



Supervisor's Rank and Student's Performance in Post Graduate Research in Universities in Cross River State

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Abstract: The study investigates influence of supervisors' rank on students' performance in post graduate theses and dissertations in postgraduate research in universities in Cross River State. The study adopted the ex-post factor research design. The population of the study consists of all the 3912 Post graduate degree students who completed their theses defence between 2019 to 2021 academic year among Universities in Cross River State, with specific reference to the University of Calabar, University of Cross River State and the Calabar center of the National Open University of Nigeria. Using the simple random sampling technique to select 406 respondents, data was analysed using the one-way ANOVA. The findings reveal that the supervisors' rank has no significant influence on students' performance in post graduate thesis and dissertation. Students' performance in their final year research work is the same (equal) for those supervised by Lecturer 1, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor. This may be true because of the open access possibility for supervisees to maximize online resources or consult academic mentors who might not be highly ranked academically. The study conclude that deans of Post Graduate School or postgraduate school administrators should ensure that different departments and faculties where postgraduate programmes are domiciled assigns supervisor with a higher level of expertise with regards to specialization and interest, rather than rank to supervise their post graduate student since the rank of supervisors' does not influence students' performance in post graduate research theses and dissertation.

Keywords: Supervisor's rank, Student's performance, Post graduate research, Universities.

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis supervisor is usually known as overseer, monitor, mentor, facilitator or a coordinator. A supervisor can also be one of the most senior staff at the place of work such as a professor, Associate Professor, Senior lecturers who oversees a graduate student's thesis or dissertation in the

universities (Schultz & Duane, 2010). In most cases, the supervisors' rank does not enhance students' effective performance in thesis supervision as most students learn thesis and dissertation writing from online resources and other research mentors who may likely not be senior lecturers but are knowledgeable in thesis and dissertation.

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Winston, Miller, Ender, Grites, and Associates, (1984) in Nathara (2013) study on a supervisor's roles for successful thesis and dissertation found that the success of a thesis or a dissertation for a graduate student relies upon the roles of their supervisor. The student not only needs to be equipped with the knowledge, but also be able to manage others and external factors at the same time. The journey during the period of conducting research is mixed with various tasks. Five supportive roles of a supervisor involving the supervision system are specific technical support, broader intellectual support, administrative support, management, and personal support brings about the output of the study. A supervisor's roles for successful thesis and dissertation is reported by using the survey on graduate students in the universities in Thailand probing for the current practices of supervisor and the expectation of student towards the supervisor's roles. The reflection from the students' perspective can help develop relationship between supervisor and student for undertaking a successful thesis and dissertation. The study also contended that the goal of being a good supervisor is to help a student advisee to complete the thesis and dissertation. Thus, the supervisor's roles take effect not only the successful completion of student thesis and dissertation work in good time but also to help the student's total development. The source concluded that the foundation of an original idea of academic advising can be applied to the roles of supervisor and the vital idea concerned for student "personal" development. Thus, the concentration for academic advising is designed to facilitate "total" development for each student.

Norhasni, Aminuddin and Abdul (2009), conducted a study on open access research student supervision. The study averred that supervisor's rank influences thesis supervision due to the experience the supervisor may have acquired during his or her working with the students. In other case, a student might performance excellently well in thesis supervision by consulting online research materials and consultation from research mentors who may likely not be highly academically ranked. According to their study, rank is a function of person's educational qualification, experience or other critical accomplishments in the place of work but not necessarily experienced in research supervision. Tosun (1997) in Nuri and Bıkmaz (2014) pointed out that some instructors who conduct thesis supervision do not fulfill the qualifications necessary for being thesis supervisor. There is expectation that the supervisor of the thesis brings the impact of his rank to bear on the quality of the thesis and its defence.

