an *“institution that offers graduate programmes leading to masters and doctoral degrees”* (Ganqa, 2012:26).

University is *“an educational institution which provides academic degrees in academic disciplines”* (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2012:44).

In this context university is an institution of higher education and research which offers undergraduate and postgraduate education.

## **1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **1.8.1 Research Design**

The researcher employed a qualitative research approach in this study. Qualitative research is embedded within the interpretive paradigm. The interpretivists do not regard that social world as “out there”, but believe that the social world is constructed by human beings. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm is concerned with the understanding of the subjective world of human experiences (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011:21) In this regard, knowledge and reality are constructed by the individuals who take part in it (Gall, Gall & Borg, and 2010:343). Since qualitative research plays a vital role in illuminating the meaning of the lived experience, data was collected at the site where the participants experienced the challenges under study (Creswell,2014:77).The researcher explored reflective accounts of master students’ experiences in research supervision at the University of Limpopo. As such, the use of qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to understand the phenomenon under study and interpreted the meaning of the participants assigned to it (Creswell, 2014 77). The researcher also interacted with the participants directly in their natural setting (Ary et al., 2014:451).

Case study design was employed with the aim of understanding the master students’ experiences of research supervision at the University of Limpopo (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:435). Since case study does offer a multiple prospective analysis, the researcher did not just consider a voice and perspective of one or two participants, but the views of the other relevant groups (Maree, 2012:75). Case study is an exploration of a bounded system or single or multiple cases over a period of time (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:370). The researcher strove to make in-depth understanding on how the participants made meaning of the phenomenon under study

in order to explore the experiences of master students regarding research supervision (Maree, 2012:75).

### **1.8.2 Population and Sampling**

Population is the study's target group of people that it intends to study or treat, while sampling is the process of selecting representative sample of individuals from the population of interest. In this study the population is the Master Students and their Supervisors and a sample is the subset or individuals selected from the population at the University of Limpopo (Majid, 2018: 03).

This study was conducted at the University of Limpopo .This institution is located in the eastern side of the city of Polokwane. The university is situated in the rural community of Mamabolo in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Purposive sampling was employed in order to hand-pick the participants from the population that were included in the sample. The implication is that the participants were selected on the basis of the possession of particular information regarding master students' research supervision (Cohen; Manion & Morrison, 2011:143). The study sample included twelve participants from the Faculties of Humanities, and Management and Law. Three schools were selected from each faculty. The three schools are Education, Social Sciences and Languages and Communication Studies from the Faculty of Humanities. From the Faculty of Management and Law, the three sampled schools were Economics and Management, Accountancy and Law. The total sample consisted of twenty-four participants .The following criteria was used to sample the participants in each faculty:

- Two students in the initial stage of their research projects having their research proposals recently approved,
- Two students who are in the middle of their research studies,
- Two students who are in the field collecting data and analysing data of their study,
- Senior supervisors and junior supervisors.

### **1.8.3 Data Collection**

The researcher triangulated data collection process in order to seek convergence and corroboration of the results from different data collection techniques (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:439). Such data was gathered as follows:

#### *Phase 1: Document analysis*

The researcher analysed documents such as Postgraduate Research Supervision Manual (2015); University of Limpopo Annual Research Report (2015); Draft Research Development and Support (2015), Code of Practice, Admission, Supervision and Assessment (2015), Master Students' Progress Reports 2013-2017 as well as University of Limpopo's The Dawn, July-August 2013-2017. These documents were requested from the supervisors of each sampled school. Information obtained from these documents was recorded in the researcher's field note book. The reviewed documents helped the researcher to get a clear background, knowledge and insight in terms of how best master students' research supervision could be improved at the University of Limpopo (Cohen et al., 2011:143).

#### *Phase 2: Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in September 2017. This allowed for probing and clarification on answers (Maree, 2012:89). The semi-structured interviews also assisted the researcher to obtain in-depth information about the thoughts, feelings reasoning and knowledge of the participants. Supervisors provided their views regarding models they employ for supervising master students, as well as guidelines that are in place for the best practice of master students' research supervision.

#### *Phase 3: Observations*

Observation was the last technique employed to gather data in order to enable the researcher to record the infrastructure such as the library, Centre for Academic Excellence, computer laboratory as well as the Postgraduate Centre. Electronic machines were also observed in supervisors' offices: Fax machines, telephones, photocopiers and old printers. The use of observation checklist assisted the researcher

in gaining an understanding of the practice of master students' research supervision. The researcher wrote down field notes from what he observed (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen & Walker, 2014:236).

#### **1.8.4 Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organising data into categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:395). The implication is that the researcher synthesised and made meaning from the data collected (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:93). In addition, Cohen et al. (2011:237) argue that analytic induction involves making sense in terms of participants' definition of the situation, noting patterns, themes and categories. Inductive data analysis was employed in order to achieve the objectives of this study and answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014:28). In this study, data was analysed separately in terms of data collection techniques and the sampled schools and later compared, and integrated to form one research report. Data collected from document analysis was analysed through content analysis. Content analysis focuses on interpreting recorded materials about human behavior (Ary et al., 2014:32). This means that the text data was first read, reread, interpreted, categorised, coded and themes identified. (Cohen et al, 2011: 238). The researcher employed thematic data analysis to analyse data collected from the semi-structured interviews and observations. Data from semi-structured interviews was first transcribed, read and proof-read carefully, categorised, coded into main themes and later into minor themes (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:520). The researcher also used thematic data analysis to analyse data from observations.

#### **1.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY**

Trustworthiness is a way that the researchers persuade themselves and the readers that the research findings are worthy of attention (Nowel, Deborah& Jill, 2017:03).

This concept trustworthiness is refined by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to parallel the conventional qualitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability (Nowel et al, 2017:03). So, in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, these measures were taken care of:

- Credibility

Credibility is concerned with the truthfulness of the research findings. It involves how well the researcher has established confidence in the participants, with the findings based on the research design, and context (Ary et al 2014:531). This was warranted by building trust with the participants from the beginning, which enabled the researcher to obtain detailed and honest responses (Ary et al, 2014:532). In addition, member checking was employed where the findings were taken back to the participants to determine whether the participants felt that the findings were accurate or were the depiction of their experiences (Creswell 2014:28). The voice recorder which was used during interviews warranted the accurate report of the findings based on the viewpoints of the participants. Direct quotations from the interviews were used to provide the experiences and voices of the participants. The researcher discussed the findings of this study with the supervisor in order to avoid bias. Moreover, six selected schools at this university provided a broader picture about the extent to which master students' research supervision is conceptualised in this context (Ary et al., 2014:533). Furthermore, triangulation of data collection techniques was also used to ensure the credibility of this study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:202).

- Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the researcher's findings can be generalised to other contexts. Since case study design was adopted in conducting this study, the findings are not transferable due to the smaller sample size (Ary et al., 2014:534).

- Dependability

To enhance dependability, the researcher engaged with the participants for three weeks (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:355). The researcher also triangulated data collection techniques in order that the weakness of one tool could be compensated by the other (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:156). The supervisor examined the research process and data interpretations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:156). The audit trail was also conducted (McMillan & Schumacher, 2011:203).

- Confirm ability

The researcher employed an audit trail throughout the study to trace the course of the research step by step via decisions made and procedures implemented (Creswell, 2014:30). Methods of data collection were also triangulated, so that the weaknesses of one method could be compensated by the other (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:203).

The researcher also provided evidence from the interview transcripts to support all interpretations (Creswell; 2014:30).

### **1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The practical value of this study might be of interest to the policy developers for the transformation of master's student's research supervision at the University of Limpopo. Recommendations of this study might also provide positive a response to the calls for accountability and quality by the Council of High Education to increase student enrolment, student throughput and research outputs in tertiary institutions by increasing budget for higher education institutions. This study might assist the Heads of Departments (HoDs) of postgraduate studies to review the existing research supervision models. Supervisors as important human resources to sustain research programmes might also gain insight on how master students experience research supervision. Moreover, master students themselves might also learn from their experiences in order to move towards better understanding of research supervision practices.

### **1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The research project was limited to the following twenty-four participants: six master's students and six supervisors from the three schools in the Faculty of Humanities, (Education, School of Social Sciences, and School of Languages and Communication Studies); and six master students and six supervisors from the three schools in the Faculty of Management and Law (Accountancy, Economics and Management, and Law). The study only focused on the experiences of master students regarding research supervision at the University of Limpopo. Other

postgraduate students (honours and doctoral) at the sampled institution were not part of this study.

## **1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations in research are principles that guide our research designs and practice. Researchers are supposed to adhere to certain code of conduct, when collecting data from the participants. The key ethical considerations are always involved when the researcher decide to conduct a research. The ethical considerations work to:

- Protect the rights of the researcher and the participants;
- Enhance the research validity;
- Maintain scientific integrity. (Fleming,2018:208)
- **Permission to conduct research**

Permission to conduct research was granted by the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC). The researcher held meetings with the directors of the sampled schools in order to get access to the relevant participants and documents. This was followed by face-to-face meetings with the engaged participants, establishing relationships and building trust, explaining the purpose of the study, and arranging suitable schedules and venues for data collection.

- **Informed consent**

Participants were informed that participation in this study is voluntarily. They were made aware that they might discontinue with the study at any time they wish to do so. Participants were also informed that they were not forced to participant in the study (Cohen et al., 2011:480).The researcher requested them to willingly sign the consent forms after clarifications of the study were made.

- **Anonymity, confidentiality and privacy**

The participants were given the right to anonymity, confidentiality and privacy. This was done to ensure that the participants' identity is protected during and after data

collection. Data collected is kept privately and the findings are provided anonymously (Cohen et al., 2011: 485)

### **Protection from harm**

The researcher ensured that no participant was exposed to physical or mental harm or engaged in the activities that run the risk of causing any form of harm to other participants. The researcher was honest, respectful and sympathetic to the participants during the data collection period.

- **Preventing of Deception**

The participants were informed about information being collected from them and how it was going to be used. This was done in order to ensure that there was no deception.

### **1.13 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY**

**The study consists of the following five chapters:**

**Chapter 1** presents an introduction and orientation, background and motivation of the study, problem statement, theoretical framework, research questions, purpose and objectives, and definition of key concepts. The research methodology which includes research design, population and sampling, data collection and data analysis is clearly unpacked. The chapter also covered the following aspects: trustworthiness, significance, limitations, ethical considerations and outline of the study.

**Chapter 2** provides relevant and appropriate literature that highlights research studies and experiences about postgraduate research supervision globally.

**Chapter 3** deals with the research methodology. This encapsulates description of research paradigm, approach, research design, and data collection techniques and data analysis.

**Chapter 4** provides a presentation of the findings of this study.

**Chapter 5** gives conclusions, discussions, recommendations and suggestions for further res

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines the South African Higher Education context, the international research supervision and supervisory relationships. Role and responsibility of master students and supervisors, supervisors' expectations, students' expectations and research supervision models are presented.

#### **2.2 SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT**

According to Muraraneza and Mtshali (2014:04), there is emergence and growth of knowledge-based economy in the world, dominated by technology and scientific discovery that pose a challenge to all higher educational institutions to generate knowledge and develop skills, through research by postgraduate students. South African High Education Institutions are expected to transform postgraduate students into knowledge production and managers through research supervision process, where the supervisor plays a vital and supportive role (Muraraneza & Mtshali, 2014:04). Ganqa (2012:28) confirms that master's degrees are recognised for the vital and valuable contribution they make to the generation of new knowledge, skills development and improvement of research capacity. In South Africa master's research is higher on the priority list of HEIs (CHE, 2016:35).

In addition, the Higher Education Act 27 of 1996 proclaimed that it is desirable for HEIs to enjoy freedom and autonomy in their relationships with the state, within the context of public accountability and national needs for advanced skills (Development Bank of South Africa, 2010:56). Moreover, White Paper 3 identified the following various social purposes that higher education was intended to serve:

- to mobilise human talent and potential through life-long learning and provide the labour market in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society.

- to undertake production, acquisition and application of how knowledge contributes to the creation, sharing and evaluation of knowledge (DHET, 2012:12).

Therefore, the core role of higher education should be disseminating knowledge and producing critical graduates through research, and contributing to economic and social development (Development Bank of South Africa, 2010:56). In contrast, it is clear that the crisis of higher education has a number of dimensions. South African higher education is inadequately funded by the state, when considering the Gross Domestic Product allocated to the high education sector (Badat, 2015:09). The percentage increased between 2004/2005 and 2015/2016, which is 0,68% to only 0,72%, and this level of funding is very low as compared with other countries. In 2012, Brazil's allocation was 0,95% of GDP to higher education, Senegal and Ghana 1,4%. Moreover, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is also inadequate to support all the deserving students at the level of undergraduate and postgraduate (DHET, 2012:10). However, a recent study commissioned by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, indicated that a free-fee university education for the poor in South Africa is feasible, but will need more funds for both NSFAS and the university system, and that will depend on the availability of resources (DHET, 2012:13).

On the other hand, the Universities South Africa (USAF) is supporting a free-fee higher education system on the basis that there will be clarity on how the full higher education budget will be constructed to maintain current levels and quality of service delivery (USAF, 2015:03). It is suggested that the level of public investment in Higher Education must be internationally benchmarked and matched with the value of the public good (USAF, 2015:03).

## **2.3 THE INTERNATIONAL MASTER STUDENT'S RESEARCH SUPERVISION**

### **2.3.1 Research Supervision in New Zealand**

#### **2.3.1.1 Research supervision arrangements**

In New Zealand, at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) the Contracting Monitoring Committee has established postgraduate workload and research supervision practice policies. This mechanism assists in monitoring and controlling research supervision and allocation of workload at all levels of the university departments, schools and faculties (Miller & Dreyer, 2012:27). The Manukau Institute of Technology and South Cross University have combined their ways of practicing research supervision. The two institutions have established the Master's Candidates Centre, which is the central place where master students visit to get resources, network their process reports and general assistance. The center is the university intranet learning platform which is a blackboard (Miller & Dreyer, 2012:26). The main objective of the center is to break isolation of masters' research students' encounter and create a community of the schools where remote students will be assisted (Miller & Dreyer, 2012:26). The resources that are provided at the center are distributed to the supervisors' centers to enable supervisors to understand and appreciate those resources. In addition, Miller and Dreyer (2012:27) note that supervisors also contribute to the discussion forums on how best research supervision can be practiced. Moreover, there is an online postgraduate supervision center for students who enroll for masters and doctoral research in Business Administration. The infrastructure encourages collaborative knowledge creation and sharing by masters' students' research and supervision by the use of electronic network (Eddy & Cardno, 2008:03).

On the other hand, McCallin and Nayar (2011:64) argue that in some universities in New Zealand, some of master students complete and few do so in a specified time. So the universities have been challenged to examine systems and processes of research supervision programmes. Government has changed priorities of higher education which affected university research funding. These have indirectly impacted on how supervision of research is managed. For example, the New Zealand University Funding is

competitive and influenced by the Performance-Based Research Funding Model. PBRF model is aimed to foster and reward excellent research. This model emphasises the need for universities to be socially and economically accountable for the research work, so that it supports economic and educational policy (McCallin & Nayar, 2011:64). This problem with the timely completion of master students, resulted in the examination of the different ways of research supervision in New Zealand universities. A group supervision model is established and it involves the relationship between the supervisor and the student and the student to the student. It provides a supportive cohort interaction between the supervisor and a group of students. The group learning model aims at promoting an intellectual independence, while at the same time collective learning offers social and emotional support to all students (Qureshi & Vazir, 2015: 98). According to Qureshi and Vazir (2015:98), there are two types of group supervision models: 'led supervision group and peer supervision group'. The led supervision model has a leader to serve as an expert and facilitator. The leaderless peer supervision group shares leadership tasks. Group supervision is seen as a strategy to reduce isolation of students, to support students, and to encourage the exchange of ideas and to mentor students for publishing the research (Qureshi & Vazir, 2015:98).

### **2.3.1.2 Financial support for research supervision**

There is a Postgraduate Research Student Support Fund at the University of Auckland. Master students undertaking supervised research are automatically entitled to this fund for four years of their studies. Students are awarded 4800 dollars for a four-year programme (University of Auckland, 2016:11). The funds should be spent on conference attendance, research-related travel, accommodation costs, and photocopying and printing research materials. The University offers a Masters, Honours and Postgraduate Diploma Scholarship. These scholarships are awarded on merit. For example a high-achieving student who applies for Masters, Honours or Postgraduate Diploma Scholarship is offered 10,000 dollars per annum towards living expenses and costs of his or her registration fees. Students are also offered a Summer Research Scholarship for high-achieving final year Honours students and Masters' students. In addition, a Student Loan and Allowance is available at this university. Loan and

allowance are administered by Study Link, which is a service of the Ministry of Social Development and master students have an opportunity to access such funds (University of Auckland, 2016: 15).

