RESEARCH SUPERVISION EXPERIENCES OF MASTERS IN EDUCATION STUDENTS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY.

By

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DECLARATION

I, Ncumisa Hazel Ganqa, declare that the dissertation titled ***"RESEARCH SUPERVISION EXPERIENCES OF MASTERS IN EDUCATION STUDENTS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY"*****,** which I hereby submit to the University of Fort Hare is my own work and has not been submitted before by me for any degree at any other university. The work which I have submitted is the result of my independent investigation and all the sources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of full references.

Signed: Date:

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my family, the academics and the research community.

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, transformation in South African Universities saw an increase in the number of postgraduate students enrolling for Masters' research programmes as access and educational opportunities have been widened. The purpose of this research was to investigate research supervision experiences of Masters postgraduate students. A qualitative, contextual, descriptive and phenomenological research design was used to explore the experiences of the 2010 MEd cohort at a purposively chosen university. This was a small scale study of six participants in different stages of their research projects sampled purposively. The preferred phenomenological interview method of gathering information from the subjects was in-depth unstructured interviews. This research study revealed that the postgraduate students at the University under investigation still continue to experience the traditional model of a single supervisor supervising a strictly research based work. The most crucial component of research supervision experiences that emerged was the quality of supervision between supervisors and supervisees which revealed power struggles in supervisory relationships. Such relationships emerged as push and pull, fight or flight amongst different individual participants and their supervisors.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CHE	**Council of Higher Education**
CHAE	**Council of Higher and Adult Education**
CHE	**Council of Higher Education**
CHET	**Council of Higher Education and Training**
CoP	**Community of Practice**
DoE	**Department of Education**
DHET	**Department of Higher Education and Training**
GMRDC	**Govan Mbeki Research Development Council**
HDC	**Higher Development Council**
HEI	**Higher Education Institution**
HEQC	**Higher Education Quality Council**
HEQF	**Higher Education Quality Framework**
HSRC	**Human Science Research Council**
MEd	**Masters in Education**
NMMU	**Nelson Mandela Metropole University**
NPHE	**National Plan for Higher Education**
PhD	**Doctor of Philosophy**
SAHEI	**South African Higher Education Institution**
SDC	**Student Counselling Department**
SDL	**Self Directed Learning**

RDC	**Research Development Council**
TLC	**Teaching and Learning Centre**
UNISA	**University of South Africa**
USS	**University Support Services**
ZPD	**Zone of Proximal Development**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter presents the background and context of the study on research supervision experiences of Masters in Education postgraduate students. The problem statement, research questions, the purpose and the objectives of the study, significance, scope, limitations, definition of key words and chapters outline are provided in this chapter. It ends with a brief summary.

1.2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Universities worldwide are engaged in the transformation processes. Due to the rapid changes, developments and knowledge production in different parts of the world, the majority of Higher Education Institutions are challenged and committed to effect these changes which include globalization, funding in tertiary institutions and building a rich research culture (Badat 2010:p,34; Zhao 2003:p,189). In line with these global changes, South Africa also embarked on improving its practices of research capacity through various plans and policies (Department of Education 2001, Department of Education 2002a; Council on Higher Education 2003, 2004).

A central transformation issue in South African context was to increase postgraduate enrolment and research outputs (Department of Education 2001, 2009; Council on

Higher Education 2004). Firstly, the transformation-oriented initiatives seeking to effect institutional changes included “increased and broadened participation for black, women, disabled and mature postgraduate students” and “equity of access and fair chances for success to all” (Badat 2010:p,36). Widened access to research programmes attracted working and not working men and women to return to postgraduate studies. As a result in recent years the numbers of postgraduate students in South African Universities have increased significantly (Council on Higher Education 2004; Department of Higher Education and Training 2009).

The tertiary institution under investigation has been given a pseudo name, the University of X to comply with ethical principles. Figure 1 below shows the present and the increasing enrolment of Masters in Education full time and part-time postgraduate students at the University of X at rural and urban campus for 2010.

Programme	Qualification Code	Enrolment 2009 h/c	2010 h/c	2011 projected
Masters in Education	51000	44	49	51

Figure 1 (University of X Faculty of Education: Departmental Review 2009/10).

O’Donnell, Tobell, Lawthon & Zummit (2009:p,27) defend participating adults in the Masters programme as adults returning to postgraduate study after a large gap since they last completed undergraduate degree. For O’Donnell (2009:p,27) the students bring to a Masters programme a number of related challenges as a result of a gap between completing undergraduate study, Honours degree and the commencement of postgraduate study.

The challenges experienced by adult postgraduate students present themselves in a variety of ways. Firstly, the academic skills level of the participants may have dropped in the years since they last studied. Secondly, practices which were once familiar may be experienced as new and unfamiliar. Thirdly, some participants in Kamler & Thompson's (2009:p,504) view may struggle with the changes in the new technology; for an example the use of powerpoint presentations, searching for e-journals and searching for books on online library.

Abiddin & Ismail (2011:p,18) acknowledge that postgraduate students come to postgraduate studies with increasingly varied backgrounds, preparations, expectations and motivations. Such motivations for most postgraduate students to study Masters degree are to be re-skilled, improve their qualifications, increase chances of employment and become more marketable (Waghid 2006:p,427). In addition, Bitzer (2007:p,1011) & Mutula (2009:p,14) maintain that academic qualifications, personal career development, promotion at work and contribution to research are reasons given by these postgraduate students on pursuing Masters degree. Hence, Higher Education research indicates that the best predictors as to whether or not a student will graduate are academic preparation and motivation (Pascarella & Terenzin 2005:p,436).

Statistics in South African Higher Education Institutions show that more than 70% of postgraduate students are largely enrolled on a part time basis (CHE 2004; DoE 2009). Research conducted by Sayed, Kruss & Badat (1998:p,276) indicate that some postgraduate students opt for part-time because of work or family commitments. Notably, postgraduate students largely enrolled on part-time basis mostly are educators pursuing demanding professional careers (Ibid). Given the profile of the Masters students entering the system, worth noting is that postgraduate

students are not a homogenous group as differences can be identified in age, level of maturity, gender, class and ethnicity.

Budget allocation to South African Higher Education Institutions is weighted in favour of postgraduate throughput. As a result the government policies and plan on South African Higher Education (DoE 2001, 2002a; CHE 2003) recognize the imperative to inconsistent outputs of postgraduates particularly Master and Doctoral graduates. Throughput rate is understood to mean that students will graduate within a minimum period of time (National Research Foundation 2007). The Department of Education suggested that in the subsequent five years, the South African Higher Education Institutions should improve the efficiency of its postgraduate outputs so that Masters' graduates constitute 6% of the annual output of graduates (DoE 2007:p,76).

On the hand, the National Plan of Higher Education (DoE 2001) reports only six research intensive South African Universities responsible for 70% of all Master's and Doctoral degrees in the system. A Centre for Higher Education Transformation Report by Human Science Research Council (2010) identifies three different university clusters in South Africa grouped according to functions. Firstly, the clusters include the input variables of Masters & Doctoral enrolment in South African Universities. Secondly, the university clusters indicate output variables which include student success rates and graduation rates. University of X is rated fourth in the second cluster of tertiary institutions with low research throughputs. By implication, the rating of the University of X is an indication that it has not yet fully established itself in relation to input and output variables necessary to place it in the top big five universities.

To that effect, the existence of rapid Higher Education transformation legislated (DoE 2002a, CHE 2003) has put more pressure on Higher Education Institutions demanding more quality and accountability. Since its implementation; Higher Education Quality Framework (CHE 2003) has also put pressure on universities for postgraduate students to complete their studies within set time frames. Of course, the terms timely completion and completion rates are quantifiable and comparable and lend themselves on accountability. This, in turn, subjects universities to bureaucratic management through outcomes and products (Lessing & Lessing 2004:p,77).

Within such quantitative environment, supervisors may find that encouraging postgraduate students to undertake postgraduate studies carries with it a degree of uncertainty given the growing data on 'At Risk Postgraduate students' (Mouton 2007:p,1083). Already there are signs that some universities are prepared to identify their preferred cohorts of postgraduate students (Mouton 2007:p,1083). For an example, Lessing & Schulze (2003:p,161) indicate that full time postgraduate students have better opportunities of success than part-time candidates. In its academic plan the University of X Faculty of Education's intention is also to increase the number of full time postgraduate students in the MEd programme (DoE 2010:p,25).

In addition within South African Higher Education demanding context, there is more pressure on universities to have explicit policies and procedures, selection criteria and admission of postgraduate students (DoE 2002a). Generally, there is a wide variety of procedures and practices which exist with regard to admission and intake of Masters' postgraduate students, proposals approval and defence of dissertations (DoE 2007). The National Plan for Higher Education (DoE 2001:p,25) states that

Higher Education Institutions in South Africa should, “ensure that they do not recruit postgraduate students who do not have the potential to pursue further studies and do not retain postgraduate students who have no chances of success”. CHE (2003:p,8) also emphasizes “suitably qualified staff to support postgraduate students’ independent work by offering guidance on all aspects of research process and on keeping to an achievable time schedule for these research projects”.

While there has been a growth in student numbers enrolling for postgraduate studies and an increasing importance in research programmes, there has not been a substantial increase in the output of successful postgraduate students (CHE 2004). Following MEd review in 2008 as it is aligned with HEQF at the University of X (DoE 2010:p,15); there are indications that the progress is very slow due to the majority of postgraduate students who are part-timers and thereby yield to inconsistent throughput rate. Notably, the University of X postgraduate students’ throughput rate is slow and inconsistent due to large enrolment of part-time postgraduate students whose research skills are limited (DoE 2010).

Seemingly, the degree by research only proves to be too demanding for postgraduate students who have limited research background and lack of technical skills (DoE 2010:p,53). Furthermore, the requirement that research must be completed in a maximum time of 4 years (University of X 2011:p,4) seem to be time consuming for part-time postgraduate students. Hence, there is a concern worldwide including South Africa about the quality of postgraduate supervision in Higher Education Institutions and the length of time it takes postgraduate students to complete their studies (Koen 2005; Brown 2007; de Beer & Mason 2009).

Mouton (2010) claims the problem of the lack of Masters' student throughput not only hold consequences for national and economic development but also for the number of potential researchers and PhDs to be increased. For various reasons, the state of postgraduate studies at South African tertiary institutions including the Higher Education Institution under study has come under scrutiny in recent years (Lessing & Lessing 2004; Mouton 2007).

Firstly, institutional audits of CHE (2004) have demanded that universities look more closely at various aspects of the quality of postgraduate supervision (Mouton 2007: p,1078). Secondly, South African Universities are not producing enough graduates within a reasonable time period and these failures are attributed mainly to inefficient supervision Mouton (2007:p,1080). Thirdly, Human Science Research Council (2010) raises concerns about the decline in research postgraduate students pass rate. Furthermore, feedback revealed that most South African Universities are not doing enough to ensure the necessary conditions are put in place to ensure quality of postgraduate research activities (Dietz, Wadee & Jansen 2006; Badat 2010).

The above perceptions led the Department of Education to set an increase in postgraduate enrolment, research programmes and research output as a strategic goal for South African Higher Education Institutions (SAHEI) (DoE 2010). But, South Africa is now facing an issue of increasing postgraduate research programmes but have an insufficient number of suitably trained supervisors (de Beer & Mason 2009:p,213; Lessing & Schulze 2003:p,163). Notably, postgraduate supervision in South Africa currently takes place in a much more problematic context hence Lessing & Lessing (2004:p,74) claim that there are already examples of lack of success in research and that university and supervisors are blamed for such failures. But (Wisker 2005:p,58) defend this by arguing that in South Africa; with postgraduate

supervision still relatively under resourced, the number of postgraduate students per supervisor has increased significantly.

It should be noted that in South African tertiary institutions supervision is usually conducted by a single supervisor and not by a supervisory team as it is common in more developed countries (Dietz, Wadee & Jansen 2006:p,29). SAHEI follow British model of supervision where a single student work with a supervisor on an assigned or agreed on topic over a lengthy period of time that would eventually lead to submission of a dissertation (DoE 2009). Traditionally, postgraduate supervision has not been systematically quality assured as the process has been left to the individual supervisor with minimal guidance or interference from the institution; characterized by slow throughput rates, unaccountable behaviour by supervisors and disputes between postgraduate students and supervisors (CHE 2004).

Given the above context, while more accountability in tertiary institutions is probably desirable, the mechanisms for its achievement are likely to be hotly debated. Mouton (2007:p,1079) argues that the current discourse in SAHEI is obsessed with concerns of efficiency rather than effectiveness and quality. In this process apparently too much focus is placed on managerial and administrative solutions rather than on the challenges posed by academically under-preparedness of postgraduate students (Ibid). Research studies (Bartlett & Mercer 2001; Mouton 2007:p,1082) have shown that longer than average completion and above average attrition rates are attributed to poor supervisory management of postgraduate research supervision or weak institutional support. Yet, universities expect academics to supervise postgraduate students without the supervisor having to always have the necessary background to do so (Mouton 2001).

Dietz et al. (2006:p,11) contend that the strongest concern in South African Master and Doctorate supervisors is that supervisors themselves are often products of poor supervision and do not therefore hold experience of what constitutes competent supervision. Appointed supervisors seldom have a conceptual map of what constitutes acceptable supervision (Ibid). But, Badat (2010:p,21) believes that the number of qualified doctorates acts as another constraint on significantly enhancing output of research graduates.

The perception at some South African Universities seem to be that academics become qualified to supervise postgraduate students merely by virtue of having their own PhDs (Dietz et al. 2006:p,4). Worth noting is that some supervisors may not have had any relevant training on postgraduate supervision (Zuber-Skerrit & Roche 2004:p,85). The evaluation made by Zuber-Skerrit & Roche (2004) on workshops organized for supervisors and postgraduate students on their roles and responsibilities; shows that the training workshops mainly cater for postgraduate students needs and focus less on supervision.

By implication, without any training or any assessment of the supervision capacities and competencies; MEd postgraduate students might experience challenges on being supervised by such supervisors. For Dietz et al. (2006:p,12) bad practices in postgraduate supervision are sustained by a lack of effective intervention from within or outside the institution to correct the problems of research supervision. In search for a solution to this dilemma, the actual research supervision of postgraduate students in South African Universities has come under renewed scrutiny (de Beer & Mason 2009:p,214).

From supervisors' perspective, Lessing & Schulze (2003); Brown (2007); Lumadi (2008) maintain that supervisors find that postgraduate students are less prepared for higher degrees studies than in the past, have more challenges, complete work more slowly and are generally difficult to work with. Furthermore, postgraduate students do not meet the requirements to complete their Masters programme (Ibid). Phillips & Pugh (2005:p,129) claim supervisors increasingly find themselves supervising mature age professionals who possess equal or greater knowledge of the research subject.

From postgraduate students' perspective complaints of inadequate supervision, a lack of communication between postgraduate students and supervisors, postgraduate students' misconceptions of the roles of supervisors have been revealed by various studies (Babbie & Mouton 2004, Vitae 2009). Other major challenges involving postgraduate students' experiences are poor relationships with supervisors, study isolation, confusion over resources and lack of academic support (Dietz et al. 2006; Bitzer 2007:p,1012; HSRC 2010).

Sayed et al. (1998:p,276) show that poor supervision amongst other reasons, is the explanation provided by postgraduate students for non-completion of their dissertation. Koen (2005:p,32) also confirms reasons for non-completion of Masters degree as including institutional factors like "poor supervision and lack of suitably qualified supervisors". In Babbie & Mouton (2004:p,8)'s view poor supervision may take many forms from the lack of guidance, inexperience, incompetence and lack of relevant knowledge of the topic. In somewhat the same vein, Wisker (2005) has noted the relationship between the supervisor and candidates as a key factor in postgraduate study success.

Furthermore, there have been a number of studies that suggest student attrition is associated with poor supervisory arrangements (Abiddin & West 2007:p,28; McComarck 2004; Bartlett & Mercer 2001). While some studies report on postgraduate students dissatisfaction with supervision (Sayed et al. 1998; Bitzer 2007; Vitae 2009), others refer to supervisors need to develop supervisory skills (Lessing & Schulze 2003, Zuber-Skerrit & Roche 2004) and more authors suggested effective practices and management strategies of supervision (Gurr 2001; Gatfield 2005; Abiddin & West 2007; Kraus & Ismail 2010).

Perhaps, the most important function of postgraduate supervision lies in the transformation of novice postgraduate students into competent researchers as pointed out by Lessing & Lessing (2004:p,76). But how that can be accomplished is worth exploring through investigating MEd postgraduate students' research supervision experiences. Hence, in its quest to address issues on research supervision, SAHEIs hosted several conferences with numerous recommendations emanating from such conferences (Dietz et al. 2006). Given the complexities of postgraduate supervision; taking postgraduate studies seem to have challenges not only for the supervisors but also for postgraduate students.

It is in the light of the above perceptions that Dietz et al. (2006:p,33) perceive Masters for many postgraduate students as the dream that could easily become a nightmare. Ginns, Marsh, Behnia, Cheng & Scalas (2009:p,577) also believe that if postgraduate students experience unsupportive climate and poor supervision; then Masters postgraduate students are likely to complete their degree with negative consequences not only for the student but also for the university and the society at large. It is against this background that the researcher identified a gap in literature

that requires engagement; an investigation into research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students at the University of X.

1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research indicates that for most Higher Education Institutions; postgraduate supervision is key to a successful completion of Masters Programme (Wisker 2005). Furthermore, government funding of universities has gradually become more tightly linked to postgraduate completion. Hence there has been a growing interest in locating factors influencing successful and timely completion of postgraduate programmes. However, ensuring quality in postgraduate supervision in South Africa is complicated and entangled with issues of power, expectations, and differences in relation to supervision practices (Brown 2007). Despite the legislated demands for quality supervision and accountability for postgraduate research (DoE 2001, CHE 2003, CHE 2004); the current postgraduate throughput rates remain low and a cause for concern.

Key issues that play a vital role in the process of research supervision is the relationship between the supervisor and the student (Abiddin & Ismail 2011; Waghid 2006; Bailey 2002). Various studies have approached the question on how to deal with postgraduate supervision from supervisors' perspective (Lessing & Schulze 2003, McComarck 2004, and Malfroy 2005). With regard to supervisory practices, there seem to be ample evidence to suggest that supervisors base their approach on their own, often unexamined experiences as research postgraduate students (Bartlett & Mercer 2001:p,77; Dietz et al. 2006).

As a result, to date, most studies have concentrated on identifying elements of effective supervision (Dietz et al. 2006; Abiddin & West 2007), successful supervisory relationship (Lessing & Schulze 2003), while others have even developed theoretical models on supervisory management strategies (Vilkinas 2002; Gatfield 2005; Kraus & Ismail 2010). Yet, how MEd postgraduate students experience research supervision remains an area worth exploring (Ibid). An area of concern is the question of current postgraduate students' experiences from their own viewpoints.

While difficulties of postgraduate students have been identified by various research studies in other tertiary institutions, research into the silent majority has generally not been given due attention in the university under study. Since postgraduate students are also central to their studies (Bailey 2002); their voices need to be heard. Hence, investigating research supervision experiences of mEd postgraduate students at the University of X seem to be of importance.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.4.1. Main Question

- What were the lived experiences of MEd students on postgraduate supervision at the University of X?

1.4.2. Sub-question

- How did MEd postgraduate students experience research supervision at the University of X?

1.5. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to examine research supervision experiences of Masters in Education postgraduate students at the University of X. More importantly, the researcher aims to present findings and descriptions of postgraduate students' accounts of their lived postgraduate research experiences.

1.6. OBJECTIVES

- To examine research supervision experiences of Master in Education postgraduate students at the University of X.
- To assess the nature of postgraduate supervision in relation to roles, responsibilities and expectations of supervisors and supervisees, supervisory relationships and University Support Services.
- To explore postgraduate students' experiences with regard to supervision of their Masters in Education projects.
- To present findings and descriptions of postgraduate students' accounts of their lived experiences on postgraduate supervision.

1.7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The responses to this study's research questions might be of theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, there seem to be very little literature describing

postgraduate research supervision experiences of postmaster in Education students. This study might provide positive response to the calls of accountability and quality by Council on Higher Education/ Higher Education Quality Committee (2003) to increase student enrolment, student throughput and research outputs in tertiary institutions. The practical value of this work might be of interest to policy developers for the transformation of education in tertiary institutions and its contribution to the communities as well as the society.

Budget allocation to higher education institutions is weighted in favour of postgraduate throughputs (CHE 2004) this study might be of value to university administrators. Also, supervisors as important human resource to sustain research programmes will gain insight on how postgraduate students experience supervision in their Masters programme. Moreover, bringing forth accounts of postgraduate students' lived experiences; researchers on postgraduate supervision may access useful information in aspects such as postgraduate students learning needs. Furthermore, postgraduate students themselves might learn from their experiences and their reflections in order to move towards better understandings of research supervision practices.

1.8. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This research study dealt with sampled full time and part-time postgraduate students who are registered for Masters in Education at one of the identified Higher Education Institution in South Africa. Not only was this research project limited to six MEd postgraduate students, but its focus was only at the University of X's rural and urban

campuses. This research focused at the postgraduate research supervision experiences of six sampled MEd cohort registered in 2010.

1.9. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.9.1**. Postgraduate students** are those students that are matured persons building an academic career path after Bachelor degree (Abiddin & Ismail 2011:p,16).

19.2. **Postgraduate supervision** refers to the process of providing advice, guidance and quality assurance for postgraduate research student by a supervisor to obtain a recognized postgraduate research degree (Lessing & Lessing 2004).

1.9.3**. Master of Education (by Research only):** is a postgraduate academic research degree of Masters in Education that consist of a research component in the form of a dissertation done in a defined scope and limited length (CHE 2003).

1.9.4**. Experience:** Jarvis, Holford & Griffin (2003:p,54) point out that the term "experience" is used in a number of ways with a multitude of meanings. These include something direct, a feeling, knowledge, life history and an emotional moment. Not only does the word "experience" contain many ambiguities, but it also acts as a verb or a noun. As a noun it implies what is known from observing, undergoing and encountering the knowledge. As a verb it is a process of observing (detached) but also an undergoing (passive) or encountering (interactive) (Groenewald 2007).

For Zuber-Skerrit & Roche (2004) experience is knowledge of or the skill in or observation of an event gained through involvement in or exposure to that event. Thus, the meaning of experience itself has no intrinsic meaning but the meaning of

experience depends on an interpretive process (Taylor 2000:p,287). Therefore, the meaning of experience in this research study implies that learning from experience happen in the everyday life, but the learner is likely to be an important part of the experience as he enriches it with his own personal contributions.

1.10. CHAPTERS OUTLINE

The study consists of five chapters.

Chapter 1 provides an introduction that includes background, problem statement, research questions, the purpose, the objectives, the significance and the scope of the study as well as definition of key terms.

Chapter 2 presents with the discussion of the relevant literature that highlights key concepts, ideas, research studies and experiences relevant to the research study. The theoretical and the conceptual framework form the basis of the reviewed literature.

Chapter 3 deals with the description and justification of research methods to be used in the study, with the discussion of the research approach, research design, research methodology, data analysis, validity and reliability, reflexivity and ethical issues.

Chapter 4 consists of data presentation and data analysis. Thematic approach to data analysis is examined. Discussion of findings is presented according to the themes that emerged.

Chapter 5 highlights the summary of findings, implications for practices, suggestions and recommendations for further research and conclusions.

1.11. CONCLUSION

This chapter gave an orientation and the background to the study. The purpose and the main objectives and the significance of the study were preceded by research questions. The scope of the study, the definition of terms and chapters outline was dealt with.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to outline literature and theories relevant to the study. This study is exploring the theoretical and the conceptual basis of research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students. This chapter is structured according to theoretical framework, conceptual framework to postgraduate supervision and the functional approach to postgraduate supervision.

2.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Theoretical framework forms the underlying structure which can be compared to the construction of a new building wherein there is a foundation upon which the structure is built. Based on the above perception no one theoretical perspective is adequate enough for gaining insight and understanding of the experiences of postgraduate students as such an approach would be one dimensional. Hence the researcher anchored this research project on Knowles (1980) Andragogy and Vygotsky (1978) constructivist model as the lens through which to view research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students.

