

Factors Accounting for Delayed Completion of Theses Among Postgraduate Students of the University of Education, Winneba

Cosmos K. Dzikunu , Martin Wiredu Agyekum, Edison D. Pajibo , Daniel Yelkpiერი
Institute for Educational Research and Innovation Studies (IERIS)
University of Education, Winneba
yelkpiერი2017@gmail.com

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Abstract : *The purpose of this research is to examine the factors accounting for the delay of post-graduate theses completion among students in the University of Education, Winneba. The study adopted a case study design. Semi-structured interview was used to collect data. Documentary evidence from the University were also used. The target population was made up of supervisors of student theses and alumni of the University of Education, Winneba. Eighteen participants constituted the study sample. Purposive and snow ball sampling techniques were used to select supervisors and alumni. The key findings of the research are four-fold; that is student-related-factors, delay in working on corrections suggested by supervisors; supervisors-related factors, supervisors' workload, administration and supervision; institutional-related factors and financial challenges. The study recommends that post-graduate students are assigned to supervisors within their area of specialisation and at the early stage of enrolment. Also, departmental graduate committees should institute regular thesis seminars by which students can present progress report on specific chapters of the work for effective tracking.*

Key words: supervisors, alumni, graduate students, thesis completion, seminars

INTRODUCTION

Generally, it is noted that “the research and development initiatives at the university level, especially in the postgraduate programmes, have significantly contributed to the knowledge-based society, and therefore, many universities are actively promoting their postgraduate programmes” (Muthukrishnan, Sidhu, Hoon, Narayanan, & Fook, 2022, p. 51). This might be as a result of the fact that postgraduate research and development contribute immensely to the ranking and visibility

of universities globally. In respect of this, there has been an increased in graduate enrolment across all universities around the world (Muthukrishnan, et al. 2022).

However, in all these efforts, the most important regarding the postgraduate research journey is graduation and therefore, “postgraduates need to engage themselves in an immersive research environment” (Muthukrishnan, et al. 2022, p. 51) in order to complete their theses and graduate on time. Meanwhile, the realization of postgraduate students graduating on time has become a nightmare for many. This growing concern over the quality of postgraduate training, the length of time it takes students to complete their studies, success rate and the high percentage of postgraduate students who terminate their studies is worrying. All these concerns point to the fact that there are some underlying factors that contribute to the delay of postgraduate thesis completion in our universities, and the world over.

In the early nineties, for instance, several institutions in Canada expressed concern about problems with postgraduate education, especially the long time it takes students to complete their research (Frempong, Osei-Amankwah, Kyeremeh, 2020). Similarly, in the United States of America, the Council of Graduate Schools reported in 1991 that time-to-degree and the changing research environment was of great concern to many stakeholders in higher education. In support of this argument, Lessing and Schultze (2002) noted that attrition rates and completion rates of postgraduate students were becoming statistics of vital concern to government and funding agencies as they tended to rely on a performance-driven model to make informed judgments about higher degree research.

Oredein (2012) indicated that only 10 percent of Masters degree candidates completed their dissertations in three years at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, in 1998. These concerns point to a common phenomenon; that is, postgraduate students in both advanced and developing countries are experiencing problems which either delay their studies and prevent them from completing on time or make them abandon their studies. In view of this realization of similar trends across the world, studies in postgraduate duration and concerns about shortening the time taken to complete postgraduate studies have become of utmost interest not only to managers of higher educational institutions but to governments, funders of postgraduate studies and other stakeholders in higher education.

Some scholars in educational research (Atkinson & Parry, 2000; Lessing & Schultze, 2001; Mouton, 2001; Grant, 2002) believe that problems of low completion rates are mainly due to poor supervision and can therefore be solved by improving supervision offered to students. Although, the emphasis here is on the role of the supervisor, the significance of the students’ role in the relationship towards achieving timely completion of thesis has also been recognized as a significant factor.

