

Supervision and Workload as Determinants of Postgraduate Theses Quality in Ondo State Universities

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Abstract

This study investigated supervision and workload as determinants of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State Universities. The study specifically examined the level of postgraduate theses quality; the relationship between supervision and postgraduate theses quality and the relationship between workload of academic staff and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities. A cross-sectional design type was adopted in this study. The population of this study consisted of theses of all postgraduate students and academic staff who supervised all the postgraduate theses in Ondo State universities in Kogi and Kwara States. The sample for the study consisted of 150 postgraduate theses and 150 academic staff from 2 public universities in Ondo State. The 150 lecturers were those who have completed the supervision of at least one postgraduate student. The sample was selected using multistage sampling procedure. Two self-designed research instruments tagged "Supervision and Workload Questionnaire (SWQ)" and "Postgraduate Theses Quality Checklist (PTQC)" were used to collect data for the study. The face and content validity of the instruments were ascertained by experts of Tests and Measurement before distributing it to the respondents. In order to ascertain reliability of the instrument, data collected were tested using Cronbach's alpha which yielded reliability co-efficient value of 0.81 for SWQ while 0.84 was obtained for PTQC. The data generated through the instrument were analyzed using the descriptive and inferential statistics. The results revealed that the level of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities was moderate while around 40 percent of theses assessed were of low quality. It was also revealed that supervision and workload were related to postgraduate theses quality. It was recommended among others that theses supervision should be

E.G.C.S.J

Accepted 5 June 2021

Published 15 June 2021

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.5048498



classified as part of the academic staff workload; this will help in reducing the other workload of academic staff.

Key words: Supervision, Workload, Quality, Postgraduate Theses,

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Introduction

A low quality thesis indicates that a student has not followed the prescribed criteria: that they have not included a comprehensive literature review against which to argue or critically discuss their findings; they have not included the services of a statistician to scientifically validate their results; or had their writing proof-read and edited to eliminate syntax errors. A low quality thesis may also indicate that their supervisor was perceived to be unhelpful or that conflict occurred due to mismatched roles or a misunderstanding of each other's responsibilities in the research process or that each other's expectations were not met. It appears that postgraduate students have not been producing and submitting quality theses as their final work. The researchers observed that most of the theses submitted by postgraduate students are not original, statement of problem and research objectives are not clear. The research methodology, clarity in presentation of result, presentation of findings, clarity of research conclusion and the technical quality of the research work appears to be below standard.

All postgraduate students need to acquire technical competence, analyze data, manage their time and personal responsibilities, and build up a network of peers and expert colleagues. Postgraduate theses therefore have both an intellectual and a psychological component that need to be acknowledged. Mackinnon (2014) and McAlpine and Norton (2016) therefore argue that postgraduate students' needs must be addressed at institutional, departmental and individual levels. Lovitts (2005) include elements in the macro- and microenvironments, as well as individual resources as influences in postgraduate completion and creative performance.

Research supervision can be likened to the duties of a mid-wife, who assist a pregnant woman in the labour room process. In this scenario, the supervisor is the mid-wife, who assists a pregnant woman (the student), to give birth (conduct research), to a child (dissertation/thesis). In concordance with this analogue, Moira (2011) defines research supervision as a form of teaching that arises out of specialist research identities. The researchers defined research supervision as the scholarly assistance, advice, teaching, guidance, encouragement, mentoring, tutoring, training, counselling, critiquing and motivation rendered a student by a supervisor, who is usually an expert in the subject under investigation. This definition implies that the supervisor – student is a hierarchal relationship, in which the supervisor is more knowledgeable than their student with regards to research and how to optimise their work output (Straus & Sackett 2012).

Supervision is a complex social encounter which involves two or more parties with both converging and diverging interests. Therefore, balancing these interests is very crucial to the successful supervision of postgraduate research projects. The role of the supervisor therefore, includes factors that if not adhered to, will have an impact on their student's development and therefore the research process and overall product (Straus & Sackett, 2012).