2.2.1 Theory: Andragogy

In an attempt to document differences between the way adults and children learn, Knowles (1980) popularized the concept of “andragogy”; the art and science of

helping adults learn contrasting it with “pedagogy”; the art and science of teaching children. Knowles (1980) developed Adult Learning Theory which focuses on the idea that adults learn best when they talk to others about their life experiences and relate these experiences to the learning process. Knowles’ theories concentrate on an adult learner who is independent and has a need to understand how learning something new will benefit him, how it fits to existing knowledge and reinforces autonomy to learn in a way that works for them (Taylor 2005:p,187). A set of assumptions about adult learners amongst other things encompass:

- *Voluntary participation in learning programmes.*
- *Moves from dependency to Self Directed Learning.*
- *Motivations to learn which are internal rather than external.*
- *Relevance and Application of new knowledge to adult life.*
- *Safe learning environment (Knowles 1980:p,85).*

The nature of adulthood assures that adults are responsible for the most aspects of their lives (Brookfield 1990). As learners, adults come to learning as volunteers and have the power to engage or withdraw from the proceedings at any stage, depending how they perceive the fulfilment of their expectations (Brookfield 2001:p,9). By implication, if adult learners wish to engage in a learning process, they may do so with intention and enthusiasm. Groenewald (2007:p,95) claim that in most cases postgraduate students will bring relevant life experiences to the learning situation. Therefore, their past experiences can be resources for both themselves and for other postgraduate students.

However, one of the most challenging and difficult but essential tasks of the facilitator is to set a climate for learning and to assist in the development of a group

culture which adults can feel free to challenge one another and can feel comfortable with being challenged (Brookfield 1990:p,13-14). This then implies that embarrassing adults publicly and displaying disrespect is likely to make withdrawal certain. However, this may not mean that criticism and suggestions should be avoided in discussions and supervision sessions, but it may mean that a sense of self worth should be considered. Hence, for Mezirow (2000) adult learners need to be subjects of their own learning through what he calls, “Self-Directed Learning” (SDL).

Self Directed Learning is a process in which individuals take initiative without the help of others in planning, carrying out and evaluating their experiences (Knowles 1980:p,74). Mezirow (2000:p,198) in his Transformative Theory on Adult Learning explains Self Directed Learning as “ a process in which individuals take the initiative without the help of others in planning, carrying out and evaluating their own learning experiences”. In keeping with conceptualization of quality as transformation, one of the central concerns of South African Higher Education Institutions is the enhancement of Transformative Learning (CHE 2003:p,13).Transformative Learning is described as learning that changes the way individuals think about themselves and their world and that involves a shift of consciousness (Mezirow 2000).

In essence Transformative Learning promotes self-directed learning in an adult learner who takes responsibility of his own learning and makes informed decisions (Ibid). Groenewald (2007:p,100) notes on one hand the benefit of SDL which can involve the adult learner in isolated activities such as searching for information in the internet, communication with peers and experts. On the other hand, SDL can be difficult for adults who lack independence, confidence, internal motivation or resources (Taylor 2005:p,369).

2.2.2. Constructivist model

This study is positioned within constructivist model as the researcher considers constructivism to be the foundation from which to explore postgraduate students' research supervision experiences. Vygotsky (1978) set out to discover relationships between learning capabilities and developmental process through the theory of constructivism. Because of the emphasis on postgraduate students as active learners, constructivist strategies are often called student-centred approaches to learning (Vygotsky 1978). Learner-centeredness implies that supervision have to take place from the postgraduate students' point of view.

However, Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana (2002:p,102) point out that the power of the postgraduate students in supervision context is usually constrained by their position within the institution and their personal development. For an example, some postgraduate students may personally feel they can make changes in their development. By contrast, the supervisors may have control over what happens in supervision and in such situations the student can feel helpless. Nonetheless, postgraduate supervision can assume a student-centred approach by identifying the postgraduate students learning gap which Vygotsky (1978:p,86) calls, "Zone of Proximal Development".

Vygotsky (1978) developed Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a concept that arose from his belief that in order for one to learn, a challenge is needed which will maximize ones intellectual development (Snowman & Biehler 2006:p,49). While Donald et al. (2002) interpret ZPD as the difference between the postgraduate students' capacity to solve problems on his own and his capacity to solve them with assistance; Zuber- Skerrit & Roche (2004:p,90) maintain that ZPD can be described

as, “the distance between one’s present development level and the level of potential future development”.

Donald et al. (2002:p,99) warn that the ZPD is not a quality of an individual learner but rather a potential for his intellectual development created by the internal mental reaction that occurs as the learner participates in activities. Seemingly, working within ZPD requires a great deal of guided participation under postgraduate supervision. Hence, the postgraduate students’ development to become independent researchers may take place under the guidance of competent and committed supervisors as a result of what Vygotsky (1978) terms “scaffolding” (Dysthe et al. 2006:p,312).

A scaffold is normally a temporary structure that is erected around a building to support the building process until it is complete. It is gradually removed as it ceases to be needed. Snowman & Biehler (2006:p,52) understand scaffolding to mean the guidance that the student receives to enable the student to achieve what he is unable to achieve independently. Also, Zuber- Skerrit & Roche (2004:p,86) confirm that supervision provides a social context where the supervisor plays a vital scaffolding role in assisting and guiding the student to move from the ZPD to the next level of become an independent researcher.

By implication, as the postgraduate students develop and become skilled at applying the knowledge and research skills gained from supervision, the input of the supervisor will gradually be reduced as the researcher works on his own towards completion of the programme. However, the constructivist theory can be criticized for its tendency to assume that all postgraduate students have the intellectual to construct their own meanings as both supervisors and postgraduate students can be

active agents and generators of knowledge irrespective of their different approaches to research work in Higher Education Institutions.

2.3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A brief overview of Higher Education Institutions in the international context where research programmes are organised in various ways is discussed followed by African Higher Education context which is shaped according to European models. Also, as with public Higher Education Institutions internationally, South African context has various ways of organising its research programmes. Conceptualising postgraduate supervision and models of supervision which consists of the traditional and alternative models are discussed.

2.3.1. Higher Education Institution

Higher Education is an educational level that follows the completion of a school providing secondary qualification. Tertiary is normally taken to include undergraduate and postgraduate education. Universities are the institutions that provide tertiary education. Sometimes, universities are collectively known as tertiary institutions or Higher Education Institutions. Completion of tertiary education generally results in the awarding of an academic degree. For Badat (2010:p,43) not only is Higher Education very important to national economies as a significant industry in its own right but also equally important as a source of trained and educated personnel.

Higher Education Institutions are traditionally seen as the training ground for intellectual capacity and skills development in a country (Boughey 2004). Since universities are funded according to their throughput rates (National Research

Foundation 2007); it seems to be a financial imperative for universities to spend time and resources effectively to ensure that postgraduate students experience successes with their studies. In turn the success of postgraduate students would lead to universities increasing their research output and capacity (Department of Higher Education and Training 2009). In addition it would increase the potential of qualified academic staff for employment within Higher Education Institution (Osborne, Marks & Turner 2004:p,299). Thus, the international and national context of Higher Education needs to be examined.

2.3.1.1. International context of Higher Education

Higher Education internationally specifically refers to postsecondary education institutions that offer bachelor degrees, Masters degree, PhD or other equivalents (Pascarella & Terenzin 2005). However, the international universities have organized their research programmes in various ways. In Germany, France, and Netherlands graduate schools concentrate upon a particular theme and provide both research and supervision and taught courses (Dysthe, Samara & Westrheim 2006). The Canada Association of Graduate schools proposed guidelines to encourage higher standards of supervision and speedier completion of programs of graduate studies (Brew & Peseta 2004:p,17). The Australian Research Council has established a code of supervisory duties to improve supervision of research postgraduate students, monitoring of supervision and student progress (Calma 2007:p,93). Thus, research programmes seem to be organised in different ways and in different contexts.

2.3.1.2 African context of Higher Education

Higher Education is regarded as a key force for African modernisation and development (Mutula 2009). However, African Universities currently function in very difficult circumstances both in terms of social, economic and political problems facing the continent (Teferra & Altbach 2004:p,24). Africa with more than 54 countries has no more than 300 institutions that fit the description of a university (Ibid). A few countries including Gambia, Guinea- Bissau and Seychelles have no universities but preparations are underway to create one or more major postsecondary institutions (Mutula 2009). Other countries including Angola, Somalia and Democratic Republic of Congo have lost university level institutions as a result of the political turmoil.

Therefore, by international standards, Africa is the least developed region in terms of Higher Education Institutions and enrolments (Teferra & Altbach 2004:p,22). As a result in the context of globalisation, the economic problem facing African countries make it difficult to provide access and increase funding for Higher Education (Ibid). Despite having challenges and obstacles in providing the education, research and services; other countries in Africa such as Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa dominate the continent with academic institutions shaped and organised according to European models (Zeleen 2003:p,139). Mutula (2009) confirms that Higher Education in Africa including South Africa have adopted the Western model of academic organisation.

2.3.1.3. South African Higher Edcuation context

Wisker (2005:p,5) claims that research in South African Higher Education Institutions is the fundamental learning activity and postgraduate degrees are recognized for the valuable contribution they make to the generation of new knowledge and improvement of research capacity. Brown (2007) confirms that Master's and Doctorate research is high on the priority lists of Higher Education Institutions in South Africa. The path to a Masters degree in South Africa usually follows the attainment of an initial undergraduate degree followed with honours degree (CHE 2004).

South African Higher Education must contend with the declining resources as with public Higher Education internationally whilst simultaneously having to deal with more students' diverse backgrounds and pressures for increased accountability and quality assurance (CHE 2004; DoE 2009). Despite the widened access to postgraduate programmes SAHEI's seem to be experiencing similar challenges with other tertiary institutions worldwide. It in this light that the researcher dug deep into research supervision experiences of Masters in Education postgraduate students at the University of X.

Masters in Education (MEd) is a programme that offers taught coursework and research component in some South African universities (CHE 2003). MEd programmes are offered on both full and part-time basis in different South African Universities. Notably, there has been a change in some SA universities where coursework as taught content is carried alongside a research component for the MEd degree. As an example, University of Pretoria has a seminar based postgraduate studies. Also, Wits University, University of Cape Town, and University

of KwaZulu Natal work together in funded consortia that bring together postgraduate students for the purpose of joint seminars and workshops(Dietz et al. 2006:p,9).

A third model is the split side of Master and Doctorate degrees where student work with a single supervisor but also participates in formal based training at an overseas university. Another model is the laboratory based team of collective research postgraduate students under supervision of a common supervisor (Dietz et al. 2006: p,10). But at the University of X MEd is by dissertation only and carried full time or part-time with a single supervisor appointed for the novice researchers (University of X 2011). Despite the varying models of supervision that are seminar based or dissertation only, Masters research and the problems of postgraduate supervision put research output under threat (Badat 2010:p,33).

2.3.2. Conceptualising the notion of "postgraduate supervision"

In South African Universities the term "postgraduate" has the same meaning as the term "graduate" in North America as it refers to the course of study that is carried out after undertaking first an undergraduate degree and an Honours degree. At the University of X (2011) postgraduate students pursuing studies at Master's and Doctoral level in Higher Education Institutions are referred to as "postgraduates"; whilst Norway Universities, use the word "graduate" to refer to Masters Level and "postgraduate" for PhD level postgraduate students (Dysthe, Samara & Westrheim 2006:p,299). The Norwegian Master's degree takes two years to complete after a three year Bachelor degree. To meet the challenges of non-completion an increased focus has been on improving supervision practices at both graduate and postgraduate levels.

At the University of X (2011), the term “research degrees” refers specifically to all Doctoral degrees in the form of thesis, as well as Masters degrees that consist entirely of a research component in the form of a dissertation (University of X 2011:p,1). The literature indicates the terms also equivalent to research supervision as “higher degree research supervision”, “research higher degree supervision”, “dissertation supervision” or “postgraduate supervision” (Calma 2007:p,91). For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the term “postgraduate supervision”.

Postgraduate supervision has been defined in a variety of ways by different scholars. Examples include Calma (2007:p,92) who defines postgraduate supervision as university academic staff supervision of postgraduate students undertaking Masters by research. In a similar fashion, Lessing & Lessing (2004:p,74) acknowledge that postgraduate supervision refers to the guidance of a postgraduate research student by a supervisor to obtain a recognized postgraduate research degree.

In a somewhat different vein, the term “postgraduate supervision” may not necessarily refer to research supervision as this is a much broader term that may encompass supervision of the research of academic staff such as when professors for instance are commissioned to report to institutional or national agencies (Calma 2007:p,93). Neither should postgraduate supervision be confused with clinical supervision, personnel supervision on workplace settings nor supervision in general training (Dysthe et al. 2006:p,299). Instead, at the University under study postgraduate supervision is perceived as a working relationship between a supervisor and a postgraduate student, the objective being to successfully complete the work necessary for the student to gain a degree (DoE 2010).

Although, this study favours Lessing & Lessing's (2004) conceptualization of postgraduate supervision, it is evident that postgraduate supervision refers to the supervision of candidates during the development of their dissertation research. Despite the many terms associated with research supervision, there is common conceptual consensus that it carries the following:

- *induction of the student to scholarly community,*
- *the training of the student with appropriate research skills and knowledge and competences needed in an academic field ,*
- *the provision of an environment that encourages completion of the research study (Calma 2007; Dysthe et al. 2006).*

Discussing the myriad of definitions of postgraduate supervision in the light of the above perceptions, postgraduate supervision in South African Higher Education context can be defined as the process of providing the necessary environment that encourages the completion of research by postgraduate student.

The term "postgraduate research supervision" usually refers to the supervision or promotion of postgraduate students research activities leading in whole or in part the awarding of Masters degree (http//www.che.ac.za). There are processes associated with postgraduate research supervision. In principle, University of X (2011:p,2) ascertains research supervision as a crucial aspect in ensuring the success of postgraduate research candidate as postgraduate research implies a relationship and an agreement between the candidate, supervisor and academic department. In postgraduate supervision postgraduate students are given guidance in all aspects of

their research projects from designing an acceptable research proposal to writing a dissertation (University of X 2011:p, 9).

As a result most writers recommend having a formal contract between supervision and postgraduate students (Mouton 2001; Phillip & Pugh 2005). CHE (2004) documented and recommends that rights and responsibilities of supervisors and postgraduate students should be communicated in the form of a learning contract. Once the research proposal has been approved an agreement has to be reached and a kind of contract may be drawn between the two parties (Mouton 2001:p,45). In essence, the student agrees to undertake the proposed study as outlined in the research proposal. In turn, the supervisor has to provide the student with the necessary guidance and supervision to achieve this goal (University of X 2011:p, 3).

Bush (2007:p,398) refers to the role played by the supervisor and the supervisee in signing learning contract as transactional leadership. Transactional leadership is an exchange process which may secure benefits for both parties (Ibid). Although not legally binding a strong moral commitment implies certain responsibilities and duties for both parties. This indicates that the supervisors and postgraduate students' contract may help clear a number of misconceptions in relation to roles, responsibilities and expectations of both the supervisors and postgraduate students.

However, a point to consider is that the process may not engage postgraduate students beyond the immediate gains from the transaction because it may not produce long term commitments. Notably, there are obvious concerns that moving to such a contractual agreement for supervision could create problems with contracts encouraging postgraduate students' dependency on the supervisor (Mouton 2001:p,47).

On contrary, benefits of such an agreement would be challenging the unequal power relations which can create over ambitious expectations between the supervisor and postgraduate students (Brown 2007). Furthermore, the non-completion of the Masters programme may mean the termination of such a contract which could reflect negatively on the tertiary institutions' postgraduate students' throughput and research output rates. Yet, when a supervisor accepts a student, whatever the formal rules may be, both have entered into an implied moral contract which last until one of the three: supervisor, student or research project expires (Bush 2007:p,399).

In the same line of thought as Bush (2007); Ismail & Abiddin (2011:p,81) claim supervision can be interpreted as a two way interactional process that require both the student and the supervisor to consciously engage each other within the spirit if professionalism, respect, collegiality and one-mindedness. Vilkinas (2002:p,129) perceives supervision as a social encounter which involves two parties with both "converging" and "diverging" interests (Ibid). Thus, balancing these interests seems to be very crucial for the successful supervision of research projects.

But for Ginns, Marsh, Behnia, Cheng & Scalas (2009:p,579) no supervision seem the same because conceptions of research and the models that drive supervision and students expectations differ. In spite of the differences, CHE (2003) advocate for quality in postgraduate research supervision. Lessing & Lessing (2004:p,76) refer to two aspects of quality: the quality of supervisory process by supervisors and the quality of research output by postgraduate students. Wisker (2008:p,192) maintains that supervision is widely acknowledged as influencing the quality of postgraduate dissertations and thus by implication of postgraduates.

For Phillips & Pugh (2005) part of achieving quality is the selection of competent supervisors. A supervisor is an academic assigned to supervise the student research project until its completion (http//www.che.ac.za). At the University of X a supervisor is required to hold amongst other things a PhD, have academic knowledge in the field of study, show keen interest in establishing working relationship with the student (University of X 2011).

In some South African Universities a co-supervisor is appointed alongside an experienced supervisor. The role of the co-supervisor is to collaborate with and support the primary supervisor in the management and supervision of the postgraduate students research projects as well as monitoring postgraduate students progress (CHE 2003; Krauss & Ismail 2010:p,160). Murphy, Bain & Conrad (2007:p,209) complement the role of the supervisor for the importance of assistance postgraduate students receive from others involved also in the Masters project.

Murphy et al.'s (2007) view correspond to the phenomena of the Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development described as "the distance between the actual development levels as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978:p,86). Vygotsky claimed that learning occurs in this zone which bridges the gap between what is known and what is unknown. However, the process of selecting a supervisor is made difficult by diversity of factors which Wisker (2005:p,54) finds to be personal, professional or organizational which can impact upon the success of supervision.

Brew & Peseta (2004) suggest supervision to be a facilitative process that includes mentoring of the candidate. Yet, the supervisors seem to have the challenge to

achieve the status of a mentor (Lee 2007:p,687), a reflective colleague to the mentee. Furthermore, a supervisor may be engaged in a model of supervision that has more disadvantages than advantages. The researcher examined models of postgraduate research supervision, the traditional model as well as the alternative approaches to postgraduate supervision.

2.3.2.1. Apprenticeship model of postgraduate supervision

There are cultural differences in ways that universities organize supervision on their Masters' programme (Kamler & Thompson 2008:p,513). For an example in Britain and Australia the relationship is with a supervisor and an associate supervisor with whom postgraduate students meet on a regular basis in tutorials. By contrast, in North America, a committee that acts as both examiner and guide with one advisor providing more intense support oversee the dissertation research. But, de Beer & Mason (2009:p,214) note that postgraduate supervision in South Africa is conducted by a single supervisor and not by a supervisory team as is common in more developed countries.

Traditional model of supervision is based on a single supervisor working with a student over an extended period of time. The imagery of a student arriving for a first supervision session dutifully assigned books for reading and a topic for investigation was a fairly common picture of supervision in South African Universities (Dietz et al 2006:p,9). Traditionally, postgraduate supervision has not been systematically quality assured as the process has been left to the individual supervisor with minimal guidance or interference from the institution; characterized by slow throughput rates, unaccountable behaviour by supervisors and disputes between postgraduate students and supervisors (CHE 2004).

Mouton (2001:p,22) claim that the traditional postgraduate supervision takes place on one to one basis; there are frequent face to face meetings between students and supervisors. In preparation for the meeting, students must submit written work that the supervisor marks and comments (Ibid). Subsequently the document is likely to be discussed in a meeting between the student and the supervisor. In practice this interview is seldom minuted or recorded, but sometimes summaries are kept by the supervisor in a file or given to the student (Stack 2008).

However, this procedure seems not to be ideal as gaps in the instruction process might be created. A situation where the instructions, discussion, submissions and evaluations between the supervisor and the supervisee are automatically recorded would be far more appealing. Previous research studies (Dysthe, Samara & Westrheim 2006:p,301; de Beers & Mason 2009) document weaknesses in individual supervision and recommend a more collective supervision practice where ongoing research is constantly being discussed. Overdependence on the supervisor, lack of ownership and mismatch of personalities were some of the problems reported by students and supervisors (Dysthe et al. 2006:p,300). A major issue has been the difficult balance between authority and dependence (Ibid).

Although traditional postgraduate supervision, which takes place on a one to one basis between postgraduate students and supervisors (Mouton 2001:p,22) can be advantageous on one hand for some postgraduate students; on the other hand there are research findings that report overdependence of postgraduate students on supervisors for guidance from the selection of research topic and throughout the whole research process (Brown 2007; Dietz et al. 2006; Koen 2005).

Bartlett & Mercer (2001) are of the opinion that in apprenticeship model of supervision, the student may adopt a position of passivity and let the supervisor directs the relationship. Yet, the postgraduate students have to take initiative with regards their research projects. Given this context, recent shifts in transforming tertiary institutions seem to put the traditional model of supervision under pressure and moves towards accountability and new approaches to supervision are likely to be inevitable.

2.3.2.2. Alternative models of supervision

Notably, several trends are emerging in SAHEI (Dietz et al. 2006) that signal a gradual break with traditional supervision and initiating moves towards alternative models of supervision. In Norway, it was decided to change Masters of Philosophy Education program from the sole reliance on one to one supervision by utilizing the potential in group supervision and peer review (Lave & Wenger 1998). The first conceptual approach to look at in the alternative models of supervision is Lave & Wenger (1998) who endorse social learning theory of learning where participation in a community is the crucial aspect.

Communities of Practice is a socio- cultural theory of learning through which we can study and understand the process of becoming a member of an educational community in terms of participation in the practices of that community (Ibid). With this approach identities for MEd students might be through shared practice and mutual engagement. Lave & Wenger (1991) use the term “legitimate peripheral participation” to characterize the process by which new comers become included. For Lave & Wenger (1991:p,36) peripherality when it is enabled suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources of understanding through growing

involvement. Of course, legitimate peripheral is a complex notion involving relationships of power (Ibid).

Although it may be an empowering position for postgraduate students when they are given space and opportunity for more participation in postgraduate supervision, but it may be disempowering if postgraduate students are kept from participation in learning communities (Senge 1990). From such view learning seem not to reside in postgraduate supervision, but in the way postgraduate students participate in the process of supervision. From Lave & Wenger's (1991) social learning theory, it can be concluded therefore, that research postgraduate students can lean more effectively and productively with other peers if they can form Communities of Practice; what Senge (1990) refers to as "learning communities".

Secondly, Dysthe et al. (2006:p,300) introduced a multivoiced approach to supervision consisting of supervision groups, student colloquia (same postgraduate students, no supervisor) as a supplement to traditional supervision. Dysthe et al. (2006:p,310) discuss group supervision as a strategy for reducing isolation, supporting postgraduate students, encouraging the exchange of ideas and mentoring postgraduate students in relation to publishing and seeking jobs. To overcome isolation, creation of learning communities has been largely advocated (Senge 1990; Lave & Wenger 1991; Dysthe et al. 2006).

McCormack (2004) also encourages group supervision for development of supervision skills which have an impact on postgraduate students' writing processes. Benefits of group supervision are found to be support, help in gathering materials, experience in thinking on your feet, encouragement to write, clarify and communicate idea and professional growth. Moreover, there could be gains through readings and

from insights supervisors share with their postgraduate students. However, Van Heerden & le Roux (2009:p,262) caution of risks associated with group supervision as experienced by participants in a particular project. By implication, these risks may include postgraduate students experiencing confusion when listening to participants advocating different views. Such risks and challenges experienced by postgraduate students could be that the structure of the project may affect the effectiveness of group supervision.

To van Heerden & le Roux (2009:p,269) certain individuals for different reason may not use the opportunities to express themselves as sometimes the supervisors tend to dominate sessions. Dysthe et al. (2006:p,315) believe that the aim of multivoiced approach model is not only to counteract the negative effects of postgraduate students having to rely on just one person for supervision, but also to investigate the potential of group learning in the research and writing processes. Of course, the interaction of voices might enable postgraduate students to critically reflect on various perspectives of supervision practices instead of relying on authoritative thinkers. However, a question to be asked is whether this multivoiced approach is worth the time and effort for the supervisors and the postgraduate students given the times frames for completion of Masters programme.

Thirdly, in agreement with Lave & Wenger (1991); and Dysthe et al (2006); de Beer & Mason (2009:p,214) also developed an idea of blended learning approach which intended to reduce the work load of postgraduate supervisors whilst at the same time maintaining and ensuring the quality and success of student research output. Blended Learning is the combination of different training MEd to create an optimum training program for a specific audience (Ibid). The term “blended” means that traditional instructor led training is supplemented with other electric formats and

online supervision (de Beer & Mason 2009:p,215). It was found that an online environment could provide textual resources on which tutor could provide feedback.