Studies that support the view that institutional inadequacies are responsible for slow completion and non-completion rather than student-centred factors also support attempts that focus on enhancing the supervisory process, postgraduate supervisor development efforts, enhancing supervisors' understanding of their responsibilities in order to improve upon their relationships with students and co-supervisors (Albertyn, Kapp & Bitzer, 2008; Lee, 2009; Ameho, 2005; Said, 2024). It is worth noting that the training of supervisors at postgraduate level is a crucial factor in students' successful completion of a Ph.D. programme (Said, 2024 & Seidu, 2015). Likewise, Ngozi and Kayode (2014) attributed the delay in completing the postgraduate degrees to poor supervision, and for Lussier (2018) lack of adequate mentoring. What these researchers have in common is that their investigations were towards the fact that the problems of delay completion are multifaceted involving students- supervisor relationship, supervisor support to students and general responsibilities of stakeholders such as heads of department and graduate programme coordinators.

The phenomenon of delayed completion and non-completion among postgraduate students is based on students' perceptions and the role of supervisors as an important factor in improving postgraduate education (Botha, 2018). The major problems identified in terms of postgraduate students' inability to complete their studies on time are inadequate supervisors for postgraduate research and poorly managed thesis examination process resulting in long examination durations (Amehoe, 2013).

Some of the concerns raised for delayed thesis completion were based on unpleasant situations of delivery of postgraduate studies: (1) the large number of students taking long extended durations of candidature to complete and submit their theses for examination, and (2) the increasing trend of students who have had to wait for long periods of thesis examination after submitting their theses (Jiranek, 2010; Amehoe, 2013). In short, these unsatisfactory situations were perceived to prolong students' completion durations. Sufficient empirical evidences in Asia, South America and Africa have proven that timely completion, extended completion or non-completion of postgraduate degrees are influenced to a very large extent by the time spent during the research or thesis writing stage rather than at the course work stage (Kearns, Gardiner & Marshall, 2008; Jiranek, 2010; Amehoe, 2013).

Students' completion of thesis could be influenced by a number of other factors that relate to specific institutional contexts. This implies that the factors in terms of breadth and scope could differ from one institution to the other. However, there are arrays of factors that could serve as common underlying strands such as; research skills of students, student-supervisor personal qualities, institutional arrangements, and availability of time for both supervisors and supervisees (Muthukrishnan et al. 2022, Said, 2024) . In Ghana, current evidence shows that students' inability to complete post-graduate programmes are on the rise in the universities. According to a study by Asante (2016), high percentage of post-graduate students is unable to complete their studies within the stipulated period of three to four years. It is worrisome if duration of postgraduate programmes

becomes longer as it makes the institution unattractive to prospective candidates. In order to understand this phenomenon, there is the need to pay attention to research on postgraduate thesis completion in Ghanaian universities.

The unique nature of either supervisor, students or institutional related factors gives credence to varying approaches in conducting research on the subject matter (Lindsay, 2015). Some researchers choose to investigate one or two of the factors, with student and supervisors being dominant. What has been the situation in the UEW? cursory observation of postgraduate study programmes reveal that none of the factors has been investigated in the University of Education, Winneba.

At the University of Education, Winneba, there is the perception that both masters' and doctoral students encountered more difficulties at the research stage than at the course work stage, which sometimes results in non-completion or delayed completion. In recent times, the M.Phil. and PhD programmes that are offered in various departments in the UEW have witnessed significant improvements in enrolment levels, yet, completion rates do not commensurate with the increased enrolment. The result is that the completion rate among postgraduate students is significantly low (The Planning Unit, 2024). The logical conclusion is that there is a low graduation rate among research students in the UEW. The low graduation rate generally seems to be a function of the delay in completion of thesis among graduate students. In the University of Education, Winneba, duration for graduate studies is two years for M.Phil. and three years for PhD degrees. However, as stated above, a good number of students are unable to complete within the stipulated period of time. While this may be due to many reasons, the overarching reason is delay in the completion of the thesis component of their programmes. Statistics from the Planning Unit of the University of Education, Winneba show a very low cohort completion rates among Ph.D. candidates admitted between 2015 to 2017. The data are presented in Tables 1 to 3:

Table 1: Graduation Ratio for M.Phil. Candidates Admitted to UEW from 2015-2020

Year	Enrolment	Graduated	Percentage (%) of Graduates
2013 – 2015	563	163	29
2014 – 2016	652	302	46
2015 – 2017	630	141	22
2016 – 2018	1,033	111	11
2017 – 2019	1,637	412	25
2018 – 2020	2,138	412	19

Source: Planning Unit, UEW (2024).

