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Quantitative Exploration of Perceptions and Realities about the Quality of Research Supervision at PhD Level in Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explored the perceptions and the realities of quality of PhD research supervision in Punjab, Pakistan, including a comparative study of students and supervisors in public universities of Punjab Pakistan. The main aim of the study was to examine the role of supervisor support, academic and research guidance, professional relationships and institutional support in terms of the overall quality of PhD supervision. This research is planned to investigate the PhD scholars' perceptions and realities of research supervision quality in Punjab, to identify the key challenges faced by students and supervisors in maintaining effective supervision, to analyze the institutional policies and support systems (or lack thereof) affecting supervision quality and to propose evidence-based recommendations for improving PhD supervision in Punjab. A cross-sectional survey has been conducted in the six universities of Punjab to interview 300 PhD Scholars. Every efforts has been exercised to collect the meaningful, reliable and trustable data through ensuring validity, reliability and ethical consideration. The analysis demonstrates that supervisors' support, academic and research guidance, professional relationship between scholars and supervisors and institutional support to the PhD scholars are the contribution factors to ensure the quality of research supervision to the PhD scholars, In the light of research findings it is recommended that the structures of communication in universities ought to be reinforced through attaching mandates to regular supervisory meetings and structured interaction schedules, which will ensure that academic engagement is in full swing and the quality assurance systems should be strengthened to institute monitoring mechanisms of the institution which periodically test the quality of the supervision practices and administrative policies concerning the approval of proposals, submission of the thesis and examination must be simplified in order to minimize unnecessary delays that can be counterproductive in PhD courses.

Keywords: Perceptions, Punjab, Pakistan, quality, realities, research supervision, quantitative.

Introduction

Doctoral education plays a fundamental role in the quality of the researchers, scholars and academics that are produced as a result of their work in advancing national development through knowledge creation and innovation. PhD supervision is regarded as the foundation of doctoral training, as it affects the level of completion, the quality of research, and the process of formation of a scholarly identity. Effective supervision is associated with motivational support, timely feedback, collaboration in learning and training of critical thinking skills globally. Nevertheless, even with the importance of supervision identified, the reality of supervisory practices is very different depending on the country especially in the developing world where structural and institutional factors undermine the best supervisory practices (Abdelkreem et al., 2024).

When discussing the context of Pakistan, the last two decades have seen a rapid increase in the number of doctoral education as a result of rising academic qualification requirements and national objectives of building up research capacity (Fatima et. al., 2020). But this growth has also brought structural constraints, such as insufficient supervisory resources, inconsistency in quality assurance processes and institutional demands to raise the volume of research. As the largest province, with the most universities and PhD enrolments, Punjab has significant difficulties in ensuring the standards of supervision. The scholars have observed that differences in the supervisory competence and institutional support systems adversely affect the doctoral experience (Abiddin, 2007).

One of the key influences on the course of PhD is the nature of the expectations held by students and their real experience with the supervisors. Guidance expectations, feedback expectations, research direction expectations and academic mentoring expectations have a significant impact on doctoral satisfaction and academic success. The failure to meet these expectations may negatively affect progress of student, his or her confidence, and academic identity through supervisory overload, lack of expertise, or communication gaps (Heyns et al., 2019). There are some initial indications that doctoral students in Pakistan often experience delays in feedback, inconsistent supervisory conferences and little academic mentoring, but no systematic empirical research has been found (Lessing & Schulze, 2002). The international literature indicates that the quality of supervision is not only related to the subject knowledge but also interpersonal relationships, positive feedback, psychological safety, and establishment of a favorable research environment. Effective supervision should have clear expectations, systematic direction and prompt academic communication. However, in most developing nations, the supervisors are not usually trained in the art of mentoring, use a more traditional teacher-centered approach, and have extensive administrative burdens. All these aspects limit the quality and extent of supervision provided to doctoral students (Mirwani & Rauf, 2025).