Judith, Semeijn, Janjaap, Cees & Gelderman (2009) reported that an increasing number of

educators are actively involved in master thesis supervision as part of their daily responsibilities. Master of Science degrees are becoming increasingly popular, with a master thesis required for the completion of the degree program. As a result, the supervisory staff involved in the supervision process at universities and institutes of higher learning is broadening, and includes people with limited supervisory experience. The study concluded that supervisors' rank is not equitable with supervisory experience.

The roles of a supervisor are professional roles. The supervisor concurrently may act in many roles as a coach, teacher, friend, colleague, trainer, role model, and guide. Coaching builds trust and understanding between the student and the supervisor (Robertson, 2009). The students need the direction of the supervisor who should be preferably of the rank of professor, Associate Professor or Senior lecturer. Beside coaching and training, the supervisor also acts as a role model who listens and guides the student to achieve the goal. The master plan for conducting research can be illustrated as a cycle of research (Wisker, 2008) as the stages of ideas, plan, activities, assess and evaluate ideas, re-plan activities, assess and evaluate. The cycle that moves on each stage is accumulated with experiences of previous stages characterized by confirming and reflecting the new knowledge. A study on the students' persistence in a distributed doctoral program in educational leadership in higher education (Ivankova & Stick, 2007) mentioned that the feedback from an academic adviser is beneficial and helpful for a student to succeed in his/her thesis and dissertation. Furthermore, a good supervisor requires the leadership skills: a mixture of three-skill approach (Northouse, 2010) technical skill, human skill, and conceptual skill to help the student in producing the best outcome.

Cohen (1995) expressed that the features that students desire from their supervisors are supporting students, having enabling role and guiding, which can be carried out by any educator that is knowledgeable in research supervision irrespective of academic rank. Although thesis supervisors have important effects on students from several aspects, Tosun (1997) pointed out that some instructors who play thesis supervisor role do not fulfill the qualifications necessary for being thesis supervisor. Within this framework, in the event that the supervisors, who have important positive effect during the process, do not fulfil the qualifications expected of them, the outcomes tend to be negative. Hence, it can be said that most graduate students have problems with their supervisors who do not possess desirable qualifications. Some students may drop out owing to poor thesis supervision. Aside from

these, students having anxieties about their research abilities in the aspects of communication and relationship with supervisor get stalled or slowed down on their work (Acker, Hill & Black, 1994).

Bazrafkan, Yousefy and Yamani (2019) studied on The Journey of Thesis Supervisors from Novice to Expert: A Grounded Theory Study. Supervision is a well-defined interpersonal relationship between the thesis supervisors and their students. The purpose of this study was to identify the patterns which can explain the process of expertise attainment by thesis supervisors. A quantitative and conceptual model/framework of 20 universities of medical sciences in Iran since 2017 was used as sample. Purposive snowball sampling and theoretical sampling was used to enroll 84 participants. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Based on the encoding approach of Strauss and Corbin (1998), the data underwent open, axial and selective coding by constant comparative analysis. Then, the core variables were selected and a model was developed. The findings showed that the results obtained from supervision by a novice supervisor are not the same expectation from an Associate Professor and a Professor.

In this context, the expectations of graduate students and the results that are obtained will give significant ideas to supervisors. Students need a leader who keeps them on track during their research work and makes them feel confident. The supervisor's roles are critical, and the success of the student depends on supervisor's ability to tell the student the truth and to respond to what needs to be done in time. The supervisor should know the strengths and weaknesses of the student. At the same time, the supervisor should know how to provide relevant documents, expertise, advice, and emotional support, and allow the student to learn self-motivation to attain all of their goals.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted the ex-post facto research design. This design is chosen because at the time of data collection, the independent (causal) variable namely supervisor variables had already happened and there is nothing the researcher could do to control them. The population of the study consists of all the 3912 Post graduate degree students who completed their theses defence between 2019 to 2021 academic year among Universities in Cross River State, with specific reference to the University of Calabar, University of Cross River State and the Calabar center of the National Open University of