Table 1 shows a composite data on M.Phil. students completion rate from 2015-2020. According to the data, the highest completion rate was in 2016, 302(46.0%) while the lowest graduate completion rate was recorded in 2018, 111(11.0%). Over a period of 6 years (2015 – 2020) the

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average graduate completion rate for M.Phil. was 25.3%. This implies that after 6 years (2015 – 2020), only a quarter of the students completed their programmes.

Table 2: Completion Rate for PhD candidates admitted to UEW in 2015/2016

Programme	Number Admitted 2015/2016	Number Completed 2018/2019	Completion Rate
Ph.D. Social Studies	8	0	0.0
Ph.D. Special Education	2	1	50
Ph.D. Guidance and Counseling	3	0	0.0
Ph.D. Art and Culture	11	7	63.3
Ph.D. Science Education	3	1	33.3
Total	27	9	33.3

Source: Planning Unit, UEW, 2024

Table 3: Completion Rate for PhD candidates admitted to UEW in 2016/2017

Programme	Number Admitted 2016/2017	Number Completed 2019/2020	Completion Rate (%)
Ph.D. Social Studies	9	3	33.3
Ph.D. Special Education	5	0	0.0
Ph.D. Guidance and Counseling	5	5	100
Ph.D. Art and Culture	16	7	43.8
Ph.D. Science Education	1	0	0.0
Total	36	15	41.7

Source: Planning Unit, UEW, 2024

Table 4: Completion Rate for PhD candidates admitted to UEW in 2017/2018

Programme	Number Admitted 2016/2017	Number Completed 2019/2020	Completion Rate (%)
Ph.D. Social Studies	6	1	16.7
Ph.D. Special Education	1	1	100.0
Ph.D. Guidance and Counseling	4	1	25.0
Ph.D. Art and Culture	10	6	60.0
Ph.D. Mathematics Education	8	1	12.5
Ph.D. Science Education	3	3	100.0
Total	32	14	43.5

Source: Planning Unit, UEW, 2024

The data in Tables 2, 3 and 4 reveal that completion rates for Ph.D. candidates admitted over a three-year period (2015/16; 2016/17; 2017/18) have been increasing marginally from 33.3 to 43.0. Undeniably, among the various faculties, completion rates were still marginal with regards to 2017/2018 Ph.D. programmes in Mathematics (12.5); Guidance and Counselling (25.0) and Social Studies (16.7). These variations could have been influenced by a number of factors, especially workload of supervisors. In view of the underlying data, this study seeks to investigate factors accounting for delay in completion of theses, since these have been sources of dissatisfaction among postgraduate students and are detrimental to the brand image and survival of the University of Education, Winneba.

Purpose

The ultimate purpose of this study was not only to contribute towards ensuring that students complete their programmes on time, but also to identify and understand the factors accounting for slow completion and non-completion.

Research Question

The question that directs the study is:

What are the factors accounting for delayed completion and non-completion of theses among postgraduate students of the University of Education, Winneba?

Study design and sampling procedures

Qualitative study design was used to explore the factors that account for the delay thesis in the University of Education, Ghana. Multi-stage sampling technique involving a three-stage approach was used to select faculties and participants for this study. For the first stage, the University was clustered, based on the faculties. There were ten (10) faculties offering postgraduate programs. These include Social Science Education, Science Education, Educational Studies, School of Creative Arts, School of Business and School of Communication and Media Studies, Foreign Language Education, Ghanaian Language Education, Home Economics Education, and College of Distance Education.