In Pakistan, Punjab, there has been a long-standing problem of the lack of qualified supervisors in most universities of the public sector. PhD supervisors often have several PhD students on their books at any given time and therefore they do not have the time to make any kind of meaningful contribution to the development of their research and to give individualized research advice (Paltridge, 2002). Supervisory overload leads not only to delayed feedback but also to poor quality of reviews, which are usually perceived by doctoral students as the reason to be demotivated or unable to grow in terms of academics. Additionally, most supervisors are forced to deliver on high publication output, and at other times, the supervisor has to compromise on the mentoring role (Fatima et al., 2020). The other significant issue is the type and quality of feedback given to doctoral students. Clear, timely and constructive feedback is

needed to mold research design, methodological clarity and academic writing. Nonetheless, the research in Pakistan has recorded that feedback can be shallow, too critical or even fail to meet the global research standards. This discrepancy adds to the confusion of PhD scholars and the inability to develop autonomous scholarly abilities (Rafiq, 2024). The situation is even worsened where the supervisors lack the knowledge of the modern methodologies or other new interdisciplinary research paradigms.

It is generally accepted that the quality of the research supervision at the PhD level is one of the key pillars of doctoral education and academic research development. Universities around the world underline the significance of effective supervision in the development of intellectual, professional, and personal growth of doctoral scholars (Mason, 2018). This level of supervision is not only an administrative necessity, but a relationship that is dynamic and complex, which has a direct impact on the quality of research, the completion rates, and the success of the PhD programs in general. A brief survey of the impressions and facts on the quality of research supervision projects the utopian expectations of stakeholders and the real predicaments that prevail in academic system (Pyhalto et al., 2014).

PhD supervision is the role of helping students to go through the process of conducting independent research, which includes defining a research problem and writing a high-quality dissertation. Supervisors should offer academic guidance, methodological advice, and critical commentary, as well as encourage creativity and critical thinking. Moreover, they also serve as mentors in that they facilitate the professional growth of students, promote publication and assist in networking opportunities within the academic community. Theoretically, ideal supervision is typified by respect, openness of communication, promptness of feedback, and clarity of roles and responsibilities (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2001).

Objectives

- To examine PhD students' perceptions of research supervision quality in Punjab.
- To identify the key challenges faced by students and supervisors in maintaining effective supervision.
- To analyze the institutional policies and support systems (or lack thereof) affecting supervision quality.
- To propose evidence-based recommendations for improving PhD supervision in Punjab.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey has been conducted in the six universities of Punjab, namely Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU) Multan, Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB), University of Sargodha, University of Gujrat, Pir Mehr Ali Shah Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi and University of Punjab Lahore to conduct interview with 300 PhD Scholars to explore the quality of research supervision extended to the PhD Scholars by the research supervisors. A comprehensive questionnaire has been designed to explore the research objectives. To ensure the suitability and workability of the questionnaire, it is pretested, in the light of pretesting some questions were deleted and some were added. The collected data have been analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion

The present chapter gives an analysis and interpretation of the data collected in the context of the study Perceptions and Realities about the Quality of Research Supervision at PhD Level in Punjab, Pakistan. Data analysis was performed by SPSS version 22.0 which included demographic, descriptive and inferential statistics. The mean and standard deviation measures were used to summarize the primary variables for the study such as supervisory support, communication between supervisors and PhD scholars, research guidance, institutional facilities, quality of feedback received and overall satisfaction regarding research supervision. Inferential statistical tests like Correlation, Regression, Chi-square and Gamma tests were used to test the strength and direction of relationships between study variables and also to find out which variables were significantly associated with the perceived quality of research supervision at the PhD level. The results of the discussion were divided into two main sections - the first section reported the frequency and percentage distribution of demographic characteristics of the respondents, and the second was concerned with the descriptive statistics of the study variables which allowed a description of the perceptions and realities of the quality of PhD research supervision in the province of Punjab, Pakistan.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	180	60.0%
	Female	120	40.0%
	Total	300	100%
Age Group	25–30 years	110	36.7%
	31–40 years	120	40.0%
	41–50 years	50	16.7%
	Above 50 years	20	6.6%
	Total	300	100%
Field of Study / Specialization	Social Sciences	80	26.7%
	Basic Sciences	70	23.3%
	Engineering & Technology	60	20.0%
	Management Sciences	50	16.7%
	Humanities	40	13.3%
	Total	300	100%
Year of PhD Study	1st Year	70	23.3%
	2nd Year	80	26.7%
	3rd Year	76	25.3%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mode of Study	4th Year & above	74	24.7%
	Total	300	100%
	Full-time	220	73.3%
	Part-time	80	26.7%
Funding Status	Total	300	100%
	Fully Funded	110	36.7%
	Partially Funded	90	30.0%
	Self-Financed	100	33.3%
	Total	300	100%