Students experienced lots of difficulties during their research process. Some of them are not familiar with the research topic and some of them are lack of knowledge about research methodology. In the other side, supervision is one of the main elements that should be taken into account when discussing about postgraduate students. Observation from this subject must be seriously monitored in order to guide the students to complete their studies. Therefore, both on a departmental and individual basis, the supervisor must be diligent about

explicitly working with students to establish mutual expectations, responsibilities and benefits for working together and with other interested parties (Gwarinda, 2010)

It has been observed over the years that supervisors are experiencing difficulties in the supervision of postgraduate theses because of the poor quality of research work. Most of these supervisees were discovered to have dubbed or copied other persons' research work, not that alone, many of them find it difficult to work on new ground. It is further observed that some students even work with their supervisors for several months, without following up for corrections. When supervisors correct some work and expect them to effect the necessary corrections and resubmit, some of them will never turn-up at the appropriate time, thereby affecting the postgraduate theses quality written by some of these students.

The supervisor's academic workload such as courses being taught, number of students being supervised (both undergraduate and postgraduate), scripts marking are usually very enormous and in most cases leading to excess workload. This may invariably affect the quantity/quality of time available for post graduate thesis supervision. In some institutions, this situation is even made worse by additional administrative assignments, which some supervisors are saddled with in these institutions.

With the increased demand and subsequent expansion of higher learning, quality of supervision is becoming highly compromised because university senior faculty members are becoming overworked with teaching, marking of examinations scripts; own research, publications as well as management work as section/departmental heads. Recruitment of new qualified staff would have been a solution to this although this is not always adequately done due to lack of Ph.D holders in the required areas of specialisation, not to mention the financial constraints in many universities in the developing countries. As a result, many university faculties have resulted to developing own PhDs within the University Staff Development Programmes.

Based on the foregoing, this study investigated supervision and workload as determinants of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State Universities. The study specifically examined

- i. the level of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities;
- ii. the relationship between supervision and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities and
- iii. the relationship between workload of academic staff and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities

Research Question

1. What is the level of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were postulated for this study

- 1) There is no significant relationship between supervision and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities.
- 2) There is no significant relationship between workload of academic staff and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities.

Methodology

A cross-sectional design type was adopted in this study. The population of this study consisted of theses of all postgraduate students and academic staff who supervised all the postgraduate theses in Ondo State universities in Kogi and Kwara States. The sample for the study consisted of 150 postgraduate theses and 150 academic staff from 2 public universities

in Ondo State. The 150 lecturers were those who have completed the supervision of at least one postgraduate student. The sample was selected using multistage sampling procedure.

Two self-designed research instruments tagged “Supervision and Workload Questionnaire (SWQ)” and “Postgraduate Theses Quality Checklist (PTQC)” were used to collect data for the study. The first instrument (SWQ) was administered on academic staff while the second instrument (PTQC) was administered on academic staff supervising postgraduate theses. SWQ consisted of two sections. Section A of SWQ sought for demographic information of the respondents while section B consisted of 14 items which measured supervision and workload of academic staff. Section A of PTQC also sought for demographic information of academic staff who assessed the postgraduate theses quality, Section B consisted of the basic information of the theses assessed while *Section C* consisted of 20 checklist items to assess postgraduate theses quality. Likert 4 point rating scale of preference was used for SWQ as follows: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The same scale was adapted to classify PTQC as Excellent, Good, Fair and Poor.

The face and content validity of the instruments were ascertained by giving the designed questionnaire to experts of Tests and Measurement for vetting before distributing it to the respondents. The reliability of the instruments was determined by finding the internal consistency of the instruments. In order to ascertain reliability of the instrument, data collected were tested using Cronbach’s alpha which yielded reliability co-efficient value of 0.81 for SWQ while 0.84 was obtained for PTQC. Both co-efficient values obtained were considered statistically high to make the instruments reliable.

The researchers personally administered the instrument as this made it possible for the researchers to explain and interpret some items of the questionnaire to the respondents. The data generated through the instrument were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentage, mean, standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics of Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities?