Moreover, at the University of Canterbury students have an access to Masters' and Doctoral Scholarship. Students apply for this scholarship from their departments and master students are required to fund the difference between the domestic fees met by the scholarship and their international tuition fees (University of Canterbury, 2017:11). Furthermore the New Zealand citizens and holders of New Zealand residence class visa are allowed to borrow money from University Student Loan. The student loan may be used to pay for tuition fees, course-related costs and a weekly allowance for living costs. In that line the Department of Geological Sciences has The Manson Trust Fund which provides partial support to master students. The money is only meant for paying fieldwork, analytical costs and dissertations expenses (University of Canterbury, 2017:11).

### **2.3.1.3 Resources for research supervision**

The Auckland University of Technology has the Thesis Link, which is a postgraduate research blog. This blog provides international commentaries and suggestions about research from research students and academics. Master students use it as a hub for dialogues where students share ideas and discover what is new in the research world. The blog is followed on face book and twitter (Auckland University of Technology, 2017:12). In addition, the University of Canterbury has library and learning services. Students have access to a large collection of print, multimedia and micro texts from the library. The library's website provides students with electronic resources including databases. Moreover, there is equipped working quiet study, writing and shared study space. The university offers after-hours access to central workplace facilities to master students (Auckland University of Technology, 2017:15). Moreover, university has study rooms where students get access to the following: A kitchen area with a fridge and microwave; telephone for internal calls; individual study space with power point, networked computers and printer and a wireless internet access. Students also get access to the study rooms for 24 hours by swiping a card and these areas are

monitored by the security after hours and on weekends (Auckland University of Technology, 2017:16).

#### **2.3.1.4 Workshops and seminars for research supervision**

The AUT has a Postgraduate Peer Mentoring Group. This is a network for mentoring groups, where master students meet, socialise and discuss their experiences in research projects. The writing retreat sessions are conducted three times a year in winter away from the AUT. The Graduate Research School is responsible for all writing retreat costs and only research students who apply for the first time are given first preference. There is a Turnitin resource which is set up to allow students to check plagiarism of their research work and this device is accessed by students through Student Digital Workspace under Blackboard (Auckland University of Technology, 2017:13). In that line, the email network is available where masters students who are currently enrolled are automatically subscribed. Students get information on postgraduate workshops, events, scholarships and university current affairs. However, students who do not wish to receive communication through this network are allowed to unsubscribe (Auckland University of Technology, 2017:13).

### **2.3.2 Research Supervision in Australia**

#### **2.3.2.1 Research supervision arrangements**

The Australian Research Council has introduced a code of supervisory duties with the aim of meeting the international standard of practicing master students' research supervision in their universities (Dublin University, 2010:06). The Australian National University has a high level three-stage model of research supervision. This type of research supervision is used in an attempt to encompass the key steps of how to structure the supervisory relationship as student progress in their studies (Dublin University, 2010:06).

The first stage of the three stages of research supervision is where the supervisor helps the student to select a research topic, planning the research, identifying and acquiring resources and managing the process of his or her project. In the second stage the

students are monitored, but allowed to operate with great independence. In the third stage the students are given guidance with the writing up of the project, which is characterised by an increase in time and effort exerted by the supervisor (Dublin University, 2010:08). In addition, Thomsen, Nordentoft and Wchmann-Hasen (2012:01) indicate that the Australians also employ the collective academic style of research supervision, which provides possibilities for incorporating progressive and systematic interaction between master's students and their individual writing processes. The collective supervision is aimed at reducing the students' isolation and is used as a measure to ensure that students experience a congenial culture and develop network with their peers (Thomsen et al., 2012:02).

At the University of Wollongong in Australia, a Code of Practice-Supervision is established by the (URC) University Research Committee. The Code of Practice-Supervision has appointed a supervisory panel which comprises the principal supervisor, joint supervisor and other advisors. There is a minimum of two supervisors in each panel who supervise students (University of Wollongong, 2010:23). In the same line, the University of Sydney in Australia has established supervisory teams consisting of two senior research supervisors. Each team has to supervise only five students. The university is employing the following research supervision styles for higher degrees (University of Wollongong, 2010: 23).

- Default of supervision: Here the Head of Department appoints one research supervisor and one auxiliary supervisor and the research supervisor becomes the coordinating supervisor
- Supervisory panel: The Head of Department appoints a supervisory panel consisting of more than two supervisors. Such a panel consists of mixed research supervisors and auxiliary supervisors. The Head of Department nominates one research supervisor as a coordinating supervisor (University of Wollongong, 2010:25).

### **2.3.2.2 Financial support for research supervision**

The University of Sydney has scholarships to assist master students towards research studies. There is a Postgraduate Research Support Scheme which provides students with funds for travel and participation in conferences and seminars. The funds also support students for research fieldwork. The university has a School of Masters' Research Support Scheme which is awarded to students who pursue research studies. Some schools at the University of Sydney have travel allowance which the School Based Scheme is supporting students for paying accommodation and conference registration fees (University of Sydney, 2017:08). In that line the Western Sydney University provides financial support to students under the Research Higher Degrees Policy. Students are normally awarded 2000 dollars per full-time year in low cost disciplines and 7000 dollars in consumable-intensive high cost areas (Western Sydney University, 2016:28). This fund is available for items including skills developments, research materials fieldwork and travel for conference attendance and registration fees (Western Sydney University, 2016:28).

In addition, the University of New South Wales has established scholarships to assist both domestic and international master students with research funding. Students receive annual stipend, living allowance and tuition fees (University of New Wales, 2016:28). The Postgraduate Support Scheme is available, which assists students in applying for funding to attend conferences. The fund assists students to pay for expenses such as: registration, travel, accommodation as well as living expenses. Students with financial challenges are granted loans. Such students should apply as the loan is not automatically approved. Only loans up to 10 000 dollars are available for each student per year (University of New South Wales, 2016:30). In addition, Australian Federal Government Research Training Programme Awards and the Adelaide Scholarship International are established at the University of Adelaide. The scholarship provides students with tuition fees and living allowance. Master students are awarded 27082 dollars for two years with no extensions (University of Adelaide, 2018:13).

### **2.3.2.3 Resources for research supervision**

Students are exposed to Information Technology Service and Computers. The Information and Communication Technology help the students to access emails, telephones and Software. Computers are allocated to all master students and newly enrolled doctoral students. However, the computers remain the property of the schools. So, students have to return the computers to schools once they have completed their studies. The Heads of Schools are responsible for the retrieval of these computers (University of Sydney, 2017:08). In addition, the University of Adelaide comprises five separate libraries. Students have access to the website of one of the libraries where they search online journals and electronic books. There are specialist research librarians for every programme offered at the university, who assist master students in accessing research information. Students are advised in choosing bibliographic style as well as using the bibliographic software (Adelaide University; 2018:15).

### **2.3.2.4 Workshops and seminars for research supervision**

The University of Sydney expects students to attend workshops and seminars where papers are presented. Students are required to send their topics to the Presentation Research Administrator 14 days before presentation scheduled in order that the topics can be scrutinised and edited before presentation date (University of Sydney, 2017:09). Students at the University of the New South Wales are supposed to attend one research conference a year. The conference provides students with an excellent opportunity to network with other research experts. Students may spend weeks in different laboratory and access specialist skills, equipment and expertise to assist their research work (University of New South Wales, 2016:34). In addition, the Career and Research Skills Training provides master students at the Adelaide University with online modules and resources about the students' research projects (University of Adelaide, 2018:13). Moreover, the Graduate Research School at Western Sydney University has a comprehensive package of workshops. It provides students with online module and seminars. This programme is delivered free to students, viewed and updated each year. Students are supported on proposal writing, presentations and report writing skills (Western Sydney University, 2016:14).

### **2.3.3 Research Supervision in United Kingdom**

Conducting higher degree research in HEI is an ill-defined process. It is expected that universities should provide students with excellent supervision in order for the students to complete their projects on time. However, it seems there are challenges that supervisors and students are facing in different universities.

#### **2.3.3.1 Research supervision arrangements**

At the University of Cumbria the Graduate School has appointed supervisors with appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support and monitor the progress of master students. Appointed supervisors hold an academic qualification and have experience of research at masters and doctoral levels. The University of Cumbria has a policy that states that no supervisor should supervise more than six PhD students and 10 Master students. The Head of Department ensures that workload allocation takes into account the number and the type of research students that the supervisor is responsible for (University of Cumbria, 2016:19). In that line the University of Manchester uses supervisory team. This consists of the main supervisor, one co-supervisor and an advisor. The main supervisor is responsible for contacting the students regularly one hour per week to allocate and discuss the project as well as responding to day-to-day queries of the students. The co-supervisor offers support to students, especially when the main supervisor is not available at the university or he or she has attended to something work related.

Moreover, the student's advisor has the main role of providing pastoral role, monitoring students' progress as well as giving advice (University of Manchester, 2018:14). Furthermore, at Liverpool Hope University the Faculty Senior Academic Advisers offer guidance on the university regulations and progression. Master students taught course work leaders give support to master students who need academic advice (University of Liverpool, 2017:08). It is also indicated that the University of Manchester has eProg device which is employed to monitor the students' attendance. All research students' attendance points are recorded monthly by this device. Students whose attendance is

unsatisfactory could lead them being excluded to the research programme (University of Manchester, 2018:08).

Furthermore, Leeds University ensures that research supervision is efficient and effective and timely; the Community Group supervision which is known as peer-driven-based supervisory has been introduced. This supervision complements the supervision provided in students' home academic institutions (Hunt & Swallow, 2014:04). The Community Group supervision is complemented by the Functional Pre-Modern-Model.

Here supervision is dyadic and the relationship of the supervisors and the students is central. This relationship of supervisors and students is viewed as 'private'. Masters and PhD students are seen as apprentice to their supervisors. This is where power imbalances and patriarchal relationship exist. Supervisors possess expertise to be imparted to the students, furthering patriarchy (Hunt & Swallow, 2014:04).

### **3.3.3.2 Financial support for research supervision**

In England, public funding to postgraduate students has been limited compared to undergraduate students. So this has been seen as one of the contributing factors to the decline of United Kingdom postgraduate students pass rate. This low pass rate then led to the introduction of some form of a postgraduate loan system (House of Commons Library, 2018:03). Postgraduate Masters' loan which is a new system of income-contingent loan was introduced by Government to assist master students. The loan is awarded to master students less than 30 years of age who do course work and research-based masters. Each student is awarded 10 000 dollars and the loan is repayable at 6% interest (House of Commons Library, 2018:03).

In addition, the University of York offers master students scholarships directly through individual departments. There is also a charitable funding which provides financial support to master students, though the funding is often small and therefore targets a particular group of master students (University of York, 2018:04). There is a York Loyalty Discount for students who complete undergraduate degree, and the students are awarded ten per cent discount on fees for masters taught course. Students are also offered Career Development loans that are used for paying work-related learning.

Students who are expected to present their results at conferences have access to financial support from the Research Committee Fund. Some students receive research related-travelling and consumable support provided by their Schools. Such students receive 10 000 dollars each per year (University of Manchester, 2018: 14).

### **2.3.3.3 Resources for research supervision**

Effective supervision requires supervisors who are knowledgeable and skilled in the research field; however, this effective supervision could not be achieved if the institutions have no resources for supervision. So for effective supervision to be practised, the Harper Adams University has established an open access computer facilities located in the Postgraduate Centre and the Bamford Library. All master students are entitled to use these facilities (Harper Adam University, 2017:09). There are computer support staffs appointed to assist master students in accessing information. The university has assigned full-time master and doctoral students based at the university own personal computers and also share office accommodation with research assistants. These computers are used for the whole three years research programme plus six months for writing (Harper Adams University, 2017:10).

In addition, the University of Edinburgh provides central library facilities: email, share access to computers and network access for all campus-based students. Students have access to electronic information point. Schools provide students with accommodation and furniture. Many of the university's students support services offer services on an online as well as face-to-face support. However, a range of services that distance students can access are more limited than the one on campus (Harper Adams University, 2017:10). Moreover Liverpool Hope University has installed a Moodle website which the students use to access learning materials outside of normal taught supervision session. The university has a library which offers master students a wide range of information sources including: print and electronic journals; electronic books; indexes; datasets and research facilities (University of Liverpool, 2017:08).

#### **2.3.3.4 Workshops and seminars for research supervision**

Students at University of Cumbria undergo training and a Development Programme which is coordinated by the University Graduate School. A discipline specific skill workshop is also provided in different departments. The Cumbria Research Programme sessions run monthly from October to June every year. The programme gives master students opportunities to mix with other students across the disciplines. It encourages development of peer support network. Students are also exposed to a mandatory Ethics training in this research programme. In addition, the university has an induction programme which includes: Orientation information; details of relevant university procedures and personnel. This induction is designed to clarify expectations on submission time, quality of research, support available to master students and the type of supervision (University of Cumbria, 2016:06). The university has an online material which offers access to part-time master students who study away from the (University Cumbria, 2016:06). Moreover, the Manchester University arranges workshops where students are encouraged to attend lecture courses where research components such as relevant research topics, methodology, literature review, data analysis are discussed (University of Manchester, 2018:11).

#### **2.3.4 Research Supervision in Tanzania**

##### **2.3.4.1 Research supervision arrangements**

To deliver master students research supervision, the Ardhi University has outsourced by bring in experts from countries such as Sweden, Zambia and Uganda (Ardhi University, 2015:06). However, the university sticks to the traditional student supervision approach based on the apprenticeship supervision. Students experience limited relationship with their supervisors. They do not have access of meeting other students or research advisors at formal gathering such as workshops and seminars.

Supervisors in the Tanzanian universities have too many students to supervise to an extent that supervisors could not read critically all students' research work (Komba, 2017:99). It is stated that supervisors have to supervisor 10-15 students as well as do other duties including teaching, conducting research and undertaking outreach. In the

same line, at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) research supervision is constrained by inadequate research supervision facilities, limited resources and students' unpreparedness. On the other hand, shortage of research supervisors with experience is minimised through joined supervision. The UDSM outsource Swedish professors who assist students with the research work in Sweden through sandwich arrangement (University of Dar es Salaam, 2015:51).

However, lack of coordination between the local main supervisors and the external Swedish co-supervisors delay the students' research proposal to be approved on time. There was a case where a student was instructed to change the research topic by the co-supervisor, but when the student met with the local main supervisor, the student was told to change the research topic to the initial topic and that delayed the student's research progress (University of Dar es Salaam, 2015:44).

In addition, it is noted that at the UDSM effective research supervision is also constrained by lack of norms of what constitutes effective supervision. The UDSM research supervision guidelines state that the supervisor plays a role of guiding, encouraging and inspiring the student. Moreover, at UDSM, it appears that in practice, supervisors do not comply with the basic principle of student's supervision, as supervisors do not timely and thoroughly give feedback on the students' work as well as holding regular meetings (University of Dar es Salaam, 2015:44). Furthermore, Ardhi University is facing a challenge as a result of depletion of academic staff, especially at the senior level as most of supervisors are aging, brain drain through government appointments, lack of retention strategies to retain senior and young academics (Ardhi University, 2015:72)

However, at Sokoine University master students are assigned a supervisor appointed by a department within a month of registration. The supervisor acts as academic advisor who also guides students in research proposal development. The supervisor ensures that students submit the periodic report on the research progress including seminars results every 6 months to the Head of Department (Sokoine University, 2011:04). The university is offering masters' course work over the duration of twelve months. During these twelve months students have to develop research proposals in order to proceed

with the research part of the study after successfully completing course work and submission of the proposal (Sokoine University, 2011:04).The research part of the study takes 12 months and students who fail will be given six months to complete their projects (Sokoine University, 2011:05).The students' progress and performance is monitored by periodic presentation of a six months referred seminars over a period of twenty-four months. At the final stage of the research, students are required to defend their dissertations after submitting one manuscript for review in peer-reviewed scientific journal (Sokoine University, 2011:09).

#### **2.3.4.2 Financial support for research supervision**

It is noted that at the St John University students are sponsored by private sponsorship which pays some students 50% of the annual tuition fees and 100% of other fees (St John University, 2018:44). There is also Research Student Loan offered to students and this is only meant for paying tuition fees. Students have to apply for this loan as it is not automatically awarded to master students (University of St John, 2018:44).

