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Affability of Supervisory Communication Skills on Research Process Completion for Postgraduate Students: A Case of Northern Zone Universities, Tanzania

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Abstract:

This study investigated the contribution of communication skills employed by research supervisors in enhancing the research process completion for postgraduate students in universities of the Northern zone of Tanzania. Guided by Katz's theory, developed by Robert Katz in 1955, the study employed a convergent design using the mixed-methods approach. The target population was 6 Directors of postgraduate studies, 14 heads of departments, 175 supervisors, 390 PhD continuing students, 635 masters continuing students, 84 PhD alumni, and 150 masters alumni, equivalent to 1454. The study sampled 214 respondents using probability and non-probability techniques. Questionnaires and interview guides used to collect data were validated by three research experts from the Faculty of Education at MWECAU. The Cronbach Alpha method and peer debriefing were employed to determine the reliability of questionnaires and interview guides, respectively. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics presented in tables, while qualitative data were transcribed, coded, and organized into themes and presented in the narrations and quotations. The findings revealed that research supervisors, through various forms of communication skills, enhanced the completion of postgraduate students' research process by providing immediate research feedback and organizing and conducting supervisory meetings. The study also revealed that some supervisors use polite language to communicate with postgraduate students on research matters and clarify complex concepts regarding students' research. The study concluded that though some supervisors did not give feedback immediately and some students ignored supervisors' corrections and were distracted by job responsibilities, communication skills employed by research supervisors have a good contribution in enhancing the completion of postgraduate students' research process. The study recommended that university administration should continuously strive to enhance student support in achieving their academic goals.

Keywords: Communication skills, completion, postgraduate, research process

1. Introduction

Communication is the process of transmitting and receiving information, ideas, opinions, and emotions between two or more people. It is a fundamental aspect of human interaction and is essential for the successful exchange of information, coordination of activities, and development of relationships. Communication takes various forms, including verbal, which involves using spoken language to convey messages, and non-verbal, which includes body language, facial expressions, and gestures, written which involves the use of written language, such as in letters, emails, reports, and other forms of text-based communication and visual which involves the use of images, diagrams, charts, and other visual aids to convey information (Keiling, 2023).

Enhancing university relationships can be achieved through effective communication, which strengthens interpersonal bonds and fosters better teamwork, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. It makes students convey unfavourable messages without escalating and undermining confidence. Effective communication plays a vital role in academic studies as it enables the research supervisors to have the ability to communicate non-verbally, listen intently, handle stress when it arises, and comprehend both their own and the other person's emotions. There is a saying, "Tell me and I will forget; Show me, and I will remember; Involve me, and I will understand" when stressing about communication

skills. Communication is necessary to share knowledge, concepts, attitudes, experiences, emotions, and opinions (Malia & Patil, 2023).

According to Wang and Meng (2019), communication skills are strongly linked to several important outcomes. Communication abilities are essential to an individual's social and personal well-being, contributing significantly to their happiness and life satisfaction. Although there is a strong connection between communication skills and adaptability in handling stress, the study provides no explanation or insight into how communication skills augment the completion of postgraduate students' research process. The research also shows that effective communication skills significantly promote and improve students' academic performance; however, the study did not address the question of how postgraduate students employ these skills when writing research dissertations. Hence, there was a need to conduct a study to investigate the contribution of communication skills employed by research supervisors to enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research process.

Tsepiso et al. (2024) emphasized that effective communication is essential to postgraduate supervision, but many obstacles exist, such as the differing educational, cultural, and racial backgrounds of supervisees and supervisors. Higher education institutions face difficulty in retaining students. Due to cultural differences, some students feel uncomfortable proceeding with their studies, which frustrates them. The study did not, however, demonstrate how supervisors' use of effective communication techniques helps postgraduate students finish their research dissertations.

The failure to accomplish the research process in universities has become a common phenomenon that has attracted the attention of various education stakeholders, including researchers. According to Fragouli (2021), the role of the research supervisors in helping postgraduate students complete the research process is challenged by the students' diverse racial, cultural, political, economic, linguistic, and educational backgrounds. It is also worth noting here that research supervisors are called upon to assist students in striking a balance between professional development and other personal life interests. A more efficient and effective postgraduate education results from students developing skills that are important for them in their lives, bridging studies, and figuring out how all supervisory team members work together more effectively. Fragouli's study did not indicate the skills to be used by supervisors in guiding postgraduate students to be competent in writing research dissertations. This raised a concern that made the current researcher find the contribution of communication skills employed by research supervisors in enhancing the completion of postgraduate students' research process.

Van et al. (2019) maintain that high dropout rates, delays, and dissatisfaction among the PhD students are common problems in doctoral education. Irshad et al. (2021) in Pakistan indicated that many doctoral students fail to complete their studies within the allowable time frame of 3-5 years. When such distinctive students fail to complete the doctorate within the stipulated time, many questions are raised by parents and employers, and no proper answers are given to them. These situations acted as a push for the current researcher to investigate how communication skills employed by research supervisors enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research process in Northern Zone Tanzania.