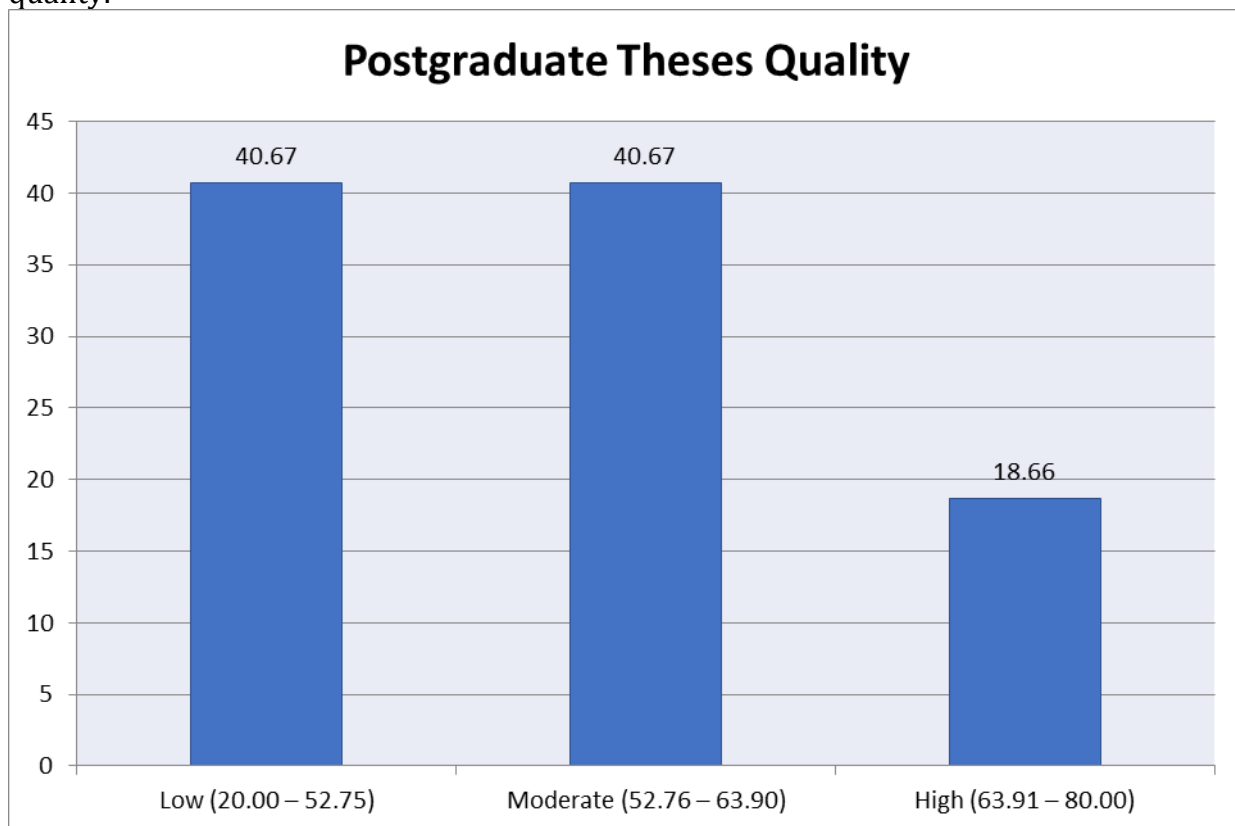
In analyzing the question, respondents’ scores on theses quality were used. Frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation score were used to illustrate the responses to items 1 – 20 in section C of Postgraduate Theses Quality Checklist (PTQC). To determine the level of postgraduate theses quality (low, moderate and high), the mean score and standard deviation of the responses were used.

The low level postgraduate theses quality was determined by subtracting the standard deviation from the mean score ($58.33 - 5.58 = 52.75$). The moderate level of postgraduate theses quality was determined by the mean score (58.33) while the high level of postgraduate theses quality was determined by adding the mean score and standard deviation ($58.33 + 5.58 = 63.91$). Therefore, low level of postgraduate theses quality starts from 20.00 to 52.75, the moderate level start from 52.76 to 63.90 and the high level of postgraduate theses quality is from 63.91 to 80.00. The level of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities is presented in table 1 and figure i.

Table 1: Level of Postgraduate Theses Quality in Ondo State Universities

| Levels of postgraduate theses quality | No of Respondents | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Low (20.00 – 52.75) | 61 | 40.67 |
| Moderate (52.76 – 63.90) | 61 | 40.67 |
| High (63.91 – 80.00) | 28 | 18.66 |
| Total | 150 | 100 |

Table 1 revealed the levels of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities. The result showed that out of 150 postgraduate theses assessed, 61 theses representing 40.67 percent of the theses assessed were of low quality. Those whose theses were of moderate quality were 61 representing 40.67 percent while 28 postgraduate theses representing 18.66 percent were of high quality. This showed that the level of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities was around moderate with 40 percent of the whole theses assessed were of low quality. Figure i further revealed the level of postgraduate theses quality.