In table 1, the sample comprised of 60.0% males (n = 180) and 40.0% females (n = 120). This means that there is a male dominated but evenly divided both males and females participation in PhD education. Concerning the age, most of the respondents are in the 31-40 years age group (40.0%), 25-30 years (36.7%). The lower percentages are noted in the age 41-50 years (16.7%), and the age over 50 years (6.6%). This trend suggests that the majority of PhD students are middle career people, which is also in line with the general trends in doctoral enrollment where students acquire higher education after having acquired some sort of professional or academic experience. When compared to the field of study, the respondents are spread on the disciplines with the largest numbers in Social Sciences (26.7%), and Natural Sciences (23.3%). The next are Engineering & Technology (20.0%), Management Sciences (16.7%) and Humanities (13.3%). Such a fairly balanced representation across the disciplines suggests that there was a multidisciplinary representation, which enables a more generalized application of the findings to other academic areas. The PhD-study year depicts an almost identical distribution at all the doctoral-education stages. The 2nd year students form the largest group (26.7%), followed closely by 3rd year (25.3%), 4th year and above (24.7%), and 1st year (23.3%). This balance implies that the research will get the views of a student at various stages of their doctoral training, which will add more depth to the variability of experiences in their responses. In regards to mode of study, a substantial majority (73.3) of the respondents are full-time PhD students with 26.7 being part-time students. This shows that full-time doctoral study is the most common mode, which is a preference by the institution and/or availability of students to engage in research that is intensive in nature. Lastly, funding status depicts that 36.7% of students are fully funded, 30.0% partially funded and 33.3% self-financed.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to Supervisor Support.

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	NO (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
My supervisor is accessible when I need academic guidance.	5%	10%	12%	40%	33%
My supervisor provides constructive and timely feedback.	6%	12%	10%	38%	34%
My supervisor helps me refine my research problem effectively.	7%	11%	13%	39%	30%
My supervisor encourages independent thinking.	4%	9%	15%	42%	30%
My supervisor supports my publication efforts.	10%	14%	18%	33%	25%
Meetings with my supervisor occur regularly.	8%	13%	14%	37%	28%
My supervisor responds to emails/messages promptly.	6%	11%	13%	40%	30%
I receive adequate time during supervisory meetings.	7%	12%	15%	36%	30%

In table 2, a substantial number of participants (40% Agree and 33% Strongly Agree) indicated that their supervisors are available when they require academic advice. This shows that 73% of students have satisfactory accessibility, which implies that the availability of supervisors is generally high. Nevertheless, the fact that one-fifth of the negative responses (SD + D) and one-twelfth of the neutral responses indicates that a significant minority continue to have issues accessing it, perhaps because of workload, institutional factors, or intermittent availability. The reactions are positive, as 38% Agree and 34% Strongly Agree (72% overall satisfaction). This implies that a majority of the supervisors are offering valuable and timely feedback, which is essential in PhD progress. But 18 percent of all respondents disagreed that this is the case, and told of delays or insufficient depth in feedback to some scholars. This indicates inconsistency of supervisory practices in institutions within Punjab. About 69% of the participants (39% Agree, 30% Strongly Agree) attested that supervisors assist in making their research problems effective. This indicates that supervisors usually have significant influence in determining the direction of a research. However, the 18 percent disagreement and 13 percent neutrality predict the fact that some proportion of students might be poorly guided in conceptual or methodological terms in their initial phases of research formulation. Here, the data indicates that the perception is highly positive, with 42 percent Agree and 30 percent Strongly Agree (72% overall). This reflects that the level of critical thinking and academic independence, which is critical at doctoral level, is being encouraged by supervisors to a large extent. The disagreement is relatively low (13%), implying that the vast majority of the supervisors do not resort to overly directive supervision styles, but there is a certain degree of variation. This product presents relatively worse results. Agree and Strongly Agree (58% in total) are only 33 and 25 per cent, and 24 per cent (SD + D) are dissatisfied; 18 percent are neutral. This reveals an