TCU (2022) indicates that the rate of postgraduate students' enrolment in higher learning institutions in Tanzania is high, but the number of postgraduate students completing the research process is low. When more time is taken beyond the one prescribed by universities to finish a PhD program, the student's social and financial lives are greatly affected. Tanzania Commission for Universities (2019), cognizant of the importance of supervisors' role in the research process, insists that the management of the university is mandated to ensure that supervisors assist postgraduate students with preparing their dissertations and finishing their work within the prescribed time frame. Communication skills are essential for supervisors to be able to do their work effectively and efficiently. Communication abilities guarantee information sharing among university organization participants. Supervisors can help students write their research dissertations by using these skills. Under the presumption that effective progress in writing a research dissertation depends on the interaction between supervisors and postgraduate students, the current study examined the role that communication skills play in improving the completion of postgraduate students' research process.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Poor communication attributed to differences in the educational background, culture, and race between supervisees and supervisors is one of the obstacles that negatively affect the supervisory process, thus delaying the completion of the research process and making some students feel uncomfortable in universities (Almusaed & Almssad, 2020; Tsepiso et al., 2024). The role of the research supervisors in helping PhD and masters students complete their research process despite students' diverse racial, cultural, political, economic, linguistic, and educational backgrounds (Fragouli, 2021). The delay in the process has received complaints from students, parents, supervisors, and employers due to additional tuition fees to cover the extension time (Irshad et al., 2021) and the student's educational, linguistic, political, and cultural backgrounds (Fragouli, 2021; Van et al., 2019). The reviewed studies did not settle the effects of communication skills on the completion of postgraduate students' research process. Hence, the current study investigated the affability of supervisory communication skills on research process completion for postgraduate students in universities in the Northern zone of Tanzania.

1.2. Research Question

How do the communication skills employed by research supervisors contribute to the completion of postgraduate students' research process in universities in the Northern Zone of Tanzania?

1.3. Significance of the Study

The findings of the study enable the directors of postgraduate studies to allocate postgraduate students to the right skilled supervisors. Besides, the findings help university supervisors of the Northern Zone of Tanzania maintain good communication with supervisees, set goals, identify the needs of students, and monitor postgraduate students' writing of their research well. The study's findings are beneficial to postgraduate students as they urged them to follow appropriate guidance from their supervisors and apply communication skills in writing their research based on the schedule of activities stipulated in the timetable. The results of the study can also be used by parents, students, employers, and lecturers to better understand how communication skills help postgraduate students complete their research undertakings.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded on Katz's theory of three skills, which was proposed by Robert Katz in 1955. The theory came up with three key skills for successful leaders, supervisors, and administrators: technical, human, and conceptual skills. Technical skills involve knowledge of specific work types, analytical abilities, and the use of appropriate tools and techniques. They are crucial in middle and low-level management. Human skills involve communication, problem-solving, and interpersonal abilities. These leaders create trust, identify needs, and motivate followers to achieve organizational goals. Conceptual skills, such as time management and problem-solving, are essential for top management in decision-making. The theory emphasizes the importance of employing these skills by research supervisors in guiding postgraduate students' research process. Katz's theory enables supervisors to understand the needs of postgraduate students and guide them in writing their research dissertations. The theory's focus on communication skills makes it possible for supervisors to mentor and involve students in the real research process. The weakness of the theory is its focus on identifying skills rather than explaining why some skills have a higher influence than others.

This theory is pertinent to the study because it contains supervisory skills, which are essential for supervision, communication skills being one among them. Supervisors of postgraduate students identify needs, set goals, and assist students in obtaining additional information for their research dissertations by using their communication abilities. These skills increase supervisors' ability to mentor postgraduate students, foster a relationship between the supervisor and supervisee, and help students perceive their worth and recognition. Through such communication skills, students' curiosity in learning is increased, thus enabling them to become familiar with the subject matter of their research dissertation. This facilitates the student's ability to perform their responsibilities and complete their research process on time.

3. Review of Empirical Studies

Communication skills mean the ability to convey information verbally, non-verbally, and in written ways. Communication skills are essential for personal and professional success, allowing research supervisors to engage postgraduate students, provide clear instructions, and help them adapt their writing skills in a research process.

Dong et al. (2020) conducted a study on the relationship between research supervisors and students with master's degrees in China. The study specifically focused on exploring the relationship between supervisor and supervisee regarding the use of social media, which was popular among students. The study surveyed 109 graduate students from 2 universities in China to explore information usage for research on social media related to supervisors' relationships. Social media provide freedom in communication via media technology through participation, dialogue, and community connectivity. The findings of the study revealed that graduate students were active on social media. Students had succeeded in communicating with their supervisors and improved their relationships with their fellow students. This implies that the use of social media in supervision is essential for improving good communication between supervisor and supervisee. The previous study put more emphasis on the relationship between supervisor and supervisee on the use of social media. However, information on how supervisors should maintain good communication with the students was established by the current study. Hence, the current study investigated how communication skills employed by research supervisors enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research in Northern Zone Tanzania.