#### **2.3.4.3 Resources for research supervision**

The Muhimbili University of Health Allied Sciences has reasonable conditions in terms of lecture halls, seminar rooms, laboratories and teaching rooms with whiteboards. The university has benefited from research funding through acquisition of laboratory equipment, electricity generators for backup power supply to research unit. Small projectors are available in all lecture rooms, solar power system is installed at the library to enable users to computer and read literature material in the event of power shortage. However, it is indicated that audio-visual teaching aids need to be replaced taking into account the room and class size at the university. The university has internet Wi-Fi coverage in most all the buildings (University of Dar es Saleem, 2016:61)

In addition, UDSM has requisite supervision resources for master students. These include physical plant, human resources and information and communication technology services. There are well equipped libraries, seminar rooms and study rooms. On the downside, the physical infrastructure has deteriorated and need urgent refurbishment. Students are also unable to access the internet due to low speed of the

Wi-Fi. Limited laboratory facilities also constrain master students in performing some experiments (Ardhi University, 2015:70). In addition, the Ardhi University has Consortium of Tanzanian University and Research Libraries. However, the consortium does not have all journals relevant for research. Apart from the e-journals, the laboratory work and lecture rooms need to be improved in order to enhance research environment at the university (Ardhi University, 2015:72).

#### **2.3.4.4 Workshops and seminars for research supervision**

In order to impact competence in research methods, students are required to present three seminars over two years. The first seminar is presented within six months in order for students to reflect on orientation of the subject matter of the intended discipline (Sokoine University, 2011:06). The second seminar is presented after completion of course work as part of research proposal approval process. The purpose is to ascertain competence in research methodology and analytical skills (Sokoine University, 2011:06). The remaining seminar is presented before the submission of the draft dissertation to the supervisor. The purpose is to ensure master students' progress in research work as well as mastery of the discipline of study (Sokoine University, 2011:10). On the down side, the UDSM has a challenge of inadequate of academic enrichment activities such as postgraduate seminars, writing workshops and writing for publication activities (University of Dar es Salaam, 2015:51).

#### **2.3.5 Research Supervision in South Africa**

##### **2.3.5.1 Research supervision arrangements**

South African universities also follow the guidelines for master students' research supervision to provide quality research supervision (University of Pretoria, 2012:21). Thus, master students' research supervision seems to be planned, controlled and monitored in various ways in different contexts. Some universities offer coursework paired with mini- dissertation. At the University of the Western Cape, a majority of supervisors use the Writing Process Feedback (WPF) model, where master's students are expected to complete and submit sections of their thesis that is, drafts of chapters (Holtman & Mukwada (2014:186). In addition, at the University of the Western Cape, a

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is used which explains the roles and responsibilities of both the students and the supervisors. This (MoU) even spells out the frequency of the supervision meeting as well as the number of leave days that students are entitled. It has been noted that most South African tertiary institutions usually allocate one supervisor for a group of students unlike other universities in developed countries (DoE, 2009:04). As such, supervision is not quality assured as the process is left to one supervisor with minimal guidance or intervention from the institution (DoE, 2009:02). Moreover, some supervisors display selfishness and lack respect for their students (Swanson & Watt, 2011:09). However some universities in South Africa employ the traditional supervision model also known as apprenticeship model, where a student is supervised by one or more supervisors (Holtman & Mukwanda, 2014:186). Some universities resort to co-supervision which is felt to be beneficial to the novice supervisors because it helps them to cope with the problems that supervisors encounter (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013:04). In contrast, Hill (2011:30) argues that co-supervision also has a potential for abuse because there can be modeling of poor research supervision practice, from more experienced on behalf of the novice supervisor, such that poor supervision is mistaken for normal practice.

Challenges also arise where a supervisor is not up to date with the field of his or her supervision, which means that such a supervisor is unable to help in problem-solving and giving advice to the master's students (Grossman & Crowther, 2015:01). It is also noted that South African academic institutions are struggling to establish a knowledgeable, qualified supervision cohort to effectively cope with influx of expected master students. So the growing need for supervisors and desire for cross-disciplinary research to maximise innovation for future social-economic benefits necessitated a co-supervision to address the proposal increase in research graduates by the National Development Plan Vision for 2030 (DoE, 2009:09).

However, at the University of Witwatersrand co-supervision is used to support masters and PhD candidates in various forms (Grossman & Crowther, 2015:02). Co-supervision is practiced, where one supervisor is referred as the principal, who oversees the research process, while the co-supervisor contributes to specific area of her or his

expertise (Grossman & Crowther, 2015:02). The same co-supervision is practiced at Tshwane University of Technology where there is the main supervisor and co-supervisor. The main supervisor is responsible for providing guidance and support and meeting students regularly. The co-supervisor meets with the students on special circumstances as well as when the main supervisor is not available at the university (Tshwane University of Technology, 2017).

In addition, (Holtman & Mukwanda, 2014:188) maintains that new student supervision arrangements to supplement single-supervisor structure have been established, and that knowledge sharing among the master students and between supervisors is becoming more vital in the new trend of research supervision. The new supervisory practice such as joint supervision of one student by two or more supervisors and committee supervision which provides complementary expertise is in place to assist the master students. Seemingly, the pairing of experienced supervisors with less experienced ones allow for greater expertise because supervisors with different areas of expertise work, together to provide the quality of supervision to master students (Ganqa, 2012:26). The added advantage of joint supervision is that, the different supervisors will bring different skills and styles of supervision (Holtman & Mukwada, 2014:188). Despite all these different types of supervision models that are seminar based or dissertation only, masters' research and the challenges of postgraduate supervision put the research output under threat (Ganqa 2012:28).

#### **2.3.5.2 Financial support for research supervision**

Institutions play role in assisting students in accessing external funding such as scholarship. There is internal funding including teaching assistantship where students in difference departments assist supervisors with teaching. Some universities have initiated internal funding policies to reduce students need to work outside the universities. In addition, it is stated that students are engaged in work study projects as a way of cushioning them from financial difficulties (Holtman & Mukwanda; 2014: 189).

At the University of Cape Town, Student Funding is available to assist students with study funds. Students are supposed to apply for this funding at the Postgraduate Centre

and Funding Office. The fund is meant for conference attendance and overseas travelling costs (University of Cape Town, 2014-2016:35). There are other financial sources including: University-wide-scholarship which is available for all students to apply and the National Research Foundation bursaries which takes two forms: bursaries awarded directly to students on application and the bursaries awarded to supervisor and the distribution of these bursaries is at the discretion of the supervisor, within the framework of conditions laid by the NRF (University of Cape Town; 2014:35). However, at the University of Pretoria financial support for research supervision is very limited. Students have to fund most of the university's facilities out of their pockets (University of Pretoria; 2018: 138).

#### **2.3.5.3 Resources for research supervision**

The University of Pretoria has research supervision resources. However, students are supposed to register in order to have access to the library material. At the library, students must be able to use the resources on their own, such as searching for information from the internet, develop research skills without the assistance of the supervisor or Librarian. (University of Pretoria, 2018:138). However, the university has the Graduate Support Hub where research skills activities are practiced every week. Skills including writing for publications, writing up dissertations and thesis, setting up a research programmes are offered (University of Pretoria, 2018: 134). In the same line, the Stellenbosch University provides master students with research supervision resources such as photocopying machines at the Copy shop Student Centre. Students have access to computers in various laboratories and in the Postgraduate Office areas. In addition, there is an Open Source Software which students are encouraged to use freely, as other software supplied by the university are paid for use (Stellenbosch University; 2014:14). Printers are available at the library; however, students have to buy printing credits and load the credits on students user name account in order to use these printers.

Moreover, other universities such as the University of Cape Town, to enhance and support master students, these are established: The postgraduate Centre where master students meet, read, use the Wi-Fi and internet stations. The office offers equipped

seminar room seating up to 45 people. There is reading room and provision of journals. The library services are also available. The Chancellor Oppenheimer Library is the main library at this university. This library offers a range of reading areas, computer working stations, and audio-visual viewing areas (University of Cape Town, 2014:38). There is an Information and Communication Technology services which provides information and communication technology infrastructure, systems and support through Information and Technology desk help.

Master students have access to email account which gives them opportunity to access the storage space both from campus and outside the campus. Above all, the Council for Higher Degrees supports postgraduate writing development through the Writing Center. Students walk in one-on-one to do consultations with the consultants to get assistants on academic writing skills. This center is meant for learning experiences not for editing the work (University of Cape Town, 2014:40). Seemly, University of Johannesburg established a Writing Centre for research for master students. The center is headed by the academic coordinator and staffed by postgraduate students trained in how to write academically (University of Johannesburg, 2015:06).

#### **2.3.5.4 Workshops and seminars for research supervision**

According to Holtman and Mukwanda (2014: 188) the University of Western Cape has a University Postgraduate Division, where master students with language and writing skills problems are assisted. To boost the confidence of master students, supervisors use conferences and workshops. Students present papers and seminars and get feedback from peers and staff (Holtman & Mukwanda, 2014:188). Supervisors arrange orientation week during which master students are offered support courses on research as well as open question and answer sessions.

However, this is the opposite in most international universities. In Tanzania at Ardhi University, supervisors are facing a large number of master students (10- 15) per supervisor. So supervisors cannot read critically all the students 'research work. In that line at the University of Dr es Salaam, research is constrained by an inadequate of research supervision facilities. Then, to overcome this challenge the universities have to

outsource Swedish professors. There is also an adequate of academic enrichment activities such as postgraduate seminars and writing workshops and publication

## **2.4 THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP**

The relationship between supervisor and student is a multi-faceted one. Supervisors have to spend some time with the students to consider how relationship will work, as this is valuable for developing a long-term mutual effective relationship (Swanson & Watt, 2011:09). An effective relationship between the supervisor and student is a key to the success of both parties. However, it needs supervisors and students to ensure that the relationship remains open, respectful and constructive (Simon Frazer University, 2010: 01). It is important to establish an effective supervisor–student relationship at the early stage of the research project in order to communicate supervisor and student’s expectations (University of Tun Hussien, 2016:01). In addition, an effective supervisor-student relationship enhances a good interpersonal and working relationship which is associated with good research process and student satisfaction (University of Tun Hussien, 2016:01). Failure in supervision is often the results of different expectations and clashes of personality. In that line, (Abiddin et al., 2009: 14) indicated that good communication and openness between the supervisors and students are important elements of supervision where supervisors and students are able identify their shortfalls.

However, personality factors might involve clashes to communication as a result of differences in age, culture, language, or personal differences in research approach. Therefore, students and supervisors bear their own degree of responsibility in dealing with such clashes (Abiddin et al., 2009; 14). It was also shown that students feel more satisfied with their supervisors when they meet their supervisor regularly (Abiddin et al., 2009: 14). According to Makerere University (2011:04), supervisor-student relationship should be a closed one. For example, students in science discipline conduct research in a laboratory with their supervisors but, in arts and social sciences students are mostly working alone at home and the relationship tends to be a distance as a result of less frequent contact with supervisors. So it is the responsibility of the universities to

establish formal requirements for regular meetings between supervisors and students (Abiddin et al., 2009:14).

Moreover, Makerere University (2011:04) pointed out that supervisor–student relationship depends on both supervisors and students' expectations. Supervisors and students should establish a mutual partnership and create matching expectations. This implies that supervisors and students should have mutual trust, respect and acceptance. A shared sense of responsibility and commitment should be a precondition to the success of this partnership (Makerere University, 2011:04).

#### **2.4.1 Personal Relationship**

Taylor (2014:01) argues that investigation of reasons for non-completion of a masters' degree suggested a major issue. A mismatch relationship and personality conflict. So it is noted that supervisors have responsibilities to direct students to sources of assistance if personal issue arise. Seemingly, supervisors and students have to establish close collaborative relationships and friendships, as they are expected to spend many years working together. In addition, Taylor (2014:01) notes that supervisors are required to understand the student as a whole person looking at activities such as involving family, friends, work and community. Moreover, (Abdidin & Ismail (2011:206) pointed out the importance of establishing interpersonal relationship between the supervisors and students. So supervisors should be seen as the face of the faculty for master students. Such relationship is referred as an essentially privatized and personalised relationship (Abiddin & Ismail, 2011:210).

However, Holtman and Mukwada (2014:184) noted that there are different views on what the nature of personal relationship should be, as some say supervisors have powers over students and as such the two can never be equal. Calma (2014:100) also argues that the relationship at a personal level may result in complications, hurt feelings and can be destructive to the academic relationship. Holtman and Mukwada (2014:185) also affirmed that supervisors should not involve themselves with students' personal problems because supervisors are not professionally trained counselors, so they may cause harm than good in trying to play councilors' role.

Furthermore, Schulze (2012:24) identified power dynamics in supervisory relationship which is described as an ability of the individual or institution to achieve something whether by right, control or influence by other. According to Swanson and Watt (2011:05), to keep a good relationship between students and supervisors interpersonal communication should be used as strategy to resolve supervision conflict. Seemingly a good match between the students and supervisors both academically and personally, is a key catalyst for the development of a successful relationship and progress of the student (Swanson & Watt, 2011:05).

In addition, it is indicated that the relationship of supervisors and students is thought to be as one of mentorship or apprenticeship. So supervisors should be accessible to students: for consultation, advice and assistance and reply to any written requests within a reasonable time (Swanson & Watt, 2011:05).

## **2.5 ROLE OF THE SUPERVISORS**

A role is a prescribed set of responsibilities, obligations and functions that are associated with a given position that one holds in a certain context (Ganqa, 2012:41). On the other hand, responsibilities are specific tasks or duties that supervisors and students are expected to complete as functions of their roles (Llewellyn, 2012:15). According to Swanson and Watt (2011:05), the role is a supportive one where the supervisor may be a mentor, guide, model and manager of the master student. Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2010:02) affirm that the role of the supervisor is to ensure that his/her supervision becomes effective by giving students the correct level of direction, regular meetings and show interest in project and encourage ideas and individuality. In addition, Holtman and Mukwada (2014:18) point out that the key roles of supervisors are to help students to develop skills in scholarly writing. In that line, at the University of the Western Cape, supervisors maintain that their role is to guide students through the research process. So, the role is classified under three categories: Teaching, assessing and pastoral role (Holtman & Mukwanda, 2014)

### **2.5.1 Teaching Role**

In teaching, the supervisor mentors, directs, facilitates, inducts and assists students in acquiring the knowledge and skills. The supervisor guides students on research methods or approaches and on how to conduct fieldwork. Supervisors conduct workshops, with the view to help students develop research logic (Swanson & Watt, 2011:09). In addition, Holtman & Mukwanda (2014:184) regard a supervisor as a teacher and role model of master students. Supervisors help students to draw timelines for research projects. Students are also taught how to write their reports academically (Holtman & Mukwanda, 2014: 184).

### **2.5.2 Assessment Role**

Supervisors have the role of providing critique to students' work. The supervisors work as a "second eye" and provide feedback to all key areas of the research process including structuring of arguments, identifying of research gaps and methodologies. Lessing and Lessing (2016:77) argue that the role of supervisors is not to write the thesis, do language editing or drive for practical problems encountered by the students. However, supervisors assess some of the possible solutions that the students might consider in compiling their projects. In some universities, the first year master's students have to present written reports to the supervisors for these supervisors to assess whether the students qualify to be registered for master's courses (University of Pretoria, 2012:14). In addition, supervisors have the duty of doing interim assessment of students' assignments, proposals, chapters and giving feedback on rubric research skills tool. The rubric tool should show the applicable strong points and points of improvement of the students (Shreeve & Clapton, 2011:12). According to Shreeve and Clapton (2011:12) supervisors also assess how students are updating their own knowledge and research skills in managing and analysing data.

Moreover, the implementation of the students' research abilities is assessed by supervisors, for example: a student may be assessed on how he or she can make a presentation at students' conference and participation in research project (Moskvicheva, Bordovskaia & Darinskaya, 2015:580) Furthermore, Dublin University (2015:14) notes

that senior supervisors always play a role of assessing the master students' dissertations. As an assessor, supervisor makes judgment with regard to whether the students have passed or failed. The supervisor is required to identify the abilities and strengths of the students as well as the areas where students need improvement (Holtman & Mokwanda, 2014:184).

### **2.5.3 Pastoral Role**

The supervisors' pastoral role includes giving advice to students, motivation and encouragement. Supervisors' role is to help build trust within the supervisory relationship and provide emotional support (Holtman & Mukwada, 2014:185). Furthermore, Abiddin and Ismail (2011:214) describe the supervisory role as the balancing act between various factors, expertise in the area of research, support for students, critique and creativity. Three supervisory tasks were identified such as the administration of research process, monitoring and ensuring quality of the research. Moreover, Swanson and Watt (2011:06) claim that the supervisor's role is to provide a high-quality research and learning environment for the master students.