The second stage involved selecting departments from the five faculties for the study. Two departments in each of the five faculties, were purposively selected. The selection was done based on the number of years in postgraduate studies. The third stage involves the selection of the participants for the study. Two supervisors were purposively selected from the five (5) departments taken into consideration their experience. In addition, eight (8) alumni were selected from the five faculties for the interview. The selection of the supervisors was based on this criterion: that is, the supervisor should have supervised a postgraduate thesis for at least three consecutive years prior to the study. The alumni were selected using a snowball approach, because they were scattered all over the country and could not be brought to one place for a random sampling.

Data collection

The data collection was conducted from 2022 to 2023 using a semi-structured interview guide developed and piloted for the study. The interview guide contained information on the factors that account for the delay of thesis at the University. The interview guide was reviewed during the training of interviewers and after the pre-testing. Participants were selected for the interviews through the following process. Once contacted, the purpose of the study, the general objectives, benefits, and risks of taking part in the study were explained to them. Those who agreed to be part of the study were interviewed. Verbal consent was obtained from those who decided to participate. In addition, interviewees were informed about the strict confidentiality and anonymity of the information they would provide. The interviews lasted for an average of 30 minutes and were conducted in English Language. The interviews were tape-recorded.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim in English. Data quality checks were performed by reading the transcripts and playing the audio tapes to verify that all the audio files had been transcribed correctly. The data were analyzed using Atlas. Ti Analytical Software version 7.5, and the analyses considered for emerging themes.

Results

Characteristics of interviewees

The ten supervisors selected for the study were at least senior lecturers and have served as supervisors for at least three years in the various departments. Six of the supervisors were males while four were females. The alumni were graduates of the University of Education, Winneba who completed their programmes between 2015 and 2020. Two were females while the remaining six were males. All alumni who participated in the study were married people when they were doing their programmes at the University.

Main themes

Four main thematic areas were identified for the causes of the delayed thesis (Figure. 1). These were (i) availability of resources, (ii) financial challenges, (iii) student-related factors, and (iv) supervisor-related factors. The sub-themes associated with each organizing theme are presented under each theme.

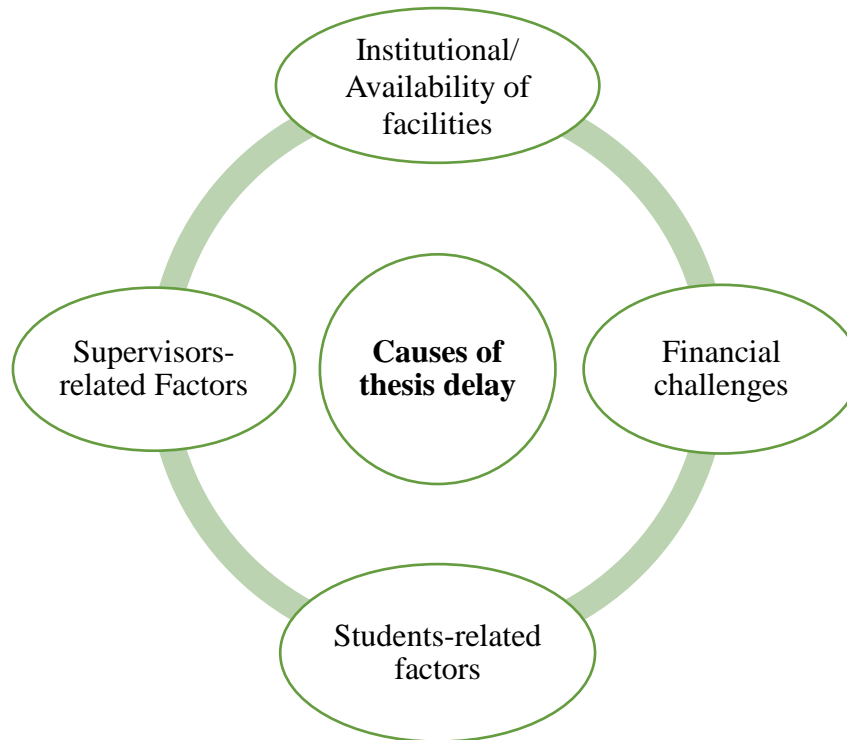


Figure 1: Thematic diagram showing the causes of the delay thesis

Institutional factors

There were mixed results regarding institutional factors. While some participants mentioned there were few facilities, others indicated there were enough to aid students in completing their thesis on time. The following were some comments of participants;

Not much of an excuse is there. The internet is there, but students must be trained. The students should utilize the reference library (Supervisor # 1).