Almeatani et al. (2019) carried out a study on a supervision-mobile system for enhancing student-supervisor communication in Saudi Arabia. The focus of the study was to determine the requirement for master's students to complete writing their research. The study used a case study and survey research design, which enabled the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data at the same time. However, the current study used a convergent design using a mixed research methods approach to explore more quantitative and qualitative data in one phase. The study used a survey online to collect data from graduate students and their advisors. This method requires a place where internet connectivity is very reliable for the questionnaire to be filled out on time. The findings of the study revealed that peer collaboration supports communication with students who are supervised by the same advisor. Face-to-face meetings with the supervisor were more productive in improving students' research writing; however, this would be possible if the supervisor were ready to assist students in their learning. Hence, the current study investigated how communication skills employed by supervisors enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research in the northern zone of Tanzania.

Ritesh et al., (2022) aimed at investigating the supervisory feedback to postgraduate students in Australia. The study used a questionnaire to collect information and analyze data by using narrative style analysis and presented themes. The use of one instrument is not useful to triangulate information. The findings of the study revealed that feedback skills used by supervisors and students were positively effective. This implies that supervisors should keep on creating good relationships with students and provide feedback on time. This would enable postgraduate students to write their research well and meet the deadline for submission of their work. However, at each educational level, feedback is very

important to students' academic development, and there can be differences in the type and style of providing feedback. To enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research writing, supervisors are required to guide the proper use of communication skills in universities in Northern Zone Tanzania.

Alison et al. (2020) conducted a study on making the most feedback for academic writing development in postgraduate research in Australia. The study was carried out in 1 university involving supervisors and postgraduate students. The respondents in the study participated voluntarily and gave written consent. This implies that the respondents had freedom of choice and were ready to provide support and reliable information. Data was collected through an online survey to reduce cost and time; however, this is only viable in places where internet service is very reliable. To fill the gap, the current study used a face-to-face mode of delivery, collecting information using an interview guide and questionnaire. The study used both closed and open-ended questionnaires to collect information on how the students understood the importance of feedback. The researcher analyzed data using the Mann-Whitney Test and SPSS software. Thematic analysis of the open survey was conducted by two experienced researchers. The study used a sample of 13 students and 9 supervisors to provide information.

The findings of the study revealed that an online-supported programme helps research supervisors enhance postgraduate students' academic writing development and healthy giving feedback; however, the current study was face-to-face interaction between supervisor and supervisee to see how well postgraduate students complete their research process safely. Feedback from the supervisor enabled the students to focus and make good modifications to the research work. Although the reviewed study gives healthy feedback on the online programme, the current study explored the concept and got more information to see how well face-to-face feedback employed by the research supervisors enhances the completion of postgraduate students' research process in Northern Zone Tanzania.

Ngulube (2021) conducted a study on postgraduate supervision practices in education research and the creation of opportunities for knowledge sharing in universities in South Africa. The study used content analysis of master's and PhD outputs of completion from 2010 to 2016. The study used content analysis of themes to retrieve the electronic database of the university to explore postgraduate supervision practices in the research. The researcher used a case study research design to collect data under a qualitative research approach. This enabled the researcher to get firsthand information and become part of the research. However, using a case study design confined the findings to universities in South Africa. The current study was conducted in the Northern Zone of Tanzania using a convergent design under a mixed research method approach to get the required information. The findings from the reviewed study revealed that supervision of education has remained rooted in the classical individualistic model. Team supervision creates communicative space and opportunities for knowledge sharing. This enables new supervisors to gain more experience and become more competent in performing their jobs by adopting different skills from experienced personnel in the university departments. However, students from different cultures have different ways of communicating, and if they are not handled well, it can cause misunderstandings among supervisors. Hence, the current researcher investigated how communication skills used by supervisors enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research process in universities in the Northern Zone of Tanzania. The reviewed study was based on the supervision of education in general, but the current study focused on the supervision of postgraduate students in the research process.

Generally, the reviewed studies indicated that poor communication brings inefficient research writing; however, the study did not explain how communication skills should be used to enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research process. Since most reviews conducted worldwide were in different contexts, their findings were different from those found in Tanzania. The previous studies did not indicate how communication skills enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research process. Hence, the current researcher investigated the contribution of communication skills employed by research supervisors to enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research process in universities in the Northern zone of Tanzania.

4. Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a convergent design under a mixed-methods research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population was: 6 universities in the Northern zone of Tanzania, 6 directors of postgraduate studies, 175 supervisors of postgraduate students, 14 heads of departments who offer postgraduate studies from Science, Education, Business, Medicine, and Theology, 635 masters continuing students, 390 PhD continuing students, 84 PhD alumni and 150 masters' alumni to make the total of 1454 respondents from Northern zone Tanzania (Admission offices, 2022). The researcher used proportionate stratified and simple random sampling techniques to get 36 supervisors, 55 PhD continuing students, and 89 Masters continuing students. Snowball sampling was used to sample 15 Masters alumni and 8 PhD Alumni, an expert purposive sampling technique was used to sample 5 directors of postgraduate studies, and a criterion sampling technique was used to sample 6 heads of department to make the total sample of 214 respondents which was 14.7% of 1454 entire population of the study. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), a sample of approximately 10-30 of the population is sufficient.