**Figure i:** Level of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities**Testing of Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between supervision and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities.

In testing this hypothesis, data on supervision of thesis under Section B of SWQ (item 1 – 7) in the questionnaire were collated and analyzed. Data on postgraduate theses quality under Section C of PTQC (item 1 – 20) in the questionnaire were collated and analyzed. Both were compared for statistical significance using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 levels. The result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Correlation between Supervision and postgraduate theses quality

| Variables | N | Mean | S.D | r-cal | Sig. |
|----------------|-----|-------|------|--------|------|
| Supervision | 150 | 21.74 | 2.03 | 0.681* | 0.00 |
| Theses Quality | 150 | 58.33 | 5.58 | | |

*P<0.05

Table 2 showed r-cal (0.681) is significant at 0.05 level of significance because $p=0.000<0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there was significant relationship between supervision and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities. This implies that supervision of thesis was related with postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities.

Research Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between workload of academic staff and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities.

In testing this hypothesis, data on workload of academic staff under Section B of SWQ (item 8 – 14) in the questionnaire were collated and analyzed. Data on postgraduate theses quality under Section C of PTQC (item 1 – 20) in the questionnaire were collated and analyzed. Both were compared for statistical significance using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.05 levels. The result is presented in table 3.

Table 3: Correlation between workload of academic staff and postgraduate theses quality

| Variables | N | Mean | Stand Dev | r-cal | Sig. |
|----------------------------|-----|-------|-----------|---------|-------|
| Workload of Academic Staff | 150 | 19.31 | 1.82 | -0.508* | 0.000 |
| Theses Quality | 150 | 58.33 | 5.58 | | |

*P<0.05

Table 3 showed r-cal (-0.508) is significant at 0.05 level of significance because $p=0.000<0.05$. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there was significant negative relationship between workload of academic staff and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities. Hence, workload of academic staff was related with postgraduate theses quality in negative direction i.e. the more the workload, the less the postgraduate theses quality.

Discussion

The study revealed that the level of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities was around moderate with 40 percent of the whole theses assessed were of low quality. This might be due to extent of thoroughness of supervision of thesis and academic workload of supervisors which are determinant of postgraduate theses quality. This finding supports the conclusion of Wang and Li (2008) and Murphy, Bain and Conrad (2007) who concluded that postgraduate theses are mostly of average quality.

The study revealed a significant relationship between supervision and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities. The probable reason for this finding could be because of the important role of supervision in postgraduate theses quality. The implication of this finding is that thorough supervision will guarantee postgraduate theses quality. This finding is in consonance with findings of Otago (2010) and Fowler (2013) who all found out that a significant relationship existed between supervision and postgraduate theses quality in universities.

It was further revealed that there was significant negative relationship between workload of academic staff and postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities. The researcher is of the view that when workload of academic staff is moderate, they will have time to attend to postgraduate students and this may guarantee postgraduate theses quality. The implication of this finding is that moderate academic workload for supervisors will lead to giving supervisee more attention that will guarantee postgraduate theses quality. This finding supports the contention of Hawk, Cambron and Pahmeyer (2008) who concluded that a significant relationship existed between academic workload and postgraduate theses quality.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the level of postgraduate theses quality in Ondo State universities was moderate while around 40 percent of theses assessed were of low quality. It is also concluded that postgraduate theses quality depends on extent of supervision and moderate workload of academic staff.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

- 1) Theses supervision should be classified as part of the academic staff workload; this will help in reducing the other workload of academic staff.
- 2) Academic staff should devote valuable time to supervision of theses and ensure thoroughness of supervision.

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Cite this article:

Author(s), ADENAGBE, Olubunmi Adejoke (Ph.D *in view*), EDAFIOGHO, Oluwatoyin Afolake (Ph.D), OLOFIN, Samuel Oluwaseyi (Ph.D), (2021). "Supervision and Workload as Determinants of Postgraduate Theses Quality in Ondo State Universities". **Name of the Journal**: Euro Global Contemporary Studies Journal, (EGCSJ.COM), P, 1- 9. **DOI**: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5048498> , Issue: 2, Vol.: 1, Article: 1, Month: June, Year: 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.ijarbas.com/all-issues/>

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