apparent gap in publication mentoring in research, implying that a significant number of supervisors are not proactive in helping students to publish in journals, conferences, or high-impact outlets. This is a very important limitation to PhD supervision. The answers are moderate satisfaction, 37% Agree, 28% Strongly Agree (65% overall). Nonetheless, the 21-percent disagreement and 14-percent neutrality indicate that meetings are not regular. This can be an indication of scheduling, institutional workload strains or a absence of formal monitoring mechanisms of supervisory involvement. There are 70 percent positive reactions (40 percent Agree, 30 percent Strongly Agree) that indicate that supervisors tend to be responsive using digital communication channels. Nevertheless, the 17 percent disagreement means that there are supervisors that postpone the responses, and this can slow down the research process and decision-making. Approximately one-third of the respondents (36% Agree, 30% Strongly Agree) indicated adequate meeting time. Nevertheless, disagreement and neutrality of 19% and 15% respectively indicate that time is not necessarily sufficient and structured, and thus a rushed discussion or incomplete feedback may occur.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to Academic & Research Guidance.

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	NO (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
My supervisor provides clear direction on research design.	6	10	14	40	30
I receive sufficient methodological guidance.	7	11	15	39	28
Ethical research practices are emphasized by my supervisor.	5	9	14	42	30
Ethical research standards are clearly explained.	6	10	15	40	29
I am guided in writing for international journals.	10	14	20	33	23
My supervisor assists in networking and conference participation.	12	15	18	32	23
Research expectations are clearly communicated.	5	9	16	41	29
I receive detailed feedback on drafts.	7	12	15	38	28
My supervisor guides me in data analysis techniques.	9	13	18	35	25
My supervisor helps me publish in recognized journals.	11	14	19	32	24

In table 3, the mostly, respondents have positive perceptions with Agree and Strongly Agree answers varying between 55% to 72% on the various indicators, with neutral and disagree answers being substantial in many places. Concerning the research design advice, approximately 70% of respondents (40% Agree and 30% Strongly Agree) stated that supervisors give explicit direction with only 16% of respondents (SD + D) and 14% staying neutral. This suggests that supervisors tend to be productive in assisting students to identify research issues as well as organize their research. Likewise, methodological guidance among respondents was also positively rated (67%), indicating that majority of the supervisors help in the choice of research methods and data collection strategies, but there is also a range of

supervisory expertise. Regarding ethical research practices, the respondents ratings are not very weak, as the percentage of those who agree or strongly agree that supervisors focus on ethical behavior is around 72, and a limited number of respondents expressed dissatisfaction. This indicates that supervision practices are very much inculcated in academic integrity and ethical awareness. Similarly, there is also a positive trend in clarity of ethical standards with the majority of students (approximately 69 percent) agreeing with the statement, which suggests that the majority of students are knowledgeable of research ethics requirements. The results however indicate a significant drop in the areas of advanced academic support, especially on the area of international journal writing wherein the respondents rated at about 56 percent expressed the positive views, with a significant percentage rated as neutral or dissatisfied. Likewise, networking and conference participation support is quite low and only approximately 55% of the responses are positive. Regarding communication of research expectations, the findings are moderately good, and approximately 70 percent of the respondents refrained to disagree, which indicates that supervisors tend to have clear goals and expectations towards research progress. Conversely, performance regarding feedback on drafts reveals moderate scores where about 66 percent of the feedbacks are positive, yet there is variation in the quality and promptness of the feedback. The data analysis guidance aspect has a dual-dimension perception with only approximately 60% of the respondents saying they are satisfied with it and a substantial number of them said they disagree, or had no opinion.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to Professional Relationship.