Questionnaires for research supervisors and continuing postgraduate students, as well as interview guides for directors of postgraduate studies, alumni postgraduates, and heads of departments, were used to collect the required information. The questionnaires and interviews were validated by three (3) research experts in educational planning and management from Mwenge Catholic University. The researcher pilot-tested the instruments using 1 university, and the reliability of the questionnaires was determined by using the Cronbach Alpha, which established a coefficient of .936 for continuing postgraduate students and .933 for research supervisors. The dependability and trustworthiness of qualitative research instruments were ensured through peer debriefing and triangulation techniques. The quantitative data were descriptively analyzed in SPSS version 21 into frequencies, mean, and standard deviation and presented in tables, charts,

and figures, while the qualitative data were thematically analyzed and presented in narratives and direct quotations. Ethical principles of research were maintained by getting informed consent from the respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. All cited works were acknowledged.

5. Results

The focus of this section is to present the findings on how communication skills employed by research supervisors enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research process as per the focus of the study. The respondents in the study were research supervisors, continuing postgraduate students, alumni masters and PhD, directors of postgraduate studies and heads of departments. The responses from the postgraduate students and research supervisors were rated on an agreement scale and interpreted according to Taherdoost (2019). To get a sense of the respondents' viewpoints, the researcher combined the percentages of agree and strongly agree to denote agree and disagree and strongly disagree to denote disagree. The information obtained from the research supervisors and continuing postgraduate students' questionnaires was supplemented with an interview guide provided by postgraduate alumni, postgraduate students' directors, and heads of departments. The responses of supervisors and postgraduate students are summarized in tables 1 and 2, respectively.

S/N	Statement	SD		D		U		A		SA		Mean
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
i	Good communication between supervisor and supervisee enhances postgraduate students' complete writing of their research with morale.	0	0	1	3.2	0	0	15	48.4	15	48.4	4.4
ii	Receiving work from students and giving feedback improve good communication and enhance the completion of the research process	1	3.2	0	0	0	0	12	38.7	18	58.1	4.5
iii	I communicate with my students orally by using polite language and directing them to write the statement of the research problem.	0	0	1	3.2	1	3.2	17	54.8	12	38.7	4.3
iv	Research supervisors communicate regularly with their students to enhance the completion of the research process	1	3.2	1	3.2	1	3.2	25	80.6	3	9.7	3.9
v	I allow my students to communicate by phone with me when faced with challenges in writing their research process.	0	0	2	6.5	0	0	16	51.6	13	41.9	4.3
vi	I listen to students' misconceptions attentively and employ listening skills to guide postgraduate students in writing their research.	1	3.2	0	0.0	1	3.2	17	54.8	12	38.7	4.3
vii	Supervisors use consultation hours to meet with their students regularly and emphasize them to complete their studies	1	3.2	1	3.2	5	16.1	18	58.1	6	19.4	3.9
viii	Supervisors conduct effective meetings with students to help postgraduate students complete their research.	1	3.2	3	9.7	4	12.9	18	58.1	5	16.1	3.7
ix	I have good collaboration with my students to enhance proper research writing	0	0	2	6.5	1	3.2	22	70.9	6	19.4	4
x	I guide my students to attend seminars that enable them to acquire relevant information about their dissertation	0	0	4	12.9	2	6.5	19	61.3	6	19.4	3.9
	The average mean score											4.1

Table 1: Supervisors' Responses on the Contribution of Communication Skills Employed by Research Supervisors Enhance Completion of Postgraduate Students' Research Process (n = 31)

Source: Field data (2023)

Key: f = Frequency, % = percentage

The data in table 1 indicate that the great majority of supervisors (96.8%) agreed with the statements that receiving work from students and giving feedback improved good communication and enhanced completion of the research process, while 3.2% strongly disagreed with the statement. This implies that research supervisors read the students' research work and provided feedback by writing comments in their research documents, and during the feedback session, the supervisors clarified areas that were not understood by the students. The average mean score of the statement was very high (4.5), implying that supervisors provided feedback to the students to improve good communication. When postgraduate alumni were interviewed to triangulate information, one of them gave the following response, "*Supervisors provided feedback through written comments on the document, email, phone and face to face*" (PAL 4, personal communication, 4th October, 2023). This indicates that supervisors' feedback with clear clarification is important to enable postgraduate students to understand the research concepts when writing research dissertations. The interviews with the heads of departments confirmed the responses obtained from the students when one of the heads of the department said: Some students complain that their supervisors do not provide feed immediately or do not show up. So, it is a matter of flexibility and the student's understanding of how to work with the supervisors because not all the time the supervisors are available based on the nature of their positions and the tasks that they do at the university (HOD 1, personal communication, 16th April, 2024).

The other head of the department emphasized:

"Supervisors have many responsibilities, especially those who have departmental responsibilities; they lack time to help students because most of the time they are busy conducting departmental meetings to discuss official duties." (HOD 3, personal communication, 17th April, 2024)

The information from heads of departments and alumni postgraduates is contrary to the supervisors' information that receiving research documents from students and providing feedback improves communication skills. This implies that some supervisors were very busy with official matters and paid little attention to providing postgraduate students feedback to modify their work. This implies that feedback skills are essential in guiding postgraduate students to complete the research process. Students are required to consult their supervisors and follow instructions given by supervisors.