It was quite fortunate because when it comes to resources, during orientation, we were told we could walk to the library. So, I had instances where I walked to the librarian, and I was provided with the books I needed. The library was useful for the first-year coursework (Alumnus #5).

Both alumni and supervisors agreed that adequate facilities, including internet access and library reading materials, were available. This suggests that the situation was not bad, at least there were some amount of resources for graduate students to use for their theses work. Institutional factors contribute immensely when it comes to postgraduate students graduating on time. It is noted that many supervisors have expressed their concerns over the lack of institutional support and the need

for better institutional services and practices to be readily available for postgraduate students' research (Sidhu, Lim & Chan, 2017). A study by Muthukrishnan, et al (2022) found that key factors influencing graduation on time among postgraduate students included direct and positive relationship between institutional support, research skills, self-management skills and motivation to graduate on time.

Dissenting opinions from an alumni and supervisors revealed that resources were insufficient for the students. Some of the comments are as follow:

We do not have the necessary facilities. We lack graduate rooms for students. The PhD and M.phil students share the same room. We do not have computers, so the students use their laptops (Supervisor # 3).

Our library is not adequately equipped for postgraduate programs. There are no journals or adequate space for students to sit; the furniture and the lighting system and sockets are poor. Students complain about the instability of the internet (Supervisor #3)

The data highlight inadequate rooms for graduate students, poor internet connectivity, inadequate computers, and teaching aids. Participants also expressed concerns about the lack of reading rooms and electronic gadgets such as computers that are essential for enhancing student learning. This situation does not support postgraduate research and does not enhance their chance to graduate on time. It is in this light that Muthukrishnan, et al., (2022) are of the view that universities should take effective measures, such as providing resourcesful research facilities and workshops in sharpening their postgraduate students' research skills.

Others expressed concern about the availability of old reading materials in the library, making it very difficult for them to get current reading and keep abreast of recent happenings.

I want to speak from my subject area. I am a theater art student. We do not have these resources. What we do is that we go online and search for related articles for the work. When you go to the library, you get older age books that are not relevant (Alumi #)

The data reveal that a subject like Theatre Art did not have some resources needed for their programmes so students have to resort to the internet for such materials instead of relying on old library materials that are not helpful. It is in this respect that Rasul and Singh (2017) argue that access to up-to-date library facilities are generally acknowledged as a success factor in the completion of graduate research studies.

Financial challenges

Another factor that postgraduate students faced was financial challenge which significantly limits students' ability to complete their thesis on time. From the narratives, it is evident that some

students struggled to pay their fees on time, while others lacked funds for data collection due to being self-funded. Some supervisors made these observations:

The financial challenge I notice is the payment of fees. Many postgraduate students cannot present their works because they cannot pay their fees. (Supervisor # 5).

Many postgraduate students cannot present their works because they cannot pay their fees. (Supervisor # 2).

The data show that lack of financial resources impacts students' academic performance and ability to meet deadlines. Participants highlighted that financial constraints delay access to necessary materials and resources, further hindering their progress. The stress of financial instability also affects their focus and overall well-being, making it even more challenging to complete their academic work efficiently. In view of the financial burden and its implications on thesis completion, Said (2024) reiterates that all universities should evaluate ways to improve access to research infrastructure and provide greater financial assistance to support graduate students during their research work.

Another participant noted that the departments had no financial support for those who could not pay their fees; hence, such students relied on bursaries.

The departments have no financial support for the students, so they rely on a bursary, but it is not sufficient and regular (Supervisor # 8).