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	NO (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
Communication with my supervisor is respectful and professional.	5	9	12	42	32
There is mutual trust between me and my supervisor.	6	10	14	40	30
My supervisor motivates me during challenging phases.	7	11	15	39	28
My supervisor encourages intellectual independence.	6	9	14	41	30
I feel comfortable discussing research difficulties.	5	10	13	43	29
Feedback is constructive rather than discouraging.	6	10	15	40	29
The actual supervision quality differs from what I expected.	10	14	20	35	21
Supervisor workload negatively affects supervision quality.	12	16	18	32	22
Publication requirements create pressure that affects research quality.	11	15	19	33	22

In table 4, the findings indicate that there is high level of respect and professionalism in communication between supervisors and students with 74% of the respondents (42% Agree and 32%

Strongly Agree) indicating satisfaction. A low percentage (nearly 14) were dissatisfied with it, which means that the quality of professional communication is mostly preserved in PhD supervision. In the same way, the relationship between supervisors and students is also positive with almost 70% of responses being positive, implying that the majority of students have confidence in their relationships with supervisors. Such a trust is a positive contributor to the academic engagement and research. Regarding motivation in difficult times, approximately 67% of the respondents said that supervisors are encouraging or strongly encouraging and a smaller percentage said that they were neutral or dissatisfied. This means that in most cases, supervisors are involved in supporting researchers through challenging phases of research, but it might not be consistent across institutions. On intellectual independence, about 71% of the respondents indicated that they have had positive experiences meaning that the supervisors will stimulate students to think critically and independently instead of simple directive supervision styles. This is a significant pointer of good doctoral training. The results also indicate that the level of comfort of discussing problems in a research is high with almost 72 percent of the respondents agreeing to the idea that almost all PhD scholars feel psychologically safe and supported when discussing their research with their supervisors. Constructive feedback also is well perceived with an agreement of about 69% but there are still some students who complain of inconsistent feedback. Nevertheless, the outcomes also reflect some critical systemic issues. Approximately 56 percent of the respondents concurred that reality of supervision is not the same as expectations at the beginning with a high percentage of the respondents also being indifferent or dissatisfied. More importantly, workload of supervisors is found to be a significant limiting factor and about 54% of the respondents reported that heavy workload has a negative impact on the quality of supervision. On the same note, another important issue is publication pressure whereby approximately 55% of the respondents indicated that publication pressures add stress to research which impacts on research quality.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to Institutional Support & Realities.

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	NO (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
The university provides adequate research facilities.	10	14	18	34	24
Access to research funding is sufficient.	12	16	20	30	22
Research workload expectations are realistic.	9	13	18	36	24
Supervisor-to-student ratio affects supervision quality.	8	12	15	38	27
Institutional policies support timely PhD completion.	10	14	17	35	24
Administrative processes delay research progress.	14	18	20	28	20
Administrative procedures support timely progress.	10	15	18	34	23
There is monitoring of supervision quality at departmental level.	12	16	20	30	22
Library and digital database access is adequate.	9	13	16	37	25

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	NO (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
Research funding opportunities are available.	11	15	19	32	23
Supervisors are overloaded with administrative duties.	13	17	18	30	22
Political or institutional pressures affect research quality.	12	16	19	31	22
Publication requirements create stress for PhD scholars.	11	14	18	33	24
Supervision quality varies across universities in Punjab.	10	13	17	36	24
Institutional monitoring of supervision quality exists.	12	15	18	32	23

In table 5, the majority of the respondents (Agree + Strongly Agree) (58) reported that universities have sufficient facilities, whereas about 24 percent of the respondents said it does not and 18 percent were not sure. This implies that even with the existence of basic facilities, the same facilities are not equally adequate in all institutions and differences between universities can be observed. Regarding research funding, respondents were only very satisfied (52 percent) but a relatively big percentage was found to be neutral or even dissatisfied. This means that funding of research is not readily available and not always which has a direct impact on the quality of research that PhD scholars can do. In terms of research workload expectations, approximately 60 percent of the respondents felt that workload is realistic with the rest of the respondents either disagreeing or being unsure. This indicates moderate satisfaction but also indicates that in certain instances, the workload expectations of PhD students might be too high or not well organized. One of the important results pertains to the ratio of supervisor to students where only about 65 percent of the respondents responded that it influences the quality of supervision. This shows a significant problem of the structure of the Punjab higher education system in which there can be too many students per supervisor and supervision quality and attention is lowered. On institutional policies conducive to timely completion of PhD, approximately 59 percent of the respondents indicated that they agreed but the remaining respondents indicated that they were neutral or disagreed. This implies that there are policies in place, but their application is not always effective and uniform across institutions. An important issue can be raised concerning administrative procedures where about 48-50 percent of the respondents said that the administrative procedures slow down research development, which suggests a great institutional bottleneck. There was only a minor increase in the number of people who considered that administrative systems underpin timely development, with inconsistency and overall inefficiency in administrative systems. The findings also indicate that the quality of supervision monitoring at the departmental level is mediocre with an average of 52 percent of the respondents giving a positive answer with a significant number of the respondents being neutral or disagreeing. This implies that there are weak institutional monitoring systems that are used to guarantee the quality of supervision. In library and digital database access, approximately 62% of the