Data in table 1 show that a great majority of supervisors (93.5%) agreed that good communication between supervisor and supervisee enhanced postgraduate students' completion of the research process. The average mean score of the statement was 4.4. This indicates that supervisors communicate with students orally, face-to-face, and via phones to provide guidance and support students in performing their work. This draws the attention of postgraduate students to get information through facial expressions and body language. Supervisors communicate with students using polite language, employ listening skills to listen to students' misconceptions attentively and guide postgraduate students in writing their research. Hence, supervisors provided guidance and supported students in performing their work. To triangulate the responses of the supervisors, responses from postgraduate alumni and heads of departments were sought. One of the Postgraduate alumni said, "*I had good communication; I mean, whenever I had a problem, my supervisors were ready to help me*" (PAL 1, personal communication, 20th September, 2023). This indicates that the flexibility and readiness of supervisors to listen to students' misconceptions and guide them to write correct information enhanced the completion of postgraduate students' research process.

The findings unveil that there was a channel of communication that research supervisors and postgraduate students followed in performing their duties. Communication through Zoom and WhatsApp enabled supervisors and postgraduate students to see each other and provided an opportunity for students to ask questions and get clear information. Hence, the use of monitoring forms draws the attention of students to communicate with their supervisors and discuss the students' progress in the research process. Hence, the findings of the study revealed that information from alumni postgraduates and heads of departments concur with the responses of research supervisors that good communication between supervisors and postgraduate students enhanced the completion of postgraduate students' research process.

Data in table 1 show that a great majority of supervisors (90.3%) indicated that they collaborated with postgraduate students, while 3.2% were undecided, and 6.5% disagreed with the statement. The statement had an average mean score of 4.03. Moreover, data indicate that the great majority of supervisors (80.7%) indicated that they guided postgraduate students to attend research seminars, while a minority of 6.5% were undecided, and 12.9% of supervisors disagreed with the statement, with an average mean score of 3.87. This suggests that the participation of postgraduate students in the scheduled postgraduate research seminar presentations enabled students to learn and acquire communication skills such as facing the audience, speaking without reading the texts on slides, and controlling some emotional feelings when answering questions orally. The high average mean score responses of supervisors implied that postgraduate students were given opportunities to learn different research concepts from other students' presentations. This made students develop self-confidence and avoid repeating similar mistakes. The data in table 1 show that 6.5% of supervisors disagreed with the statement, which could imply that some students were not attending the presentations and some supervisors were not active in performing their jobs. This situation could create an uncondusive environment for some postgraduate students, thus delaying the completion of the dissertation writing. Hence, the director of postgraduate studies should keep reminding students to attend seminars and be committed to their work.

The data in table 1 show that the majority of supervisors (77.5%) agreed with the statement that supervisors use consultation hours to meet with their students regularly and urge them to complete their studies, while 16.1% of supervisors were undecided and a minority 6.4% of supervisors disagreed with the statement. This connotes that the majority of supervisors (77.5%) used consultation hours to meet with students, while 6.4% of supervisors did not. This could be due to some supervisors being busy with teaching to the extent of jeopardizing consultation sessions for students. The findings of the study are in agreement with Katz's Theory of 1955, which revealed that leaders with higher levels of

communication, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills can adapt their ideas to followers in order to achieve organizational goals. Good communication between supervisor and supervisee creates an atmosphere of trust and identifies the needs of the students. The findings from supervisors revealed that all statements in the scale had high average mean scores ranging from 3.7 to 4.5. This implies that communication skills employed by research supervisors contributed immensely to the completion of postgraduate students' research process.

Apart from collecting data from the supervisors, the researcher inquired about the continuing postgraduate students' views with regard to the use of communication skills to enhance the completion of the research process. Table 2 summarises their responses.