In Blended Learning postgraduate supervision, the role of supervisors implies that of indicating the sources of information to be accessed by postgraduate students in the face to face consultations and via the Internet and libraries, and evaluating what the student has gained from it. Not only does the use of technology facilitate creativity and communication but it also encourages engagement (Robertson 2002; de Beer & Mason 2009:p,215). Although Blended Learning postgraduate supervision has distinct advantages, it is likely that postgraduate students might still prefer face to face supervision due to their not fully understanding or appreciating these benefits. New postgraduate students might not always know which resources are available and how to use the ones at their disposal such as resources which include electronic interblending library databases (Kamler & Thompson 2008:p,514)

Although the researchers see blended learning approach to research supervision as a possible solution to supervisor resource problem; Lessing & Lessing (2004) show an increasing proportion of postgraduate students who are from previously disadvantaged backgrounds with limited experience of library facilities information and technology skills and independent research work. The work of Lumadi (2008:p, 27) indicates that increased postgraduate students enrolment has created additional demands on postgraduate supervision towards completion of their research projects. Of course, such demands could be supplemented by institutional support services such as supervision through online resources.

Discussions and emailing on the internet to form communities with fellow researchers regardless of where they live may be advantageous for some

postgraduate students. Yet, some postgraduate students who have limited understanding of the new technology may still prefer face to face supervision. Furthermore, in South African Higher Education context online supervision might not be much relevant because of the diverse cultural capital the postgraduate students bring to the supervision sessions.

Despite a number of alternative models of supervision, Lee (2010) advocates the new integrated framework to supervision approach. Alternatively, Lee (2010:p,19) developed five approaches to postgraduate supervision:

- *Functional- where the issues is one of the project management*
- *Enculturation – where the issue is to become a member of disciplinary community.*
- *Critical thinking – where the postgraduate students are encouraged to question and analyse their research work.*
- *Emancipation- where the postgraduate students are encouraged to develop themselves.*
- *Developing a quality relationship- where the postgraduate students are inspired and cared for.*

Her argument is that supervisors who are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of all the above approaches to supervision and who are able to combine approaches appropriately will be better placed to develop their postgraduate students (Ibid). Summarily, alternative approaches to research supervision seem to have a common goal of creating independent researchers through learning communities. Nevertheless, Calma (2007) confirms that no one approach is right or wrong, but it is its appropriateness that matters.

2.4. FUNCTIONAL APPROACH TO POSTGRADUATE SUPERVISON

The functional approaches to postgraduate supervision were examined in relation to roles and responsibilities of supervisors and postgraduate students, expectations, communication, supervision meetings, supervisory relationships and University Support Services.

2.4.1. Roles and responsibilities of supervisors and postgraduate students

A role is a set of responsibilities, obligations and duties that are associated with any given position that an individual holds in a particular context (Johnson 2009). Mouton (2001) purports that to supervise means to direct or oversee the performance and a supervisor is defined as the person who supervises research work of a student. Zhao (2003) see that the power relationship is less equal with the supervisor adopting an instructive and directive role. Although Vilkinas (2002:p,129) believes that supervision is a direct responsibility of supervisors, it seems equally important that supervisors do not see standing over and above as a reason for being authoritarian.

Instead of adopting authoritative roles, Brown (2007) considers that a supervisor should be a role model and should be an authority on the subject as postgraduate students experience difficulties with supervisors who have insufficient knowledge of the area in which they supervise. Each of the word that describes the supervisor as the director and overseer implies the extraordinary authority given to the supervisor and that lives very little space for the one who is being supervised to exercise initiative and have meaningful input in the research process.

Most of the reviewed literature texts not only position supervisors in terms of professional and personal qualities, but also link these qualities to specific roles. Mouton (2001) identifies four different roles of supervision as advisor, guide, quality controller and pastor. (Brown 2007; Delamont, Parry & Atkinson 2004:p,36) describe the eleven roles of supervisor as director, facilitator, adviser, guide, critic, freedom giver, support, friend, manager and examiner. By implication, supervisors are to play the multiple roles in postgraduate supervision to cater for individual's learning needs.

Wisker (2005) perceives the role of the supervisor as to provide technical and emotional support. Exploring the two domains of the supervisory relationship; technical expertise may be easier to quantify but emotional intelligence is somewhat harder to determine due to subjective nature of the human relationship. Of course, supervisors are human and they also, like postgraduate students have strengths and weaknesses. Delamont et al. (2004) suggest that the supervisor must have sufficient social and technical skills to deal with emotional and cognitive aspects of Masters research.

Certo (2006:p,3) maintains that a supervisor is a manager who ensures that the postgraduate students are performing what is required of them such that the department will make its contributions to the University's goals. In somewhat the same vein Wisker (2005) advocates that a supervisor need to give postgraduate students time to work independently and creatively bearing in mind that he is equally responsible for the success of the postgraduate students' work. While supervisor-supervisee relationship has been acknowledged as an important factor directly influencing the success or failure of postgraduate supervision (Wisker 2008); mentoring has also been identified as a critical ingredient in the research supervision process (Waghid 2006:p,429).

Dietz et al. (2006:p,42) claim that mentors, are “advisors, people with career experience willing to share their knowledge: supporters, people who give emotional and moral encouragement; masters; in the sense of employers to whom one is apprenticed: sponsors, sources of information about, and aid in obtaining opportunities; models of identity of the kind of person one should be to be an academic”.

The supervisor as a mentor also supports the candidates’ development offering both personal and professional support (Pearson & Kayrooz 2004:p,105). Lee (2010: p, 22) affirms that the supervisor plays a gate keeping role so that the supervisee has the opportunity to become a member of a professional community. Therefore, mentoring, supporting, constructivism by the supervisor could lead to the personal growth of the candidate and could result to the candidate becoming an independent researcher. However, potential problems may exist in the relationship between mentors and mentees of different genders, races or ethnic backgrounds (Lumadi 2008; Mutula 2009; Koen 2005).

Considering the domains of supervision which include administration in their department (DoE 2010) involvement in the teaching and research activities, it seems unlikely for supervisors to perform all the stipulated roles for all the postgraduate students they supervise. The effect of these multiple roles and demands could be that supervisors may find themselves in difficult positions of having to provide encouragement and support to postgraduate students while enforcing institutional roles and project deadlines.

It is these fundamental conceptual difficulties which may create problems in understanding the relationship when it breaks down and puts completion of research

studies under threat. Yet, little guidance is offered to prepare supervisors for these multiple roles hence Brew & Peseta (2004:p,20) argue that it is left up to an individual to develop an effective teaching style through trial, error and self reflection. Not only does the role of supervisor seem to be complex as research practices change, but also the expectations of supervisors and supervisees are likely to vary (Delamont et al. 2004).

2.4.2. Expectations of supervisors and supervisees

When both postgraduate students and supervisors disregard their roles and responsibilities problems may arise. Wisker (2005) believes that different expectations of both the supervisor and the student remain a concern on supervisory relations. The goals could give rise to conflicts and tensions in their relationship. While the supervisor may strive for quality and push postgraduate students towards independence; the student may have a desire to pass the degree in order to change careers or for job promotion and pull for handholding throughout the research project (Bartlett & Mercer 2001). These reasons seem to be seldom strong enough to sustain the postgraduate students in the research process.

Delamont et al. (2004:p,37) claim that there are postgraduate students who are so uncertain about their ability that they ask the supervisors' approval for every minute of their studies. This goes against the academic requirements that a postgraduate student have to demonstrate the ability to work independently (DoE 2010). Not only can postgraduate students be initially seen as dependent on the supervisors; but they are ultimately expected to develop and become independent researchers.

Seemingly, postgraduate students are challenged on becoming both dependent and independent researchers (Phillips & Pugh 2005). Thus, postgraduate supervision as a form of developing postgraduate students to become independent researchers may encounter misaligned expectations between the supervisees and supervisors which by being mistakenly assumed or less communicated may give rise to challenges more than benefits.

2.4.3. Communication

Supervision is a communicative activity and needs to be based on theories of language and communication (Dysthe et al. 2006:p,302). Such communication might include amongst other things, specific dialogues between the student and the supervisor. These dialogical activities can involve talking, thinking, acting, and active participation in supervision sessions. Wisker (2005) have identified that supervision is not limited to face to face dialogues but involve different types of interaction such as written comments and e-mailing. However, given the different social and institutional positions of supervisor and postgraduate students channels of communication in supervision seem to be unequal.

For Certo (2006:p,10) successful supervisors are good communicators, able to delegate, fair, provide feedback and constructive criticism. If supervisors are to be effective, it is necessary for them to be capable of carrying on a critical conversation about supervision itself with colleagues and postgraduate students (Ibid). However, these requirements may pose challenges to both supervisors and postgraduate students indicating therefore that supervisors too may have poor interpersonal skills.

Bitzer (2007:p,1010) acknowledges that supervision of postgraduates is a process that involves complex and interpersonal skills. These skills range from guidance of the selection of the research topic, research proposal presentation, methodological choices, documenting and publishing the research report, maintain a supportive and professional relationship as well as reflecting on the research process (Ibid). It is evident therefore that supervisors require effective interpersonal skills (Delamont et al. 2004:p,36).

It is these interpersonal skills that make it possible for supervisors to interact and communicate with their postgraduate students effectively about their research studies. Koen (2005) and Lumadi (2008) have discovered that most dissatisfied postgraduate students complain of poor communication with their supervisors and a lack of common understanding of what supervision entails. Similarly, most dissatisfied supervisors accuse their postgraduate students of carelessness, laziness, inflexibility and of not willingly accepting criticism and challenges (Lessing & Schulze 2003; Dietz et al. 2006).

Challenges in MEd supervision such as poor communication have been blamed for non-completion of Masters degree (Lumadi 2008:p,30). It has been noted that language barriers, lack of cultural specific knowledge about intellectual demands of a Masters degree can hamper effective communication between the postgraduate students and supervisors. Feedback to research postgraduate students is a vital aspect with multifaceted functions in postgraduate research supervision. Yet, “providing feedback which combines thoroughness and sensitivity, and which is necessarily critical, analytical and evaluative is a difficult balancing act” (Dyke 2009: p,309). It demands attention not only on how but also on what feedback is given and received (Ibid).

Wisker (2005:p,55) maintains that postgraduate students report that they are not given constructive criticism of their research studies by their supervisors. Females taking postgraduate programmes feel that they are in a more vulnerable situation than their male counterparts (Wang & Li 2009). But, Felton (2005) defends by saying that some male supervisors are too scared to criticize a female student for fear of an emotional reaction. In cases where female postgraduate students are supervised by male academics, there are times when women postgraduate students may encounter difficulties as a result of not having a female academic as a role model (Wang & Li 2009).

Dyke (2009:p,307) affirms that receiving critical feedback can be emotionally difficult for writers as in some instances it may be counterproductive and damaging to postgraduate students' self-esteem, thus negatively affecting the learning outcomes. Wang & Li (2009) study indicate that postgraduate students who have high self-esteem and strong academic abilities tend to have proactive attitude towards critical feedback; whilst postgraduate students with low levels of confidence and academic competence are vulnerable to unfavourable judgment. Felton (2005) is of the opinion that excessive criticism from supervision has been blamed for feelings of inadequacy, loss of confidence and non-completion of dissertations.

In contrast, Wisker (2005:p,58) argues that while postgraduate students should not feel they have to agree with everything; they ought to hide their feelings of embarrassment and anger, suppress the desire to justify the criticized work immediately and be grateful to the supervisors' criticism. Wilkinson (2005) noted that engaging with supportive and sensitive supervisor who exposes postgraduate students to constructive criticism helps postgraduate students to adopt and develop a critical stance in relation to their work. But, some postgraduate students are

unlikely to see the differences between feedback and critical comments of supervisors. Yet, constructive criticism can be necessary if good work is to be produced.

The reality in practice, as noted by Stracke & Kumar (2005:p,5) is that “the relationship, and resulting communication, is influenced by the roles adopted by both the supervisor and the postgraduate research student”. In long distance supervision, the lack of personal contact has an effect on postgraduate students who feel isolated or unacknowledged (McComarck 2004). Yet, the flow of communication which is an instrument of power which functions as a coordinating agent of people from Brown (2007)’s perception comes from the top. Research has shown that the way feedback is given might suggest or create a different relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee (Brew & Peseta 2004; Wang & Li 2009).

Kumar & Stracke (2007:p,463) look at the written feedback in terms of three fundamental functions of speech: referential, directive and expressive. Expressive feedback which consisted of criticism, praise and supervisors opinion were perceived by postgraduate students as the most beneficial (Dyke 2009). Stracke & Kumar (2005) recommend a conversational approach to giving feedback because postgraduate students depend more on supervisors’ feedback for the approval of their proposals. However, although such verbal exchange of ideas are valuable what is shared in conversations can sometimes be forgotten as compared to writing comments which will allow the student to reflect on and address specific issues.

In cases of unfavourable feedback concerning the supervisor or reports of unsatisfactory progress on the part of the candidate, postgraduate students are mandated to consult the Head of Department in an attempt to resolve such matters

(University of X 2011:p,18). This is in line with the University review to monitor the standard of postgraduate research degree awarded in its name and the quality of the education provided to enable postgraduate research postgraduate students to attain those standards (DoE 2010:p,47). This then implies that the relationship between the supervisors and the supervisees have to be a working relationship striving towards achieving independency on the part of the supervisees.

2.4.4. Supervision Meetings

Wisker (2008) claims that postgraduate students have a problem knowing when and how often to consult their supervisors. This then correlates with Brown's (2007) recommendation that different students be supervised according to their abilities, needs and requirements. Phillips & Pugh (2005) believe that meetings between supervisor and supervisee tend to be dominated by technical and logistic elements whereas issues concerning behaviours and expectations can become taboo topics. Because of many other meetings, the supervisor may not be available at all times for consultation with the student.

Furthermore, other administrative work demands may detract time available for consultation. Bailey (2002) indicates that mature age postgraduate students from previously disadvantaged communities and remote locations frequently find themselves disadvantaged in supervision context as they have limited knowledge of research skills. Postgraduate students' cultural background and experience can impact significantly upon his educational opportunity and achievement (Robertson 2002:p, 2).

Robertson (2002) list also in references is an important contributor to the debate about cultural deprivation. His theory of cultural and social capital refers to the

knowledge, experience, attitude which the student bring with them when they enter the supervision arena (Dysthe et al. 2006:p,302; Zhao 2003:p,188; Robertson 2002: p,2). Robertson (2002) asserts that some postgraduate students may have the capital which match the expectations of the supervisors, are able to invest profitable and can increase their cultural capital (Ibid).By implication, postgraduate students may bring to the supervision sessions various challenges in terms of acquired research skills, academic writing and use of technology (de Beer & Mason 2009).

Seemingly, postgraduate supervisors ignore the fact that part-timers may not all possess the same cultural capital as the full time postgraduate students. Hence, Robertson (2002:p,3) advocates that the implications of Bourdieu's theory for postgraduate supervision is that supervisors have to be sensitive to postgraduate students' cultural capital differences. For Wang & Li (2009:p,445) postgraduate students experience fears not only constructed by supervisory relationships but also constructed within wider cultural and institutional processes.

2.5. SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIPS

Various authors (Gurr 2001; Gatfield 2005; Abiddin & Ismail 2011) noted different styles of supervision in relation to relationships between supervisors and postgraduate students. Dietz et al. (2006:p,69) distinguish between a business, product-oriented supervision versus a more personal, process-oriented relationship. The personal-process-oriented relationship type has its focus on building and maintaining relationship and shows minimal interest on the research work (Dietz et al. 2006:p,72). Such relationship is relatively known as friend-friend supervisory style. In business-product-oriented supervision style, Brown (2007) describes the

relationship of supervisor and student as master and servant where there is a distribution of power and authority.

2.5.1. Master- slave relationship

In Abiddin & Ismail (2011:p,17)'s view in master-slave relationship the master is in control of decision making and has the final say whilst the slave obeys without question. Phillips & Pugh (2005:p,145) affirm that postgraduate students are treated as slave labourers as they are pushed into more areas of research and have to pull from their own resources in instances where supervisors are not interested in their research work. But, Delamont et al. (2004:p,37) warns that too much control on product orientations threaten the originality of research project and the autonomy of the novice researcher.

In Mouton (2001)'s view the relationship between a supervisor and the student is likely to be a unique one in which there is an unequal balance of expertise and power. Zhao (2003:p,194) also notes that when the supervisor is described as the knowledge expert certain power is conferred on the expert on behalf of somebody, a process that can displace the voice of the student in learning and research. Of course, supervisors may be generally competent in the research field but they may not necessarily be knowledge experts as postgraduate students may bring to supervision rich experiences from their professions. There is evidence that many supervisors themselves lack knowledge and expertise in research methods (Mouton 2007; Lessing & Schulze 2003).

In line with the above perception, supervision can be a context for the display of unequal power relations (Ginns et al. 2009; Mouton 2007; Brew & Peseta 2004).

There is unequal power that exists between supervisors and postgraduate students in terms of skill, authority and experience (Zhao 2003). For Brown (2007:p,244) the relevance to power in supervision is twofold: structural power where postgraduate supervisor have an institutional position and function and the relational power which includes the relationship between the supervisor and the student. Bitzer (2007:p, 1013) ascertains that the supervisor is the one who grades the students he thus finds himself in a position power (Ibid). The “power of the grade” possessed by the supervisor as well as the title “university supervisor” often compels the student to conform to anything to make the supervisor happy (Abiddin & West 2007:p,29).

Phillips & Pugh (2005) refer to the awareness of postgraduate students of their supervisors’ authority on the subject and the power this confers in the supervision relationship. Of course, supervisors are powerful factors in student academic life (Sayed et al. 1988:p,285) but how their power will be employed remains a concern for many postgraduate students. Alternatively supervisees might experience another supervisory style in friend- friend relationship. This, in turn, implies that different supervisory styles may be employed in different supervisory scenarios for different supervisees.

2.5.2. Friend- friend relationship

Waghid (2006:p,430) argues that the relationship between supervisor and student should neither be built on customer-supplier relationship, nor on expert-novice relationship, but rather be constructed as one of freedom and friendship. Waghid (2006)’s notion of freedom and friendship in postgraduate supervision provides postgraduate students with help in positioning the supervisor as a critical friend. A critical friend is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be

examined through another lens and offers criticism of a person's work as a friend (Carlson 2009:p,083).

Different expectations of the postgraduate students from the critical friend can create tensions because some postgraduate students may be interested to know about their strengths than an honest answer on their perceived weaknesses. In the light of the above argument Carlson (2009:p,084) affirms that neither is a critical friend someone who embraces the role of an expert nor can he be negative, fault finding or judgmental. Instead he may share his experiences on what is supervised and suggest useful references to support the postgraduate students on their research studies. By implication, supervisors may assume the role of a critical friend in supervising postgraduate MEd postgraduate students.

A small exploratory study by Lee (2010) finds that professional masters' postgraduate students regard supervision as a two-way exchange of learning and ideas. Viewing supervision as a collegial two way learning process is likely to be a healthy way of reflecting upon supervision and its potentials rather than considering supervision as a hierarchical relationship between postgraduate students and supervisors. In this regard, the supervision relationship not only scaffolds the professional and personal needs of the student, but it is also a vital link between the student and the supervisor (Wisker 2005).

Although there are nurturing and supportive elements in aspects of personal process oriented approach in guide-explorer, expert-novice relations and a balanced relationship in colleague-colleague and friend-friend (Mouton 2001); Delamont et al. (2004:p,35) warns that too little control can delay completion and can even lead to total failure of the dissertation. Brown (2007) acknowledges that student and

supervisor relationship is subject to limitation that professional and interpersonal relationships may encounter.

Brown (2007) is of the opinion that supervisors adopting a laissez-faire approach to supervision may not be giving postgraduate students the necessary guidance. Taking into account the fact that freedom-friendship relationship recommended by Waghid (2006) is needs oriented, flexible and unstructured; the researcher argues against the notion of laissez faire freedom which to postgraduate student may promote laziness and thus delays in submission and completion of their research projects. Of course, one style of supervision may not work well all the time. Sometimes supervisors have to be task-oriented to get the job done efficiently and effectively. At other times a relationship-oriented style of supervisor which focuses on team building and on moral building can be appropriate.

Although supervisory relations differ, they may not be discussed in isolation. Furthermore, it can be possible to detect certain logic. Taken into account may be the fact that supervisory styles may not follow a single style throughout the supervision process, but the dynamics of supervisory relationships may venture from businesslike to personal approach, from product-oriented to process-oriented approach (Delamont et al. 2004:p,38). For Lessing & Schulze (2003:p,164) the differing expectations of supervisor and student in their relationship as parent-child, master-slave can be developed positively towards nurturing but negatively towards obedience and overprotection.

2.6. CONCLUSION

Because this research study had its focus on adult learners in Higher Education Institution at a South African University, the researcher reviewed literature on adult learning theories. The theories and literature on how adults learn seem not to point at a specific model recommended. But many ideas about how learning may take place can be used as a foundation to think through research supervision experiences of adult participants of Masters in Education postgraduate students. In the light of the above literature; it seems that diverse postgraduate population and different qualities of supervision means that MEd students have a variety of research supervision experiences. Since there seem to be no explanations on how adults experience learning; the researcher thus conducted an in depth investigation of the lived research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provide a critical examination and applicability of qualitative research methodology using phenomenological approach. Data gathering methods and process, ethical conduct, reflexivity, reliability and validity of data collected followed. Since the purpose of this study was to explore and describe the research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students; a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive, contextual and phenomenological research design was discussed.

3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH: QUALITATIVE

Schram (2003) perceive qualitative research as a subjective approach used to describe life experiences and giving them meaning. Creswell (2007:p,18) asserts that in qualitative research "claims of knowledge are based upon constructed perspectives from multiple social and historical meanings of individual experiences". Hence, Leedy & Ormrod (2005:p,132) claim that qualitative approach is concerned with understanding of human beings through their description of experiences as lived and defined by the actors themselves.

Leedy & Ormrod (2005) base qualitative research on the premise that human beings are complex and dynamic. Since qualitative research plays an important role in illuminating the meaning of the lived experiences (Grant 2008b:p,5); the researcher investigates reflective account of postgraduate research supervision experiences of

the sample of MEd postgraduate students studying at one of the Higher Education Institutions in South Africa through qualitative approach.

Babbie & Mouton (2004:p,134) assert that qualitative approach looks at the narrative and descriptive nature of situations, relationships or people, dealing with the description of human beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, perceptions, emotions. Since the qualitative studies data collection methods are flexible and unstructured; Strauss (2005:p,56) claims that data is captured verbatim and considerable use of inductive reasoning. This implies that they make specific observations and then draw inferences about the lager population from the sample (Ibid).The qualitative research report findings in words, narratives and in literary style (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:p,96).

Babbie & Mouton (2004:p,135) are of the opinion that qualitative approach is a valuable means of obtaining insight through establishing a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Hence qualitative approach was used in this research study because of the nature of the research phenomenon which requires in depth exploration of postgraduate research supervision experiences of MEd students.

Exploratory studies attempt to explore the dimensions of the phenomenon under study (Silverman 2005). Mouton (2001) acknowledges that to explore entails examination with the intention to find out more about the unknown situations. The exploratory approach was utilised to explore unknown aspects of the lived experiences of MEd postgraduate students. Babbie (2006) defines exploratory research as a research conducted to gain new sights, discover new ideas and or increase knowledge of the phenomena. As a result, the researcher selected the exploratory research to gain new insight and discover new ideas and, or increase

knowledge on postgraduate research supervision through an exploratory research question. Leedy & Ormrod (2005:p,136) confirm that questions for qualitative questions are exploratory and descriptive.

Descriptive research refers to studies that have their main objective the accurate portrayal of the character of persons, situations or groups (Creswell 2007). Babbie (2006:p,174) shares the same view regarding descriptive approach that it provides in depth description of the phenomenon as it naturally occurs. Since description is done when little is known about the phenomenon under study (Berg 2004:p,233), the researcher intended to unearth supervision experiences of postgraduate students as there seem to be little known literature about how they are supervised. To that effect the present study did not bring a prior hypotheses but only a guiding research question.

Denscombe (2004:p,103) acknowledges that the descriptive in-depth investigation will pull out what is happening within and among people's daily experiences on the phenomena under study. A descriptive design enables the researcher to describe any complex phenomenon on its own terms (Ibid). The detailed description of postgraduate MEd students were facilitated by means of participants' responses captured in field notes, audio-tape, reflective journals and informal conversations The appropriateness of descriptive strategy is that it allowed a thorough description of postgraduate research supervision experiences of 2010 MEd cohort in a particular context.