An alumnus mentioned that;

Apart from the thesis grants we get from the government, we do not get any financing, unlike elsewhere, where there are projects that support students (Alumnus # 7).

The data indicate that postgraduate students financed their programmes from their own resources and did not have alternative means such as scholarship or project funding to enable them carry out their research work. It is noted that the government bursary given to postgraduate students is inadequate and not regular, and therefore students have no option than to combine studies with work. Therefore, it is worth considering the suggestion of Said (2024) who recommends that universities should invest in expanded access to research materials and financial support for students so as to enable them complete on time.

Students-related factors

Most students enrol on the graduate programme with a lot of expectations and anxieties. Students expect their supervisors to be available and review their work on time. Conversely, students must commit to their tasks and stay dedicated to their work and graduate on time. However, it was not

always the case, there were some challenges that students had to contend with and the following are some observations:

Because of a lack of time on the part of students, they seem not to be regular during tutorial meetings or appointments with their mentors. Some students are not patient enough to do what the supervisors tell them to do. Sometimes, students err by writing their letters for a change of supervisors (Supervisor # 1).

The main factor here is the students themselves. They are out there working, so they don't have the time to complete their project work. They need to secure their jobs. So, they often miss out on their routine seminar presentations (supervisor # 7).

Some students are combining work, family, and school. Therefore, that becomes a challenge, as well as where they live. For example, one of my students lives somewhere up in the Volta-North, and even getting here will take a day or two before she can get here. And that can also be challenging. We don't have full-time postgraduate students. Although the program is full-time, they come in, and then they have to go to work. They are taking care of their family. So these are some things that I believe also become a challenge in completing their thesis (Supervisor #9).

An alumnus observed that:

When we are asked to make corrections, we, the students, submit them late because we are also workers (Alumnus #2).

The results show that some students were often unavailable for coursework and meetings with their supervisors due to their work commitments. Additionally, some students did not take the time to address their supervisors' comments thoroughly. They apparently rushed through their thesis work, leading to numerous mistakes. They turn to blame their supervisors for delaying or frustrating them. The present finding seems to agree with Muthukrishnan, et al., (2022) who support the conception that the students' ability to manage and overcome their challenges in their research journey will certainly aid them to complete on time. A similar study found that postgraduate students faced work-related challenges and difficulty in accessing supervisors and recommended providing counseling services to support students in balancing work and studies (Tikoko, 2021).

Apart from their work commitments, the narratives reveal that some students were married and lived with their families, either not on or near campus. Some even lived in distant regions, requiring two to three days of travel to reach campus. This distance often makes it challenging for them to meet their supervisors frequently for discussions. Khozaei et al (2015) noted that students characteristics such as family commitments, financial problems, psychological barriers, and research barriers influence the progress of students' thesis completion. Wilson and Pool (2024)

observed that the challenges faced by postgraduate students include supervision and personal challenges.

There were cases with students not adhering to timelines given by their supervisors. Some comments are presented as follow:

The delay sometimes comes from the students. Some supervisors will give a timeline, but the student will not adhere to it, so supervisors become angry and try to punish the students in an attempt to leave the work (Alumnus #6).

When we are asked to make corrections, we, the students, submit them late because we are also workers (Alumnus #2).

Some did not adhere to the timelines and worked at their own pace. This sometimes makes it very difficult for the supervisors to monitor them effectively. Usually because students are combining work with their studies it becomes difficult to meet timelines and when this becomes a habit it puts the supervisor off. The finding corroborates the finding of Said (2024) when he stressed that students find it highly challenging to balance their thesis work with other responsibilities, and to set and adhere to deadlines.

Others attributed the delay to the topics selected by the students. Some choose topics with limited prior knowledge and scanty literature. Consequently, they sometimes get stuck or lose interest in the topic. This observation was made by an alumnus in these words:

When choosing a topic, students sometimes don't know whether they will get enough literature in the area. We start the work, get to chapter two, and realize we are stuck (Alumnus#3).