		SD		D		U		A		SA		M	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
i.	My supervisors employ oral elaboration communication skills to enhance postgraduate students' completion research process	M	1	1.1	3	3.4	2	2.2	52	58.5	31	34.8	4.2
		P	1	1.8	6	10.9	8	14.5	27	49.2	13	23.6	3.7
ii.	My supervisors correct students' work and provide feedback immediately to enhance the completion of the research process	M	4	4.5	8	9	6	6.7	46	51.7	25	28.1	3.9
		P	4	7.3	6	10.9	6	10.6	23	41.8	16	29.1	3.7
iii.	My supervisor uses polite language to communicate with postgraduate students and directs them to write a clear statement of the problem.	M	4	4.5	5	5.6	8	9	47	52.8	25	28.1	3.9
		P	2	3.6	5	9.1	3	5.5	24	43.6	21	38.2	4
iv.	My supervisors conduct conversations with postgraduate students orally when faced with challenges in their research process	M	1	1.1	3	3.4	1	1.1	50	56.2	34	38.2	4.3
		P	3	5.5	4	7.3	5	9	20	36.4	23	41.8	3.9
v.	My supervisors employ listening skills to understand the students' misconceptions and guide them to complete the research process	M	3	3.4	5	5.6	7	7.9	45	50.5	29	32.6	4
		P	4	7.3	6	10.9	7	12.7	22	40	16	29.1	3.7
vi.	My supervisors use consultation hours to meet with students regularly and insist on the completion of the research process.	M	3	3.4	6	6.7	11	12.4	40	44.9	29	32.6	3.9
		P	4	7.3	8	14.5	10	18.2	23	41.8	10	18.2	3.5
vii.	My supervisors take parental responsibility in communicating and guiding postgraduate students to complete the research process.	M	5	5.6	7	7.9	14	15.7	37	41.6	26	29.2	3.8
		P	0	0	4	7.3	10	18.2	22	40	19	34.5	4
viii.	My supervisors provide feedback to students in written form.	M	3	3.5	2	2.2	8	9	47	52.7	29	32.6	4
		P	0	0	3	5.5	7	12.7	29	52.7	16	29.1	4.1
ix.	My supervisors conduct effective meetings with students to enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research process.	M	3	3.4	11	12.4	5	5.6	54	60.6	16	18	3.8
		P	0	0	5	9	10	18.2	20	36.4	20	36.4	4.1
x.	My supervisors guide students to attend research seminars to acquire relevant information to complete their research process.	M	5	5.6	4	4.5	13	14.6	43	48.3	24	27	3.9
		P	1	1.8	5	9.1	4	7.3	22	40	23	41.8	4.1
	Total mean scores	M											4
		P											3.9

Table 2: Postgraduate (Masters and PhD) Students' Responses on the Way Communication Skills Employed by Research Supervisors Enhance Completion of Postgraduate Students' Research Process (N=89 Masters, and PhD =52)

Source: Field Data (2023)

Key: F= Frequency, %= Percentage, M = Masters and P = PhD Students.

Data in table 2 show that a great majority of masters (94.4%) and PhD postgraduate students (78.2%) agreed with the statement that supervisors conduct conversations with postgraduate students orally when faced with challenges in their research process, while 1.1% of masters and 9% of PhD were undecided and 4.5% of masters and 12.8% of PhD students disagreed with the statement. The findings imply that both master's and PhD students had an opportunity to meet their supervisors to address challenges encountered during the research process. Oral communication between

supervisors and students seemed to be an important aspect of the supervisory relationship and the research process for the postgraduate students.

A minority percentage of master's students (1.1%) and PhD students (9%) remained undecided about the statement, while 4.5% of master's students and (12.8%) of PhD students disagreed with the statement. These findings imply that some students had problems getting into meaningful conversations with their supervisors to address research challenges, which contributed to delays in the completion of the research process. Almeatani et al. (2019) emphasized that face-to-face meetings with supervisors were more productive in improving students' research writing. This implies that good communication employed by supervisors in guiding postgraduate students enhances the completion of the research process.

When one of the postgraduate alumni was interviewed on how communication skills were used by supervisors to enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research process, the following response was given:

"I normally call my supervisor by phone; hence, whenever he has time, we meet, and if he has no time, we make local arrangements to meet at another time." (PAL 3, personal communication, 24th September 2023)

This means that good communication between supervisor and supervisee encourages students to work hard and gain different skills in improving their dissertations within their research process. This was possible because supervisors were ready to support the students. The other postgraduate Alumni commented, *"I can say that supervisors are cooperative and help students to achieve their goals, including myself; I managed to complete my studies on time"* (PAL 6, personal communication, 28th October, 2023). The information given by postgraduate alumni 6 shows that the success of students depends on cooperation between supervisors and postgraduate studies in exchanging ideas and focusing on modifying the research dissertation to be of good standard. This information correlates with the data from research supervisors in table 4 that the great majority of supervisors (90.3%) communicate orally with postgraduate students to improve their research dissertations and complete their research process. This means that the students who paid attention to their supervisors' suggestions managed to write their research dissertations as instructed by their supervisors. However, those who were not communicating with their supervisors had delays in completion. The findings of the study show that oral conversation encouraged postgraduate students to work cooperatively with their supervisors. Hence, during conversation sessions, supervisors should create a conducive environment to communicate with students and elaborate on all written comments.

Data in table 2 indicate that the great majority of masters (93.3%) and the majority of PhD students (72.8%) agreed that supervisors employed oral elaboration communication skills to enhance postgraduate students' completion of their research process while 2.2% of masters and 14.5% of PhD were undecided and 4.5% of masters and 12.7% of PhD students disagreed with the statement. This implies that oral elaboration communication skills were effectively employed by the supervisors to guide the postgraduate students in the course of completing their research process. However, some supervisors were not using oral communication skills to guide postgraduate students in completing their research process, and other students were busy with family and personal issues, which contributed to delays in the completion of postgraduate students' research process. The findings of the study revealed that the use of oral elaboration clarifies areas of misconceptions and provides enough room for students to ask questions and get correct answers, which motivates students to work hard in their research process. Students succeeded in communicating with their supervisors and improved their relationships with their fellow students (Dong et al., 2020). This entails that oral clarification on educational, social and family issues removes all misconceptions and helps supervisors find a good way of guiding postgraduate students in the completion of their research process.