A phenomenon cannot be understood outside its own context that is, the physical setting in which the process talks place or the individual characteristics that influences the phenomenon. It is in this light that Berg (2004:p,233) perceive

qualitative studies as holistic, flexible and context bound. Furthermore, Schram (2003) points out that qualitative research provides the framework to explore, define and assist in understanding the social and psychological phenomena of organizations and the social settings of individuals. For Silverman (2005) contextual involves research conducted in the participants' natural setting. Creswell (2007:p, 19) suggests contextualisation of the research phenomenon in order to add value to the understanding of the research topic.

The purpose of contextual approach was to understand the phenomenon of interest in relation to its immediate environment. The contextual nature of this study focuses at a South African University located in rural and urban campuses. The intention of this contextual approach was not to generalise the research findings but to describe the lived experiences of 2010 MEd cohort within the selected physical location. The researcher explores the applicability of qualitative study in this research project using a phenomenological approach.

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN: PHENOMENOLOGY

To date there is much disagreement about the meaning of phenomenology possibly because the term has been so widely used (Ehrich 2005:p,1). While Husserl (1965) defines phenomenology as "the science of essence of consciousness"; van Manen (2007:p,3) perceive phenomenology as the interpretive study of human experience. Grant (2008b:p,5) contends that the term "phenomenology" is derived from two Greek words phainomenon which means to "appear" and logos "the study of words". Therefore, phenomenology might be defined as the study of something as it

appears. For Giorgi & Giorgi (2003:p,236) phenomenology in the most comprehensive sense refers to the lived experiences that belong to a single person.

For the purpose of this study, phenomenology has been defined as the exploration and description of phenomena where a phenomenon stands to refer to postgraduate research supervision experiences of MEd students. Wojnar & Kristen (2007:p,174) mention two prominent types of phenomenology that guide the majority of phenomenological investigations; descriptive (Husserl 1965) and interpretive (Heidegger 1962) phenomenology.

3.3.1. Descriptive Phenomenology

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research has its historical roots at the turn of the 20th century in the work of Edmund Husserl. Husserl (1965) developed and employed the research method he called phenomenology for use in philosophy and human sciences including psychology. Ehrich (2005:p,2) claim that phenomenology emerges as a reaction against the positivist view of philosophy and psychology. In addition Wertz (2005:p,167) endorsed that in psychology, phenomenology method is a descriptive and qualitative study of experience that attempts to faithfully conceptualize the process and structure of the meaningful world that is lived through experience.

Wertz (2005:p,167) argues that descriptive phenomenology method does not begin with pre-existing theories nor does it test hypotheses. Neither does it explain human experience with reference to environmental causes (Ibid). Instead, referring to the works of Giorgi (2008b), the operative word in phenomenological research is to " describe" as accurately as possible the phenomena, refraining from any pre-given

framework, but true to the facts (Groenewald 2004:p,5). Although the version of descriptive phenomenology is selected for its applicability to this research study, the researcher contrasts descriptive with interpretive known as Hermeneutic phenomenology.

3.3.2. Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Interpretive phenomenology has emerged from the work of hermeneutic philosophers such as Heidegger who argue that “The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation” (Heidegger 1962:p,37). Heidegger (1962) believes that humans are hermeneutic (interpretive) beings capable of finding significance and meaning in their own lives (Wojnar & Kristen 2007:p,175). In hermeneutics phenomenology, researchers interpret human experience as though it was a text and the outcomes of research studies are viewed as texts that offer rich and deep accounts (Hein & Austin 2001:p,6).

Hermeneutic phenomenologist maintain that before conducting an inquiry of a phenomena, the researcher must reflect on his past experiences, preconceptions, and biases on the phenomena under investigation so that during the interpretive process the researcher can more clearly access the fore understanding held by the research participants (Sampson 2007:p,400).Thus, interpretive phenomenology seems to insist on interpreting human experiences rather than describing them. Ehrich (2005:p,1) claims phenomenology has been conceptualized not only as a valuable qualitative approach to study human experiences but also phenomenology as a philosophy and a research method. Thus, the researcher chose

phenomenology as the research design to investigate lived research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students.

3.3.3. Phenomenology as a philosophy

Phenomenology provide an appropriate strategy for qualitative inquiry by positioning the researcher within the study to collect data on participant meaning, focusing upon a phenomena and bringing personal value to it (Giorgi 2008b). Common to different types of phenomenology as a philosophy are four key qualities which include subjectivity, description, intentionality, and reduction.

With regards to subjectivity, Finlay (2009:p,17) argues that researchers need to bring critical self awareness of their own subjectivity and assumptions and to be conscious of how these might impact on the research process and findings. Giorgi & Giorgi (2003:p,252) believes that nothing can be accomplished without subjectivity so its elimination is not the solution. Rather how the subject is presented is what matters and objectivity itself is an achievement of subjectivity (Giorgi & Giorgi 2003:p, 255).

Experience is seen as the source of all knowing and the basis of behaviour (Finlay 2009:p,12); because it is named in terms of the subjectivity it evokes in those who have experienced it. Phenomenological research seems to be premised firstly on “experience”. For Husserl (1965) experience is the foundation of our knowledge of ourselves, of other people and the world in general (Wertz 2005:p,167) and can be a valid, rich and rewarding source of knowledge (Denscombe 2004:p,103). Hence, phenomenologist does not view human experience as unreliable source of data; rather they see it as the cornerstone and description of knowledge about human phenomenology (Groenewald 2004:p, 6).

Finlay (2009:p,8) argues that any research which does not have at its core the description of things in their appearing focusing on experience as lived cannot be considered phenomenological. Hence, descriptive phenomenology is not primarily concerned with explaining the causes of things but tries instead to provide a description of how things are experienced firsthand by those involved (Husserl 1998).

In contrast to other phenomenological approaches to research, descriptive phenomenology prefers to concentrate its efforts on getting a clear picture of the "things in themselves" that is the things as directly experienced by people (Husserl 1998). For Giorgi (2008b:p,2) a phenomenon is experienced directly, rather than being conceived in the mind. As a result in the eyes of descriptive phenomenology, a phenomenon is something that is not yet understood through analysis, or theorizing, but something that stands intentionally in the need of explanation.

Intentionality refers to the consciousness and individuals are always conscious of something (Heidegger 1962). Since, consciousness is always consciousness of something therefore phenomenologist's claim that phenomenology is intentional (van Manen 2007:p,8). While Heidegger (1962) perceive intentionality as the total meaning of the object which is always more than what is given in the perception of a single perspective (Wertz 2005:p,169); for Giorgi (2008b) intentionality refers to the process of describing and gaining insight into how and what is experienced. For the purpose of this research study, the researcher chooses Giorgi's (2008b) intentionality to gain deeper insight on MEd postgraduate lived experiences.

In focusing on the people's ways of being in the world, phenomenology descriptively elaborates structures of the self, various kinds of intentionality and the constitution of

the experienced world (Wertz 2005:p,171).Thus, phenomenology research seemingly, begins with and constantly holds in view concrete examples of the experiences under investigation which require phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction occurs when “each experience is considered in and for itself” (Wojnar & Kristen 2007:p,172)

Reduction is a process that involves suspending or bracketing the phenomena so that “things themselves” can be returned to (Husserl 1998). The first procedure involves simply putting aside pre existing theories about the topic. More specifically, this involves abstaining from explanations that have been postulated regarding the phenomena under study (Wojnar & Kristen 2007:p,173). Furthermore, Denscombe (2004:p,106) suggest that at least three particular areas of presupposition which need to be set aside:

- *Scientific theories, knowledge and explanation*
- *Truth or falsity of claims being made by participants*
- *Personal views and experiences of the researcher which would cloud descriptions of the phenomena itself.*

Husserl (1998) believes it is possible to gain insight into the common feature of any lived experience through bracketing. He refers to these features as universal essences or eidetic structures and considered them as to represent the true nature of the phenomenon under investigation (Giorgi 2008b:p, 4). Giorgi & Giorgi (2003:p, 263) perceive an essence as the core meaning of an individual experiences that makes it what it is. Hence, in order to discover the essential characteristics of the phenomena being investigated Husserl an method requires the use of imaginative variations (Giorgi & Giorgi 2003:p, 255). Imaginative variation attempts to understand

and describe the essence and structure of an experience or phenomenon being investigated.

Husserl (1965), Heidegger (1962), Giorgi (2008b) deduces that the second level of bracketing (epoche) is the elimination of bias associated with common knowledge as the basis for truth and reality. To that effect bracketing is the method used to assist in the elimination of this researcher bias (Ibid). However, the attitude of reduction seems to have prohibitions that delineate what the phenomenological researcher might not do. Of course, such prohibitions are likely to distinguish descriptive phenomenological research from other contrasting methods of phenomenology such as interpretive phenomenology.

However, a number of commonalities in descriptive and interpretive approaches to phenomenology can be noted. Firstly, both focus on the phenomena itself; and not on the subjective experience of the participants. Secondly, the use of imaginative variation is common to both approaches to help illuminate the themes or essences during data analysis. Both the descriptive approach and hermeneutic approaches contend that imaginative variations are a reflective process which allows researchers to discover which aspect or qualities of phenomena are essential (Ehrich 2005:p, 6). Thirdly, both phenomenological approaches utilize the data to create the text (van Manen 2007) or general statement (Giorgi 2008b) which represent the essential structures of the lived experiences of the phenomenon.

By contrast, Husserlian method insists on the importance of description rather than interpretation. While the line between description and interpretation seem to be thin and perhaps contestable; Giorgi & Giorgi (2003) argues that the drive for phenomenologist is to stay with description until a holistic picture of the issue

emerges. Furthermore, descriptive phenomenology emphasizes reduction which involves bracketing or suspending ones beliefs in order to uncover the essential structures (Wojnar & Kristen 2007:p,178). Yet, hermeneutics approach denies that it is possible or even desirable to set aside or bracket researchers' understanding and experiences (van Manen 2007:p, 8).

Groenewald (2004:p,11) contends that for hermeneutics it is doubtful if it is possible for researchers to rid themselves entirely of presuppositions. They argue instead that researchers need to come to an awareness of their pre-existing beliefs, which then make it possible to examine and question them in the light of the new evidence (Wertz 2005:p,168). While there is a need for an open attitude; how much attention a researcher must pay to bringing his own experiences to the foreground and reflexively exploring his own subjectivity remains a cause for concern.

Thus, there remains a debate as to whether or not it is necessary to engage reduction for hermeneutics. Although the setting aside of pre conceived ideas was carried out throughout this research project; however, a continuing debate is on whether epoche and reduction as phenomenological concepts according to Van Manen (2007:p,6) are possible. Husserl (1998) contends that in the process of reduction the phenomenological researcher moves from the naive expressive description obtained through eidetic epoche (second level of bracketing) to the structural description. Thus, phenomenology as a research method needs to be examined.

3.3.4. Phenomenology as a research method

For Grant (2008:p,6) an exploration of phenomenology as a research method needs to be situated in a wider context of research, which has been dominated previously

with scientific methods with its emphasis on objectivity, neutrality, measurement and validity. Phenomenology as a research method identifies the essence of human experience concerning a phenomenon as described by participants in a study (van Kaam 2005:p,15). One of the great challenges facing the human sciences and service professions is the choice and application of research methods that respect the uniqueness, complexity, and meanings of lived experience (Wertz 2005:p,172). Finlay (2009:p,20) remind us that there is no one way to carry out phenomenological research since "the specific method used depends on the on the purpose of the researcher, his or her specific skills and the nature of the research question and data collected."

Since descriptive phenomenology explorations have the potential to help the researchers understand the complexity of human experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of the participants experiences (van Manen 2007:p,9); researching the question of the subjective experiences and personal meanings of postgraduate students' research supervision experiences seem to lend itself to the method of descriptive phenomenology. Husserlian method was chosen for this research study because of its emphasis on the importance of subjective experiences as the most appropriate method for understanding the phenomena of postgraduate supervision.

Husserl's (1998) idea that phenomenology research should refrain from importing external framework and set aside judgments about the realness of the phenomena is supported. The overall attitude adopted in this work was to put aside the researcher's knowledge of scientific theories and research on postgraduate supervision in order to focus on the lived experiences of postgraduate students as

expressed by the participants. Having discussed phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a research method, data gathering methods and data analysis followed.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Regarding data sources, van Manen (2007:p,8) state that phenomenologist can utilize a variety of data sources including their own personal experiences, obtain experiential descriptions from others via interviews or observations or utilize experiential descriptions in literature that will yield experiential data. However, descriptive phenomenology data sources can be notes, reflective journals, memos and informal interviews (Groenewald 2004:p,23). Hence the researcher's data collection methods included purposive sampling of the research participants and the research sites, reflective journals and interviews.

3.4.1. Sampling: Purposive

Sampling is the process of selecting people with whom to conduct research (Silverman 2005). A sample consists of the elements of a defined population (Ibid). For Denscombe (2004:p,19) population refers to the entire group of persons who meet the criteria that the researcher is interested in studying. Because the purpose of drawing a sample from a population is to obtain information from the population, Strauss (2005) claim it is imperative that the individuals included in the sample constitute a representative cross section of the individuals in the population. Inclusion criteria for the sample denote characteristics that must be possessed by the element to be included in the sample (Babbie 2006:p,367). Thus, in Babbie's (2006) understanding the concept of sampling involves taking a portion of the

population, making observations on this smaller group and then generalizing the findings to the population.

There are two kinds of sampling known as probability sampling and non probability sampling. Berg (2004:p,233) state that probability sampling is based on the idea that people or events are chosen as the sample because the researcher has some notion of the probability that these will be a representative cross section of people in the whole population being studied. A sample size may refer to a number of person, but also to the number of interviews and observations conducted. Since qualitative studies require use of relatively small numbers of samples, it was difficult for the researcher to choose the sample for the study on the basis of probability sampling. Non-probability sampling was chosen because it allows participants to narrate stories about their lived experiences (Leedy & Ormrod 2005).

Non-probability sampling takes place in different forms such as convenience sampling, snowballing and purposive sampling (Leedy & Ormrod 2006:p,145). Convenience sampling refers to the selection of subjects that can be easily accessible to the researcher (Silverman 2005). With snowballing, the sample emerges through a process of reference from one person to the next (Creswell 2007: p,18). In relation to purposive sampling the researcher deliberately selects the specific people with similar characteristics as they are likely to produce the most valuable data (Denscombe 2004:p,15). Therefore, purposive sampling was likely to be suitable for this research study.

Not only is purposive sampling a method that is applied when selecting a population with similar characteristics or particular qualities (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:p,149) but it also seeks information for rich cases for in depth study. Furthermore, it is used to

ensure certain types of individuals displaying certain attributes are included in the study (Berg 2004:p,32). As Husserl (1998) puts it, phenomenology dictates the method not vice versa including the type of participants. To achieve this Husserl suggest the kinds of individuals who will be suitable for participation as:

- *those who have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched,*
- *verbally fluent,*
- *able to communicate and express their feelings and thoughts*
- *express willingness to be open to the researcher (Grant 2008b:p,7).*

Therefore, the above characteristics were looked for from the participants who were sampled.

Berg (2004:p,32) contends that purposive sampling allows the researcher to study a portion of the population rather than an entire population. Although it would be ideal to investigate supervision experiences of the entire population of 2010 MEd postgraduate students; Strauss (2005) claims when a population is too large the researcher has no option but to draw a sample from the population to be studied. Hence only six participants from a population of 49 MEd 2010 cohorts were selected to represent that population. Denscombe (2004:p,146) recommends research participants of up to 10 people. The inclusion criteria for this study were:

- Two participants were in the initial stages of their research projects having had their research proposals recently approved.
- Two participants were in the middle of their research work piloting their studies.

- Two participants were in the field collecting and analysing data for the main study.

Not only did the researcher sample the research participants but also the research site. Research site is the physical location in which data collection takes place (Silverman 2005:p,43). This research study draws a sample from one Higher Education Institution in South Africa; the University of X 2010 MEd cohort. The researcher sampled six particicpants from forty-nine postgraduate students studying MEd at the University of X at rural and urban campuses. Access to the research site was negotiated with the Faculty of Education as well as the Ethics Committee of the University of X.

3.4.2. Interviews: Unstructured Interviews

Schram (2003) describes an interview as a personal conversation through which information is obtained. Similarly, Silverman (2005:p,155) defines an interview as " A two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the purpose of obtaining research relevant data focused on specified objectives". Interviews allow the researcher to capture and describe complex activities that produce meanings (Babbie 2006). In a different note, Denscombe (2004:p,163) & Silverman (2005) maintain that interviews involve a set of assumptions and understanding about the situation which are not normally associated with a casual conversation. Common to these definitions of various authors on interviews is the notion that in an interview the participant provides the researcher with the information through conversation. Of importance is Schram (2003) observation that non verbal behaviours and interview context can be noted by the researcher to become part of the data.

From Babbie's (2006) viewpoint an interview can take many forms ranging from face to face interaction, telephone conversation and email. Generally, interviews can be classified into three major categories structured, semi structured and unstructured. Structured interviews involve tight control over the format of the questions and answers like a questionnaire (Denscombe 2004:p,166). Unlike questionnaires, a semi-structured interview is flexible with few leading questions and the answers are open ended (Babbie & Mouton 2004); while the unstructured interviews go further in the extent to which emphasis is placed on the interviewee's thoughts (Creswell 2007). The difference in these three types lie in the way the interviewer formats the questions.

The preferred phenomenological interview of gathering information from subjects was in depth unstructured interviews. Leedy & Ormrod (2005:p,146) maintains that an unstructured interview is literally an interchange of views between two people conversing about a theme of mutual interest. For Denscombe (2004:p,105) unstructured interviews allow plenty of scope for the interviews to move the discussion to areas that they regard as significant. As a result the unstructured interviews provide an opportunity for the participants to openly give an account of their supervision experiences.

3.5. DATA COLLECTION PHASES

Following Giorgi's work (2008) the aim of phenomenology is to produce accurate descriptions of human experiences. Researchers operating within this tradition mainly utilize descriptions provided by others obtained through interviews and

through written texts (Ehrich 2005:p,5). Hence data collection process included piloting the study, journaling and interviewing process.

3.5.1. Piloting

Since a preliminary study is mandatory in order to reach informed decisions regarding the most appropriate form of data collection (Stevens 2003:p,237); the researcher undertook a pilot study with two participants a male and a female. The pilot study had been limited by using fewer subjects. Selecting the most suitable research design for this study was challenging. It was while revealing their stories, that the participants made sense of their lived experiences and communicated meaning; that phenomenological choice of descriptive method became clear to the researcher.

Each of the two participants provided written reflections, face to face interview audio taped describing what was it like to be supervised in Masters in Education programme. Data collected was analysed using Giorgis (2008b) descriptive phenomenological method. Giorgi's phenomenological method was useful in the pilot study because it took subjective experiences as its main focus. First, the participants' descriptions of the phenomena under study were read for a general overview. Protocols of analysis included categorising of significant statements, creating individual situated structure, developing general situated structure and developing a general description.

Relevance of the pilot study could be summed up as providing the researcher with ideas, approaches and clues that may not have been foreseen. The research design and research methods applicable for the study were chosen after piloting. In addition

to improving data collection routines, the pilot study added knowledge that led to improved dissertation writing. Since phenomenological studies require suspension of bias so that the studied phenomena can be regarded with an openness that allows aspects to be revealed from the subjects' viewpoint (Wojnar & Kristen 2007:p,175); the pilot presented the researcher with an opportunity to practise bracketing.

3.5.2. Journaling

Journaling is a method of data production and collection that is frequently used by researchers (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Since each of the participants had either lived through the experience or was in the process of living through a significant research supervision experience; the participants were requested initially to provide the researcher with written descriptions of situations regarding their experiences. The descriptions varied in length and revealed a fairly organized depiction rather than a lived account of their experiences. The reports received appeared somewhat distant and reflective in nature. It was then that in order to reduce bias and misinterpretation, opportunities for the participants to talk for themselves were to be created.

Notes from informal conversations with participants about their research supervision experiences on their MEd research projects were taken. The reported lived experiences and the observed experiences of postgraduate students was recorded on the field notes because Groenewald (2004:p,24) insists on the importance for a researcher to maintain a balance between descriptive and reflective notes such as hunches, impressions, feelings and so on. Wojnar & Kristen (2007:p,176) are of the opinion that bracketing may be accomplished by using field notes as a reflective diary to write down the investigators observations, assumptions while simultaneously

refraining from prematurely foreclosing on the researchers hunches about the emerging concepts.

Different types of journal entries included introspective conversations with myself about my thoughts, feelings and my experiences of postgraduate supervision, scribbled conversations with others, notes from presentations and workshops on postgraduate supervision attended, informal conversations and field notes. Re-reading journal entries (Kriegel 2009:p,591) gave the researcher space to bracket her own thoughts, feelings and experiences of MEd postgraduate students' research supervision.

3.5.3. Interviewing

Although participants' journals were considered as rich and valuable resources; Fourtounas (2003:p,8) saw an undeniable difference between the written and the spoken word. A firsthand account of the experience had to be provided and the spoken word took precedence over the written word. Fourtounas (2003:p,7) claims, "If we want to hear stories rather than reports, then our tasks as interviewers is to invite others to tell their stories, to encourage them to take responsibility for the meaning of their talk". Therefore, rather than to accept a written reflection of the lived supervision experiences of the participants, the story of the experience had to be told. Thus, the truth of supervision experience of MEd postgraduates had to be allowed to speak for itself.

Creswell (2007:p,185) claim that the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that will best help the researcher to understand the research questions. Since the research questions were directed to participants'

feelings and emotions, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions about the theme in question; the following research question guided the interviewing process:

"How do you experience research supervision on MEd programme at the University of X?

Leedy & Ormrod (2005:p,139) argue that phenomenology depends exclusively on lengthy interviews which may take one to two hours with careful selected sample of 5 to 25 participants. In this work face to face interviews were conducted in different context and at different times. On average each interview lasted between 55 minutes and an hour with a sample of six participants who provided the researcher with the verbal accounts of their experiences. Field notes were taken during the interview sessions. Mouton (2001:p,105) states that taking field notes during interview is appropriate in qualitative data collection because it facilitates remembering the interview events. As a result field notes enabled the researcher to retrieve the data during data analysis. To validate data, the researcher asked for permission from the participants to record data through the use of a tape recorder.

Denscombe (2004:p,107) confirms that data collection by phenomenology tends to rely also on tape recorded interviews. The process of tape recorded interviews was valuable as it provided the researcher with the possibility of exploring matters in depth. Throughout the interviews the researcher listened attentively and maintained minimal verbal responses but acknowledged the participants' responses by nodding. The participants were probed to elaborate on certain issues that would carry the interview further. For clarities the participants' responses were paraphrased.

While attempting to contain the experience to the specific situation identified by the participant, the first level of bracketing (epoche) was engaged in by resisting any

temptation to contribute to the original meanings presented. During the interview, the home language of the participants was used while the descriptions provided were transcribed and served as data. It was easier for the participants to express themselves in their home language; therefore the data was transcribed by the researcher.

The interviews remained open-ended and receptive to the participants' full stories. To avoid misinterpretations, follow up interviews were conducted with the same participants who were asked to elaborate on their original meanings. Babbie (2006) believes it is helpful to conduct follow up interviews and indicates that this procedure of having the subject read his original description helps the participants to recall finer details of the situation that was experienced.

3.6. DATA ANALYSIS

Schram (2003:p,144) perceive data analysis as a mechanism for reducing and organizing data to produce findings that require description and interpretation by the researcher. Two known types of data analysis are thematic and content analysis. Content analysis is a method which helps the researcher to analyse the content of the documents (Denscombe 2004:p,221), but thematic analysis look at the merging themes from the data collected (Babbie 2006). While thematic analysis is described as a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon; themes are defined as a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon (Ehrich 2005:p,11).

For data analysis, van Manen (2007:p,9) the interpretive phenomenologist outlines a number of considerations such as thematic analysis which helps unravel the themes, a holistic approach which asks what phrase captures the meaning of the text or data source and the selective approach which ask what is essential or revealed in the text. In contrast with hermeneutic phenomenology which uses less prescriptive methods of data analysis, descriptive phenomenologist analyzes data utilizing Giorgio's (2008b) systematic process with five key steps:

- *Reading the entire description to get sense of the whole statement*
- *Differentiating the description into meaning units*
- *Transformation of subject's everyday expressions into more Formal Language with emphasis on the phenomenon being investigated.*
- *Synthesizing transformed meaning units into structural descriptions.*
- *Synthesis of transformed meaning units into a general structure statement.*

(Hein & Austin 2001: p, 15)

Giorgi's (2008b) phenomenology approach bases itself on factual data that are collected for the purpose of examination and explication and follows strict data collection and analysis processes (Hein & Austin 2001:p,15). This is in contrast to hermeneutic phenomenology which talks a more creative approach and does not necessarily rely on factual data provided by others. The hermeneutic phenomenology approach seems not to have a step by step formula to follow for data collection and analysis. Instead it provides a set of guidelines to follow.