Nigeria. Using Taro Yamane (1967 formula to justify the sample size, Hence a sample size of 406 used is adequate, having exceeded the 363 minimum required by this formula. For each University, about 10.37 percent of the population of students in a Faculty was selected by simple random sampling. The theses and dissertations were numbered serially from one to three thousand nine hundred and twelve (1-3,912). Each number was written on a slip of paper folded and placed in a box. After shaking it, one slip of paper was selected each time with replacement. This was done until the 406 sample theses and dissertations were selected. The sample of this study consist of forty nine (49) students alongside Supervisor(s) from Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, one hundred and ninety five (195) students alongside Supervisor(s) from the University of Calabar and one hundred and sixty two (162) students alongside Supervisor(s) from National Open University of Nigeria, Calabar study center. This gives a supposed sample of four hundred and twenty (420) students alongside Supervisor(s) drawn from three (3) Universities in the study area from 2019 – 2021. However, fourteen supervisors (3.3%) provided incomplete data leaving the real sample size at 406 students, with the fourteen as mortality figure. The study made use of both primary and secondary data sources. The secondary data is the set of scores (grades) of theses and dissertations students obtained from the respective universities in the Post Graduate School as was obtained from the assessment report of the external examiner(s) of the candidates examined. The major instrument used in the study was the researcher – designed Theses and Dissertations supervisor variables scale (TADSVS); comprising sections A and B. Section A elicited information on the supervisor's personal data, including name of respondent, name of the university, faculty, department and sex. While section B comprised twenty (20) items measuring supervisor's attitude to thesis supervision using a five point agreement Likert scale; Very Strongly Agree (VSA), Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The one-way ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses raised in the study since the dependent variable (performance) is continuous and the independent variable (rank) is categorical and more than two categories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic description of respondents

The data for this study were collected from a random sample of 406 respondents. Their demographic description was done using frequency counts and simple percentage as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents demographic description

Demographic variable		N	%
Institution	UNICROSS	53	13.0
	UNICAL	200	49.0
	NOUN	153	38.0
	Total	406	100.0
Faculty	Science	62	15.3
	Arts	35	8.6
	Communication	24	5.9
	Education	100	24.6
	Management	80	19.7
	Basic medical	35	8.6
	Engineering	2	0.5
	Agriculture	6	1.5
	Social Science	62	15.3
Total	406	100.0	
Gender	Male	287	70.7
	Female	199	29.3
	Total	406	100.0
Teaching experience	1-7 years	21	5.2
	8-14 years	38	9.4
	15-21 years	99	24.4
	Above 21 years	248	61.0
	Total	406	100.0
Area of specialization	Pure sciences	125	30.8
	Arts	20	4.9
	Communication	28	6.9
	Education	130	32.0
	Management	18	4.4
	Basic medical Science	21	5.2
	Engineering	32	7.9
	Agricultural science	12	3.0
	Social Science	20	4.9
Total	406	100.0	
Supervisor's rank	Lecturer 1	21	5.2
	Senior lecturer	38	9.4
	Associate professor	99	24.4
	Professor	248	61.1
	Others	0	0
	Total	406	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

The results in Table 1 show that 53 students (13.1%) came from UNICROSS, 200 (49.3%) from UNICAL and 167 (41.1%) came from NOUN. By faculty, 62 (15.3%) were from Science, 35 (8.6%) from Arts, 24 (5.9%) Communication, 100 (24.6%) Education, 80 (19.7%) from Management Sciences, 35 (8.6%) from Basic Medical, 2 (0.5%) from Engineering, 6 (1.5%) from Agricultural Science and 62 (15.3%) from Social Science. In terms of gender, 287 (70.7%) were males and 119 (29.3%) females. With respect to years of teaching experience, 21 (5.2%) had taught for 1-7years, 38 (9.4%) for 8-14 years, 99 (24.4%) for 15 – 21 years and 248 (61.0%) for above 21 years. By area of specialization, 125 (30.8%) were of Pure Sciences, 20 (4.9%) Arts, 28 (6.9%) Communication, 130 (32.0%) Education, 18 (4.4%) Management Sciences, 21 (5.2%) from Basic