## **2.6 THE FUNDAMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SUPERVISORS AND STUDENTS**

### **2.6.1 Supervisor's Responsibilities**

- The supervisor should assist student with the selection of a suitable research topic.
- The supervisor should be accessible to students for consultation and discussion of academic process and research.
- Responding in time to the written work submitted by students, with constructive suggestions for improvement.
- supervisor makes arrangement to ensure continuity for supervision for the supervisor who will be absent for extended period (Swanson & Watt, 2012:06; University of Edinburgh, 2015:10)

## 2.6.2 Student's Responsibilities

According to Ismail & Abiddin (2009:361), the students are the main persons responsible for their research work. It is emphasised that it is the student's responsibility to determine what is required and carrying it out, and that students have to come through with clear aim of becoming competent professional researcher. Some of students' responsibilities are:

- Students work with supervisor to select a suitable management research topic;
- Students have to acquaint themselves with the standards expectations of the relevant degree;
- Students make commitment and show dedicated efforts to gain the background, knowledge and skills needed to pursue research project successfully;
- Students seriously consider the advice and criticisms received from supervisors;
- Students should endeavor to understand and follow the institutional ethical policies;
- Students should be diligent, hardworking and have sense of urgency;
- They should be motivated towards research work, be pleasant at work; and
- Students should give continual feedback, so that the supervisor can give informed instructions (Ismail & Abiddin, 2009:357).

However, Makerere University (2011:06) identified some put-offs that supervisors experience in the supervision of master students:

- Students who submit a second draft of chapter that does not address issues that the supervisor identified in the previous draft;
- Students who submit long chapters two hours before a meeting and expect feedback; and

## **2.7 SUPERVISORS AND STUDENTS' EXPECTATIONS**

### **2.7.1 Supervisors' Expectations**

Several studies pointed to mismatched student and supervisor's expectations due to lack of communication which resulted in master's students' supervision breakdown (Swanson & Watt, 2011:12). Supervisors expect the students to be independent to choose methods, styles and resources. Students should be independent and show their original thought and incentives, outsource editing and proof reading and keeping appointments for meetings (University of Tun Hussein, 2016:06). It is expected that students acquaint themselves with the standards expected of the relevant degree in their projects. Supervisors expect that students should fulfill the requirements of the research degree programme (The University of Edinburgh, 2015:11). In that line, Amzat, Yusuf and Kazeen (2010: 18) argue that students must ensure that they keep in touch with regular meetings with the supervisors to discuss their challenges and progress regarding their projects. It is pointed out that supervisors expect students to be industrious and have a sense of urgency. In case where the students' first language is not English, the supervisors expect the students to indicate at the early stages of the project in order that proper training of English can be done (Mokwada & Holtman, 2014:187).

In addition, supervisors expect the students to have personal qualities such as, to be problem solvers, disciplined, innovative, engaging, reflective, self-motivated and comfortable in discussing issues with supervisors (Friendrich-Nel & Mackinnon, 2010:05). Students are expected to be responsible and work on the feedback supervisors have given. Moreover, Amzat et al. (2010:18) indicate that supervisors expect students to identify research problem, formulate the research question, and design the methodology. It is also pointed out that supervisors need to be updated regularly about the student's progress and that submission deadlines is met with fewer reminders (Simon Frazer University, 2010:01).

Furthermore, students are expected to be honest and report progress and should he or she get stuck or find a dead-end, the student should consult supervisors immediately.

Supervisors need the students to progressively take control of research project and develop an authoritative voice on topic of their research (University of Bergen, 2010:04) According to Swinburne University of Technology (2015:09), when supervisors give students the benefit of knowledge and advice, students are expected to treat such knowledge and advice with respect. However, supervisors need to reassure students that even though students consider supervisors' suggestions, students are not obliged to adopt a particular position (Swinburne University of Technology, 2015:09).

### **2.7.2 Students' Expectations**

Students believe that they belong to an institution and research group, which the supervisors are in a powerful position concerning their work and processes. According to Swanson and Watt (2011:12), students express the need for an enthusiastic and supportive supervisor and see the supervisor's main duty as a provider of support, constructive criticism and overall guidance. Bell (2010:09) affirms that students expect supervisors to read all the submitted work and allocate time to discuss it with students and also create a mutual self-help relationship. In addition, Swanson and Watt (2011:12) point out that student expect to be informed about the availability of facilities such as study space and photocopy entitlements. It is expected of supervisors to correct and comment on the written work before he or she could meet with students (University of Tun Hussein, 2016:02). Students expect supervisors to be advisors not judges and those supervisors should not only praise the students, but also be able to make useful suggestions about the student's work (Simon Frazer University, 2010:02). Supervisors are expected to assist students in oral presentation and familiarising students with services and facilities of the university (University of Tun Hussein, 2016:02).

## **2.8 RESEARCH SUPERVISION MODELS**

### **2.8.1 Blended Group Research Supervision Model of Donnelly and Fitzmaurice**

#### **2.8.1.1 Essence of blended group research supervision model**

The blended group research supervision model is a supervision model where students use group feedback to develop independence and ability to do self-assessment through

peer learning (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013:03). The students and supervisors create a research community for support for both students and their supervisors which are based on effective social and intellectual climate for postgraduate research (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013:03). Blended group supervision is a combination of group supervision, peer supervision and individual supervision. The purpose of the model is to ensure that the three combined models supplement one another and help the students to complete their studies on time. The blended model also uses technological resources to connect isolated students in discussion, sharing skills and knowledge online as a united community (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013:04).

### Blended Group Supervision Model Structure

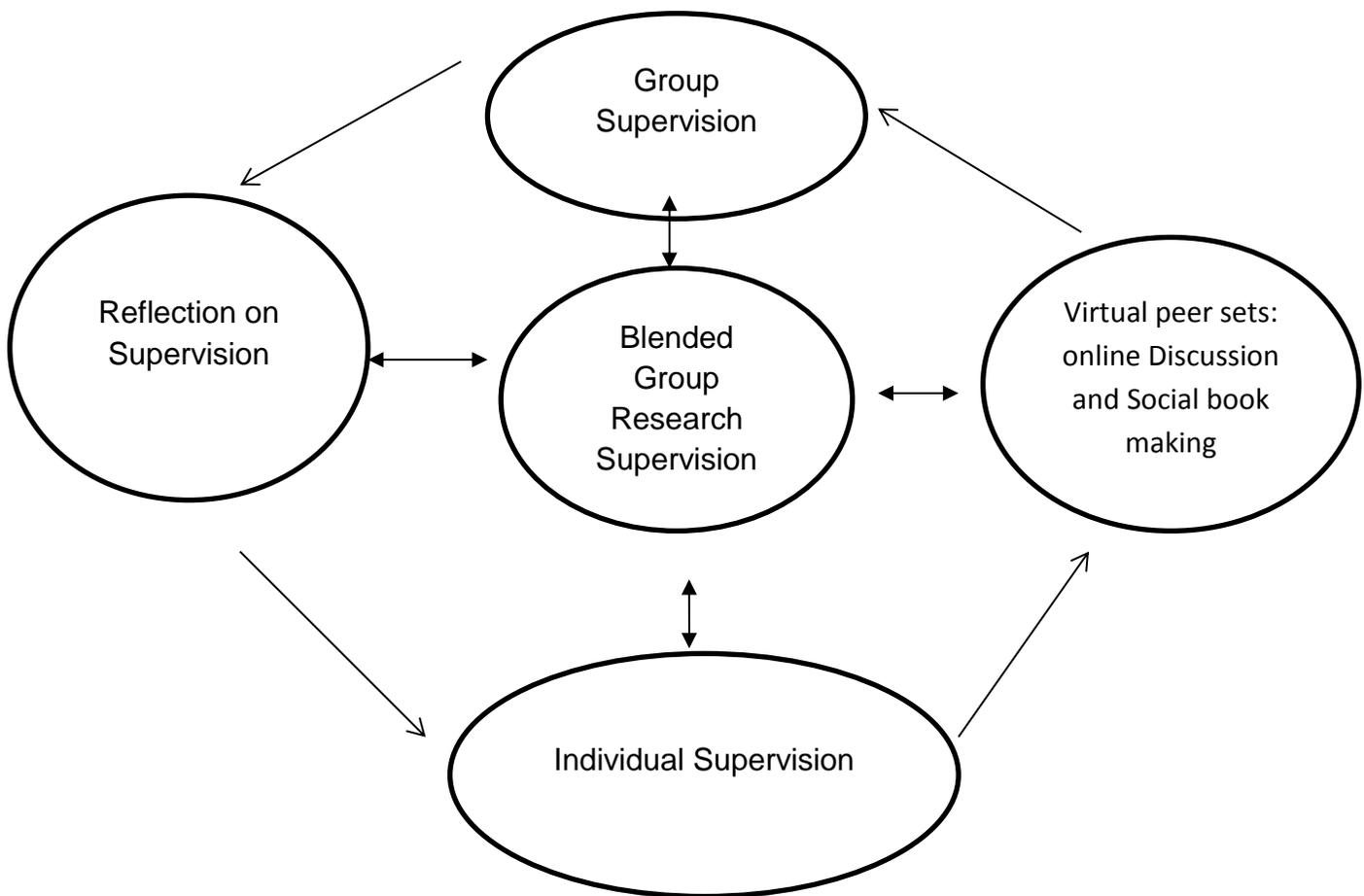


Figure 2.1 Illustration of how the blended group research supervision model is used in the research supervision

### **2.8.1.2 Advantages of the blended group research supervision model**

- It is a strategy to reduce student's isolation from one another;
- Encourages support among a group of students;
- Encourages exchange of ideas, skills and knowledge among the students;
- Supervisor's administrative workload is reduced;
- Student's confidence is enhanced unlike when they have to speak face-to face with their supervisors;
- Students develop writing skills and acculturate into the disciplines;
- Students are encouraged to exchange experience of frustrations and discuss research related issues;
- As a model which uses technology, it is viewed as a cost-effective of practice as face-to-face; and
- Students share experience and get exposed to the use of technological resources together (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013:04).

### **2.8.1.3 Disadvantages of the blended group research supervision model**

- As this model involves technology, the unavailability of technological resources may be a major source of frustration;
- Limited skills and knowledge on the side of supervisors and students on how to use the technology resources also remain a challenge; and
- The issues of the network breakdown sometimes work to the students and supervisors' disadvantage (Donnelly & Fitzmaurice, 2013:11).

#### **2.8.1.4 Summary of the blended group research supervision model**

The blended research supervision model is a combination of individual group and peer supervision models. The model is intended to form a community where students and supervision share ideas, skills and knowledge on research supervisors. This encourages students and supervisors to do self-assessment among them. It creates opportunities for social and academic interaction among the students and supervisors and uses technological resources such as online in order to accommodate all the students who are at a distance from the university.

#### **2.8.2 Traditional Research Supervision Model of Mc Callin (2012)**

##### **2.8.2.1 Essence of traditional research supervision model**

The traditional research supervision model is based on a single supervisor working with students over an extended period of time. The model allows the students to be on campus doing full-time research work. This model does not accommodate changed needs and expectations of students and communities. The supervision is dominated by face-to-face communication and interaction as the students are mostly fulltime (Mc Callin, 2012:68). In addition, the model prepares students for independent research. It assumes that the supervisor is an expert and the student is an apprentice and learns by doing. This model suits the intelligent and self-directed students who are capable of becoming independent researcher with minimal assistance from the supervisor (Mc Callin, 2012:68).

## Traditional Research Supervision Model structure

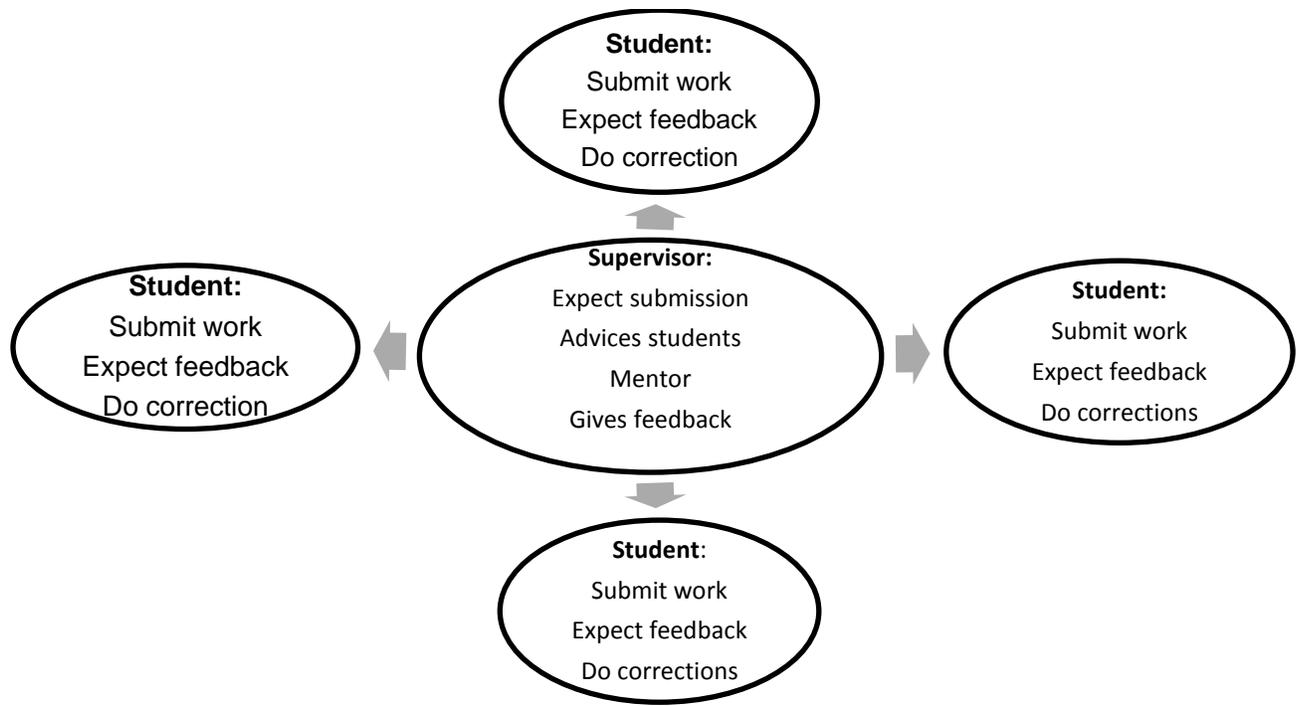


Figure 2.2 Illustration of how traditional research supervision is employed.

### 2.8.2.2 Advantages of the traditional research supervision model

- It prepares students for independent research;
- The supervisor and students experience regular contacts;
- The students communicate face-to-face with the supervisors;
- The supervisor is in charge of all the students' work and gives feedback alone;
- Most of the time full-time students have access to university resources as the model favours students who are always at the university; and
- Students seek little assistance from their supervisors (Mc Callin, 2012:69).

### **2.8.2.3 Disadvantages of the traditional research supervision model**

- It suits only the intelligent and self-directed students;
- Supervisors are overloaded with the administrations and supervision duties;
- Supervisors also have a limited chance of sharing ideas with other supervisors among the faculty school and department;
- It encourages the supervisor to face a large number of students alone which results in the supervisor not having enough time to attend to the individual students; and
- Students might be left alone for a longer period of the time when the supervisor is out of the university performing other work related activities or if he or she is on leave (Mc Callin, 2012:70).

### **2.8.2.4 Summary of the traditional research supervision model**

The traditional research supervision model is based on a single supervisor who supervises a large number of students alone. This model encourages independence researching and carters and favours the most intelligent students. Moreover, full-time students have an advantage than the part-time ones as they have enough time to consult with the supervisor while their counterparts, part-time students will be a distance away from the university. It is a disadvantage to students who rely on their supervisors and peers for research supervision Mc Callin (2012: 70).