Giorgi's (2008b) way of conducting phenomenological data analysis was selected for this research study. Wertz (2005:p,169) had employed similar ways of data

analysis. For the purpose of this study the following steps of data analysis were followed:

- Sense of the whole

Following the completion of each interview, the researcher transcribed the tape recordings. The transcribed language from the interview served as data. The transcription helped the researcher to think about what the interviewees were saying and how were they saying it. This process of transcribing and listening to the participants stories also prompted additional questions for follow up interviews. Therefore, the data was read and reread to obtain sense of the whole as the transcribed interviews, according to Giorgi (2008b) require of a number of readings. With the aid of bracketing, the essence of the phenomena was able to reveal itself. No theoretical explanation was imposed as Giorgi (2008b) advise the researcher to neither question nor make explicit the general sense obtained but to adopt a phenomenological stance.

- Natural Meanings Units

From the reading the data, statements that appeared to be revealing about the phenomena under investigation were highlighted. Themes were identified in the interview text and natural meaning units emerged. The whole sense of meanings was differentiated into manageable, coherent units where the partial meanings made up a whole. Bracketing at this level also continued. While retaining the narrative sequence in the respondents' original language, the initial description was rewritten in the second language (Giorgi 2008b).

- Central Themes

Each meaning unit was re-examined in terms of its relevance and significance to supervision experiences. Central themes were established in an unbiased manner. Attempts were made to identify the dominant meaning of each unit. From a psychological perspective, the participants' descriptions were rephrased in simple language (Giorgi 2008b).

- Situated Constituents

With respect to the phenomena under investigation, the essence of that situation was revealed. Repetitive themes and descriptions within the meaning unit that were not relevant to postgraduate supervision experiences were eliminated. The remaining themes were addressed and transformed into a psychological language thus making the meaning of the participant clear (Giorgi 2008b).

- Situated Narrative Description

The meaning units that were transformed into psychological language were tied together to form a consistent description. The Individual Situated Structure (ISS) included the concrete aspects of the situation that answers the research question. The Situated Narrative Description was prepared as a way to General Situated Structure of each protocol (Giorgi 2008b).

- General Situated Structure

Having completed the ISS, a general level of description was developed from each protocol. While the particulars of the specific situation were omitted, at this point the aspect postgraduate supervision became the central focus. With the themes identified, the process of writing the themes began. Rewriting continued until the

parts and the relationship between the themes were captured as accurately as possible (Giorgi 2008b).

- General Description Structure

The general structure of postgraduate supervision was the descriptive answer to the main question, “How do MEd postgraduate students experience research supervision”. The General Description of the Structure of the phenomenon required the above steps (Giorgi 2008b). Each protocol was analysed individually as bracketing was applied to allow for emerging themes. The eidetic epoche was constantly applied throughout data analysis, rather than to attempt to translate or interpret the experience.

As part of implementing the phenomenological method, a list of beliefs and expectations that might have biased the interview and data analysis was compiled. the research analysis was a reflexive process although presented as a linear step by step procedure. The data collection and analysis were undertaken concurrently. The primary objective for data collection and data analysis was to represent the subjective viewpoints of postgraduate students’ supervision experiences. In an attempt to honour all data equally, the primary units of analysis were participants with the informed consent.

Data was reorganised by merging the written descriptions and interview material into one. The interview protocols were reduced to natural meanings in which each unit represented a statement that made complete sense expressed in the words of the participants. The natural meanings were explicated and then described, thus attempting to capture lived experiences of the participants. Only when the sense of the participants lived experiences were obtained through description; did it become

appropriate to extract themes and compare findings with other sources in the literature. Thus, Giorgi's (2008b) approach to data analysis was useful to analyze the research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students. Since gaining support and trust of research participants is critical to informed, ethical, academic enquiry and phenomenological research (Schram 2003); the researcher had to consider ethical issues.

3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical codes are essential in any profession dealing with human life (Markham 2007:p,13). To access the research site, permission was requested from the University of X (see Appendix A). The supervisor also requested on behalf of the Faculty of Education permission to be granted to the researcher to access the research site as well as the participating postgraduate students (see Appendix B). A protocol checklist from Faculty Ethics Committee responding to questions on ethical issues was submitted to Ethics Committee for approval of conducting research at rural and urban campuses. The request was granted by Ethics Committee for conducting interviews with postgraduate students (see Appendix C) on condition that the researcher was to report the findings with honesty without misrepresenting or intentionally misleading others about the nature of the findings. Under no circumstances was data fabricated to support a particular conclusion thus credit was given where it was due.

Not only permission was requested for research site, but entry to research participants was also negotiated. Ethical considerations included negotiating access for conducting interviews using informed consent forms. Such informed consent

forms were given to six participants studying at the University of X (see Appendix E) Informed consent form included a brief of the nature of the study, a description of what participation involved in terms of activities and duration, the researchers' name and contact details, signature and date of the letter indicating agreement to participate.

The rights of the participants were protected through anonymity, confidentiality and privacy (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:p,343). To maintain the above ethics; participants' biographical information was hidden by using pseudo names. The captured responses in audio tape were transcribed in codes. The participants were ensured that the transcripts would not be given to anyone. The Higher Education Institutions where the research was conducted is not revealed nor identified in the research report. Since the researcher intended not to expose the participants in any form of psychological harm, the participants were ensured of their rights to withdraw from participating from the research study at anytime should the need arise.

3.8. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The two important criteria for determining the quality of a measure are validity and reliability. Validity and reliability refers to the information produced by a measurement instruments rather than the instrument itself (Golafshani 2003). Creswell (2007:p,651) describes validity as the ability of the researcher to draw meaningful and justifiable inferences from scores about the sample or population. As Golafshani 2003:p,602) puts it, "Validity is the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomenon to which it refers". Although there is external and internal validity each type according to Golafshani (2003) have the potential threats

that can undermine the use research data. Silverman (2005:p,255) defines external validity as “the ability to generalize experimental findings to events and settings outside the experiment itself. Internal validity refers to credibility in qualitative studies (Golafshani 2003).

Threats to external validity relate to applying the research findings to other contexts and situations. Yet in the opinion of Strauss (2005), well designed research should convince the researcher and the reader that it is credible by maintaining a certain standard. Quantitative studies use validity and reliability to refer to these standards; however these concepts seem not to be applicable in qualitative studies. Instead, Golafshani (2003:p,604) suggests use of terms such as transferability, trustworthiness and credibility. Transferability refers to the extent which the researcher’s findings can be applied in other contexts (Creswell 2007). Because the purpose of this study was not to generalize the findings to other settings, transferability was of less relevance.

3.8.1. Trustworthiness

Since both quantitative and qualitative studies try to find the same thing that is the truth; Schram (2003) maintains that establishing trustworthiness ensure the quality of the findings. Leedy & Ormrod (2005:p,156) claim a critical group of strategies used to enhance trustworthiness is triangulation by source, methods and researcher theories. Triangulation is the ability to mix research methods when collecting data, so that the weaknesses of one method can be compensated (Golafshani 2003; Berg 2004; Babbie 2006)

Berg (2004) also outlines types of triangulation namely:

(a) Data triangulation which involves using diverse sources of data to obtain richer descriptions by seeking out instances of a phenomenon in several different settings at different points in time and space.

The researcher made use of different sources for data collection, the participants' journal reflection, field notes, unstructured interview and tape-recorded interviews at different intervals. The researcher then validated the collected data by allowing the participants to read the analyzed data to dictate any misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

(b) Investigator triangulation that involves use of multiple researchers engaging in discussions of their points of differences and similarities so that biases are reduced.

Following the initial readings and preliminary identification of themes in each of the interviews, the researcher consulted three other researchers, my colleagues as well as my supervisor to discuss the themes that emanated from the data. The purpose was to exercise triangulation and unearthing of areas that required more investigations. These meetings with other researchers helped to ensure bracketing and themes refined. With the themes identified, the researcher then began the process of writing and describing how they were interrelated. Rewriting continued until I felt that the themes and the relationship between the themes were captured as accurately as possible

(c) Theory triangulation suggests that researchers approach data with several hypotheses in mind to see how each fare in relation to the data.

Seemingly, no one theoretical perspective is adequate enough for gaining insight and understanding of the experiences of part-time postgraduate students as such an approach would be one dimensional. Thus, the researcher chose Vygotsky's (1978) constructivist model and Knowles's (1980) andragogy to investigate research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students

3.8.2. Credibility

As validity in qualitative research means the extent to which the data is credible and trustworthy for Denscombe (2004) qualitative research need credibility of the research which depends on the ability and effort of the researcher. Hence, the quality assurance strategies adopted in this research was credibility, soundness and ethical conduct. By credibility, it is meant that a study becomes credible when it presents faithful descriptions and when readers or other researcher confronted it (Wertz 2005:p,175). Since the descriptive phenomenology task is not to interpret the experiences of those concerned, but to present experiences in a way that is faithful to the original (Finlay 2009:p,23); the researcher tried to see things through the eyes of the participants. In this way the participants' thoughts, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes on their MEd supervision experiences were given credibility and respected in their own right as valid.

Credibility of this research was achieved in several ways. Firstly, notes were made in the researcher's journal and secondly, an analytical log was provided to detail reflection to ensure sufficient attention to bracketing. In such reflections, the researcher's aim was to grasp the sense of each meaning unit in context, in relation to others and to the experience as a whole. Because descriptive phenomenology requires bracketing as a means of ensuring that the researcher present faithful

descriptions of experiences (Ehrich 2005:p,6); the credibility of this study depended on staying faithful to participants' words and descriptions throughout analysis. Checks were made with participants to verify that the transcriptions were a faithful depiction of their experiences.

3.9. REFLEXIVITY

Reflective researchers are researchers who whatever else they may be exploring are also prepared to make their project itself an object of study (Johnson 2009:p,23). In this research study the researcher explored a topic in which not only is she the researcher, but also one of the participants in MEd programme. In order to give an overview of how reflection was made on this research project, an exploration of reflexivity in terms of its meaning has to be briefly discussed.

Reflexivity is self-critical, sympathetic introspection and the self conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as the researcher (McIlveen 2008:p,14). Of the two types of reflexivity, personal and epistemological reflexivity; personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, beliefs, experiences, interests, social identities have shaped the research and possible changed us as people and as researchers; while the epistemological reflexivity encourages the researcher to reflect upon the assumptions about the world knowledge (Kriegel 2009:p,590). It helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings (Ibid).

For Tsekeris & Katrevesis (2008:p,11) adopting a reflective stance means a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation, not just in relation to the research methods and the data, but also to the researcher, participants and the

research context. It is in these interactions that the possibility of respecting, dignity, privacy and confidentiality of research participants (Guillemin & Guillam & 2007:p, 275). It is in these interactions that the process of informed consent occurs. Hence the researcher had to consider not only the impact of own professional and personal background in this research project but also beliefs and assumptions she might have brought as well as a range of theoretical, social and cultural assumptions on the understanding of participants.

In this chapter critical personal reflections of the researcher's own experiences as a MEd student were drawn. Enrolling for Masters degree, the researcher had no idea of what she wanted to explore for her research project. After several attempts of writing and rewriting the BED Honours research topic in preparation for a Masters degree research topic, the researcher ventured on a new research journey with a new research topic. Having read that it is important to choose a topic that one has a keen interest in (Phillips & Pugh 2005:p,110), the researcher was however, driven by curiosity of how MEd postgraduate students experience research supervision. After identifying a large gap of less heard voices of postgraduate students' research supervision experiences in literature, the phenomenological journey was undertaken.

Positioned as an experienced school teacher, a part-time student, a single mother and a researcher, attempts to bring to light and examine the interconnecting roles and positioning in this research process were made by the researcher. This is in line with what Fieldman, Paugh & Mills (2004:p,974) identify as one of the most important methodological self study approaches to research which is "to be self critical of one's role as both practitioner and researcher". Interestingly, not only were the participants MEd postgraduate students, but they were also mature, older and experienced teachers committed in family relations. Participants themselves often switched roles

over the course of their involvement in this research project as they were simultaneously postgraduate students, researchers, mothers, fathers and professionals.

In this research project the researcher intended to be self-reflexive about the details of the research process starting from the chosen topic to discussion of findings. Not only did the researcher try to present an idealist version of the research journey, but rather to share some of the challenges, the pains and gains in trying to discover what is unknown in postgraduate supervision. As a researcher, Wren (2004:p,477) argue that I might have been studied by the respondents in terms of deliberate impressions I gave as well as through the impression I “gave off”. This theory suggests that it is therefore critical to recognize how others seek to know a person’s role in order to anticipate how other people in that particular role will respond to them (Ibid). Consciously aware of the relationship that has been established between me and the participants; the pre suppositions were bracketed as much as possible.

A researcher is positioned by her gender, age and race, all of which may inhibit or enable certain research method insight in the field Fieldman et al. (2004:p,947). Tsekeris & Katrevesis (2008:p,5) claims the biography of the researcher directly affects fieldwork in two ways. Firstly, different personal characteristics allow for certain insights as a result some researchers grasp phenomena more easily and better than others (Ibid). For example the interviewing process involved postgraduate students who were older than the researcher, three male school principals, and three female teachers and amongst the females an African.

Occasionally, the participants volunteered information that indicated their openness and willingness to participate in this research project. However, it was wondered

whether the information would be so readily revealed to an older, more establish female academic. Thus, the combination of the researcher's biography and tendency towards supplication gained her access to information that might not be given so willingly to a differently positioned academic.

Since reflexivity is also closely connected with ethical practice of research and comes to play in the field where research Ethics Committee are not accessible (Johnson 2009:p,27); while doing research there were more immediate ethical concerns in which the researcher had to decide on how to respond to on the spot. For an example there were emotional moments during the participants' stories where the researcher had to decide to withdraw the interviews. The checklist was not much helpful in dealing with the realities of research practice.

These issues were neither addressed in research ethics committee application forms nor were they often anticipated when applying for approval. However, that does not necessarily mean that the experience as a researcher was always a negative. Many of the respondents whom were interviewed expressed satisfaction at having opportunities to reflect and re-evaluate their research supervision experiences. Hence throughout this research journey, a journal in which meetings with the supervisor, colleagues, participants were recorded was kept as a valuable resource. Despite the positive path of the phenomenological journey, the study had its own limitations to some extent.

3.10. LIMITATIONS TO THE STUDY

One of the greatest challenges might be the relevant choice and application of the phenomenological research method that suits this research project. Furthermore, the

researcher might be unlikely to know with certainty the sample size at the beginning of the research project as qualitative research studies require relatively small numbers. This phenomenological study, as a result was limited to research supervision experiences of only six participants. The small sample taken within this study may mean that the findings may not be generalized to a larger population, but may rather shed light on how MEd postgraduate students experience research supervision.

As a novice researcher the ability to analyse and to search for deeper meaning may have been compromised. Another limitation to the study is that as an adult learner, the researcher might have had personal preconceived perceptions and information that may have affected the themes and the interpretation of data. But presuppositions and perceptions of postgraduate supervision during the analysis process through self reflection were minimised. Because the experience is reported retrospectively, the researcher understands that the report represent a reconstruction of lived events from the participants' viewpoints. Thus, an attempt had been made to remain as true to the stories of the participants as much as possible.

To some extent it seemed necessary to provide some closure in the interviews, to end the interviews comfortably by putting feelings and memories to rest. Somehow that called for counselling skills of which the researcher was ill-equipped. Despite the study's limitations, the participants' voices revealed through the study provided insight to postgraduate students' lived experiences on being supervised in Masters in Education programme and made suggestions on how postgraduate supervision could be improved.

3.11. CONCLUSION

A design that was perceived as most appropriate for this research study was phenomenology. Although phenomenology of Husserl (1971) and Heidegger (1962) have not been intended for applied research; worth noting can be that phenomenology as an approach has been used extensively for research in philosophy and psychology. Furthermore, a new interest in this approach within the education discipline seems to have emerged. On investigating research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students, descriptive phenomenology has been chosen for this research study. Data was collected in different phases using different data gathering methods.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter reflects on the data of the lived research supervision experiences of postgraduate in their Masters in Education programme. It is structured into two sections; section A which presents and analyse data of the respondents. Profiles of the respondents, the research site and supervisors and the participants stories quoted verbatim and analysed are highlighted. Section B deals with findings of this research study that were established through thematic analysis

SECTION A: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.2 PROFILES

The study reveals the profiles of the respondents, profile of the research site and the profile of the supervisors.

4.2.1. Profile of the respondents

Name	Age	Gender	Race	Nationality	Language	Occupation	Marital status	Year last studied	Mode of study	Mode of supervision	Research stage

CJ	42	M	Black	S.A.	X	Principal	M	2009	Part-time	Single	End
UR	44	F	Black	S.A.	X	H.O.D.	S	2007	Part-time	Single	Middle
MK	38	F	Black	S.A	X	Teacher	M	2008	Part - time	Single	End
PS	52	M	Black	S.A.	X	Principal	M	2007	Part time	Co-supervision	Early
QT	37	M	Black	S.A.	X	Principal	M	2006	Full time	Single	Early
HW	33	F	Black	Nigerian	Yoruba	Unemployed	M	2003	Full time	Single	Middle

Table 1 above represents the profile of the respondents. The table shows commonalities as well as differences amongst the participants. All the participants were registered for Masters in Education in 2010 at the University of X. Differences in age, gender, nationality, race, marital status, language, qualifications, position at work, mode of supervision and stages in research were noted.

It is clear from the analysis of demographic variables that the postgraduate students are a different cohort in a number of ways. The table shows a variation in the age of the male and female participants which is between 33-55 years of age. The relationship between age and mode of study is most significant to identify learning experiences of young learners as well as of adult learners. Not surprisingly, the fulltime participants were much younger than part-timers who were primarily distance learners. One of the reasons for this variation might be that adult learners are fulltime employees. Interestingly, there was a gender mix and balance in terms of the number of the participants. There were three male participants and three female participants who expressed willingness to talk about their research supervision experiences.

The table shows that ethnic origins of five of the respondents are black Xhosa speaking South Africans. However, one female participant is a Nigerian, speaking Yoruba language. Zuber-Skerrit & Roche (2004:p,83) note that postgraduate students in postgraduate study may include mature age women and men from non English speaking background. They argue that there are several descriptions that can be placed on the differences associated with language background such as motivation to study (Ibid).

Five of the respondents are adult learners in paid employment in public sector and one respondent is unemployed. Interestingly, most of the participants are holding different positions at work. Three of the participants are school principals; one participant is a Head of Department in a school and a teacher. Sayed, Kruss & Badat (1998:p,276) also observe that postgraduate students enrolled on a part-time basis mostly were educators pursuing demanding professional careers. Only one participant is single and all other participants are married. The information on their marital status is seen as paramount to establishing the context of postgraduate students.

The table shows varying periods of study from 2003 to 2009. One participant last studied in tertiary education in 2003. Of course, there are assumptions that having an undergraduate degree means that postgraduate students are skilled enough to work independently in the practices necessary in higher education (O'Donnell et al. 2009). Yet, when a postgraduate student undertakes a research degree, he may not have been supervised before, but he may have expectations about the relationships between a postgraduate student and supervisor from narrative accounts of supervision from other postgraduates (Sayed et al. 1998).

Four of the participants were registered for MEd in 2010 at the urban campus; while two of the participants were registered at the rural campus of the University of X. The table above shows only one participant engaged in co- supervision. All the other participants were in single supervisory arrangement. With respect to the stage of their MEd research projects at which the researchers were when the study commenced. Having discussed the profile of the respondents, the profile of the research site then follows.

4.2.2. Profile of the research site

Location	Programme	Mode of study	Duration	Funding	University Support Services
Urban	MEd	FT & PT	FT-1 yr PT-2yrs	Scholarship Fee waiver Bursaries	Library TLC SDC RDC
Rural	MEd	FT & PT	FT-1 yr PT- 2yrs	Scholarship Fee waiver Bursaries	Library TLC SDC RDC

Table 2: Profile of the University of X (DoE 2010: p, 6)

Table 2 indicates that the research site of the University of X has two campuses: urban and rural campuses. The Higher Education Institution under study offers postgraduate programmes which include amongst others BED (Honours), Masters and Doctorates. The programme under study is Masters if Education. After completion of BED (Honours) postgraduate students become eligible to further their studies in Masters programme. Masters in Education is offered at the University of X on a part-time or fulltime basis in both campuses. While the duration of fulltime study

is one year in both campuses, part-time study can be carried in two years. But, the length it takes for part-time students to complete the Masters degree is the maximum of four years (University of X 2011:p, 9).

The research programmes of Masters in Education degree are carried by dissertation only implying that there is no taught coursework. Funding is provided to postgraduate students in MEd programme through scholarship, fee waiver, supervisory-linked bursaries and other bursaries. On admission MEd postgraduate students are assigned a supervisor to guide the students throughout the research project. Table 2 indicates that the University offers Support Services to research postgraduates which include Library, Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC), Student Counselling Department (SCD) and Research and Development Centre (RDC). TLC assists with academic writing and ongoing evaluation of student feedback reports (DoE 2010:p,55). Other than University Support Services, the individual researchers at the University of X are appointed supervisors.

4.2.3. Profile of the supervisors

Names	Race	Gender	Highest Qualification	Campus
SSK	Black	Female	PhD	Urban
SSW	Asian	Male	MEd	Urban
SSC	Black	Female	PhD	Rural
SSX	Asian	Male	MEd	Urban
SSE	Blacks	Male	DEd	Rural
SSF	White	Male	MEd	Rural

Table 3: Supervisors' profile (DoE 2010:p, 47)

Supervisors were given pseudo names SK, SW, SC, SV, SE, and SF to comply with ethical principles. A supervisor is appointed for every candidate registered for a

higher degree (University of X 2011:p,16). Table 3 indicates that supervisors at the University of X supervisors are from different races and, thus, have different backgrounds and home language. The necessary postgraduate qualification the supervisor should hold is the Doctorate degree to supervise Masters Students and PhD (CHE 2003; University of X 2011). The table above indicates the highest qualifications of supervisors supervising MEd postgraduate students at the University of X as Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or Doctor in Education (DEd). The supervisors are located in different campuses for students registered in urban or rural campus. Research supervision experiences were thus heard from participants stories.

4.3. PARTICIPANTS STORIES

Three males and three females registered in 2010 for Masters in Education at rural and urban campuses at the University of X took part in this phenomenological study. Pseudonyms were allocated to the participants in order to adhere to research ethical principles. Pseudonyms that are used are *CJ, UR, MK, PS, QT, & HW* consecutively.

4.3.1. CJ'S STORY

CJ is a black South African who lives and studies in urban campus. He furthered his studies at the University of X when he completed his undergraduate and Honours degree. He registered as a MEd part-time student in 2010 at urban campus. He is married with two children and stays with his wife who is also a professional. CJ is a school principal whilst his wife is a teacher. Motivations to further studies in postgraduate programme were given as *"personal, financial and improvement of career"*.

The respondent indicated that his dreams were to find better employment in his professional field. But his dream came to a standstill when finding a supervisor for Master in Education project seemed to be an obstacle. He believed it was the responsibility of the University administration to appoint a supervisor for him immediately after admission.

- *"Getting a supervisor was the first obstacle I had at this university. As I have registered at the end of January, I thought I would meet my supervisor at the beginning of the next month i.e. February, but that did not go as I thought. I was starting to panic when I was finally called in April and told to come and meet my supervisor"*.

Having met his supervisor, he started working hard with his research project only to find that he was drowning himself in work; unsure of whether he was taking the right direction.

- *"I feel bad to have only one person to hold my hand throughout the research programme, the part of the problem is why I can't choose my own supervisor. If it were for me, I would choose two supervisors as to get different perspectives on my research project".*

CJ confessed to having a lazy notion of what postgraduate supervision entailed and thus to having underestimated what was required in the practice; a perception he held until he developed a clearer conception of supervision at later stages of research. The participant indicated experiencing loneliness in his research project and that he preferred the structured course he was used to in Honours degree. He claimed he was not aware of the autonomy that research give could be a burden.

- *“When I applied for my Master’s degree at first I thought it would be simple. Supervision has been different to me from what I experienced in Honours. I thought in Masters, supervision meant to be given information on the research topic you have chosen like a teacher giving notes to his postgraduate students in his classroom or a lecturer reviewing books in an Honours class. I was not aware that most of the time you are just guided to work on your own. In other words you own your work”*.