The data implies that students did not read widely to establish the availability of literature on the problem they intend to investigate and thereby got stuck half way in the course of the study. This finding corroborates that of Ameen et al., (2019) who argued that the difficulties in formulating a research topic go back to a lack of conceptual clarity, poor time management and a lack of research culture. s

Supervisors-related factors

Under this theme, supervisors' style of supervision, mismatch of supervisors' specialty with students' topics workload, intentional delay by supervisors, research interest, methodological problem, and inefficiency from the supervisors were identified.

Participants emphasized that some supervisors assist students in completing their work. Some supervisors go to the extent of providing students with a template that specifies what they need from students. The following are some of the remarks:

As for him, he has a template that you have to follow. So, once he meets you, he will give you the template. You have to do this and that and that. So, he specifies what he wants from you. So, when you go contrary to what he wants from you, then automatically, your work has to be canceled (Alumus #3)

I think my style is okay, but much depends on you as the student because the supervisor is just a guy, so much depends on us (Alumnus #5).

The data reveal that some supervisors spent time to prepare a template that serves as a guide for supervisees so as to make work easier for them. The template specifies all that is expected of students throughout the thesis writing stage. This approach seems to serve the interest of some students who describe such supervisors as nice people. Ideally, the supervisor should provide technical advice to guide the student to enhance his or her understanding and early completion of the thesis work. That is why supervision is regarded as a complex and advanced form of pedagogical practice which is a joint effort by both the student and the supervisor in the creation of new knowledge (Muthukrishnan, et al., 2022). Another study found that there is a statistically significant relationship between academic stress and thesis completion among postgraduate students (Domaley, Senyamator, Bakari, Antwia and Nkrumah, 2023).

There were issues regarding the mismatch between supervisors' expertise and the topics they were supervising. Some participants made these observations:

A challenge, yes, to an extent. It's not that. Yeah, some supervisors may not have a firm grounding for what they are doing. But then, most people know what they are supposed to do. But then, the challenge comes with a mismatch. (Supervisor #2)

It's more of a mismatch between the postgraduate students' and the supervisor's interests. A supervisor may have a specific interest area. Still, a student may be given the task of supervising a different topic that is not related to their interest area. (Supervisor 4)

Some supervisors did not have adequate knowledge of the subjects they were overseeing, making it challenging to contribute effectively or provide expert insights. This often led to a lack of interest from the supervisors in the students' work. This kind of relationship often leads to frustration for both the supervisor and the students involved. This finding is supported by Wilson and Pool (2024) who argued that supervisors who lack expertise and provide delayed feedback are barriers, while personal traits, peer support and institutional support are enablers for students success.

Additionally, the heavy workload of some supervisors limits their efficiency. Due to their commitments, they often lack the time and attention to supervise students adequately. The following are the views of some supervisors:

The challenge comes with the workload of supervisors. Supervisors supervise too many theses, so they don't have time.(Supervisor #10)

It is a major challenge. There are situations where a lecturer is given four to five students to supervise. At the same time, the lecturer has to do other teaching and research, which is a serious challenge. These are the things that are challenging there. And because of the numbers that are coming for postgraduates. And the fact that some of them are working, they don't have the time to do anything. Before the year, the five or four students given to you have not completed and are adding, which becomes a serious challenge. (Supervisor #1)

The data indicate heavy workload on the part of the supervisors is a big challenge to supervision of graduate programmes in the university. This is as a result of few qualified supervisors to supervise at this level. Some supervisors are responsible for supervising four or five postgraduate students, along with their teaching and numerous undergraduate students' supervision and assessment. The present research agrees with Domaley, Senyamator, Bakari, Antwia and Nkrumah (2023) who observed that supervisors lacked the opportunity to meet their students, possibly as a result of limited time at their disposal. In the light of this they recommend that lecturers of the university should make themselves available to students and create an enabling environment where the students could have a professional relationship with them in order to address their academic needs.