## **2.8.3 The Supervisory Team Research Model of the University of Greenwich**

### **2.8.3.1 Essence of the supervisory team research model of the University of the Greenwich (2016)**

The supervisory team research model is a combination of the experienced supervisor and the novice supervisors. The experienced supervisor acts as a Director of Studies to the other supervisors. The Director of Studies is usually called the First Supervisor and is engaged in the research disciplines to direct and monitor the students' progress. The

First Supervisor also ensures that the students' progress is informed by up-to-date subject knowledge and research development. Other supervisors are responsible for supervising the students on regular and frequent basis. Where two faculties are involved in the supervision the Director of Studies will be from the faculty where the students are based (University of the Greenwich, 2017:12)

### Supervisory Team Research Model

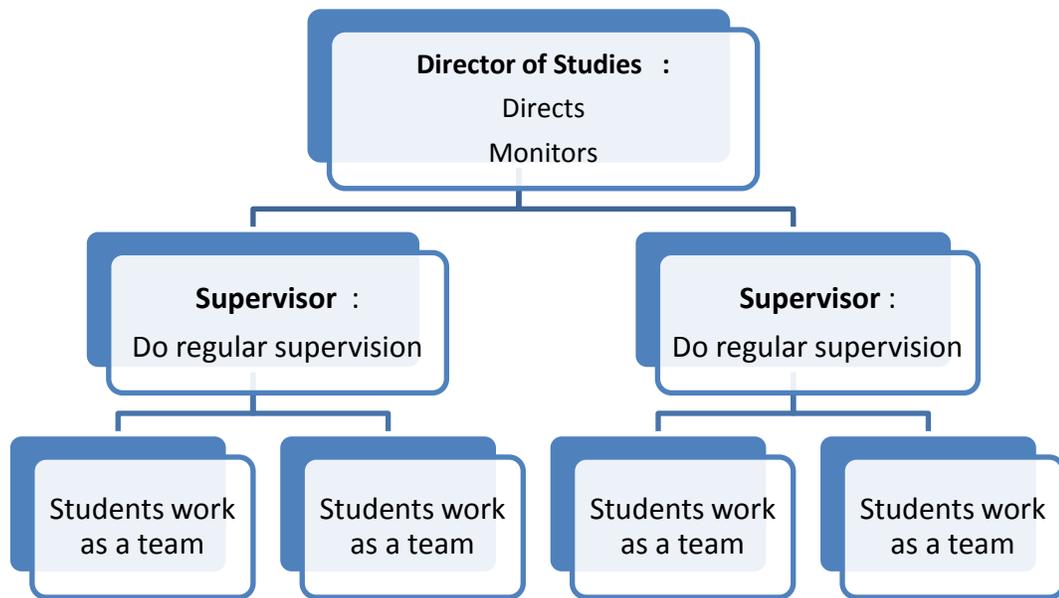


Figure: 2.3 Illustration of how supervisory team research model is employed

#### 2.8.3.2 Advantages of the supervisory team model

- Students and supervisors meet regularly in terms of consultation to share ideas; skills and knowledge about the research projects;
- Students gain different skills and knowledge of research from different supervisors and peer students;
- The administrative work load the supervisor is reduced;
- Students immediately receive guidelines and plans of their progress on the registration day; and

- Roles and responsibilities are clarified immediately to the students after they have registered (University of Greenwich, 2017:16).

### **2.8.3.3 Disadvantages of the supervisory team research model**

- Supervisors may have conflicting ideas and approaches of supervising the students;
- The conflicting ideas of the team might confuse the students;
- The more experienced supervisors might dominate the discussion and influence decision to be taken in supervisory meetings;
- Feedback to students might also be delayed as the supervisors, doing team supervision have to agree on the dates on which to give feedback to students (University of Greenwich, 2017:16).

### **2.8.3.4 Summary of the supervisory team research model**

The supervisory team model advocates for team work where the supervisors share the supervisory work with other supervisors and students. The work of the students is regularly evaluated on term basis. Supervisors work as a team in evaluating students' work.

## **2.9 CONCLUSION**

This research study had its focus on master's students' experiences of research supervision at the University of Limpopo, South Africa. The researcher reviewed the literature on learning theories on how master students learn seem not to point at a specific way recommended. However, many models of supervision and ideas about how supervision of master students may be used as a base to think through research supervision experiences of the master students.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter focuses on the methodology used in conducting this study. The discussion is structured around the research design employed as well as its relevancy in the context of this project. This is followed by an explanation of the population and sampling method adopted. The researcher also provides a description on data collection and data analysis techniques applied in this study.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The study adopted a qualitative research approach which is embedded within the interpretive paradigm. Since the interpretive paradigm is concerned with the subject world of human experiences, the social world was not regarded as “out there” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, and 2011:21). In this regard, the social world was constructed by human beings. This means that knowledge and reality are constructed by the individuals who take part in it (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010:343).

The study adopted a qualitative research approach which played a vital role in illuminating the meaning of the lived experiences. Data was collected at the site where the participants experienced the challenges under study (Creswell, 2014:77).

The researcher explored the reflective account of master students at the University of Limpopo. The use of the qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to understand the phenomenon under study and interpreted the meaning of the participants assigned to it (Creswell, 2014:770). In this study qualitative research provided the in-depth and detailed understanding about the concept research supervision from the rich voices of the participants, allowing for probing issues that lie beneath the surface of the presenting behaviors and actions (Cohen et al, 2011:219). The researcher interacted with the participants in their natural settings (Ary et al., 2014:451).

Case study design was employed with the aim of understanding master students' experiences of research supervision at the University of Limpopo (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:435). Case study is an exploration of a bounded system or single or multiple cases over a period of time (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:370). In this study, a single case of the University of Limpopo was studied. Since case study offers a multiple prospective analysis, the researcher did not just consider a voice and perspective of one or two participants, but the views of the other relevant groups (Maree, 2012:75). The researcher strove to make in-depth understanding on how the participants made meaning of the phenomenon under study in order to explore the experiences of master students regarding research supervision (Maree, 2012:75).

### **3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING**

Population is the study's target group of people that it intends to study or treat, while sampling is the process of selecting representative sample of individuals from the population of interest. In this study the population is the Master Students and their Supervisors at the University of Limpopo and a sample is the subset or individuals selected from the population (Majid, 2018: 03).

The study was conducted at the University of Limpopo. The university is located in the eastern side of Polokwane city. The university is located in the rural community of Mamabolo in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Purposive sampling was used in order to handpick the participants from the population that were included in the sample. The implication is that the participants were selected on the basis of possession of particular information regarding master students' research supervision (Cohen et al., 2012:143). The total sample consisted of twenty-four participants. This included twelve participants from the three schools in the Faculty of Humanities (Education, Social Sciences, and Languages and Communication Studies) and other twelve participants from the three schools in the Faculty of Management and Law (Economics and Management, Accountancy, and Law).

The following criteria were used to sample the participants in each faculty:

- Two students in the initial stage of their research projects having their proposal recently approved;
- Two students who are in the middle of their research studies;
- Two students who are in the field collecting and analysing data for their study;
- Senior and junior supervisors.

The following tables outline how sampling was conducted:

#### **FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

<b>School of Education</b>	<b>School of Languages and Communication Studies</b>	<b>School of Social Sciences</b>	<b>Total</b>
2 master students	2 master students	2 master students	6
2 supervisors	2 supervisors	2 supervisors	6
			12

**Table1: Study Sample: Faculty of Humanities**

#### **FACULTY OF ECONOMICS MANAGEMENT AND LAW**

<b>School of Accountancy</b>	<b>School of Economics and Management</b>	<b>School of Law</b>	<b>Total</b>
2 master students	2 master students	2master students	6
2 supervisors	2 supervisors	2 supervisors	6
			12

**Table 2: Study Sample: Faculty of Management and Law**

### **3.4. DATA COLLECTION**

Data collection techniques were triangulated in order to seek convergence and corroboration of the results from data collection techniques (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:12). The following data collection techniques were employed in order to enhance the richness and quality of the research findings:

- Phase1: Documents analysis

Documents such as Postgraduate Research Supervision Manual (2015); Annual Research Report (2015), Master Students Progress Reports 2013-2017; Draft Research Development and Support (2015); Code of Practice Admission Supervision and Assessment (2015); University Limpopo The Dawn, July-August 2011 as well as Master Students' Progress Reports 2013-2017 were analysed. The documents were provided by the supervisors from each sampled school. The researcher noted down information obtained from the documents in his field notebook. The researcher gained clear background and knowledge in terms of how best master students' research supervision could be improved from the reviewed documents (Cohen & Manion, 2012:143).

- Phase 2: Semi-structured interviews

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews in September 2017 with the sampled master students and supervisors from six schools. These were relevant and appropriate participants who were directly involved in the research supervision practice at the University of Limpopo. These semi-structured interviews allowed for probing and clarification on answers. The use of semi-structured interviews at this point was invaluable in the sense that it helped the researcher to obtain in-depth information about the thoughts, feelings and knowledge of the participants regarding research supervision (Cohen et al., 2011:420). Supervisors provided their views regarding supervision models they use to supervise master students. They pointed out the challenges they face in supervision, resources, as well as the guidelines available for the best practice of master students' research supervision.

- Phase 3: Observations

The researcher employed observations technique to collect data in order to note down the infrastructure such as the library, supervisors' office, Centre for Academic Excellence, lecture room, computer laboratory as well as the Postgraduate Centre. Fax machines, telephones, photocopiers and few printers were also noticed in some supervisors' offices. A checklist assisted the researcher in gaining an understanding

about the practice of master's students' research supervision. Observer field notes were kept (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014: 377).

### **3.5. DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative data analysis is a systematic process of coding, categorising and interpreting data in order to provide explanation of a single phenomenon of interest (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014:395). The implication is that the researcher synthesised and made meaning to the collected data (Christensen, 2012:93). Inductive data analysis was used in this study in order to achieve and answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014:28). In the same line (Cohen et al., 2011: 28) indicated that analytic induction involves making sense in terms of participants' definition of situation, noting patterns, themes and categories. To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, data was analysed according to the three phases of data collection techniques and the sampled schools and later compared and integrated to form one research report.

Content analysis was used to analyse data gathered from document analysis. Content analysis is concerned with the analysing and interpreting recorded material about human behavior (Ary et al., 2012:32). This implies that data was first read, reread, interpreted, categorised, coded and themes identified. The researcher employed thematic data analysis in analysing data collected from semi- structured interviews and observations. Data from semi-structured interviews was first transcribed, read and proof-read carefully, categorised, coded into main themes and later into minor themes. Categories and patterns emerged from the data rather than being imposed on prior data collection. (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:520). Data collected from observations was also read proof-read, categorised, coded into main themes and further into minor themes. Data was later compared and integrated to form one research report (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014: 354).

### **3.6. CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented research approach and design adopted in conducting this study. The chapter unpacked the population, sampling, data collection and analysis technique.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the findings and the discussions of this study. The study explored the experiences of Master students regarding research supervision at the University of Limpopo. The findings are presented according to the data collection techniques employed.

#### **4.2 FINDINGS FROM DOCUMENT ANALYSIS**

##### **4.2.1 Financial Support for Research Supervision**

The University of Limpopo offers a wide range of funded programmes to develop and support research initiatives by increasing productivity in research outcomes and promote quality in the field. One of the objectives of the programmes is to provide funding and leveraging opportunities to acquire state of the art research facilities and equipment. The university has established support for career advancement of young researchers and researcher staff from designated groups such as Post-Doctoral fellowship programme (University of Limpopo Annual Research Report, 2015).

The University of Limpopo has masters and doctoral prestigious scholarship. The purpose of this scholarship is to permit the university to compete with other universities for the best postgraduate students. The university is aimed at removing the financial burden from students and that students should complete their studies with the minimum study time. This scholarship is awarded to any student from institutions of higher learning with at least a 70% average mark in his or her honours degree, who will register for a full research degree. The period of funding is a maximum of two years for master students. The scholarship is renewable for second year subject to satisfactory progress. Master students are awarded R100 000 per year, and this money must be used for books, tuition and accommodation fees, typing, printing paper (Draft Research Development and Support, Incentives and Awards Programmes and Procedures, 2015).

Furthermore, the University of Limpopo has a Top-up funding for masters' and doctoral students. This funding is used to supplement inadequate bursaries given to students but do not cover all the expenses of such students. In other words, the top-up fund is granted to students who have received financial aid from external agencies which do not cover essential aspects of the students' research projects. The university considers the conditions of matching of grant as stipulated by the "Memorandum of Understanding" signed with the funding agencies.

The University of Limpopo provides a grant to both postgraduate supervisors and master students. The postgraduate supervisor support grant is meant to ensure that the departments have enough resources to meet project requirements for the registered postgraduate students. Social sciences usually require consumable resources and students in such departments and disciplines undertake fieldwork trips (Draft Research Development and Incentives and Awards Programmes and Procedures, 2015).

This study also revealed that postgraduate students are funded to cover reasonable running expenses directly associated with their specific research projects. In addition, the grant is used for research consumables such as small items of equipment, inter-library loans expenses, travel and subsistence for research purposes, such as fieldtrips to collect data. This funding is awarded to students who have proof of registration, acceptable research proposal by the Research Higher Degrees Committee, and the ethical clearance certificate for the project.

There is a National Research Foundation bursary available for full-time masters, doctoral, and post-doctoral students. An online National Research Foundation bursary application form is available. Students need to complete the form in July/August for funding for the following academic year. A bursary from their supervisor's funded projects is also available. It is also indicated that the university provides financial assistance to master students in a form of waiver (Research Development and Administration Manual for Postgraduate, 2015:35).

#### **4.2.2 Workshops and Seminars for Research Supervision**

This study revealed that departments, schools and faculties arrange regular workshops, seminars, research presentations and discussion occasions. These usually take place at the university and consist of academic staff and postgraduate students. As such, those activities do not have high costs. Supervisors, HoDs, Directors of Schools and Executive Deans have the responsibility to support and develop master students' research capabilities. The Directors of Schools are expected to offer discipline research induction on an annual basis. The Division of Research Development and Administration in consultation with the disciplines offer in-house research training programmes for honours, masters and doctoral students. The programmes include modules in research induction such as research methodology, research ethics, project and time management, proposal writing, funding agencies and publishing (University of Limpopo Annual Research Report, 2015). HoDs request permission from the Director of Research to invite editors of accredited journals to come to the university. The editors conduct research support seminars for all academic staff and students (Research Development and Administration Manual for Postgraduate, 2015:35). According to the Draft Research Development and Support, Incentives and Awards Programmes Procedures (2015), the target university use research assistants, postgraduate students at Honours, Masters and Doctoral levels, who are employed on a part-time basis to assist with research supervision. These students work on restricted hours as they should have time to do their research work. Postgraduate students' interns and contracted research assistants assist master's students with research in order to further increase research outputs.

The University of Limpopo Annual Research Report (2015) highlights that the university has employed a statistician who conducts workshops and seminars on survey and experimental design, methodology, sampling and sample size, determination, questionnaire design, capturing of survey data, and statistical analysis of quantitative data. The statistician also assists the staff and students with the presentation and interpretation of data and results.

A Research Postgraduate Supervision Manual has been developed for generic research training for postgraduate students and presents an internal postgraduate course. The course covers induction research, proposal writing, literature review, research methodology, academic writing skills, and project management. The Research Committee with consultation with faculties and school arrange for writing retreat, where students are taught on how to write literature review, background and motivation, research methodology as well as referencing (University of Limpopo Annual Research Report, 2015).

The university conducts an external research training programme. The external agencies are arranged, where students go to another institution to acquire specific training. The university pays for such visits. Postgraduate Research-Related Training Fund which is allocated to each faculty to cover costs for research visits, training seminars as well as workshops (University of Limpopo Annual Research Report, 2015:38). The University Research Office also held a three-day workshop to instill academic staff with supervision skills. Supervisors were assisted with expertise to support and assist the postgraduate students effectively. This workshop was also conducted in order equip supervisors with skills that will help in improving the throughput and the pass rate of postgraduate students (University of Limpopo, The Dawn July-August, 2011:06). The workshop was also about ensuring supervisors that effective supervision is a skill which requires supervisors to master the subject knowledge, theoretical grounding, knowledge of applicable methods and creativity, interpersonal skills, familiarity with institutional guidelines as well as rigour (University of Limpopo The Dawn July- August, 2011:06).

#### **4.2.3 Master Students' Progress Reports**

Master students' progress reports revealed that twenty-two students were on proposal writing stages in September-October 2017 when the researcher analysed the progress reports, and twenty students' proposals were approved at the Departments, Schools Faculty and Turfloop Ethics Research Committee levels. It noted that three students were collecting data; two were at the final stage of finalising their research reports while four have submitted their reports at the external examiners. One student was expected

to graduate in the 2017 spring graduation ceremony (University of Limpopo Master Students' Progress Reports, 2017).

In 2016, it was shown that in the master's student progress reports of the six sampled schools, that the university had seven students who were at the proposal writing stage and three students whose proposals had been approved from the departments, schools, faculty as well as to the TREC levels. The university also had two students who were busy writing research reports, two dropped out, as well as two whose reports were submitted to the external examiners (University of Limpopo Master students' Progress Reports, 2013-2017).