In meeting with the supervisors; the participant felt he was on unfamiliar terrain facing unfamiliar problems and that caused the confidence in his abilities to be low. In some supervision session he indicated that he felt what he had achieved in the past tended to disconnect from the present experience. Therefore lessons learnt from previous situations seemed not to apply to the present supervision scenarios.

Difficulties in the transition to postgraduate study were experienced as he was challenged in the mastery of key academic skills. O’Donnell, Tobell, Lawthon & Zummitt (2009:p,31) note that postgraduate students are likely not to come “equipped” to postgraduate study. Therefore, CJ came into supervisory relationship holding preconceived ideas of how supervisory partnership should function. Based on such assumptions CJ went to meet his supervisor to *“receive instructions”*.

- “*In supervision sessions I expected that the supervisor will be like a teacher, to be present at all times and tell you to do this and that. I was not expecting to be told to work on my own. I wanted to be told what to do. I wanted to get a plan of where to find sources. In the early stages of research I was frightened to ask questions because I thought it was not polite. I tried to please her, to show her how well mannered I am. But when I reach home I would start to*

become angry at myself for not asking what I wanted to know. I only listened carefully to what was required."

The participant's perception of his role in the early stages of research was that of a listener. While the respondent was receptive because he was unsure of exactly what to ask as he said he had limited knowledge on research, the supervisor did most of the talking. Yet, at the outset he indicated that the supervisor made it clear to him that passive participation was not expected of a postgraduate student in this university. Rather, he was expected to an active partaker. But the respondent said he experienced feelings of uneasiness as his supervisor expected him to be more responsive yet he lacked confidence as he had limited research skills.

His first meetings with the supervisor were fraught with misunderstandings as he commented:

- *"The first bi-weekly meetings with my supervisor were very scary for me because I wanted to impress my supervisor and show her that I have the intelligence of the task at hand. I also felt that my supervisor was going to give a lot of information on how to work around my topic but that was not the case as my supervisor bombarded me with tasks to do".*

The above statement captures the willingness on the part of the supervisee to acquire and develop the skills necessary for his growth as a postgraduate student yet feelings of fear and failure dominated during the supervision sessions:

- *"As I was used to meeting a lecturer in a whole class environment, meeting alone with the supervisor was somehow strange, confusing and lonely for me. I felt uncomfortable meeting the supervisor alone because I feared my*

supervisor. I was more afraid of her than my research work. I expected a supervisor to be friendly and have an open door communication policy so as to build work relations. She seemed to be a harsh person but I realised later that she was just strict and very professional in her job".

The respondent felt meetings with his supervisor were becoming more complex, more "confusing" in terms of tasks and "contradictory" in terms of direction and his feelings were deeply hurt as he expressed his sentiments:

- *"I feel this is a business arrangement but I am not a good partner. I am always thinking that I have failed very badly. When I do not know how to answer or how to engage in a dialogue with my supervisor I feel embarrassed and stupid. I just feel depressed all the time and it really is no good continuing to study with such feelings".*

The power struggles that prevailed between the supervisee and his supervisor were permeated by feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness and lack of academic skills on the part of the participant. The impact of this type of relationship resulted in alienation as he tried to accommodate the demands of the supervisor who had little interest in developing his research skills. The respondent felt he was engaged in a dominant master-slave relationship and a transactional type of a business. As a result there were instances where the participant reported experienced being pushed out of the research project as feelings of "fight or flight" dominated in him.

- *"I planned to drop out of the programme but my fellow researchers talked me out of the idea. They assisted me throughout the research stages. What really helped for me was co-supervision and colleagues. If it were not for collegial support from friends I should have dropped out of my studies long ago".*

The process of domination in the early stages was what the respondent reported he experienced. He indicated that the imposed rules and routines to him continued to a point that he thought of dropping out from his studies. The supervisee perceived the relationship with his supervisor as hierarchical and the metaphor of a "one way street" was used to express the negative feelings generated by the kind of relationship the supervisee was engaged in.

For the supervisee such a plan of dropping out of the programme was not forthcoming as the colleagues offered assistance to combat feelings of failure and encouraged him to respond positively to supervision. Although the participant indicated that he was making progress at the stages of research he was in, in his research project, his feelings were not always positively correlated with his progress however.

- *"Although I got academic support also from other supervisors especially in Dry Run and Higher Degrees Committee on my research proposal; I see myself running around in circles. Its' a maze...going over and over the data and around research methods. I think I am still struggling to collect and analyse data at the same time."*

In relation to his feelings and experience of University Support Services which supplements postgraduate supervision; he expressed satisfaction with the support from librarians and computer staff but seemed to be unsatisfactory with library regulations and working hours:

- "*I am not happy with the library opening hours especially during weekends; the only available time for us distances learners to make use of the facilities. You will find that the library on Saturdays closes early at 5pm yet during the*

week it closes at 10 pm. The university seems to cater for its full-time and day postgraduate students; what about us? It's worse on Sundays the library opens at 12pm and closes early at 5pm; you lose the whole morning time and start studying at a very tiring time the afternoon".

The participant reported not to have attended any training session or workshop although he indicated that he saw emails advising him of such programs. He described how he felt to be on the outside of a system, of not having a sense of belonging to the university system and how hard it was to become involved. The participant felt he did not integrate well into the University and its activities.

- *"I am grateful that the University paid for my fees but I feel isolated from its activities and have experienced difficulties in networking with my supervisor and other academics. I thought those workshops were meant for full-time researchers as they were taking place during weekdays when I am at work so I ignored and deleted such messages. I feel I am a forgotten person by the university".*

However, when asked how the University could respond to improve his experiences of research supervision, he suggested training workshops to be organised during weekends and holidays for part-time postgraduate students:

- "*What I would suggest the university to do is to hold these workshops or training during weekends or holidays for part-time postgraduate students. It is not easy as a full-time employee especially in the managerial position to just leave work during the day or take a leave because you have to attend a training session at the university. As an accounting officer in my job I could be charged if I can just leave work to attend to my personal things. Rather,*

Govan Mbeki Research and Development Council (GMRDC) should develop us on weekends or during school holidays".

His recommendations on good postgraduate supervision besides open door communication policy between the supervisor and the supervisee included better online journals on internet and university website.

- *"What can be done better in supervision is to provide the postgraduate students with the expected studying books or journals because you will find that you waste a lot of time reading unnecessary material. Sometimes you take back all the books to the library without even using them because of their irrelevance to your topic".*

4.3.2. UR STORY

UR is a middle aged black single South African female who has one child. She is a professional educator who has been recently promoted to be Head of Division for Mathematics Literacy at a black township high school. She has a string of qualifications attached to her obtained from different South African Universities. On being probed on what motivated her to continue studying Masters in Education part-time as adult learner at urban campus; the respondent identified the specific need to acquire MEd in order to get a particular position in the workplace which would give her an improved financial package.

- *"It's a different motivation because during my undergraduate studies it was just about getting certificates but as an adult learner there are different things such as more job opportunities. My goal is to have a better position at work. An additional salary could be a bonus."*

For UR undertaking postgraduate Masters programme, required the choice of the institution that will meet her expectations. The choice of the University of X was made by the respondent because of its accredited reputation, quality of education and access to diversity of postgraduate programme.

- *"I did a postgraduate course at the University of South Africa (UNISA), my Honours degree at Nelson Mandela Metropole University (NMMU) but it was quite far from me as I had to travel now and then from East London to Port Elizabeth. X is one of the universities that I obtained most of my education. I chose X as it is the nearest university and I wanted to have contacts with my supervisor for my research. X is one of the best known universities for its reputation of excellence that had produced good leaders in South Africa. It is always my first choice university especially that it was amongst the universities that entered into partnership to offer the training of teachers in the learning area that my investigation is based on".*

Sooner than expected she claimed she found that research was done differently at University of X than in NMMU. On entering this university, UR brought with her high expectations as she was coming from another university and felt she will not have a problem in receiving a supervisor who will be able to assist her on her research field of study.

- "*At Honours degree I felt quite comfortable often obtaining high marks. But I think University of X is tighter in its schedules on research programmes"*.

However, during the two year period (2010-2011); UR had worked with two supervisors. The first supervisory arrangement into which she entered was characterised by problems. The first difficulties were created by cultural differences

and secondly by the differing academic expectations that impacted on the relationship.

- *"My first supervisor was a foreigner who was not even friendly with me; he seemed to be too busy and had not much interest in my research topic. Although the guy was an intelligent academic, he seemed incompetent in my research field. He told me he knew less about the curriculum issues but more on researching skills. He would give me a list of books and journals that I will have to go find in the internet and in the library. He would tell me to go and read 10 articles and summarise them and I find that difficult to do. I was just not sure of where we were getting to or what he actually wanted".*

The above statement indicates that the participant's role as a researcher was taken for granted by her supervisor that she understood the requirements of being an autonomous learner. Although UR considered herself a highly successful academic; she believed that her supervisor considered her an inadequate student. Over the months the participant continually struggled with a perceived lack of guidance in her work and lack of support.

- "*I felt frustrated as the time was moving on without making any progress. I expected to get guidance about research skills, constructive criticism, to be advised and that is what lacked throughout the stages of my research. On my part I tried to always work ahead of my supervisor, to be motivated and dedicated to my work, to plan, to be organised at all times, to always submit work before or on due dates and tried to get help from those who were always willing to support me*".

Despite the dedication on the part of the supervisee, she continually felt alienated and ignored by her supervisor and that caused her frustrations. She tried to fix what she thought was wrong by making calls and emails which were never returned including requests of extra readings and extra meetings.

- "*My supervisor would schedule an hour meeting once every month. There are always fears of the unknown whenever one is to meet a person that you have to work with for a long duration. I would sit in his office with him not knowing what to say to me or what to do with me. We will sit for a long time talking less to each other but watching him doing his university work".*

UR began her communication with her supervisor based on her previous experiences in another university where the bureaucratic structures limited the roles of the student as the decision-maker.

- *"I felt insulted by his rudeness. I could not say a thing for fear of upsetting him. He showed no interest in my research topic but I was too frightened to challenge him or report him to the authorities. I am afraid to even express my worries with the programme coordinator."*

The participant felt challenged in confronting situations with her supervisor in fear of "upsetting" the supervisor. UR's role as a learner was to complete the tasks despite the ongoing difficulties she experienced with her superior. Of significance was that UR's actions were essentially survival strategies as she attempted to overcome the increasing alienation while struggling to position herself within the supervisory relationship. Furthermore, she reported that she felt uncomfortable to be alone with her supervisor in his office.

- "*Being supervised by a male was kind of intimidating. I was not sure if I seated correctly, spoke fluently, or expressed my desires in an acceptable manner. He was too sure of himself. He always looked at me suspiciously as if I was some kind of a stupid student".*

While on one hand, she felt compelled to continue with the supervisor the university appointed for her as it would be disrespectful to voice her dissatisfaction; on the other hand, she felt that given a choice she would change the supervisor and sought for one who showed interest in her research work.

- *"I wish I would be given an opportunity to select my own advisor but that may not be possible because as a student one is not always aware which supervisor is responsible for which area of study. Unfortunately we only had a few meetings with my first supervisor. We did not understand each other and I felt angry at myself for containing my feelings towards him. I should have reported or emailed a complaint against him".*

Of course, Wisker (2005) observes that one of the most crucial steps for successful supervision is the selection of a supervisor. On contrary, Phillip & Pugh (2005:p,106) noted that a change of the supervisor is the academic equivalent of getting a divorce. In a similar note Brown (2007) claim that the process of selecting a supervisor can be made difficult by the diversity of factors which can be personal, professional or organisational which can impact upon the success of supervision.

Nonetheless, being allocated to a new supervisor brought relief to her. From the outset, what she felt and experienced was an established mutual understanding between the supervisee and the supervisor.

- *“I was told the supervisor has left the university and I was allocated another supervisor. I was a bit relieved that I would not be seeing him again because my first supervisor made me uncomfortable in so many ways. I was disappointed that my second supervisor was also a male but he had less male ego than the first one. By the way he was more like a father, a role model and a coach”.*

The new supervisory relationship began by reaching consensus on roles, responsibilities and expectations.

- *“I have no problem with my new supervisor, he supports me. I feel much understood by him. He acts as a bridge between knowledge and me. I got a supervisor who is an expert in his chosen field. He is like a mentor but he says it is my work so I should be the decision-maker. We set targets, draw up structures and deadlines. We have fortnightly meetings and we discuss how things are progressing and how to do things differently. We see less of each other these days as I am now collecting data on the field for my main study. But when I have a problem I communicate with my supervisor over the telephone or emails”.*

With the new supervisor, however, the respondent maintained that it was a matter of choosing what to do than being forced to do something. As a result the process of supervision was perceived, felt and experienced as satisfying. Formal meetings structures were put in place for the next stages of research. Each meeting had an agenda and timeframe decided upon by both the supervisor and the supervisee. The respondent indicated that a tape recorder was used to capture feedback and discussions and that assisted her further when she was studying on her own. In

assisting UR on academic writing and research skills her drafts were sent to the University's Teaching and Learning Centre (UTLC).

- "*I contact the University for Support by e-mail, phone and library online. I do seek assistance from elsewhere besides my supervisor e.g. postgraduate students and librarian because at times I need to know how others are doing things and learn from them. I also need assistance and technical support with computers but some MEd student are very supportive".*

The tensions and feelings of inconsistency and inadequacy were no longer felt by the participant. She thought the new supervisory relationship experienced was based on customer- supplier model. Throughout this research process of supervision, dilemmas no longer blocked UR's progress. Postgraduate supervision was now experienced as stimulating and satisfying by the participant.

- "*We address challenges together and I no longer feel like a fool and stupid. He respects me and I respect him"*.

Feelings of satisfaction with the turn of events in postgraduate research supervision prompted the participant to engage in support services offered by the university. However, she expressed concern over the organisation of training workshops during working days as she is a full-time employee.

- "*Through being motivated by a fellow researcher I attended one training workshop on postgraduate supervision organised by GMRDC. It was quite informative and I was excited about it. However, as an assistant manager at work, I can no longer be absent every time there is an organised workshop for postgraduates. Moreover my leave days have expired, I find it difficult to*

attend training sessions held during weekdays. I am worried because I am losing out on a lot of research, academic skills and knowledge".

Her suggestions on improve postgraduate supervision were as follows:

- "*I suggest team work amongst supervisors so that they agree on the same requirements in terms of research procedures for postgraduate students. For an example, supervisors tend to differ when it comes to which research methods, design or approach applicable to certain research topics. University treat part-time adult learners very differently. When you visit the University apart from seeing your supervisor, there is little community to be offered. I appeal to supervisors to be patient with postgraduate students who come from other universities and have less research skills than postgraduate students from the same institution".*

4.3.3. PS' STORY

PS is a married middle aged black South African male with four children. He is employed as a school principal in Urban. Coming from another university where he dropped out of Masters degree, he opted to register part-time at urban campus as he had experienced difficulties with distance learning at University of South Africa. However, the pressures on academic work that govern the MEd study were reported as unknown by the respondent especially that he came from other university where he claims there was little guidance given on how to conduct research. On entry at the University of X, PS brought with him learning cultures and university practises that were alien with research practices at the University of X. As a result, he felt that called for him to transform and conform to his current University research culture.

- *“Having this gap ... you see, it’s quite difficult. I completed my undergraduate degree a long time, went to work, did Honours degree part-time and started these Masters elsewhere. After a break of three years, I came back to this institution which has a different research culture from my previous institution. Everything seemed new, you see... I feel like I am behind times as I am challenged in academic writing, research skills, and worse with technology. This varsity makes me to see and do things differently”.*

Not only did the respondent indicated that he struggled with the changes in the new technology such as use of PowerPoint in presentation before Higher Degrees Committee, but he also indicated that he felt embarrassed at not coping with searching literature online or emailing. From the interviews, it became evident that the interviewee seems to have little or inadequate notion of what research supervision entails.

- *“I think good supervision is when you have a close relationship with your supervisor in that you can come to him and talk a lot of ideas. Research supervision is a very personal thing. It is about relationships”.*

A more responsive approach to supervision at the early stages of research prompted good supervisory working relations which were experienced as satisfactory by the respondent. The respondent was involved in a co-supervisory arrangement.

- *“I was told about my supervisor and also I was amazed because the director of the programme, the same director in the orientation workshop became my second supervisor. She is my mentor. I have no problem with them at least they point me into the right direction. They encourage me to be self-motivated if I want my dissertation to be a success. Anyway they teach me how to be a*

good academic in future. They told me that I must go and learn from as much resources as possible".

The positive responses from the respondent on the role played by supervisors in supervising his research projects were:

- *"I am piloting the study for the main study. Initially I was not pleased that my proposal draft was changed. But now I am in the stage where it has been fairly obvious what to do next but it is a challenge to make decisions on my own. At least, you are not thrown in the jungle, my co-supervisor is hands on, she knows, she is always there. They are frank. I like their professionalism, their politeness. They give you good advices. They help you to help yourself".*

Despite the positive feelings generated through co- supervision, however, for PS who had done Masters before in another institution; the difficulty had been that "*I was already independent as I had done these Masters before but I still need to develop the required academic standard**".***

Yet, he expressed his appreciation on the fact that he had to see his supervisors on monthly face to face meetings and he claimed that regular contact with his supervisors' added value to his research project, research skills and academic writing skills.

- *"Because I was using distance learning for me it's even good that whenever I want to see my supervisor I am able to do so. If we make an appointment and I don't get the other supervisor, he will surely come back to me and in the meanwhile I would go visit another supervisor. We sit down and discuss*

why I am not doing so well in a certain area of research. We also discuss future directions of the research".

Talking about things which hindered his progress on the Masters programme, the respondent claimed he was worried and concerned for the slow progress to his research work because family commitments. Besides family matters, he reported that he experienced difficulties in completing tasks given by supervisors because of his employment work requirements.

- *"Personal and family commitments cause me to have little time left for my research project. As we are studying we are also looking after our families. You see, I don't get much encouragement from my wife. She sees my studies as my mistress as I spend less time with her and more time trying hard to improve on the computer and research skills".*

Despite experiencing less support on his research work from his family and work colleagues; positive responses to the question of how the university supported the participant on his research projects were:

- *"When I started we were shown library and how to get information online, the librarian has been very helpful; she quite often checked on how I was doing and gave me readings to do to prepare me with my Masters programme".*

But he felt that computer facilities were inadequate at the University and there was a lack of computer training and support particularly for the internet. Furthermore, he indicated that his research progress was hindered by his lack of availability and lack of his ability to use communication equipment for research purposes such as emailing, fax and computer.

- "*I stay far from the University, how I wish there was travelling allowance for part-timers because when I get to the university; the library and the computer centre are already closed and I have to go back empty handed. Meeting with fellow researchers is rare occurrence".*

Besides feelings of isolation because of part-time study as meeting and socialising with fellow researcher were experienced as a rare occurrence, the participant indicated being engaged in daily power struggles not only at home but also on campus. He felt alienated and marginalised as a part-time student as he pointed that there were minimal facilities open and fewer people around on weekends and evenings.

- ***"****It seems impossible to know who is also on the research programme and what is available for us because we are off campus as we are seen as distance learners. As a part-time student I feel very detached from the hustle and bustle of the university life. It is difficult to make friends with full-time students as they have already formed their gangs and I feel too old to be part of them."*

For the participant, Masters research was expressed as a lonely process where he felt cut off from the University life physically, socially and emotionally. Nonetheless, suggestions for improved supervision experiences of postgraduate students reflected the following:

- *"Give details of training sessions in advance, training on research methodology, academic writing, and research and computer skills and organise them during weekends to accommodate distance learners so that they do not interfere with work commitments".*

4.3.4. MK STORY

MK is a fulltime MEd student at rural campus having registered in 2010. She is a black South African female married with no children and she recently experienced a traumatic experience of losing a child. Coping with stress and studies have been experienced as painful and difficult by the interviewee. Motivations to study further in postgraduate study centered on self-fulfilment and personal growth.

- "*No one pushed me to do these Masters. So I have to push myself to learn and not only to read books but also to research. I have to be a hard worker, to be open and be dedicated to my own work to fulfil my dreams".*

To fulfil such dreams the respondent had to work hard in terms of conducting research. However, she reported on the challenges she encountered with the research process itself which caused a drop in her pace of study. Despite the claim that the researcher had been challenged in terms of collecting data on the field with respondents giving him vague information and the research process itself seen as problematic, she indicated that she was engaged in a good friendly and supervisory relationship.

- ***""****I am very fortunate to have an excellent supervisor who facilitated a very open and frank discussion about expectations. We both have an understanding of what we are both responsible for"***.**

The view by Bailey (2002) that "A lot depends on how comfortable you are with your supervisor" was given further meaning by the respondent who when asked to describe the relationships which she had with her supervisor echoed:

- *"I have a God given supervisor; she is a Christian. I even share my personal problems with her. She prays with and for me, I am so comfortable to be with her, she is like a sister to me. I treat her like my mum and she treats me like a child. I have developed a good and friendly relationship with her even after Masters the relationship will be there. I am blessed to have her".*

She felt she regained her confidence when her supervisor prayed with her. She felt she was able to communicate openly and willingly with her. More importantly what was established in the early stages of the research work was a mutual relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee. As a result the process of supervision was experienced positively and not limited in research work but extended to friendship.

- "*She was great at calming me down. She just really gave me permission to think about things without pressurising me. Although she is always tearing my work apart, we both realise it is a professional relationship and therefore nothing of what we say is taken personally. That's kind of motivating. Without this type of supervision it is likely that I would have undergone a different kind of experience."*

She felt comfortable in initiating meetings with her supervisor. In relation with the type of feedback she got in supervision sessions and its frequency she reported positive experiences.

- "*It was through the support, guidance and mentorship of my supervisor that I am now able to work alone. She has been very generous in terms of giving advice as we had wonderful conversations in our feedback meetings. She even shared with me her personal experiences as a researcher".*

A positive response on the support given by the university to promote postgraduate supervision was:

- *"It felt great to attend workshops on research methodology and postgraduate supervision which I saw on emails. This has been the opportunity for me to talk to other Masters postgraduate students. We always shared and discussed way forwards of our research projects".*

When asked a question on how the university can improve supervision experiences of postgraduate students, the response was:

- *"It would be advisable for university to acknowledge many difficulties, particularly time constraints that adult learners have. I'm lucky to have a caring supervisor, but I can see how easily it can go wrong with a supervisor who is not there when you need him. More regular contact with supervisors, university support services and other postgraduate students is needed. The University must make use of Skype chat facility to introduce online supervision for easier contact and feedback discussions just like in face book or twitter".*

But, the participant felt unhappy with the University administration procedures

- *"No correspondence was sent to me to advise me about the registration dates nor did I receive any call reminding me about re-registration maybe they were emailed. But what about those who lack technological skills, who access emails only when they are on campus? No wonder some postgraduate students drop out it's not their fault somebody is not doing his job properly. I*

appreciate that there is fee waiver for postgraduate students, but why do we have to pay for registration fees, they ought to be included.

4.3.5. QT'S STORY

QT is a student at rural campus who registered in 2010. He is a black South African male who is married with three children. His wife is unemployed and stays home to look after children. QT was in employment pursuing a professional career as a school principal but took time off work to continue with his Masters. On being admitted on Masters in Education programme at the University of X; for the participant the motivation to pursue postgraduate studies was to the climb social ladders and be recognised as an academic.

- *"For me going back to study is less of a priority than a salaried job. But going back to study may bring back the high standards and you feel are up there. So, I study because I am interested in research work and I will have status. As you know, the more one is educated, the higher one climbs the social ladder. Even in social circles you are recognised and respected".*

The participant reported on the extreme lows that he experienced on studying MEd. He felt his struggles were felt more on managing the research project and time to study.

- *"Sometimes, more often than not it is a great burden and quite expensive and I feel guilty on spending time on this research programme when there are so many other pressures on my time. ...very hard studying, juggling between family, study and children. Striking the balance has been the main problem".*

The participant reported having experienced real difficulty in getting started with his research project. At the first stages of his research project not only did he report on uncertainty about his ability but he also felt embarrassed at having to ask the supervisor for approval for every aspect of his studies. Yet, this goes against the academic requirement that a postgraduate student must demonstrate the ability to work independently (Stack 2008:p11).

- *"My research proposal has recently been approved after many ups and downs. The research proposal stage included the going forwards and backwards of papers but the work picked up again as I have to start producing chapters. I feel a little bit vulnerable probably, due to being in the first stages of research. I think in this part I am still manipulated, the supervisor knows more and I know less. I feel confused over what to do next and how to do it. He expects me to write according to his standards yet I can't go inside his brain and take his skill".*

From the outset, the respondent indicated that it was difficult for him to know where to begin to look for relevant information for his research work. His claims that the supervisor was an expert because he knew more, made him feel like a novice researcher for he says he knew less. Thus, the participant has been engaged in the expert- novice relationship.