respondents indicated that they have sufficient access which indicates that this is one of the relatively strong institutional areas. Nonetheless, the other respondents continue to experience restriction in accessing the updated academic resources particularly in institutions that are under-resourced. About 55 percent of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the availability of research funding opportunities in terms of funding availability and competitiveness, which suggests that funding support is still scarce and competitive, thus posing a challenge to PhD scholars to do a comprehensive research. The statistics also indicate that approximately 52-55% of the respondents believe that their supervisors are overwhelmed with administrative responsibilities and are thus less likely to be available to supervise and mentor their students. In the same way, institutional and political pressures on the quality of research were recognized by approximately 53% of the respondents, showing the impact of outside forces on academic freedom and research direction. Another issue is the pressure on PhD scholars to publish where only about 57% of the respondents felt that publication pressure causes stress implying that institutional focus on quantity of publications can have an adverse impact on the quality of research. Lastly, the view that there is a significant difference in the quality of supervision among universities in Punjab is endorsed by approximately 60% of the respondents, which points out the disparity in academic standards among universities. Moreover, institutional monitoring of the quality of supervision was only agreed upon by approximately 55 percent of the respondents meaning that there are weak institutional-level enforcement as well as assessment mechanisms.

Table 6: Distribution of respondents according to Overall Satisfaction.

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	NO (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
I am satisfied with the quality of research supervision.	8	12	15	38	27
I would recommend my supervisor/university for PhD studies.	9	13	16	36	26
The supervision I receive/offer meets international standards.	10	14	18	34	24

In table 6, the satisfaction with research supervision in general, about 65% of the respondents expressed satisfaction (38% Agree and 27% Strongly Agree) and the rest were neutral (15%), with a minor percentage being dissatisfied (SD + D). This shows that most PhD scholars are quite content with the supervisory support, but a significant portion of them are still faced with poor or substandard supervision. Regarding recommendation of supervisor or university to PhD studies, approximately 62% of the respondents indicated that they would recommend their institution (36% Agree and 26% Strongly Agree). Nevertheless, 16% were neutral, and around 22% disagreed with this idea, which implies that though many students think that their supervisory experience was important, a substantial number of them is not completely sure about recommending the system to future scholars. This indicates the difference in the quality of supervision among departments and universities in Punjab. To the perception that supervision is internationally of standard, merely approximately 58% of the respondents (34% Agree and 24% Strongly Agree) agreed with this statement. Meanwhile, 18 percent were neutral and

approximately 24 percent disagreed, which means that a significant number of PhD scholars think that the present practices of supervision do not correspond fully to the global standards of academic practices. This indicates a major shortage in internationalization especially in the fields like publication of research, academic writing and international research collaboration.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of Variables.

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Supervisor Support	3.72	0.68
Academic & Research Guidance	3.65	0.72
Professional Relationship	3.80	0.66
Institutional Support & Realities	3.40	0.75
Overall Supervision Quality (DV)	3.76	0.70