The University Master Students' Progress Reports reflected that in 2013 September-October six master's students were busy with the research process. One student was at the proposal writing stage. Three students' research proposals were approved at TREC one student had dropped out and the last two were finalising their research reports (University of Limpopo Master Students' Progress Reports, 2013-2017).

### **4.3 FINDINGS FROM SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

#### **4.3.1 Research Supervision Model**

The study revealed that supervisors are engaged in different supervision models, and there is no fixed structure in place that channels which supervision model should be followed in the different departments of the school. The supervisors indicated that they employ models of supervision such as the traditional research supervision model, where there is one supervisor supervising his or her students alone, the co-supervision model, in which supervisors have to pair for supervision and partnership supervision model where the students and supervisors work together as partners and the supervisor is a senior of the group.

It is pointed out that most of the supervisors employ the traditional research supervision model, where one supervisor faces a group of students alone. *"Most of the supervisors employ apprenticeship style of supervision while very few use co-supervision model"*. Supervisor: 1. *"We are supervised by one supervisor. This makes our work very easy*

*because we have developed a good working relationship with him. We know when to meet and discuss our research projects. Our supervisors have provided us with the supervision manuals to which we refer for information and procedures.”* Student: 1.

The study showed that the schools allocate supervisors where a group of students is supervised by one supervisor. Supervisor: 2 *“We have no specific research supervision model to follow. I am supervising my students alone, but sometimes I seek assistance from other supervisors, especially when I deal with statistics”*

Student: 2 *“We prefer one supervisor as long as the supervisor knows the topic. There is no need for more than one supervisor.”* Student 2 further pointed out that with more than one supervisor, there are always delays in getting feedback as the supervisors have to wait for both of them to agree on feedback date, which is time consuming. Furthermore, Student 3 mentioned that sometimes co-supervision creates conflicting views between the supervisors which confuses them.

Student 3: *“I do not prefer co-supervision. One supervisor is always perfect and right as long as he or she is conversant with the topic. There is no need to have two supervisors, who will delay us when we expect feedback from them because they have to agree on how and when feedback should be given. Sometimes we get conflicting views and that frustrates us.”*

One supervisor also indicated that he prefers supervising students alone. Supervisor: 3 *“I supervise these students alone. I arrange with them at the beginning of the programme on how we shall conduct supervision, agree on date and time to meet each other. We have contact session schedule of the whole year”.*

The students have to sign a (MoU) at the beginning of the programme regarding how they will work with the supervisor. Student: 4 *“We signed a (MoU) immediately after the first consultation process. This (MoU) is a formal agreement between the student and the supervisor on how student and the supervisor are going to work throughout the programme term. (MoU) outlines the basic principles of supervision.*

However, some participants pointed out that traditional supervision model delays them. They were worried about the slow pace of making progress in their proposal writing because the supervisors could not assist them on time. In addition, the students indicated that it took a long time for the proposal to be approved at the Faculty and Turfloop Research Committee. Moreover, it was reported that lack of co-supervision in some department delays students' progress, because some time supervisors go for teaching practice with other students and supervision stops until they come back.

Student 5: *"I submitted my work to my supervisor and it took about a month without receiving feedback. When I tried to find out, I discovered that my supervisor was out of the country attending conferences. So I was left alone frustrated and without anything to do."* Student 6: *"The challenge is that master's is a two-year programme, but you may end up doing it over a period of four years because of the delay in the faculty and TREC to get your proposal approved. The proposal at our university takes many stages to get approved. You may even think of dropping out'.*

The Participants noted that co-supervision is practiced by supervisors in some schools. Supervisor 4 indicated that co-supervision is beneficial to both the supervisors and students, and that it helps them to cope with the problems that other supervisors might be experiencing. These views were substantiated by Student 1 who said her supervisors share the sections of their projects when giving feedback. Supervisor 6 reported that co-supervision has practical advantages to students because it exposes them to a wide range of knowledge and experience which enriches their research work. *"Our students are benefiting from co-supervision as we approach research in different ways which gives the students opportunities to acquire research skills. We share the sections of research writing steps among ourselves and assist the students."* Supervisor: 6. Co-supervision works, especially when one supervisor is not good in working with statistics. Here supervisors pair themselves up and form a team of supervisors from different departments.

Supervisor 1 said that he had adopted the partnership supervision model. He pointed out that partnership supervision model is a model where all students and supervisors are equal but the supervisor is just a senior in such a partnership. The supervisor

indicated that they sit together, share, discuss and help every individual student together.

Supervisor 1: *"I do not like master-servant type of supervision. It discourages my students. I prefer partnership, where we are equal but I happen to be a senior partner. The students will sit in groups then I give them the sections of the proposal according to the step which should be followed in proposal writing then the students will discuss and write draft on those sections. The students will then be given the chance to report on what they have drafted. After the presentations there will be questions and comments and corrections"*.

Supervisors indicated the lack of commitment from the students. They cited that the students seemed not knowing why they have registered for masters' programmes because they show no commitment in doing their work. Students only read what is in line with their curriculum and then just reproduce. Moreover, students lack insight of what they are writing about because they do not read broadly. Supervisor 2 highlighted that some students show no commitment of learning because they have a tendency of registering at the beginning of the year and would then disappear from the university.

Supervisor 2: *"It is a problem to work with some of the students. Look just now, I was with a student who disappeared from the university from the beginning of last quarter when I was just about to write and submit my quarterly report to the department. I looked for her all over until I sent her colleague to search for her and fortunately she is here today, but she missed a lot"*.

The study reflected that some students just rush to write their proposals before they have searched for rich information about their topics. This delays them because they would be forced to start all over again. Supervisor 3 pointed out that students lack a reading culture. They do not read enough. *"You give the students a proposal assignment to write today, and without searching for enough information, they start writing and submitting"*. Supervisor: 3.

Supervisor 4 reported that students are supervised by one supervisor, but there is time where co-supervision works, especially when one supervisor is not good in working with

statistics. Student 2 indicated that they are supervised by one supervisor. However, there was time when supervisors pair themselves up and form a team of supervisors from different departments.

The study revealed that students registered for masters in Law have challenges in research. *“Students admitted to this masters’ programme are not competent enough. They cannot write academically. Some fail to construct paragraphs logically. In fact, we struggle to ensure that they develop research skills”*. Supervisor: 5

Supervisor: 5 *“We have a challenge of students who show no knowledge of research methodology background. We have to start by teaching them research methodology before we introduce them on how to write proposals and that consumes our time. We assume the methodology they received in their undergraduate programmes was not up to standard.”*

Supervisor 6 also pointed out that the supervision progress is very slow, especially at the beginning of the programme as they start by teaching research methodology. Supervisor 1 showed that there was a need to test students on research writing skills before they got admitted to the master’s programme. *“I think there should be an aptitude test where students could just write research steps to be followed as well as the structure of proposal first before a student could be admitted into the masters’ programme”* Supervisor 1

#### **4.3.2 Support from Supervisors for Research Supervision**

The study revealed that students are supported in many ways. Supervisor 1 mentioned that students are given guidance on how to plan, write proposals and search for information on the internet. In addition, Supervisor 1 indicated that students are also taught on how to refine research topics so that they can be researchable for the whole period of the programme. Furthermore, students are supplied with articles which are relevant to the research topics by the supervisors. Supervisor 1: *“We go to an extent of searching relevant articles for student’s topics, download and print them for our students.”*

Student 3: *“Our supervisors help us in many ways. Our supervisors also engage us in work study projects as a way of alleviating us from financial difficulties”*. The students also mentioned that sometimes supervisors edit their work as a way of trying to push their research projects. Moreover, Student 4 pointed out that sometimes supervisors would get relevant research books from the library for them so that they could have enough sources for their research projects.

Equipment such as projectors, overhead screens, computers are provided to supervisors in order to assist the students during their presentations at department and school levels. Supervisor 2 said that the printing materials and photocopies are available for free at the library. It was also reported that the faculties used to arrange Saturday research supervision meetings, where students are assisted on some parts of their research projects, like proposal writing as well as writing the chapters. The participants indicated that the university has appointed a person who is assisting students to access information on the internet. Furthermore, Student 1 stated that her supervisor also refers her to the website where she might get more information on her research project.

However, student 5 had a contradicting view: *“I never had any support, especially when I started writing my proposal. In fact, the master’s programme I was engaged in was never supplemented by the honours education I received at this university. It was totally different and difficult for me to start with my proposal. I submitted my proposal to the supervisor many times before I could get it right to be presented to the departmental.”*

On the other hand, it was mentioned that some supervisors provided great support to their students. This was substantiated by Student 6 who stated that her supervisor started from the beginning by teaching her how to write academically, orientated her on research methodology as she realised that she was lacking these skills. *“I struggled a lot, she had to start from scratch as she had realised that I was lacking these skills”* Moreover, Supervisor 3 reported that sometimes she had to edit the students’ work as a form of support, as she realised that the student had financial challenges regarding paying out editors.

The participants reported that they had experienced great support on the part of their supervisors. Student 6: *"I had no money during my data collection stages. So I reported that to my supervisor who helped me in applying for funding from the Agri South Africa, for transport and accommodation. I was collecting data at different scattered Mpumalanga farms and I had to travel from one farm to another. My supervisor helped me a lot."*

In addition, supervisors also reported that they assisted students in many different ways. Supervisor 1: *"I used to send my students' proposals to my friend who is a professional editor and would edit the student's work at a very reasonable price and edit it professionally"*.

Supervisor 2 indicated that he managed to trace a students' proposal which was reported missing in the department. He pointed out that they had appointed research assistants in their department who helped the students in scrutinising their students' proposals, before the proposal could be submitted to the department for presentation.

Supervisor 3: *"I give my students 100% attention whenever need arises. Feedback is given in time and I do corrections with them. I also commit myself to working with them until late in the evening trying to cover all the sections which need my attention"*

Supervisor 2: *"I allocate time in the process of supervision to specifically dwell on the procedures stipulated in the manual that need to be followed, especially when my students show that they are struggling with their work."*

Student 1: *"I managed to be awarded a scholarship because of my supervisor who gave me lists of companies' contacts that I could apply for financial assistance"*.

Student 1 also indicated that he was struggling to apply online for ethical clearance certificate at TREC, but after informing his supervisor, the supervisor took the student through all the steps of applying online and the student ended up managing to get the clearance certificate.

On the other hand, student 2 mentioned that she did not get that full support as she was staying far away from the university. Student 2: *"I did not get that full support I expected; I never receive any of the guidelines stipulating how I should carry the project"*

*process, no schedule for meetings. I have to call my supervisor if I need to discuss issues with him and most of the responses from my supervisor were that he was busy and I should call him later to arrange for a meeting.*” However, she said that she started to rely on the information she searched on the internet and consultations and engagement with other master students.

Student 1: *“Our supervisor is very kind and open to us. We started by planning how we should be supervised. Our supervisor sets the work targets, draws up supervision procedures and submission deadlines with us. Our supervisor would inform us in advance of the rescheduling of contact sessions, should he be committed with something work related.”*

In addition, the students indicated that sometimes supervisors would provide them with new computer software which is updated than the ones at the computer laboratory so that they can access new information related to their work. However, some part-time students pointed out that they did not have enough support from their supervisors like their counterparts, that is, full-time students, because they are always away from the university. Furthermore, Student 2 indicated that supervisors have little time that they allocate to them, especially in the afternoon as they will be faced with a large number of students to assist.

Another view was that part-time students are frustrated by supervisors who request students to send their work on hard copies because they have no printing papers.

Student 2: *“I was very frustrated by my supervisor who said I should no longer send him my work electronically, but to travel a long distance just to submit my work to his office as he has no printing papers.”*

The overall impression from the participants was that the university provided support to the master students. Student 3 affirmed that the university has installed Eviews Software, which is a programme which students use to analyse their statistical data. In addition Student 4 indicated that to provide more support, the university made students aware of the National Research Foundation, which sponsors students with registration and tuition fees every year. Moreover, Supervisor 1 indicated that the university invites

outside mentors to assist them with research work. On the contrary, some participants reported that they had experienced research supervision challenges. Supervisor1: *“We are experiencing accommodation problems. We do not have a specific lecture room for our master’s students. We always go up and down looking for a vacant lecture room as we want to have contact sessions with a large group of students and this frustrates us.”* On the other hand, Supervisor 4 indicated that the university has a quantic programme for statistical data analysis sponsored by the South African Reserve Bank and it is assisting most of the master’s students with statistical data analysis.

#### **4.3.3 Supervisors’ Expectations**

Supervisor 1: *“We expect students to be top class students whose work will not be at an average level”*. Supervisor 1: *“I expect my students to learn to write academically, read a lot and paraphrase, no plagiarism”*. Apart from that Supervisor 2 indicated that there was a need to show enthusiasm by encouraging the students to attend workshops arranged by the school even on Saturday. Students are expected to do peer-supervision where students come together and share ideas. It is reported that supervisor expect students to write and submit their research work in time in order for him to make comments and give feedback within three days after the students’ submission. Supervisor mentioned that he expect students to learn to paraphrase. Supervisor: 2 *“I expect my students to learn to paraphrase.”*

Participants indicated that they expect commitment from students. Supervisor 3 indicated that she expect her students to communicate freely with her regarding their projects anytime they need to discuss issues that they feel challenging. She pointed out that her students should become independent researchers. Students should also acknowledge that they have challenges and be prepared to be constructively criticised. Supervisor 4 argued that he needs his students to work hard, do quality work and be disciplined.

Supervisor 4:*“I need students who are open- minded, who can communicate everything they find challenging to them. Students should learn to be independent researchers and*

*acknowledge their mistakes. My students should always be committed to work hard and submit quality work at the right time.”*

Supervisor 5 argued that he expected the students to publish at least one article from their masters' dissertation once they complete and continue to study until they get a PhD, not to stop at the master's level. In addition, Supervisor 1 reported that students were expected to meet stipulated submission deadlines and honour the consultation appointments. Furthermore, supervisor 5 mentioned that the students should always work hard, show dedication, commitment as well as engage with other fellow students with regard to their research work. The study indicated that the supervisors have higher expectations from the students. Supervisor 6 supported the idea by stating that he expected the students to be independent. Supervisor 6 stated that he expected the students to be competent and confident in doing their work. The students are also expected to be committed at all times and show progress in their work. Supervisor 6: *“I have high expectations for my students. They should be able to compete, be confidence and work independently in order to represent our university at conferences.”* In addition, he indicated that his door is always open for students to be assisted, so he expects the students to email, call and SMS him during working hours.

#### **4.3.4 Students' Expectations**

Student1: *“I expect to access my supervisor whenever I need his assistance. Basically, if I am given more time and explanation that has rich information, it will motivate me to develop better learning skills.”* Student 2 said that she expected her supervisor to provide her with guidance and feedback within a short period of time. Student 2: *“Feedback after submission always motivates me, because that itself gives me time to go through my supervisor's comments, do corrections and submit back in time”.* Students indicated that they required guidance and support from their supervisor throughout the stages of their research process. They mentioned that they valued early feedback to shape their research projects.

The students indicated that they expect that the supervisor would provide them with research resources such as relevant articles for literature review. They expect that

supervisor would assist them in choosing their research topics, guide in selecting the research methodology and also on how to structure research proposals.

Student: 3 *"We expect our supervisor to provide us with research resources such as print out of articles for literature review. Our supervisor should help us when we choose research topics, guide us in selecting relevant research methodology as well as on how to structure proposals."*

Student 4 reported that she expected her supervisor to teach and give her notes like when she was an undergraduate student. Student 4: *"I thought at the masters' level we are still going to do a lot of reading notes from our lecturer and just reproduce. But it was different because my supervisor would only show direction, and guides you on how to approach your research work. So I found myself in a situation where I have to be independent and strive to do things on my own so that the work remains mine"*.

Furthermore, Student 5 indicated that his expectation was that his supervisor would be professional, transparent and able to understand her challenges regarding the research project.

Student:5 *"I expected my supervisor to give constructive criticism so that I can improve my work. I needed him to give professional guidance and be transparent to me and know that I learn by committing mistakes and that I am prepared to listen and comply with research supervision procedures"*.

#### **4.3.5 Resources for Research Supervision**

Supervisor 1 pointed out that the university has enough research supervisors for each faculty, school and department. Supervisor 1 indicated that there are facilities such as Centre for Academic Excellence and resource centers. Supervisor: 1 *"We have enough research supervisors in each faculty, school and department who do the supervising work effectively."* There are facilities such as center for academic excellence and resource center." Supervisor: 1.