Data in table 2 show that the great majority of master students (83.1%) and the majority of PhD (69.1%) indicated that their supervisors employed listening skills to understand students' misconceptions and guide them to complete their research, while 7.9% of masters and 12.7% of PhD students were undecided and a minority of masters (9%) and PhD students (18.2%) disagreed with the statement. These findings imply that despite the efforts made by the majority of supervisors to employ listening skills in guiding postgraduate students to complete the research process, few of the supervisors were not performing their jobs, thus contributing to delays in the completion of the research process among postgraduate students. This situation acts as a wake-up call for the university administration to closely follow up on the supervision process.

When postgraduate alumni were asked to give their views on how communication skills were used by supervisors to enhance the completion of the postgraduate research process, one of them gave the following response, *"To be honest, I can say that supervisors are cooperative and active. I managed to achieve my goal because of their commitments"* (PAL 6, personal communication, 28th October, 2023). The other alumni postgraduate reported, *"We communicate with the supervisor over the phone and via email."* (PAL 4, personal communication, 28th September, 2023)

Information from the postgraduate alumni signifies those supervisors employed their listening skills in guiding postgraduate students to complete their research process. Hence, delays in completion by some postgraduate students could be due to some supervisors who were not employing their listening skills to guide postgraduate students in their research process. The findings of the study show that listening skills employed by research supervisors enhanced the completion of postgraduate students' research process with some deficiencies. The findings of the study concur with information from Robert Kart in 1955, who emphasized that Human skills involve communication, problem-solving, and interpersonal abilities. These leaders create trust, identify needs, and motivate followers to achieve organizational goals.

The data in table 2 show that the great majority of masters' students (85.3%) and PhD students (81.8%) agreed that their supervisors provided feedback to students in written form, while 9% of masters and 12.7% of PhD were undecided and 5.7% of masters and 5.5% of PhD students disagreed with the statement. This suggests that the majority of postgraduate students demonstrated satisfaction with the written comments provided by their supervisors. The findings

of the study show that a minority percentage of students had concerns about the written comments they got from their supervisors. This scenario could be due to some supervisors being busy with teaching and personal activities, thus paying little attention to provide feedback to the students, leading to some students' delays in the completion of their process.

On the other hand, the findings from the continuing postgraduate students' questionnaires concur with the information obtained from the interviews with one of the directors of postgraduate study who said:

"Written feedback is usually given to postgraduate students by their supervisors depending on the research process stage of the students; some supervisors send feedback in soft-copy format through email, and others write feedback in the students' hardcopy documents. Some students meet with their supervisors face to face, and others are given feedback in written form through email or comments written in their documents." (DPGS 5, personal communication, 14th January 2024)

Another director had this to say on the issue of feedback:

"During feedback sessions, the students usually visit their supervisors' offices. Some supervisors do not hold physical meetings with the students but rather communicate with them through telephone. However, when a discussion with the student is arranged, the students get correct information from the supervisors' clarification of unknown concepts." (DPGS 1, personal communication, 12th September, 2023)

This implies that written feedback from supervisors is supposed to be elaborated clearly either through phone or meeting face-to-face with the student to create a conducive environment for the students in writing their research dissertation. Face-to-face feedback provides clear understanding and firsthand information to the students. The findings of the study concur with the study of Ritesh et al. (2022), who revealed that feedback skills employed by supervisors were effective for the students' academic growth. This implies that feedback skills employed by research supervisors enhanced the completion of postgraduate students' research process. Since some students were dissatisfied with the feedback provided by supervisors, training on research supervision should be given to supervisors to update their knowledge and to remind them of their responsibility to keep communication with their supervisees active.

The data in table 2 show that the majority of master's students (75.3%) and the great majority PhD students (81.8%) agreed that their supervisors guided postgraduate students to attend research seminars to acquire relevant information to complete their research process, while 14.6% of masters and 7.3% of PhD were undecided and 10.1% of masters and 10.9% of PhD students disagreed with the statement. Through the seminars, postgraduate students can network with other researchers, learn about current research innovations, and obtain information pertinent to their research process. The findings imply that the research supervisors, based on their experiences, respected research seminars and tried to get their students to attend. Moreover, they take it as their responsibility to make sure that their students attend seminars and maintain strong connections to the larger research process. However, based on the findings, not all supervisors prioritized research seminar attendance for postgraduate students. Individual differences in supervision skills and research field could contribute to some students receiving less guidance from their supervisors.

The data in table 2 show that the majority of master's students (78.6%) and the great majority PhD students (72.8%) agreed that their supervisors conducted face-to-face meetings with students to enhance the completion of postgraduate students' research process, while 5.6% of masters and 18.2% of PhD were undecided and 15.8% of masters and 9% of PhD students disagreed with the statement. Face-to-face meetings between supervisors and students are a common and effective practice in postgraduate research supervision. It creates personal interaction and direct guidance for postgraduate students. Face-to-face meetings allow for better communication, feedback, and mentoring, which contribute to the successful completion of students' research process. Students find these meetings helpful for the progress and completion of their research process. However, responses that were contrary to the majority connote that there were some variations in the implementation of face-to-face meetings across different supervisors.