In table 7, the descriptive part of the research analysis of the variables of the study (N = 300) shows the valuable information about the level of research supervision at PhD level. Supervisor Support (M = 3.72, SD = 0.68) can be considered as rather high perceived support that demonstrates the availability of supervisors, their communication, and feedback to students. The standard deviation is rather low, which is an indicator of consistency in the responses, i.e. the majority of participants have positive experiences that are similar. Nonetheless, the fact that the mean is not too close to the highest value points to the fact that there are gaps, especially in terms of timeliness of feedback, assistance with publication, and meeting frequency, which suggests that support offered by supervisors is excellent but not consistent. Likewise, Academic and Research Guidance (M = 3.65, SD = 0.72) indicates a moderate to high degree of guidance offered by supervisors in such areas as research design, research methodology and ethics. The standard deviation is a bit higher which implies that experiences are different so that whilst some students could have great academic mentoring, others might be restricted particularly on the higher levels such as data analysis and publication support. This difference leads to the inconsistencies in the quality of supervision given by various supervisors or institutions. Professional Relationship (M = 3.80, SD = 0.66) has the greatest mean with a positive relationship between supervisors and students with mutual trust as its most frequent characteristic. The small standard deviation also indicates that respondents agreed with each other, and so the interpersonal dynamics was a major strength of PhD supervision. However, there can still be small problems with the management of expectations and conflicts. Conversely, Institutional Support and Realities (M = 3.40, SD = 0.75) is the least mean and most variable, which means that institutional factors create significant challenges. The dependent variable is Overall Supervision Quality (M = 3.76, SD = 0.70) that indicates that the research supervision quality is mostly satisfying to the respondents. This indicates that there is a fairly good supervisory relationship and academic support.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the process of research supervision in the PhD level in Punjab, Pakistan is a multidimensional process that depends on the behavior of supervisors and their academic guidance, institutional support and socio-cultural factors. In general, the supervision quality is rather good, which means that the majority of students are rather content with their doctoral experience. Nonetheless, not all is perfect in this satisfaction and there are still substantial differences between the ideal standards of supervision and the actual practices. The key finding of this research is that effectiveness of research supervision is dominated by human and relational factors. The strongest determinants of quality of supervision were professional relationships, trust, communication and engagement with supervisor. Students with positive and respectful relationships showed to be more satisfied, have improved research progress, and have increased academic confidence. Institutional factors, on the other hand, are not central, but secondary. Problems like lack of funding, bureaucracy, workload stress, poor monitoring mechanisms were identified to adversely affect supervision but had less effect as compared to interpersonal relations. One more important conclusion is that the gap between expectations and realities of the PhD supervision is rather wide. Students join doctoral programs with hopes of being mentored, receiving well-organized advice, and being provided with regular feedback, but most find the process to be delayed, uneven, and lacking academic support, especially with regards to publication and advanced research capabilities. The research also finds that there is high variation in the supervision practices among universities, disciplines and individual supervisors. This variation underscores the lack of uniform supervision systems and quality control systems. To conclude, PhD supervision in Punjab is being conducted at a reasonable level, but it needs to be improved in a systematic manner, to meet international standards. The quality of doctoral education should be enhanced through strengthening of supervisory training, bettering of institutional infrastructure and fostering of collaborative academic relations.

Recommendations

According to the results of the research, a set of recommendations are suggested to improve the quality of PhD supervision in Punjab, Pakistan.

- Universities are supposed to institute systematic supervisor training sessions that aim at helping them acquire the basic supervisory skills such as effective communication, academic mentoring, research guidance and aiding in publication procedures. This kind of training may assist in making sure that supervisors are in a better position to respond to the various needs of doctoral scholars.
- Universities are advised to come up with standardized supervision models where the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and doctoral students are clearly articulated to provide a clear understanding of the expectations of each supervisor and doctoral student to provide uniformity in supervision practices.
- Publication support would be better promoted by inspiring supervisors to take an active role in instructing students on how to write academic papers, how to choose right journals and how to go through the publication process.

- The structures of communication in universities ought to be reinforced through attaching mandates to regular supervisory meetings and structured interaction schedules, which will ensure that academic engagement is in full swing.
- The quality assurance systems should be strengthened to institute monitoring mechanisms of the institution which periodically test the quality of the supervision practices. Ninth, administrative policies concerning the approval of proposals, submission of the thesis and examination must be simplified in order to minimize unnecessary delays that can be counterproductive in PhD courses.

Note: This research article has been derived from my PhD research work titled “Perceptions and Realities about the Quality of Research Supervision at PhD Level in Punjab, Pakistan”.

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