However, supervisor 2 argued that resources are available for students, but for the supervisor, there are very limited. Supervisor 2: *"Look, I am Head of Department. I have*

*no printer in my office. If a student sends me his or her work on line, I can't download it from my computer; I have to go upstairs to print and collect that. I am a supervisor who is teaching, marking, supervising as well as doing publications but, I have no infrastructure."*

It is further noted that the university has many resources. The university has installed Wi-Fi which enables the students and supervisors to access the internet for free. The university technician also assists students in linking their computers with the university Internet so that they can access it wherever the students are on campus. The University also has appointed subject librarians who assist the students in searching for information on the internet at the library. The computer laboratory has a number of search engines available in order for students to search information, for example 'Google Scholar.' Student 6: *"I did not have to struggle to get information as we have a library with recent research text books, computer laboratory as well as Wi-Fi which is installed in our personal computers for free"*.

The participants indicated that there are supervision guidelines which are provided by the research office of the university. It was reported that students are also provided with postgraduate research manuals at the beginning of the first year. Supervisor 2 pointed out that the guidelines are always revisited during the course of supervision throughout the programme just to remind the students of the procedures to be followed. Supervisor: 2 *"We have postgraduate research manual which is given to master students at the beginning of each year immediately after they have registered."*

#### **4.3.6 Communication for Research Supervision**

The study revealed that students and supervisor have effective ways of communication. Supervisor 1 reported that they contact one another via emails, SMS, telephone and cell phone calls as well as face-to-face contacts. The supervisor also mentioned that although all these methods of communication are convenient, she preferred that students send their research report in the form of a hard copy so that she makes comments on the copy and gives feedback face-to-face to the student.

Supervisor:1 *“We communicate effectively through emails, SMS, telephone calls, cell phone calls as well as face-to-face contacts. However, I prefer that students send their work in the form of hard copy in order that I could write comments and give feedback face-to-face to the student.”*

Student 1 affirms that face-to-face communication makes supervision easy, as students talk directly with supervisors on areas of their projects which need the students to effect changes. So students would note down some of the changes as they are busy speaking. Student: 1 *“Most of the time we call, SMS, email our supervisors. However, face-to-face interaction with supervisors develops effective and efficient mutual understanding and a working partnership.”*

Part-time students also concurred that face-to-face supervision is best, but it favors' the full-time students as they are always at the university. Student:1 *“I have a problem of distance and time as I spent time at work. Therefore, to visit the supervisor, I need to take one day leave from my work. I prefer emails and telephone calls because they are cheaper and a convenient way of communication.*

Supervisor 1 pointed out that at the beginning communication with her students used to be sour as some of students would not have an understanding of what they were supposed to do. So as the process of supervision unfolded, the students got used to the procedures and met the required standards and deadlines and communication improved.

Supervisor 1: *“At first the students did not like me because I was referred to as a strict person, especially on deadlines. I stick to the agreed deadlines and I wanted the students to be committed all the time. However, as the students got used to me in the process, they did the corrections and submitted on time. They started to understand me and communicated regularly with me because my way of supervising was working towards their advantages. They submitted work today and I give them feedback on the third day after submission.”*

The study also revealed that the technician at the computer laboratory assists the students in setting up student email addresses. Students send their research work to

their supervisors through this student email address. Part-time students who have limited access to the university internet facilities are enabled to access the university email. Cell phones which are versatile mobile devices are also employed by the students and their supervisors to contact one another.

#### **4.4 FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS**

**The following were observed:**

##### **4.4.1 Infrastructure**

The university has a librarian who assists students in accessing sources of information for their research projects. There are printers and photocopiers in the library which students use for free. The library has research text books although most of them are outdated. A computer laboratory is available where students have access to information and able to type their work. A technician is also available in the computer laboratory to assist students in linking the students' computers with the university internet. The postgraduate center is available where students meet to discuss and write research projects. The researcher also noticed a resource center which is used by supervisors for conducting supervision of group of students. The Center for Academic Excellence helps students with their work.

##### **4.4.2 Electronic Machines and Furniture**

Master students have access to facilities such as the internet. The university has installed Wi-Fi for every student and academic staff to access the internet for free. There are computers in each supervisor's office. The researcher also observed telephones and fax machines in supervisors' offices. Old printers and photocopiers were also seen in one supervisor's office. The researcher noticed that the office had very few furniture. There were desks and few chairs including the supervisor's chair. In one supervisors' office there were cabinets with files and documents.

## **4.5. DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS**

The section below provides a discussion of the themes that emerged from this study and the statements that support these themes from the literature.

### **4.5.1 Financial Support for Research Supervision**

Students are provided with financial assistance obtainable at the university. The university has Masters' and Doctoral Prestigious Scholarships established with the purpose of competing with other universities. The scholarship also aimed at removing financial burden from students. The university has a top-up funding for Masters and Doctoral students which supplements inadequate bursaries given to students although it does not cover all the expenses of the students.

The participants confirmed that the university provides financial assistance to the students in the form of a waiver where master students are awarded R10 000 each year. The students are also advised to apply for National Research Foundation (NRF) bursary which assists them with registration and tuition fees. One student indicated that his supervisor helped him in getting a sponsorship from the South African Agri when he was collecting data from different scattered farms in Mpumalanga Province.

The literature of this study also showed that universities are playing an important role in assisting students to access external scholarships. There is internal funding available in the form of teaching assistantship where students assist supervisors in teaching. Some universities have initiated internal funding policies in order to reduce students' need to work outside the university (Abddin, 2011:210). In addition, Holtman and Mukwanda (2014:189) point out that student are engaged in work study projects as a way of cushioning themselves from financial difficulties. Universities in South Africa have the National Student Financial Aid Scheme to support all the deserving students at the level of undergraduate and postgraduate, although the scheme is adequate (DHET, 2011:11) In addition, the literature notes that at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, master's students undertaking supervised research are automatically entitled to the Postgraduate Research Student Fund (Auckland University of Technology, 2017:13).

Moreover, in England, at University of York, master students who are less than 30 years of age are offered study loan of about 10 000 dollars (University of York, 2018:04).

#### **4.5.2 Workshops and Seminars for Research Supervision**

The University of Limpopo offers workshops and seminars to students. A postgraduate research manual for generic research training for postgraduate course is established to provide assistance to students. The course consists of: Proposal writing, research methodology, literature review, academic writing skills and project management. The University of Limpopo Annual Report 2015 notes that supervisors, HoDs, directors of schools and executive deans have the responsibility to support and develop master students. The Division of Research Development and Admission, with consultation of the disciplines, design and offer in-house research training programmes for Honours, Masters and doctoral students. The university takes students out on writing retreat workshops where they spend a week. It is also reported that the faculties arrange internal seminars at the university.

It is stated in the literature that the University of Western Cape has a postgraduate division where students with language problems and research writing skills problems are assisted. Supervisors use conferences and workshops to boost students' confidence by presenting papers and seminars. Supervisors arrange orientation week during which master students are offered support courses on research as well as open questions and answer sessions (Holtman & Mokwanda, 2014:188). At the Graduate Research School at Western Sydney University in Australia, students are provided with online modules and seminars. They are supported on how to write proposals, presentations and report writing. The university also offers three workshops: the first workshop at the beginning of proposal writing, the second workshop is held after the proposal is approved in the middle of the dissertation writing process and the third one happens towards data analysis process, aiming at assisting the students in understanding coding, clustering and identifying themes from the data collected (Western Sydney University, 2016:14). The literature also showed that the Adelaide University provides master students with Career and Research Skills Training (University of Adelaide, 2018:13). At Manchester University workshops are arranged,

where students are introduced to research components such as relevant topic selection, methodology, literature reviews as well as data analysis (Manchester University, 2018:11).

#### **4.5.3 Master Students' Progress Reports**

It is noted in the master students' progress report 2013-2017 that master students' who are engaged in research projects have different progress. The 2017 University of Limpopo's students' progress report showed that a high number of students are at the proposal stage, followed by a number of those whose proposals have been approved at the three levels: department, school faculty as well as the TREC. Twenty-two were at the proposal stage and another twenty had their proposals approved, while three were collecting data and two were finalising their research reports. Four students' reports had gone for external examining. One student was expected to graduate at the Spring Graduations (University of Limpopo Master Students' Progress Reports, 2013-2017).

Another indication was that in 2016, few students were at the proposal stage. Seven were busy writing proposals while the other three had their proposals approved at the TREC. Two students dropped out, two were writing research reports, and another two had their research reports submitted to the external examiners. In addition, the 2013 progress report also revealed that only one student was at the proposal writing stage and three had their proposal approved by the research committee. Another two had submitted their research projects for external examination. One student was reported as having abandoned his/her research study (University of Limpopo Master Students' Progress Reports, 2013-2017).

#### **4.5.4 Research Supervision Model**

The responses by the participants indicated that the university has no specific supervision model followed by the different departments and schools. It was revealed that most of the supervisors employ the traditional single supervisory model and some schools employ co-supervision. The findings of this study are congruent to the literature of this study. It is stated literature that some universities employ traditional research supervision where one supervisor supervises a group of students alone. The literature

shows that this type of supervision model has advantages of preparing students to be independent researchers; students communicate face-to-face with their supervisors and that students seek little assistance from their supervisors (Mc Callin, 2012:68). However, the model isolates students from other students and this situation limits students' research capacity. Supervisors also have a limited chance of sharing ideas with other supervisors among faculties, schools, and departments. The traditional supervision model encourages supervisors to face a large number of students alone, which results in the supervisor not having enough time to attend to individual students. With this model, students might be left alone for a longer time if the supervisor is out of the university performing other work related activities.

On the other hand, schools that practice co-supervision give their students opportunities to acquire different research skills. Students are exposed to a range of knowledge and experiences which enrich the students' research work (Mc Callin, 2012:68). In addition, at the University of Greenwich, Supervisory Team Model is employed, where supervisors share supervisory work with other supervisors and students. Supervisors work as a team and regularly evaluate students' work on term basis. However, the supervisors might have conflicting ideas and approach of supervising the students and such conflicts of the team might confuse the students. Feedback to be given to students might also be delayed by such conflicting team members (University of Greenwich, 2012:16).

#### **4.5.5 Support from Supervisors for Research Supervision**

The study revealed that students were supported in many ways. Students were given guidance on how to plan, write proposals, search for information on the internet and taught to refine research topics. Supervisors supply students with articles which are relevant to the research topics and also assist in editing students' work. In addition, supervisors get relevant research books from the library so that students can have enough sources for their research projects. At times the students' proposals are sent to supervisors' friends or acquaintances who are professional editors to be edited at very reasonable prices. Faculties arrange Saturday research supervision meetings, where

students are assisted on some parts of their research projects, like proposal writing as well as polishing up chapters.

Moreover, it was mentioned that some supervisors started from the beginning by teaching students on how to write academically, as well as orientated them on research methodology. One supervisor helped a student apply for funding from Agri South Africa, for transport and accommodation when the student was collecting data at different scattered farms in Mpumalanga. A certain supervisor also managed to trace a student's proposal which was reported missing in the department. The supervisor's department has also appointed research assistants who help the students in scrutinising the students' proposals, before the proposal could be submitted to the department for presentations. It was also noted that sometimes supervisors would provide them with new computer software which are updated than the ones at the computer laboratory so that they can access new information relate to their work. Literature of this study revealed that at Adelaide University supervisors also assist students on how to search online journals and electronic books. Supervisors advise students in choosing bibliographic style as well as using the bibliographic software (Adelaide University, 2018:15).

On the other hand, one participant mentioned that she did not get that full support as she is staying far away from the university. She never receives any of the guidelines from her supervisor. If she needed to discuss issues with him, the supervisor would respond that he is busy. So she decided to rely on information she obtained on the internet, and consultations and engagement with other master students. Furthermore, some part-time students argued that they did not have enough support from their supervisors like their full-time counterparts, because they were always away from the university. The participants indicated that supervisors had little time that they allocated to them, especially in the afternoon as they would be faced with a large number of students to assist.

Another view was that part-time students are frustrated by supervisors who request students to send their work on hard copies because they have no printing papers. Along those lines, one participant argued that he had never had any support, especially when

he started writing his proposal. He stated that the masters' programme he was engaged in never supplemented the honours education he received at this university. It was totally different and difficult for him to start with his proposal. He submitted his proposal to the supervisor many times before he could get it right to be presented at the departmental level.

#### **4.5.6 Supervisors' Expectations**

The study revealed that supervisors expect students to be able to identify the research topic; problem statement, formulate research question as well as choosing the relevant research methodology. The participants showed that students are expected to write academically and meet submission deadlines. Students need to be problem solvers; independent; produce original thought and disciplined all the time. It is expected of students to follow advice and constructive criticism given by supervisors. The literature showed that supervisors expect students to choose researchable topic, methods, and style as well as research resources. Students need to see supervisor's main duty as providing support and overall guidance (Lessing & Schulze, 2003:160). It is also indicated that students are expected to be industrious and have a sense of urgency regarding their research projects. Lastly, the students are expected to be responsible, and to have read many research text books in order to acquire more research skills and methodological approaches. Students are to commit themselves in working on comments supervisors have made as soon as they receive feedback (Lessing & Schulze, 2003:160).

#### **4.5.7 Students' Expectations**

The participants indicated that students need to be supported, guided and mentored all the time as they seek assistance from supervisors. Students want to be exposed and present papers at conferences. It was pointed out that students expect assistance with regard to financial support. The study literature showed that sometimes there is a mismatch of expectation between supervisors and students (French–Nel & Mackinnon, 2010:05). However, it is stated in the literature that students believe that they belong to the institution and research group and that supervisors are supposed to provide

assistance to them. Students want supervisors to read their written work, give comments promptly as well as discussing those comments with their supervisors. Supervisors are expected to be advisors not judges and should be able to make suggestions about their students' work (Simon Frazer University, 2010:02). Supervisors need to help their students in oral presentations and familiarise them to the university facilities (University of Tun Husein, 2016:02).

#### **4.5.8 Resources for Research Supervision**

The participants gave responses that were to some extent consistent with the findings from the documents analysed. Prominent in their responses were the following resources: Wi-Fi which is the university internet accessible to all students and supervisors. Some students indicated that this Wi-Fi is also installed in their personal computers in order for students to access internet wherever they are. Students get assistance from the librarian when searching information on the internet. Supervisors mentioned the issue of academic center, where workshops and seminars are conducted regarding the students research work.

Though many participants mentioned the resources available at the university, few Supervisors indicated that resources available are for students. The supervisors further indicated that they have only one printer in the school. The other supervisors mentioned that regular shortage of printing papers forced supervisors to tell students to send their work on hard copies because supervisors do not have printing papers. Another supervisor showed that there is lack of specific lecture room for her master students. She stated that they have to move around looking for a vacant lecture room every time they have contact session. Different universities in this study literature showed that resources such as Wi-Fi, computer laboratory, libraries, and postgraduate center are available for master students' research supervision. For example, the University of Canterbury has a library and study rooms where students access kitchen area with fridge, telephone, study space with power point, networked computers and printers.

#### **4.5.9 Communication for Research Supervision**

The documents analysed, reflected the issue of communication between the students and supervisors. The study revealed that students and supervisors communicate through student email which is set up by university technician in the computer laboratory. It was pointed out that students send their work through email. Cell phones which are versatile model devices are also used to communicate. The participants noted that communication is very effective between the supervisor and master students. The literature also showed that most universities use same tools for communication. Devices such as emails, SMS; telephones; teleconferences, Skype audio, Skype video as well as Facebook are used to communicate with students.

#### **4.5.10 Infrastructure**

The University of Limpopo has a librarian who assists students in accessing sources of information for their research projects. There are printers and photocopiers in the library which students use for free. The library has research text books although most of them are outdated. A computer laboratory is available where students have access to information and they use it to prepare their work and conduct other research related activities. A technician is also available at the computer laboratory to provide any necessary support and assistance. The researcher also noticed a resource center which is used by supervisors for conducting supervision of groups of students. There is also a Centre for Academic Excellence where students are helped on how to carry out their research projects. There is a postgraduate student's hostel where only postgraduate students reside. The literature from this study showed that the University of Canterbury has a library and learning services where students access a large collection of information and multimedia (University of Canterbury, 2017:13). In addition, the Auckland University of Technology also has shared study and writing space. The study space has a kitchen area (Auckland University of Technology, 2017:16)

#### **4.5.11 Electronic Machines and Furniture**

Master students have access to facilities such as the internet. The University of Limpopo has installed a Wi-Fi for every student and academic staff to access the

internet for free. There are computers in each supervisor's office. The researcher also observed telephones and fax machines. Old printers and photocopiers were also seen in one supervisor's office. The researcher noticed that the office has very few furniture. There were desks and few chairs including the supervisor's chair. In one supervisors' office there were cabinets with files and documents. The literature of this study noted that in Australia, at the University of Sydney, all master students are provided with computers, but these remain the property of the school upon the students' completion of their studies (University of Sydney, 2017:08). In addition, the literature reveals that at the University of Adelaide students have access to websites where students search for online journal and books (University of Adelaide, 2018:13) The Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand provides students with electronics such as the PowerPoint equipment for presentations, Wi-Fi, printers as well as the swiping cards to access the internet (Auckland University of Technology, 2017:15).