Data in table 2 indicate that the majority of masters (77.5%) and moderate PhD students (60%) agreed with the statement that supervisors used consultation hours to meet with students regularly and insist on the completion of the research process, while 12.4% of masters and PhD students (18.2) were undecided and a minority 10.1% of masters and PhD students (21.8%) disagreed with the statement. The findings unfolded that consultation hours provided a good opportunity for the students to meet with their supervisors to clear some concepts that were not familiar and provide a guide on how the work should be written by adhering to the university research format.

This implies that scheduled consultation hours were a common practice in postgraduate supervision and that supervisors recognized the importance of regular meetings and insisted on research completion during these consultation hours. The findings also imply that some students had different experiences and faced some challenges in meeting with their supervisors, thus, contributing to delays in the completion of students' research process. The findings of the study also show that some supervisors did not pay attention to helping the students during consultation hours. In this scenario, the university administration should keep on following up and guiding supervisors in performing their work.

During an interview with the directors of postgraduate studies, DPGS.1, DPGS.2, and DPGS.3 confirmed that they put mechanisms to ensure that supervisors are available. The first (1) director of postgraduate studies replied:

"There are various mechanisms we use to ensure the accessibility of supervisors. First of all, supervisors are appointed after the approval of the Senate. They are usually required to sign a memorandum of understanding that binds the students and the supervisors. There are several days when supervisors are required to meet with the students to discuss issues and give feedback." (DPGS 1, personal communication, 12th September, 2023)

The other director said:

"We emphasized supervisors to display the schedule of consultation hours as one way of maintaining good interaction between the supervisor and the students" (DPGS 2, personal communication, 31st October, 2023).

The third director said:

"Our students know the research journey since they joined here; we remind them of the milestones to achieve or what is expected of them and the time frame; for example, the PhD students need to have six presentations comprising of the concept note, proposal and four papers while for masters students need to accomplish course work, proposal presentation and oral presentation of the final document. In line with that, there is a monthly timetable for presentations for masters and PhD students." (DPGS 3, personal communication, 28th November, 2023)

This implies that completion of postgraduate students' research process at the master level requires a student to present a concept note, seminar paper one, research proposal, seminar paper two and final document of the research dissertation, and at the PhD level, the students need to present pre-concept note, concept note, seminar paper one, two, three and four, presentation of data, presentation of the findings and viva voce. This enables postgraduate students to have enough knowledge and skills to write research dissertations. Moreover, going through all those stages, the postgraduate student will be able to demonstrate initiative and personal responsibility in decision-making and independent learning ability required for continuing professional development, self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems and implementing tasks at a professional level, and deal with complex ethical and professional issues as per the requirements of TCU minimum standards 2019. The findings of the study revealed that the issue of postgraduate students' supervision in the research process was communicated to students and supervisors at a very early stage of the research process to provide enough time for supervisors to explore their skills in guiding students to write their research. Hence, the engagement of students in oral communication during consultation hours motivated them to develop good communication skills that enabled them to write their research dissertation with proper care and follow instructions from their supervisors.

The information from continuing postgraduate students, postgraduate alumni, research supervisors, heads of departments and directors of postgraduate studies, as supported by the mean scores ranging from 3.5 – 4.5 on a 10-item Likert scale, gives the reality on the ground in higher learning institutions when it comes to the research process. This implies that communication skills employed by research supervisors contributed to the completion of postgraduate students' research process by enabling research supervisors to provide feedback to postgraduate students immediately, guide students to attend research seminars and learn different information about the research process, make oral elaborations with postgraduate to clarify some research concepts, receive students' work and give feedback to improve the completion of students' research process, conduct meetings with students, use polite language to communicate with students, pay attention in listening to students challenges and give clear elaboration to clarify some research concepts that found difficult to be understood by students.

However, in some instances, the findings unfold that some supervisors did not provide feedback immediately, which caused delays for some postgraduate students in the completion of their research process. This scenario was attributed to research supervisors who were overwhelmed with official responsibilities to the extent of not being able to provide productive feedback to postgraduate students. Some supervisors did not pay attention to helping the students during consultation hours. This situation calls the attention of the university administration to continue following and guiding supervisors in performing their work. Hence, university administration should keep finding good ways to help students accomplish their studies.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that communication skills employed by research supervisors contributed completion of postgraduate students' research process through the provision of feedback to postgraduate students immediately, guidance to students to attend research seminars, oral elaboration with postgraduates to clarify some research concepts, receiving students' work and giving feedback on time, using polite language to communicate with students, and paying attention in listening to students' challenges. Moreover, the study concluded that delays in completing the research process by some postgraduate students were caused by some supervisors who did not provide feedback immediately as expected.

7. Recommendation

From the conclusion, the study recommended that university administration should continuously strive to enhance student support in achieving their academic goals. Supervisors should identify the needs of the students, conduct several meetings with the students, be flexible in guiding students, and encourage students to own their work.

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