Medical Sciences, 32 (7.9%) from Engineering, 12 (3.0%) from Agricultural Sciences and 20 (4.9%) from Social Science. By ranks, 21 (5.2%) were Lecturer 1, 38 (9.4%) Senior lecturer, 99 (24.4%) Associate professor and 248 (61.1%) Professor. Thus the sample was considered heterogeneous enough for the study.

Influence of supervisors' rank on students' performance

Hypothesis one: There is no significant influence of supervisors' rank on students' performance in post graduate theses and dissertations.

To test this hypothesis, since the dependent variable (performance) is continuous and the independent variable (rank) is categorical and more

than two categories, the one-way ANOVA was used, with results as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Univariate ANOVA of student' theses and dissertations performance by supervisors' rank

supervisors' rank	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error
Lecturer 1	21	71.697	7.968	1.755
Senior lecturer	38	70.308	7.304	1.308
Associate professor	99	70.086	8.208	.816
Professor	248	70.459	8.714	.577
Total	406	70.413	8.034	.698

Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F - value	P -value
Corrected model	45.419	3	15.148	.238	.876
Intercept	906402.343	1	906402.343	13961.450*	.000
Supervisor's rank	45.419	3	15.418	.238	.876
Error	26098.560	402	64.902		
Total	2039105.330	406			
Corrected Total	26143.979	405			

Not significant at .05 level (P >.05)

In Table 2, students under the supervision of Lecturer 1 had the highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 71.697$), followed by those supervised by professors ($\bar{x} = 70.459$) and the least were those supervised by Associate Professors ($\bar{x} = 70.086$). The p -value (.876) associated with the computed F-value (.238) is greater than .05. Hence, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means that supervisor's rank has no significant influence on students' performance in post graduate theses and dissertations.

The foregoing finding revealed that the null hypothesis was not rejected. That is the supervisors' rank has no significant influence on students' performance in post graduate thesis and dissertation. Students' performance in their final year research work is the same (equal) for those supervised by Lecturer 1, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor. This may be true because of the open access possibility for supervisees to maximize online resources or consult academic mentors who might not be highly ranked academically.

Contrary to the finding of this work, Winston, Miller, Ender, Grites, and Associates, (1984) in Nathara (2013) conducted a study on a supervisor's roles for successful thesis and dissertation found that the success of a thesis or a dissertation for a graduate student lies on the roles of their supervisor. The student not only needs to be equipped with the knowledge, but also be able to manage others and external factors at the same time. The journey during the period of conducting research is mixed with various tasks. Five supportive roles of a supervisor involving the supervision system are specific technical support, broader intellectual support, administrative support, management, and personal support brings about the output of the study. A

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CONCLUDING REMARK AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings show that the rank of the supervisor's rank does not influence students' performance in theses and dissertation. This is because the student can consult online resources and still do better in research and in some case, when the high ranking lecturers (supervisors) are not keeping abreast of current trends in research supervision, knowledge gap is created which may lead to their inability to perform effective supervision thereby making a low ranking supervisor more effective and better in thesis and dissertation supervision. The implication of these findings to education and measurement is that every research student should be encouraged to be free to consult and interact with a custodian of knowledge anywhere in the world whether he is his supervisor/or not because it can also help to promote educational research in Nigerian Universities. Finally, the study recommend that

deans of Post Graduate School or postgraduate school administrators should ensure that different departments and faculties where postgraduate programmes are domiciled assigns supervisor with a higher level of expertise with regards to specialization and interest, rather than rank to supervise their post graduate student since the rank of supervisors' does not influence students' performance in post graduate research theses and dissertation.

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