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented the findings and discussions from faculties of Humanities and Economics Management and Law. The findings are from school of Education, Languages and Communication Studies Social Studies, School of Accountancy, Economics and Management and Law. The findings are presented according to three phases of data collection, that is, document analysis, semi-structured interviews and observations.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of masters' students' research supervision at the University of Limpopo.

Based on the purpose of this study, the following objectives were formulated:

- To investigate the resources available for master students' research supervision.
- To develop the best way in which master students could be supported during research supervision consultations.
- To examine the supervision models employed for supervising master students.
- To examine the guidelines which are in place for the best practices of master students' research supervision

#### 5.2 MAJOR CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE STUDY

The discussion below provides a summary of the major conclusions drawn from this study. Recommendations and limitations are presented and suggestions for further research are proposed.

##### 5.2.1 Conclusion Related to Research Objective 1

*The first research objective was to investigate supervision resources available for master students' research supervision at the University of Limpopo.*

Resources for research supervision are available at the University of Limpopo. The study revealed that the university has a library. A librarian is appointed to assist the students in accessing information. The participants indicated that the university has installed a Wi-Fi which gives the students the opportunity to get information from the internet for free. There is also a computer laboratory which assists the students in the preparation of their work. The Participants highlighted that a Postgraduate Centre where

students meet on a daily basis and where they also carry out what is expected of them is available.

The findings revealed that in some schools a statistician is appointed to assist students in analysing quantitative data. It was found that the Eviews Software is installed in the School of Economics and Management Sciences where students are assisted to analyse statistical data. The participants indicated that the university has overhead projectors which master's students use for presentations at Departmental and School levels.

However, some participants showed that supervisors in some schools have to share a printer which makes supervision rather difficult. Supervisors have to move from their offices to where the printer is located. In addition, some supervisors indicated that they were overloaded with teaching work, administering examinations, marking examination scripts as well as supervising master students. Other supervisors pointed out the shortage of secretaries in departments, resulting in supervisors doing all the administrative duties alone, which make the supervisory work more challenging. In one department supervisors revealed that they were helped by student assistants in order to cope with the shortage of human resources. It could be concluded that the shortage of staff and electronic machines such as printers in every supervisor's office at the university makes it difficult for the best practices to happen as far as research supervision is concerned.

### **5.2.2 Conclusion Related to Research Objective 2**

*The second research objective was to develop the best way in which master students could be supported during research supervision consultation.*

The findings of this study showed that the master students are provided with support. The participants pointed out that the university arranged writing retreats where students were booked at hotels outside the university and spend a week assisting them with their proposals, chapters as well as report writing. The study further revealed that at times outside mentors were invited to the university to assist the students with research work. The participants highlighted that the university provided financial assistance in the form

of a waiver, NSFAS and a Masters and Doctoral Prestigious Scholarships. Apart from financial assistance, the students get editorial help from supervisors. The study showed that supervisors provided the students with new computer software which were up to date compared to the ones in the computer laboratory. So students accessed information regarding their research projects more easily. The participants highlighted that research assistants were appointed to scrutinise the students' proposals before they were submitted to the department for presentation. It could be concluded that the university provides all the support the students need to engage themselves in research and related academic activities.

### **5.2.3 Conclusion Related to Research Objective 3**

*The third research objective was to examine the supervision models employed for supervising master students*

The participants showed that they did not have a specific research supervision model that they followed. The study showed that individual supervisors employed various models of supervision. For example, most supervisors employed traditional research supervision model where a supervisor supervises a group of students alone. The findings further revealed that supervisors at times practiced co-supervision where one supervisor paired with another supervisor to address the challenges the other supervisor might be experiencing. It can thus be concluded that the university employs mainly traditional supervision model.

### **5.2.4 Conclusion Related to Research Objective 4**

*The fourth research objective was to examine the guidelines which are in place for the best practice of master students' research supervision.*

The study revealed that guidelines are in place for practicing research supervision. The participants indicated that the university provided guidelines. Such guidelines are also stipulated in the 2015 Postgraduate Research Supervision Manual. The study showed that section 1 of the Postgraduate Research Supervision Manual entails the levels which a research proposal should follow, as well as responsibilities and obligations of

supervisors and students regarding research supervision. However, these levels delay the students' research progress as it may take three months for a proposal to be approved by the TREC. The participants pointed out that the university has a Code of Practice on Admission, Supervision and Assessment of master and doctoral students' research reports. This document also stipulates all the rules, policies and procedures related to research supervision. However, some of the participants indicated that they only heard about the manual but they were never provided with it. They recommended that the manuals be provided to all postgraduate students at the beginning of the year during registration.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the above discussions, the followings recommendations on master students' research supervision at the University of Limpopo are put forward:

#### **5.3.1 Research Supervision Model**

It has been noted that the university does not have a "prescription" on the supervisory model and supervisors use different supervisory models. The study also revealed that most of the supervisors employ the traditional method of single supervisor and few schools practice co-supervision. It is therefore recommended that the university should introduce co-supervision in schools where traditional research supervision is predominant. Co-supervision is not only aimed at assisting each other in supervision, but also to form supervisory forum to discuss the students' research process. Turfloop Research Committee should hold regular meetings in order to approve students' proposal on time. Master's students should sign a memorandum at the early stages of their studies in order to enhance their commitment.

#### **5.3.2 Support for Research Supervision**

The data collected revealed that students get academic and financial support from the university and supervisors. However, this support is not extended to part-time students. It has also been indicated that part-time students get very little time for consultation. They are always given afternoon appointments when the supervisors are tired after their

teaching sessions and do not able have adequate time and energy to assist them. Therefore, this study recommends that supervisors should be allocated lesser teaching work in order to allow them enough time to focus on research supervision.

### **5.3.3 Supervisors' Expectations**

The study showed that students register and disappear from the university. In order to address this issue the study recommend that:

Supervisors should arrange regular supervisory meetings with the students where procedures regarding their projects are emphasised. Supervisors should always give early feedback after the students have submitted their work. The students should be given progress reports regularly in order to motivate them. Supervisors and students should set their expectations together.

### **5.3.4 Students' Expectations**

This study indicated that students showed no commitment. For the university to overcome this challenge, this study recommends that:

Students should be provided with the postgraduate research supervision manual at the beginning of the year immediately after registration. Students have to honour appointments arranged by the supervisors. They should be encouraged to adhere to submission date and deadlines. Effective communication to and from the students have to be encouraged. Students should be advised to set goals and show consistent progress with their projects.

### **5.3.5 Resources for Research Supervision**

The study revealed that the university is providing many resources for research supervision such as the library, statisticians, Postgraduate Centre, postgraduate hostel, Centre for Academic Excellence, computer laboratory as well as computer technicians. However, the participants stated that they were not satisfied with research text books at the library because these were old. The study recommends that books at the library

be supplemented by enough recent editions. Also, the library should open on holidays for longer hours so that the part-time students can access it.

### **5.3.6 Electronic Machines and Furniture**

It is noted that the university provided supervisors with electronic machines such as Wi-Fi, faxes, telephones, and computers. However, supervisors have limited printing machines; therefore the study recommends that supervisors be provided with enough printing facilities.

## **5.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The following section provides suggestions for further research:

- Future research should be conducted considering the experiences of honours and doctoral students regarding research supervision, as this study was only conducted on master students at the University of Limpopo.
- Further researchers should give attention to explore master students' research methodological challenges at the report writing stage; and
- Future researcher may consider conducting this study at other universities as the study was only limited to the University of Limpopo.

## **5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

- The study was focused on master students' experiences of research supervision at the University of Limpopo. So other postgraduates such as Honours and doctoral students might have their own research supervision experiences.
- The findings of this study cannot be generalised because data was only collected at the University of Limpopo.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

This chapter contains the discussions and conclusions which are presented emanating from thematically constructed data analysis. Recommendations and suggestions for further research are also presented related to this research report.

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MASTER STUDENTS**

1. What are the educational challenges you are experiencing in your studies?
2. What kind of support are you getting from your supervisors?
3. How is your relationship with your supervisors?
4. How do you communicate with your supervisors with regard to research supervision?
5. What are your expectations from your supervisors?
6. What role are you playing with regard to your research project?
7. How do your supervisors guide you with regard to your research?
8. Which resources that you need in your project are available at the University?
9. How does the university assist you with your project?
10. Which supervision models are used by your supervisors?

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SUPERVISORS**

1. What are the challenges you are experiencing in supervising Master students?
2. What kind of support are you providing to Master students?
3. How is your relationship with your students with regard to their studies?
4. How do you communicate with your students with regard to research supervision?
5. What are your expectations from your Master students?
6. What role are you playing to assist your Master students?
7. Which supervision models are in place at the university?
8. Which supervision resources are available at the university?
9. How are the students made aware of the guidelines for research supervision?
10. How does the university assist the students with their research studies?

## APPENDIX C: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

PO BOX 578

DWRAS RIVER

0812

11 JULY 2017

### TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

University of Limpopo

Private Bag x 1106

Sovenga

0727

Dear Sir/ Madam

### **SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR UNIVERSITY**

1. I am pursuing Master's degree in Community and Continuing Education at your university.
2. The title of my research is: **Masters Students' experiences of Research Supervision at the University of Limpopo: Towards Best Practice**
3. I am requesting permission to conduct my research with (12) master's students and (12) supervisors from six schools at your university: Three schools from the Faculty of Humanities: School of Education, Languages & Communication Studies and Social Sciences and three schools from the Faculty of Management and Law: School of Accountancy, Economics & Management and Law.
4. The research will involve documents analysis, semi- structured interviews and observations.

Yours faithfully

Ramorwalo Mashao Phillemon

## APPENDIX D: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

PO BOX 578  
DWARS RIVER  
0812  
11 JULY 2017

### HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

University of Limpopo  
Private Bag x 1106  
Sovenga  
0727

Dear Sir / Madam

### **SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR UNIVERSITY**

1. I am pursuing a Master's degree in Community and Continuing in Education at your university.
2. The title of my research is: **Masters Students' experiences of Research Supervision at the University of Limpopo: Towards Best Practice**
3. I am requesting for permission to conduct research with 12 twelve Master students and 12 supervisors from 6 schools at your university: three school from the Faculty of Humanities: School of Education; Languages & Communication Studies and Social Sciences and three schools from the Faculty of Management and Law: School of Accountancy; Economic & Management and Law.
4. The research will involve document analysis, semi-structured interviews and observations

Yours faithfully

Ramorwalo Mashao Phillemon

## APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORMS FOR SUPERVISORS

### 1. PROJECT TITLE: MASTERS STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF RESEARCH SUPERVISION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO: TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE

PROJECT LEADER / SUPERVISOR: Ms P Moloko.

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the following project:\_\_\_\_\_

(it is compulsory for the researcher to complete this field before submission to the Ethics Committee)

I realise that:

1. The study deals with \_\_\_\_\_

(e.g. Effect of certain medication on human body) (If compulsory for the researcher to complete this field before submission to the Ethics Committee)

2. The procedures or treatment envisaged may hold some risk for me that cannot be foreseen at this stage.

3. The Ethics Committee has approved that individuals may be approached to participate in the study.

4. The research project, i.e. the extent, aims and methods has been explained to me.

5. The project sets out risks that can be reasonably explained as well as possible discomfort for persons participating in the research, an explanation of the anticipated advantages for myself or others that are reasonably expected from the research and alternative procedures that may be to my advantage.

6. I will be informed of any information that may become available during the research that may influence my willingness to continue my participation.

7. Access to the records that pertain to participation in the study will be restricted to persons directly involved in the research.

8. Any questions that I may have regarding the research or related matters will be answered by the researcher/s.

9. If I have any questions about or problems regarding the study, or experience any undesirable effects, I may contact a member of the research team or Ms Noko Shai-Ragoboya.

10. Participation in this research is voluntary and I can withdraw at any stage.

11. If any medical problem is identified at any stage during the research, or when I am vetted for participation, such condition will be discussed with me in confidence by a qualified person and /or I will be referred to my doctor.

12. I indemnify the University of Limpopo and all persons involved with the above project or that may be related to it, for whatever reasons, including negligence on the part of the mentioned persons.

SIGNATURE OF THE RESEARCHED PERSON

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF PERSON THAT INFORMED  
THE RESEARCHED PERSON

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/  
GUARDIAN

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_ this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS

**PROJECT TITLE: MASTERS STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF RESEARCH SUPERVISION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO: TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE**

**PROJECT LEADER / SUPERVISOR: Ms P Moloko**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the following project: \_\_\_\_\_

(it is compulsory for the researcher to complete this field before submission to the ethics Committee)

I realise that:

1. The study deals with \_\_\_\_\_

(e.g. effect of certain medication on human body) (If compulsory for the researcher to complete this field before submission to the Ethic Committee)

2. The procedures or treatment envisaged may hold some risk for me that cannot be foreseen at this stage.

3. The Ethic Committee has approved that individuals may be approached to participate in the study.

4. The research project, i.e. the extent, aims and methods has been explained to me.

5. The project sets out risks that can be reasonably explained as well as possible discomfort for me or others that are reasonably expected from the research and alternative procedures that may be to my advantage.

6. I may be informed about any information that may be available during the research that may influence my willingness to continue my participation

7. Access to the records that pertain to participate in the study will be restricted to persons directly involved in the research.

8. Any question that I may have regarding the research, or related to the matter, will be answered by the researcher/s.

9. If I have any question about or problems regarding the study, or experiences any undesirable effects, I may contact a member of the research team or Ms Noko Shai-Ragoboya.

10. Participants in this research are voluntarily and I can withdraw at any stage.

11. If any medical problem is identified at any stage during the research, or when I am vetted for participation, such condition will be discussed with me in confidence by a qualified person and/ or I will be referred to my doctor.

12. I indemnify the University of Limpopo and all persons involved with the above project or that may be related to it, for whatever reasons, including negligence on the part of the mentioned persons.

SIGNATURE OF THE RESEARCHED PERSON

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE OF THE PERSON THAT INFORMED  
THE RESEARCHED PERSON

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/  
GUARDIAN

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signed at \_\_\_\_\_ this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 20 \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX H: DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS CHECKS LIST**

1.Postgraduate Research Supervision Manual 2015
2.University of Limpopo Annual Research Report 2015
3.Draft Research Development Report and Support 2015
4.Code of Practice, Admission, Supervision and Assessment 2015
5.Master Students' Progress Reports 2013-2017
5.University of Limpopo The Dawn July-August 2011

## APPENDIX I: OBSERVATIONS CHECKLIST

1. Infrastructure
2. Electronic Machines

## APPENDIX: J A LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR



University of Limpopo  
School of Languages and Communication Studies  
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa  
Tel: (015) 268 3069, Fax: (015) 268 2868, Email: Lukas.Mkuti@ul.ac.za

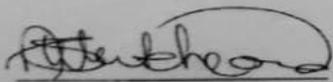
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13 December 2018

### LANGUAGE EDITING LETTER

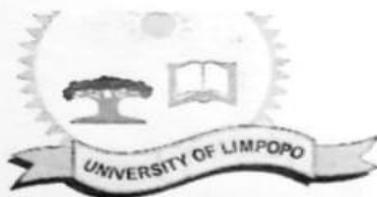
This letter serves as proof that I edited the dissertation of M.P. Ramorwalo entitled  
***"MASTER'S STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE OF RESEARCH SUPERVISION AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO: TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE"***.

Kind regards



FOR PROF. L. D. MKUTI  
HEAD: DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES

# APPENDIX: K TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



**University of Limpopo**  
Department of Research Administration and Development  
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa  
Tel: (015) 268 2212, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: noko.monene@ul.ac.za

## TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

**MEETING:** 31 August 2017

**PROJECT NUMBER:** TREC/220/2017: PG

**PROJECT:**

**Title:** Masters students' experiences of Research Supervision at the University of Limpopo: Towards Best Practice

**Researcher:** MP Ramorwalo

**Supervisor:** Dr MM Maphutha

**Co-Supervisor:** N/A

**School:** Education

**Degree:** Masters in Education Studies

  
**PROF. TAB MASHEGO**  
**CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: REC-0310111-031

**Note:**

- i) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee.
- ii) The budget for the research will be considered separately from the protocol.  
**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.**