- *"I have a disengaged supervisor who is unable to understand what my research project is all about. So there is little supervision or interaction. He is not taking any responsibility of assisting me to improve. He just doesn't care and he believes he is always right. So I bought a few books on supervising postgraduate students and I taught myself what I was supposed to do".*

The overwhelming impression from listening to the participant was how he portrayed himself as self-directed individual who was very independent to an extent of getting advices from research book instead of the supervisor. He reacted to perceived lack of guidance by taking charge of himself in order to complete his Masters project. Brown (2007:p,242) affirms that postgraduate research requires an independent researcher capable of tackling new challenges with little or no outside help.

But, given that the participant relied on research books for guidance because of feeling neglected by his supervisor; however some advices on books may not have something useful to offer. Of course, the input from supervisors can be usefully supplemented through books and journals (Kamler & Thompson 2008:p,507). On the contrary Delamont, Atkinson& Parry (2004) believe that some of the advices that books offer can have a negative effects on postgraduate students who rely too much on them. Hence, Wisker (2005) perceive the supervisor as likely to remain to be the most important resource guide.

Not only did the respondent indicate that he experienced difficulties on postgraduate supervision but he also felt challenged on establishing good working relations with his supervisor.

- *"In the initial stages he was consistent on time frames and feedback dates. We had meetings frequently but I would feel as if I was going nowhere. If there was a misunderstanding between me and my supervisor he would remind me about it during supervision sessions."*

This early situation was considered by QT to be a problem that required urgent action. However, he was not sure which actions to take for lack of guidance. He became frustrated with lack of appropriate direction and expressed his

disappointment. The perceived bad relationship between him and his supervisor annoyed the respondent. He felt annoyed at not being appreciated.

- *"I saw myself as not being a significant player in this game. I need a supervisor who has an interest in me and my research topic. In essence, I have really one supervisor but I need more than one advisor for general supervision".*

In dealing with this challenge, he claims that he attempted to pose questions and do more talking in the supervision sessions. Unfortunately his attempts to manage the situation resulted in creating more dilemmas and thus contributed to developing in him low self-esteem. Such struggles permeated feelings of inadequacy, incompetency and lack of academic success. His experiences of the role of the supervisor in the process of postgraduate supervision were articulated.

- *"There was never any discussion at the time I registered about what the role of the supervisor is and what they expected of me other than the fact that obviously I was going to produce a dissertation. "It's your Masters", he once said".*

The above statement shows QT's negative feelings towards supervision by stating confusion about the role of the supervisor. The statement "It is your Masters" did not seem to be too convincing to the participant. Initially he was surprised how little contact time he had with his supervisor who once pointed out to him that; *"it is a masters course, its' your masters and you are supposed to master things for yourself".* He further claimed he was losing direction and said "*some more supervisory interference could be useful".*

The experience of domination that he experienced imposed oppressive pedagogical processes of supervision upon him. Inherent in this approach was disrespect for QT as a student as he claimed.

- *"I suffer a lot as I don't see my supervisor sometimes because he is either not on campus or in his office. He does not even provide me with pointers of his whereabouts or what the plan of action is. I have to fight to see my supervisor as he sometimes doesn't even return my calls or emails. I don't feel as important to my supervisor as his PhD postgraduate students".*

QT adopted a reactive attitude towards feedback and was upset by unfavourable comments. He indicated that he expected directive, specific and consistent feedback. He expressed his feelings of isolation and lack of emotional support from his supervisor.

- *"I expect to get feedback and be told what needs to be done to help me improve. I don't worry much about what I have written but I need feedback whether positive or negative. My supervisor will accept a discussion or piece of writing but when I submit corrections the points that were previously accepted will be the first ones with red ink".*

He reported that inadequate networking made him feel uneasy for he said he was unaware of other postgraduate students and staff working on the same field of study.

- *"My biggest problem is not to have resources to work with and poor communication with my supervisor and other colleagues. I see my supervisor on appointment. I was never given a postgraduate guide by either the*

university or my supervisor. I really don't know what is happening in that department except that they want work from me".

Suggestions on what can be done differently on postgraduate supervision included:

- ***"****I think the university can provide better communication and information sharing sessions about what is going on in masters' degree in general and specifically the role and the expectations of the supervisors".*

4.3.6. HW STORY

HW is an African who is registered as a full-time MEd student at University of X's rural campus. She is married with no children and unemployed. She expressed her excitement at having been admitted at University of X in 2010 for Masters degree indicating her reasons as pursuing further her career. The support and encouragement received from her family and supervisor was crucial to her progress. In light of the benefits of a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger 1998); the participant may have well benefited from the positive influences and support that supervisors provided.

- *"It's a privilege that participation in research programmes has been widened. I felt that my family is encouraging me with my studies and they are impressed that I carried on and support me financially; but I think I had probably more encouragement from my family than from my supervisor"***.**

Initially she expressed extreme highs and positive feelings about the relationship she had with her supervisor. But in later stages of research; the participant reported to

have encountered difficulties in conveying her research ideas clearly in appropriate academic English and thus her over reliance on the supervisor had a devastating effect on her self-esteem as well as on her working relations with her supervisor.

- *"She is an effective supervisor or she is good at pretending because she seems to take an interest in my work. Rather than imposing something on me she makes me choose what to do and how to do it. She never gave me a course guide but she herself is a guide and then she turned into some kind of critical evaluator asking me to justify the decisions I had taken and present my chapters in acceptable academic language."*

The course guide the participant talks about have guidelines on MEd programme (University of X 2011), but what may be missing from this material is likely to be information on relations of postgraduate students and supervisors because when the supervisee undertakes the research degree. Hence, she felt frustrated at not being able to communicate effectively her feelings to the supervisor. Thus, feelings of frustration at *"receiving many question marks"* in her written work emerged.

- *"I felt some comments are devaluing my work, and some comments are a kind of discouragement. If somebody criticizes me I feel upset but then I thought "no for the sake of progress I need to take this in a positive way". I am used at being criticised by her but I work best when probably people have a go at me and put me under pressure".*

Coming from a culture where open criticism and direct critique seem not to bet encouraged, HW became submissive and accepted feedback remarks as they were. Not responding to critical comments by her supervisor, HW claims it felt like, *"selling out your homeland".* Thus, a strong sense of "working under pressure" was revealed.

She expressed her desire for communicating directly with her supervisor. In HW's perception if only her supervisor was more familiar with her cultural constructs underpinning her thinking about her research work, then she would have better chances to communicate ways that may foster a common understanding between them. However, coming from a culture where the supervisor has absolute authority in a hierarchical relationship (Wang & Li 2009: p, 447); the respondent felt nervous and did not know how to communicate openly with her supervisor to seek clarifications.

She reported on how much time she wasted on the field searching for information which was inadequate and irrelevant to her research work which meant that she had to turn around her research methodology. She indicated that she did not ask for assistance from other academics or the university personnel other than from her own supervisor because she *... "didn't want to bother them*", "*...felt that my questions might be devalued"* or "*... didn't want to create a bad impression*". Other feelings captured in the interviews indicated that her supervisor's expectations were seen by her as "*idealistic and had unrealistic expectations*".

However, she reported that she frequently find it challenging to understand the wider range of support offered by institutions. She talked about isolation and to her this was caused by limited networks with peers. Yet, she felt her experience of the university may be mediated to some extent through the supervisor.

- *"I need a caring full time supervisor who is always there telling me what to do and how to do it like a trainer or personal coach. I think there is an assumption that you know research and how to go about it. I think to be in touch with an advisor and to get additional help could be useful. I would find it helpful to be given some guidance perhaps in the form of a separate*

*lecture in the process they expect you to go through in formulating the problem, gathering information and dissertation writing"***.**

She further suggested the following on improving supervision experiences:

- ***"****Better monitoring of the supervision process".*

McCormack's (2004:p,327) suggestion that more attention should be given to the types of experiences postgraduate students have in their supervision environments seem to be of importance in terms of improving postgraduate experiences.

Summarily, various emotional responses were captured from all the participants' stories under similar and different circumstances in different stages of their research projects. Those feelings and lived experiences of the participants on early stages the middle stages and the last stages of Master in Education research are presented below.

Early stages of the research project

At this stage the participants reported so much anticipation and high levels of motivation. Positive emotions which dominated initially were related to factors such as:

- Being accepted as Masters in education postgraduate students
- Being awarded a fee waiver
- Having had their proposals approved
- Anticipation at having to undertake research in an area the participant was interested in.

However, most of the negative feelings recorded in the early stages of their research projects were associated with:

- Deciding where to start with research.
- Focusing on the project.
- Deciding on the relevant literature and methodology.
- Establishing relationship with the supervisor.

Middle stages of the research project

Although there were positive feelings recorded with excitement related to:

- joy of being in the field collecting data.
- Being able to apply theory into practice.
- Satisfaction as data collected in the field accumulated.

However, negative feelings noted in this stage were frustration, boredom, guilt and loneliness. The negative feelings were associated with:

- The realisation of the capacity of the research project.
- Amount of time and effort the research project required.
- Fears of the unknown related to being in the strange places.
- Inability to access relevant information.
- Encountering a research dead end.

Feelings of panic came in when:

- things did not go as planned in the field.
- Forgetting the use of equipment.
- Working away from places of abode and after working hours.

- Writing, rewriting and literature search which gave rise to boredom and frustration.
- part-timers had feelings of guilt in terms of balancing between work and with the study relegated to the second place.

Last stages of the research project

This stage included data analysis and writing up of the dissertation. Anxiety arose in relation to:

- Tensions between postgraduate students and supervisors.
- Academic writing and referencing.
- Frustration when participants reported that they had to wait for what they considered unreasonable periods for their supervisors to provide them with feedback and guidance.
- Technicalities associated with dissertation writing and compiling a document.

It is in the light of the above perceptions that the study revealed the findings based on the themes that emerged from the data.

SECTION B: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Having presented the views of the participants concerning their feelings on being supervised in the Masters in Education degree; the following section extracts and discuss findings of this study from thematic analysis.

- *Motivations to undertake further studies*
- *Models of postgraduate research supervision*

- *Supervisory relationships*
- *University Support Services*

These themes correlated to the title of the study, key research questions, the conceptual framework and the reviewed literature.

4.4. Motivations to undertake further studies

In respect to the information presented by all the participants, it appears that motivations for postgraduates to continue studying was not forced or imposed on them but rather was intrinsically and extrinsically motivated.

4.4.1. Intrinsic motivations

The acknowledgement by all the participants of the reasons for pursuing Masters degree relate to one of the underlying principles of andragogy as developed by Knowles (1980). In his writings Knowles acknowledges that adults seek out learning as way to better their real life tasks and problems. Reid (2006: p, 53) too supports this by saying that learning leads adults to a “strengthened identity within the distinctive field of practice and enquiry in adult life”. Brookfield (1990) also believes that as learners, adults usually have a fairly well defined idea of what they are seeking and how they want to experience it. By implication, this suggests that the majority of postgraduate students enrolling for postgraduate programmes have as Taylor (2007) puts it, “a reasonable idea of what they are letting themselves in”.

4.4.2.Extrinsic Motivations

Fifty percent (50%) of the participants in this phenomenological research study stated that they were motivated to study further because they wanted to improve their financial packages as to contribute to their family's finances. Twenty percent (20%) of the respondents reported that they would use their degree qualification to "join", "gain", and higher status relevant to their career. The findings of this study are also consistent with a picture in which taking a part-time degree course is part of a process of upward social and economic mobility (Robertson 2002). However, Hood (2006:p,111) maintains that professional and domestic commitments are likely to have a significant impact in the part-time study of postgraduates in paid employments.

Thus, the study reveals that despite the many responsibilities and challenges of postgraduate students, the decision to continue with their studies was a personal decision which was not propelled by external obligations. These internal motivators came in terms of job satisfaction, self-esteem and quality of life. While intrinsic motivation on one hand was fuelled by pride and increased by self esteem and empowerment; on the other hand extrinsic motivation was boosted by professional accomplishments through increased levels and depth of knowledge and skills.

Although academic qualifications, promotion at work, salary increase, personal, social and career development were some of the reasons given by mature postgraduate students on pursuing Masters Degree; the most crucial motivator to them was career development. Between these motivators postgraduate students seem to have the potential to improve and increase professional scope of practice,

financial benefits and a sense of satisfaction which satisfy personal, social and economic development of the individuals' life.

4.5. The nature of supervision

The study revealed that the participants are engaged in different models of supervision. Roles and responsibilities, expectations of the supervisors and supervisees are discussed. Furthermore, supervisory relationships, communication and supervisory meetings are also examined. Also the support services the participants received from the university are explored below.

4.5.1. Models of supervision

There was no single formula to explain what supervision really meant, because postgraduate supervision had been defined in a variety of ways by different respondents. Instead, the respondents indicate the various models of supervision they were engaged in such as:

(a) Single supervision

(b) Co-supervision

This study shows that 80% of the respondents studying Masters degree at University of X are experiencing mainly the apprenticeship style of supervision. The remaining minority reported on co-supervision. The above perception could be viewed in the light of Cullen, Pearson, Saha & Spear (2005:p,14) observation of South African Higher Education Institutions which are basically arranged in apprenticeship model. Apprenticeship is typically understood as advising and mentoring the Masters

candidate by a faculty member in a face to face manner (Vilkinas 2002). Vilkinas (2002) interprets apprenticeship as scaffolding, the support the master gives to his or her apprentices in carrying out a task.

On the contrary, Pearson & Kayrooz (2004:p,103) claim that apprenticeship tends to be a reproductive model of mentoring which subtly reinforces social as well as intellectual conformity. In agreement with Pearson & Kayrooz is Lee (2010:p,18) who also believes that the focus on the functional approach to supervision is limited to guidance, fixed assignments or Masters postgraduate students mainly perceiving their need of supervision in the form of supervisors' answers to their questions and feedback to their written tasks. Weaknesses of single supervision documented by Dysthe, Samara & Westrheim (2006:p,315) include tendency of the postgraduate students to be over dependent on their supervisors in initiating meetings, on receiving feedbacks and on academic writing. This is also noted in this study as feelings described by respondents on single supervisory arrangements were of frustrations and disappointments on having to rely on a single opinion.

Yet, the reliance of Masters postgraduate students on the authority of an individual supervisor seemed limits the participants' opportunities of becoming multi-skilled. For Dsythe et al. (2009:p,53) the rules of the hierarchical system may hinder the progress and the constructive cooperation of MEd postgraduate students with the research community. The traditional approach to supervision seems to be incompatible with Lave & Wenger's (1998) suggested Communities of Practice (CoP). As a result the participants in a single supervisory arrangement claimed they preferred more than one supervisor as they might able to see the other supervisor in the absence of the other. Furthermore, to them more supervisors meant a wider range of opinions which might add value to their research projects.

On the contrary, one respondent was involved in co-supervisory arrangement. Benefits of such arrangement were mentioned as receiving regular supervision from more than one supervisor and also indicated higher levels of satisfaction with supervision. Van Heerden & le Roux (2009:p,262) see co-supervision firstly as worthy as the experienced supervisor supplements the abilities and skills of the new supervisor. Secondly, the potential risks of depending on a single person are minimised. Thirdly, the isolation in cases where there is lack of communication is broken (Ibid).

By implication, the above are the circumstances that argue against the traditional master-servant apprenticeship style of supervision but for co-involvement of the research community in Masters programme. In contrast to apprenticeship model of supervision, Lave & Wenger's (1998) CoP theory do not locate responsibilities for learning within the individual learner only, but distributes it across the community. Such interactions may allow supervisors and supervisees to develop effective and efficient working partnership. Hence, Wilkinson (2005) recommends where appropriate an additional supervisor to be appointed to work alongside the primary supervisor.

However, Stracke & Kumar (2005) note that in co-supervision there can be delays in terms of getting feedback because one had to wait for both parties to agree. In somewhat the same vein Wang & Li (2009) indicate that there could be conflicting views in co -supervision or group supervision thus confusing the postgraduate students with less research abilities. Since there are matters that needs rethinking as opposed to strengthening what is in place (Vilkinas 2002); alternative ways of supervision are suggested Lee's (2010) integrated framework to supervision; De

Beer & Mason 2009 blended learning; Dysthe et al. 2006 multi-voiced approach and Lave & Wenger 1998's Community of Practise.

While on one hand apprenticeship model is acceptable in that it offers the regulatory approaches such as compulsory training accreditation by supervisors and grievance procedures (University of X 2011) thus, regulating the supervision process; on the other hand most calls (Abiddin 2007; Dysthe et al. 2009; Lee 2010) to improve supervision require co supervision and group supervision which seem to provide extra support to postgraduate students.

4.5.2. Roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students

Defining roles and responsibilities of supervisors and postgraduate students was a clear subtheme for all the participants. Although descriptors on the roles and effectiveness of the supervisors were words such as "effective", "supportive", "mentoring" and "knowledgeable"; misunderstandings of the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and supervisees were reported by 80% of the participants. The other 20% of the participants reported having a lazy notion of supervisors and supervisees' roles. As a result the latter expressed their negative feelings on not being told their roles in research work other than to write a dissertation.

Although the roles of the supervisors in this research study were in line with Brown's (2007) list of characteristics of supervisors which included being a director, supporter, facilitator guide, mentor; the difficulty with such a list was that although those roles may be well meaning, they are very general and indicate little sense of judgement involved in their application. It is debatable whether the above descriptors

are applicable in practice considering the context of supervision process. From the participants' point of views not all of them were looking for a guide or expert in knowledge. Of course, the supervisor needs not to be an expert with all the answers and feel responsible for providing all the information.

All the participants expressed their views on the difficulties they experienced in finding time to study. Different work habits on their research projects suggesting considerable what Lessing & Lessing (2004:p,164) calls "independence versus autonomy" were reflected on the part of the participants. This was confirmed by the wide range of time they said they spent on their research work indicating an hour per day, on weekends, every night and during holidays respectively. However, Wisker (2005:p,321) defends postgraduate students who study part-time in full-time employment. In the same vein Cullen et al. (2005) perceive part-timers as self managing, organised agents of varying effectiveness, accessing resources such as the supervisor, library facilities, internet and computers.

In instances where the supervisors strive for quality and throughput (Lessing & Schulze 2003; Stack 2008:p,14) all the participants claim they expect to be told exactly what to do and how to do it. Such participants are perceived by (Brown 2007) as postgraduate students who lack independence and autonomy expected from them by their supervisors. Since the participants were expected to be the owners of their research work, Delamont et al. (2004) ascertain therefore that postgraduate students have the responsibility making their own decisions about their research projects.

4.5.3. Expectations of supervisors and supervisees

There were some variations on how the actual experience of being a postgraduate student was aligned with the expectations of the supervisors. The participants indicated that they feel initially threatened at having to make their minds about the research problems. They express fears that they were not able to meet supervisors' expectations and they carry that weight most of the time. While the participating postgraduate students expected supervisors to acknowledge the wealth of their life experiences, what Bourdie's (1978) calls "the cultural capital", they brought to the supervision context to the participants, the supervisors had different expectations.

On one hand the supervisors expected the adult learners to be independent researchers (Brown 2007:p,242), yet on the other hand sixty (60%) of the participants displayed lack of research skills and use of technology. The study found that these participants were disadvantaged because of limited research skills. As a result, there was a lot of mismatch of expectations between the supervisors and the supervisees. Hence, Brown (2007:p,243) is of the opinion that where there is misalignment of postgraduate students and supervisors styles and expectations issues of power struggles emerge. Coping with stress and developing appropriate research skills expected by supervisors is reported by all the participants as more difficult than expected.

4.5.4. Communication

All the participants indicate how they learnt the importance of clear communication with their supervisors. All the participants confirm having contact with their

supervisors at least once a week, fortnightly, bi weekly and monthly respectively. In contrast, one student displays discomfort for irregular communication between her and the supervisor and this led to building poor relationships. In addition to spending less time with his supervisor, he feels he was less understood on his needs and the supervisor was less friendly. Thus, the participant tended to have low self esteem and low academic competence because of the unavailability of the supervisor. In the absence of communication with the supervisors, all the participants expressed feelings of loneliness, alienation and insecurity.

Email, website, library at a distance, telephone, cell phones are reported by all the participants as the main means of communication between them and the supervisors. One participant seem not know how to communicate openly with their supervisors. Wang & Li (2009:p,444) claim postgraduate students from non English speaking background are faced with various challenges in their postgraduate supervision. Although the main method of communication is by email but the constructive feedback was received on face to face meetings. For Dyke (2009:p, 303) there is a perception that while email is useful, face to face meetings can provide something extra but are more difficult to arrange. However, Phillips & Pugh (2005:p,115) argue against that as they claim face to face meetings can be disadvantageous for distant learners studying part-time whose study is conducted on evenings and weekends and such meetings are rare.

Oral and written feedback is reportedly the means used by supervisors to inform all the participants of their progress in their research work. With respect to feedback which consisted of praise and constructive criticism (Stracke & Kumar 2005), the participants perceive it as most beneficial. 50% of the participants who were inspired took a proactive attitude towards feedback and displayed high self esteem and

strong academic abilities whereas other half of the participants who had low levels of confidence and academic competence receiving critical feedback felt vulnerable. Feelings of inadequacy, loss of confidence and excessive criticism experienced by latter participants led to reported slow progress in different research stages. As a result two of the respondents feedback as “tough”, “disturbing”, “felt confused” and “demoralised.” All the participants claimed they depended only on the feedback from their supervisors for progression of their research projects.

4.5.5. Supervision Meetings

The study established a general bimodal pattern of supervisory interaction. Supervisors tend to see their postgraduate students more frequently in the first and the last 6 months of the postgraduate students research programme and less frequently in the middle period. “Regular”, “schedules “and “appointments” are some descriptors of words used to illustrate the frequency of contact between the supervisors and the supervisees. Meetings with the supervisors are reported by all the participants to be held according to the schedule or agreement with the respective supervisor. The respondents find fortnightly sessions useful for keeping them motivated and for monitoring their progress. By implication, supervisors are appreciated when their presence helped postgraduate students progress in their research projects.

However, the initial formal meetings with the supervisor were an intimidating experience for 80% of the respondents. Lack of support from the supervisors who were too busy to meet their postgraduate students is reported by twenty percent 20% of the respondents. They express concerns at less than frequent meetings as

they indicate that they received fewer consultations. By implication, some academics had no contact with postgraduate students for whom they have been appointed to supervise. Meetings with some supervisors were reported as having had no agenda.

Wisker (2008) warns that meetings with supervisors tend to be dominated by technical and logistic elements. Knowles (1980)'s andragogy also have a warning that the reverse side of voluntary participation in supervision meetings is that adults can easily withdraw in instances where disrespect to them is displayed. Embarrassing postgraduate students publicly is also likely to make their withdrawal from participating in Masters Programme or dropping out of the studies certain.

In long distance supervision McCormack (2004:p,327) notes that lack of personal contact had an effect on postgraduate students who feels isolated. As a result in an instance where the supervisor was unavailable the participants' progress was reported as slow. 50% of the participants perceive their negative experiences of supervision sessions as obstacles in terms of completing their research projects. However, those who respond positively to supervision sessions saw changes, growth and development in themselves personally and professionally.

4.6. SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIPS

When the interviewees were asked about the relationship between them and their supervisors, 50% describe as it positive experience and other 50% described it as an unhappy experience. On a positive note, described their supervisory relationship is described as conveying an attitude of empathy, encouragement and emotional support. But the complex and the dynamic nature of individual supervisory relation was given in the story of three other respondents. Brown (2007:p,246) sees

supervisory relationships as an arena that enables the creation of professional boundaries. In relation to Brown's viewpoint, this study reveals opportunities and challenges of supervisory relationships between the supervisees and the supervisors.

4.6.1. Master-slave relationship

For individual participants the intensity of challenges in supervisor-supervisee relationships varied. Stories of supervisors which mirrored negative supervisor behaviours such as "distant" and "uncaring" were established. Data revealed the participants' lack of power in their inability to speak to their supervisors to seek clarities. Zuber- Skerrit & Roche (2004:p,85) defends such postgraduate students by arguing that formal demands of research degree propel postgraduate students into grappling with an essential literary domain of expression in which they are largely inexperienced. Yet at times supervisors found themselves in power struggles in terms of enforcing institutional policies while establishing friendly relationship with the supervisees (Brown 2007).

Despite the negative feelings, the study reveals the importance of the emotional support that they required from their supervisors. The views expressed on guiding, monitoring and support focus on the tensions between getting enough support and being independent. 80% of the participants perceive the supervisor as the person who would provide them with the topic to work on and hold their hands throughout the research programmes.