Surprisingly, the narratives reveal that some supervisors intentionally delay students, which is a habitual behaviour observed about such supervisors. The observation was made by another supervisor as follows:

And, of course, some supervisors unduly delay, not because they don't know or don't have time, but they unduly delay. I guess it's a habit that they have perpetuated over the years. And therefore, they unduly delay the students. (Supervisor #7)

The data reveal that some supervisors deliberately delay students' work. Regardless of students' efforts, these supervisors purposefully slow down their progress. This is an unfortunate situation and this type of attitude may lead to the student asking for a change of a supervisor. This finding is in agreement with (Zahra, Haiyeh, & Sefa, 2020) who found that some supervisors and professors who do not fulfil their obligations to provide the students with sufficient information about writing their theses. Again, there are instances of methodological orientation from the supervisors. Some supervisors prefer either qualitative or quantitative approaches. This position is supported by a comment from an alumnus:

Again, I think it has to do with adequate knowledge of research methodology. Some supervisors may prefer a particular orientation, maybe a qualitative study, and some students may choose a quantitative or mixed method. (Alumnus #4)

The narrative show some supervisors were not comfortable in supervising some types of researches assigned to them because they are not well grounded in those methodological approaches. This suggests that their preferences sometimes do not align with the student's chosen methodologies, leading to supervision challenges and thesis delays. It is in view of such challenges that Macharia and Kanya (2024) suggest early identification of research topic and faculty development in research methodology, departmental culture, and prioritization of duties over research hinder research activity.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results, the following conclusions are made:

First and foremost, the relationship between supervisors and supervisees was not a “smooth sailing one” in terms of students’ attitude and lack of adequate time by supervisors for the students. Some of the poor relationship emanated from poor communication, workload of supervisors and inappropriate relationship between students and supervisors. Supervisors are trained professionals and are expected to conduct themselves in a professional manner. Postgraduate students on the other hand, should always try to establish a good rapport with their supervisors through effective communication; and supervisors are expected to reciprocate such gestures.

The key finding relates to the incidence of students not been able to complete their project works on time, resulting in many of them requesting for extension. The data revealed that, this was partly due to the students, some of whom were full time employees combining work with studies. Students who combine their work with studies will have divided attention and this will definitely affect completion rate. Supervisors were also blamed for not having regular tutorial meetings (Thesis seminar sessions) with students.

It was also revealed that the causes for the delayed thesis completion were lack of adequate facilities, financial challenges, research interest of supervisors, student-related challenges, mismatched of specialty, inefficiency of supervisors and methodological problems. Particularly regarding mixed match of specialty, this should be avoided in order not to subject the student to conflicting advice.

Again, as it relates to inadequate facilities, this should attract the urgent attention of the university authorities in order to encourage successful research activities and a feeling of belongingness by students to an academic community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government of Ghana and other stakeholders should provide adequate research grants and bursaries to research students to enable them complete their theses on time

2. Seminars for graduate students regarding time management should be intensified both at the departmental and faculty levels. At such seminars School of Graduate Studies should make it very clear to postgraduate students to assume responsibility for managing their time while on the programme because time for the completion of each programme is clearly stipulated in the students' handbook.
3. The course The post-graduate student as a research practitioner, which enable students to appreciate the essence and requirements of doctoral studies, should be mounted in all departments of the University, especially for Ph.D and M.Phil. students.
4. Faculties running post-graduate programmes should ensure that departments organize regular workshops for supervisors. This will ensure that inexperienced supervisors learn from the experienced ones.
5. Monitoring students' progress reports by post-graduate coordinators should be intensified in all post-graduate programmes and graduate coordinators should be made to submit annual reports on all postgraduate students.
6. It is recommended that supervisors advise students to choose topics related to their field of work in order to utilize facilities and human resources in their workplaces. This will also help students to reduce the in-balance between work and schooling in terms of time management and focus.
7. Heads of department and graduate co-ordinators should painstakingly identify supervisors' research interest before assigning postgraduate students to them.
8. Heads of department and graduate co-ordinators should also consider supervisors' work load when assigning students to them.

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Ethics statement

This research work did not pose any risk or danger to human participants in any way. Participants who took part by responding to questionnaires or interview questions gave their consents before taking part in the research.