While these respondents needed hand holding; Bailey (2002) claims such learners could be looked after but may not learn how to fight for themselves in the real world.

In the supervisory style of apprenticeship model, data reveals that the respondents adopted a position of passivity in instances where the supervisor directed the relationship. This, in turn, subjected the participants to place more confidence in the words “master” than in their own abilities. Generally, this then gave rise to tensions and conflicts in the supervisory relationship.

4.6.2. Friend- friend relationship

50% of the respondents reported the great pleasure they got from their relationship with their supervisors. Descriptors of good relations established between supervisors and some supervisees are observed in words such as “guide”, “supporter”, “and mentor”, “friend”. These descriptors are in line with a list of characteristics of effective relationship and good supervision identified by Wisker (2005) in words such as:

- *Approachable and friendly*
- *Supportive and positive attitude*
- *Open minded and knowledgeable.*

The participants who saw their supervisors as guide and advisors had experienced a mentoring relationship with their supervisors as a way of acquiring skills and confidence took ownership of their work and did not rely on the supervisor for answers and much direction, but rather as Sayed et al. (1998:p,276) put it, used the supervisor as a key resource. Therefore, the participants who engaged in critical conversations with their supervisors not only developed good relationships but, also obtained emotional support from their supervisors. Furthermore, the postgraduate students engaged in friend to friend relationships saw themselves as initiators in setting deadlines and goals for their research projects.

4.7. UNIVERSITY SUPPORT SERVICES

Amongst the support the participants received for their research programmes was financial, academic, supervisory and administrative support.

4.7.1. Financial Support

Despite Phillips & Pugh (2005:p,115)'s claim that part-time postgraduate students are a different cohort who undertake Masters on a self-funded basis combining work with studies; the study finds that all the participants received fee waiver from University of X in MEd programme. None of the participants' claims to have sought financial assistance from public funds or employers, but friends and family are reported by participants as slightly supportive financially. Although all the participants report that they received financial support in terms of fee waiver, they also claim that they felt disappointed that they had to pay for registration fees. Participants studying MEd part-time report that they had to travel to the university to access library facilities and supervision sessions and thus needed to be compensated by the University.

4.7.2. Academic Support

All the participants indicated that they sought help from other colleagues but not from university research community. For Dyke (2009) these contacts are more likely to be critical to postgraduate students' continuation of learning and completion of their dissertations. From their own accounts all the participants indicate that they received support not only from their supervisors but also they consulted with the previous Masters in Education postgraduate students and colleagues.

The study finds out that the participants needed to interact with others as to discuss and share experiences relating to their research projects. On one hand, the intellectual community helped reduce isolation. On the other hand, the collegial support meant that the respondents developed support networks for themselves. To the participants, family, friends and other University Support Services provided what Boughey (2004) believes to be added value to their research environment.

50% of the participants studying Masters in Education part-time claim that they did not feel that they had the same access to University's technical support and equipment like their full time counterparts. Furthermore, they reveal that they did not feel as much part of the intellectual culture of their institution. Although the respondents express high levels of satisfaction with library opening hours and assistance from the librarians; they expressed less satisfaction with the availability of books and online journals recommended by supervisors. An area of library provision where part-time postgraduate students were possibly adversely affected was that of opening during holidays.

It was not clear whether the opening hours mentioned operated throughout the holiday although it is stated occasionally that they did not. For Phillips & Pugh (2005:p,113) institutions that do not open during vacations are perhaps forgetting that many part-timers in the local area in need to access an academic library. Furthermore, opening the library for longer hours during holidays may be one of the means of sustaining part-time postgraduate students' academic interest.

University of X (2011) has a postgraduate guide that includes guidelines which gives advice on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and supervisees as well as clarification of expectations. Although such guide serves as a "guide"; seemingly

data obtained seem not to show how some of the guidelines are likely to be achieved in practice by postgraduate students and supervisors. Furthermore, there was reported evidence of a “learning contract” signed by postgraduate students and supervisors. How the learning contract helped to clarify a number of misconceptions and make the role of each quite clear, was generally unclear as the participants report anxiety as a result of uncertainty about what was expected of them.

4.7.3. Supervisory Support

Whereas 80% of the participants agree that their supervisors provided them with resources and materials to read, the other minority says such support was lacking. As a result all the participants see a need to have mechanisms in place to supervise the supervision process. All the participants indicate that there were times they were worried at the slow pace of making progress and that caused concern. They attribute that concern to the fact that they had not received sufficient training in research studies. The role of the Head of the Masters in Education programme to ensure standards of supervision and Masters degree completion (University of X 2011) was seen by 80% of the participants as “supportive”, and “mentoring” but 20% of the participants perceive the coordinator as “less interfering” in their supervision context.

Most central to this report is an identifiable pattern for the progress of the MEd postgraduate students. This pattern had three important stages: the research proposal, data collection, dissertation writing. All the participants find the very beginning of Masters research difficult. Although all the participants indicated that they came to Masters Programme with a specific research topic; but 20% of the participants indicate that they were allocated topics to research on by their supervisors. The participants indicate that they were initially threatened at having to

make up their minds about formulating the research problem as they feel they were on unfamiliar terrain facing unfamiliar problems. Challenges experienced by the participants can be related to postgraduate students not knowing where and how to identify research topics and materials (Kamler & Thompson 2009:p, 511).

All the participants indicated that they were worried at the slow pace of making progress. The slow start was experienced particularly in the first few months. Participants reported on poor guidance during the process of proposal writing, bureaucratic procedures concerning the approval of research proposals. They feel that they needed more information on Masters Programme. When asked to indicate how they received assistance from the University in the different stages of their research programme; differences between university support services and supervision were recognised. At bad times during the supervision process; the researcher finds that participants were tempted to lay the blame on the host university in general or on the supervisor in particular.

Negative feelings were reported as particularly stronger in the first few months of the research project when the road was rocky and there were many unanswered questions. During the middle stages, the respondents feel they still lacked the independence and autonomy required by research studies (Grant 2008). They fear that they were not able to meet supervisors' expectations. They were concerned at less than frequent meetings. However, the participating supervisees who were in the last stages of their research projects indicate that they required high levels of support assistance from their supervisor as they had to deal with technicalities of dissertation writing and logistics of assessment.

Zeleen (2003:p,4) refers to the period when postgraduate students inevitable experience challenges in completing their first piece of dissertation as periods of where postgraduate students feel both frustrated and stimulated by the situation in which they find themselves in. The supervisors too inevitable are likely to face the feelings of chaos and cosmos as they are put under a lot of pressure as they have a large number of postgraduate students to supervise as well as their normal teaching, administration and research commitments.

4.7.4. Administrative Support

It is ascertained that all the participants find the administrative sector of the university registration process to be a particular difficult process to engage with. As a result it affected the development of their research projects. Of significance was that a number of strategies were adopted by the University for imparting information to student about MEd programme and the institution (University of X 2011 reviewed). The most common form was the course guide. Interestingly, 80% of the respondents maintain they were not provided with such postgraduate course guide.

Unnecessary challenging administrative issues which led to chances of deregistration of some postgraduate students are reported as obstacles in Masters Programme. Yet, the existing postgraduate students can be potentially powerful agents for recruitment of new postgraduate students (Bourner et al. 1999). Hence, the respondents feel it was important for Higher Education Institution, in particular the University of X to recognise and respond to areas of concerns by gathering information on postgraduate students' experiences and work towards improving them.

4.8. CONCLUSION

The key questions investigated in this study are asked and responded to in phenomenological interviews. Themes that emerged were matched with conceptual framework as well as the theoretical aspects of the reviewed literature. Of significance, is that postgraduate students' experiences are not only constructed by supervision context but also by cultural and institutional processes. Of particular interest is that despite its challenging nature, research supervision is found to be satisfying and stimulating by other participants; while other participants reported extreme lows. Thus, given the above context of supervision experiences the actors and their stories in this research study varied markedly.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to obtain a description of Masters in Education postgraduate students' lived experiences on being supervised in their research projects. Having identified the sample of the study, the study's focus, in particular, is a step towards recommending what the University in question can do to improve postgraduate students' supervision experiences on their MEd programme. Based on the data given and the main findings; this chapter contains a summary of the research findings as well as implications for practice for the postgraduate students, the supervisors and the institution under study. Suggestions and recommendations for future research sum up this section of the research report.

5.2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The summary includes key themes on the conceptual and functional approach to postgraduate supervision.

5.2.1. The conceptual approach to postgraduate supervision

The experiences reported by the participants on their feelings and experiences on the conceptual approach to postgraduate supervision can be summarised as transition shock, power struggles and coping with academic pressures (Cullen, Pearson, Saha & Spear 2005).

Transition shock

- Lessons learnt in BED (Honours) seemingly were not applied in Masters Supervision scenarios.
- There were concerns and worries in adjusting to adapt from BED structured coursework to Masters independent research work.
- Fears of different cultural institutional practices are reported by respondents who studied Honours degree and those who started Masters Degree from different universities and not in the university under study.
- The length of time it takes to complete Masters in Education especially for part-timers.
- The pressures of having to formulate the research problem and concerns about developing and having their research proposals approved.
- Fears of having to establish a working relationship with the supervisor.

Power struggles

- Feelings of inferiority as opportunities of power games and arguments about who owns the research present themselves between the supervisors and the supervisees.
- Supervisors seen as gatekeepers to MEd qualification implying that they had the power of ownership or even suppression of the final results.
- Supervisors seen as masters in control of decision-making and supervisees as followers obeying instructions without being given opportunities to seek for clarities.
- Push and pull as the supervisors pushed for postgraduate students towards becoming independent researchers while postgraduate students need hand

holding as they pulled from the supervisors for resources, emotional support and pastoral care.

- Fighting for survival in the academic discipline or flight as some participants felt they lacked the independence and autonomy required from them to be independent researchers.
- Feelings of chaos and cosmos where the participants felt both frustrated and stimulated by the situation they find themselves in.

Coping with academic pressures

- Unfamiliarity with increasing Masters demands which were not expected.
- Mismatch of expectations and misunderstanding of roles and responsibilities between supervisors and supervisees.
- Experiencing disparities between expectation of their roles and the actual realities of Masters Research.
- Participants challenged in terms of use of computers, searching for information electronically and developing appropriate research skills.
- Concerned and worried about lack of support from supervisors who were too busy to meet their postgraduate students.
- Frustration arose over waiting for unreasonable periods for feedback and guidance.
- Supervisors determining the supervision session agendas and, in so doing, discouraged the participants from expressing their needs and feelings.

5.2.2. The functional approach to postgraduate supervision

Data in this study find there was “no set prescription” for supervisory style and roles. Not surprisingly, this research study reveals that postgraduate students at University

of X still continue to experience the traditional model of a single supervisor supervising a strictly research based work. With regards to communication it is clear that participants feel the supervisors moved away from open door policy towards more closed and directive communication style. In doing so, the supervisors determined the “agenda” of the conversations that occurred with their supervisees and, simultaneously, discouraged participants from expressing their needs and feelings.

Feedback always came in for criticism as the interviewees reported a wide range of feedback experiences. By not receiving sufficient feedback participants had a more difficult transition. Although the study reveals that good contact with supervisors during the different stages of Masters Project had a significant impact on the progress of Masters Postgraduate students; but it also shows that distance based postgraduate students could not have the advantage of the more regular contact that home based learners can have with their supervisors.

Data reveals tensions between relationships of the participants and their supervisors. Such relationships emerged as push and pull, fight or flight amongst different individual participants. Data revealed master–slave relationships and friend-friend relationships between the supervisors and the supervisees. In the master – slave relationships the supervisor, as a director, is perceived as an expert who knows best and the participants remained novices and followers. Because participants lacked a strong sense of ownership of their research they were thus seen as recipients as they seemed to be too much dependent on the input of their supervisors.

In contrast, participants who experienced friend to friend relationship saw the supervisor as a guide and mentor. The supervisor as a guide and a mentor was seen

as an advisor and a critical friend who facilitated supervisees towards becoming independent researcher. These participants took ownership of their work and seemed not to rely solely on their supervisors for answers and much direction, but used their supervisors as key resources. As resource persons and critical friends, not fault finders; participants see in their supervisors' supporters who can help them achieve their goals.

With an increase in the number of postgraduate students per supervisors; the respondents were more likely to approach University Support Services for assistance with their research projects. Not only was assistance gained from the supervisors but it also came from various other sources such as other postgraduate students, research academics, librarians, computer technicians and other university support services. Such assistance included skills for electronic use of computers and internet, searching for information and academic reading and writing.

5.3. IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE (CONCLUSIONS)

Implications for practise were drawn in line with the key sources that the study might be significant to which include Higher Education Institution, supervisors and Masters in Education students.

5.3.1. Higher Education Institutions

For the Higher Education Institution under study to accelerate economic and social development as well as greater opportunities for black, women, disabled, mature students from indigenous backgrounds in postgraduate studies, more funding has to be available. In addition, to attract research graduates to the academic profession

and facilitate the recruitment and retention of academics can be done through adequate remuneration. Furthermore, special attention has to be paid to improving the proportion of academics with doctoral qualification through a dedicated programme including additional support. For increased success, change in institutional culture to manage diversity is required.

The lack of structure in Masters in Education for postgraduate students studying can have a downside as the onus is upon the student to manage his research project successfully because MEd at University of X does not have a pre-determined structure as in BED Honours. This research study indicated that for some postgraduate students it can sometimes be difficult to know where to begin looking for relevant information. The institution runs the risk of having a situation where postgraduate students who will succeed at postgraduate level will be those who are already competent and confident of their capabilities. Hence, postgraduate students' learning needs have to be catered for. Thus, the induction program would seem to be an appropriate vehicle for exploring expected difficulties of the postgraduate students.

If a postgraduate student has a well established topic in mind, careful and honest consideration needs to be given on whether the supervisor he is allocated is the best person available to supervise in that particular area. University of X has to ensure that a student has been appointed a supervisor who has similar interest and expertise in student research area and also ensure that optimum student to supervisor ratio is established.

There are some suggestions from the data given that University of X is still engaged to a considerable extent in single supervisory arrangements, yet one to one model of

supervision can be challenging for some Masters postgraduate students. Hence, there is a need to go beyond individual supervisory interaction and restructure practices to ensure that responsibility for quality is shared and coordinated. It is in this context that there is a need of having structures in place which can affect the actual processes of research supervision such as the panel of supervisors. This conclusion seem to fit well with current and emerging approaches to supervision such as Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger 1998); Multivoiced approach (Dysthe et al. 2006); Blended Learning approach(de Beer & Mason 2009); Lee (2010)'s new integrated framework to postgraduate supervision.

It is evident that postgraduate students access a range of resources to carry through the research tasks and some of their challenges arise out of managing that complexity. More information from the supervisors and the legitimating of postgraduate students searching for information among the available resources may prevent some of the difficulties experienced by postgraduate students. Therefore, the university staff supervising postgraduate students should be given less teaching loads and less administrative work as to concentrate more on providing support for research postgraduate students.

The need for training of MEd postgraduate students and supervisors is often raised as another strategy for achieving quality in supervision. The word "training" unfortunately often refers to a very impoverished view of what can be done. A more productive perspective is to see it as an enabling and skilling those involved by strengthening their capacity to pursue their interests; learn from their and others' experiences and access specific university support services. One route to improve inputs and efforts in student supervisor interaction could be clarification of roles and

responsibilities of both supervisors and supervisees and the formal working agreement in such trainings and workshops on postgraduate supervision.

5.3.2. Supervisors

While this study focuses on better supervision practices, stories from poor practice did surface. Evidence of dissatisfaction with supervision process has been aligned with the traditional ways of providing support to postgraduate students. Given the extent of variation in individual experiences of their Masters research work and the need for postgraduate students to find many levels of and types of support, no one supervisor can be able to provide all that is needed all the time to different postgraduate students.

It is advisable that the starting point for supervision of each postgraduate student be different and accommodative of individual's learning needs because it is the outcome that counts, "the independent researcher". Thus, the supervisory process should be different for different postgraduate students. There is a need for the supervisors to provide lectures for supervisees on how to do research work, because of the multiple roles played by part-time postgraduate students as full-time employees and as part-time postgraduate students while doing research. Adequate and appropriate resources should be available to postgraduate students at different stages of their research projects.

Elements of mentoring were found in this study when some participants acknowledge that their supervisors were caring, empathetic and clearly described the relationship with their supervisors as colleagues and extremely positive. This perspective on mentorship was also noted when the participants sought advice from

other university academics other than their officially appointed supervisor. In such mentor relationship model of supervision, supervisees and supervisors were engaged in a critical conversations and the supervisors assumed the role of critical friends. It is for these reasons that this study concludes that the mentor model is more likely to lead to a positive feedback experience than the apprenticeship supervisory arrangement.

5.3.3. MEd postgraduate students

One of the major challenges which confront Masters postgraduate students who are part-timers is the requirement that the research degree be completed in the maximum of four academic years. Yet, data in this research study reveals that postgraduate students' time limitation and their inexperience on research studies may contribute to the failure of such postgraduate students to submit their dissertations on time or they may contribute to the postgraduate students' poor academic performance. Certainly, it would seem to be important at some stage in the admission process for supervisors to emphasise to MEd postgraduate students the difficulties they are likely to encounter.

Part-time postgraduate students should feel themselves to be of equal status to full-time postgraduate students and that induction arrangements should be largely the same for all postgraduate students. Clearly, it will be difficult for postgraduate students to engage in the level of independent study that is expected and required of them when the academic practices they are engaged in do not assist them in the development research and academic skills needed. It is for this reason that part-time postgraduate students should be given particular provision.

Despite the fact that the postgraduate student is responsible for the success of his research project, postgraduate students have to the cultural norms and practices of University of X. Furthermore, they have to learn to manage their resources, their research projects and time for their studies. In addition postgraduate students need to be made aware of the variety of teaching, research and administrative duties their supervisors are engaged in.

5.4. SUGGESTIONS

There are some useful pointers here to practical changes that University of X could implement to improve the postgraduate students' lived experiences. Based on the account of participants' lived experiences the researcher proposes:

(1)The clarification of roles, responsibilities and expectations of both supervisors and supervisees

Information sharing sessions should be scheduled during induction period in order for current learners to share their lived experiences and coping mechanisms with potential researchers. Such a period would assist postgraduate students to meet and observe potential supervisors and to develop research proposals systematically. Postgraduate students can benefit from attention at the beginning of their research programmes and to help clarify their expectations and the roles of the supervisors. Therefore, research expectations should be negotiated upon registration so that postgraduate students may know in advance what is expected of them.

(2) Stages of research

Supervisors need to help postgraduate students plan and formulate their research topics within set time frames. Individual discussions with supervisors about the development of postgraduate students' research projects may be held on a monthly basis. This approach to Masters study would enable the supervisors to anticipate and avoid crises that may impact on the postgraduate students' progress especially at the start of the research project when the postgraduate students have not yet achieved self-confidence in the research study. In the initial stages of their research projects, the postgraduate students still lack clarity on which paths to take that will lead to the goals of the research work.

Supervision at the start of the project should be made more frequent and as the student progresses, he should have the option to request it when needed. For instance more guidance should be given to novice researchers at the beginning of their research projects and loosened as the research skills are developed. The middle stages may include guidance on research methodology, data gathering and analysis. The last stages may include writing up of the dissertation. Emotional support from supervisors in affirming the postgraduate students' abilities to undertake research and confirmation that they are making progress is needed throughout the research stages.

(3) The establishment of supervisory panels

Co-supervision to encourage cooperation between supervisors and supervisees should be implemented instead of sole supervision. Not only do research supervisors have to act as assistant supervisors to experienced supervisors before they can supervise on their own but also need to create research communities. A forum of

supervisors to jointly discuss postgraduate students' progress and to identify common problems experienced by postgraduate students would be useful in terms of providing support.

Such forum could be developmental in bringing both new and experienced supervisors to practice in what Senge (1990) calls" learning communities". In such learning communities such supervisors can jointly discuss postgraduate students' progress and identify common problems experienced by postgraduate students. This in turn could bring to light measures to address poor and or negligent supervision. Having said that, it is strongly recommended postgraduate supervision has to be connected to participation in supervision sessions as members of the learning communities. Another supportive factor which the respondents felt could be improved are the opportunities to discuss research problems with their peers or other research group members and to present research results to different audiences.

(4) The provision for supervisory relationships

There is little doubt that individual relationships which develop between postgraduate students and academics have a greater impact on the quality of supervision. Supervisors should adjust their supervisory styles to accommodate postgraduate students' maturity levels. It is recommended that postgraduate students be treated as partners rather than as equals. Any difficulties or challenges in supervisor–supervisee relationship should be reported to Programmes Coordinator as soon as they arise.

Strategies must therefore be developed to improve effectiveness of these relationships. Such strategies could include the provision for the development of supervisors. Such professional development could begin by introducing opportunities

for supervisors to critically reflect upon their practices with a view to improve postgraduate supervision. This would potentially provide supervisors with the opportunity to explore their situations and establish means to deal with the complexities of supervision.

(5) Communication

Supervisors should review the way in which they communicate with student researchers. Effective communication and supervisory relationship may develop from the negotiated, satisfactory arrangements made between the supervisor and the supervisee. University of X should explore the potential that new technologies offer to create more effective communication and interaction between researchers, peers supervisors and the wider university support services.

Such ways of communication could be tools such as Skype chat facility, Twitter, Face book, emails, websites and online libraries. The online supervision can be some added advantage particularly through the way in which it requires one to learn to manage online conversation. University of X need to provide provision for postgraduate students who experience cultural and language difficulties. Of course, non English speakers often need a substantial amount of assistance with language. However, this could not be done by supervisors but editors could be recommended.

University of X should ensure that it is aware of specific issues with their MEd cohort. This could be done by setting up specific mechanisms to gather feedback. Feedback on submitted work should be provided within a specified time agreed upon by the supervisor and the supervisee. For instance feedback from supervisor on written work can be expected after a week of receipt.

Meaningful feedback preferably in written form as well as orally should be given within an agreed upon reasonable period between the student and the supervisor. It would be useful to maintain regular email correspondence with postgraduate students. The chat facility in Skype enables postgraduate students to submit their documents online which at the same time open possibilities for the supervisor and student to explore specific aspects of research work. Not only does the use of online supervision facilitate time for both discussion and written feedback, but it can also benefit distance based postgraduate students.

(7) Supervision Meetings

With reference to contact sessions, supervisors should avail themselves for regular consultation with their postgraduate students to provide them with constructive and timely feedback. Such frequency of contact can help reduce isolation and feelings of discouragement. If a supervisor intends to be away for a longer period of time, alternative supervisory arrangements should be made. Peer supervisory meetings where research postgraduate students have to know and learn from each other should be scheduled and agreed upon by both postgraduate students and the supervisors.

(8) University Support Services

Researchers are likely to need a greater amount of support financially, academically, supervisory and flexibility in their Masters programme. The interaction between research postgraduate students and their peers, supervisors and the wider university support services should be strengthened. Regular networking and discussions with other Masters postgraduate students in the department or elsewhere to counteract isolation is needed. Integration of researchers into wider university community could

be addressed by encouraging greater levels of interaction between different institutions. This could be done through participation in postgraduate workshops, training, seminars and academic meetings.

Development of structured tutorials to provide more support, services and resources for postgraduate students is recommended as well as use of counselling services to manage personal and academic issues of postgraduate students. Identification of talented and potential researchers amongst Masters postgraduate students to assist in tutorials is recommended. To build stronger academic and peer support network for both part-time and full time postgraduate students; Higher Education Institutions should consider offering specific provision such as research skills training during weekends. More emphasis should be put on postgraduate students to be vigilant and compulsory attend workshops organised by Govan Mbeki Research Development Council (GMRDC) for both supervisors and supervisees.

(9) *Levels of support*

Postgraduate research supervision needs to be investigated from various perspectives such as the student, supervisor and the institution. Student needs need to be addressed at institutional level, departmental level and individual level. Supervisors have to be willing to make adjustments in the relationship process to meet supervisee's learning needs. It is imperative that postgraduate students are not left to flounder alone and that they receive adequate supervision making the transition from dependence to Self-Directed Learning (SDL) smoother. Since the postgraduate students' academic experience includes increasing debt and self funding; they need support from the institution to keep them continuing their studies.

(*10) Adoption of measurement strategies to measure the overall effectiveness of the total supervision received by the postgraduate students*

With the evidence gained in this study University of X administrative policies and procedures should be in line with what is written in its postgraduate guide (2011) and ensure that postgraduate students receive these guides during registration. This would minimise challenges experienced with re-registration and de-registration and encourage postgraduate students to continue with their studies. By acknowledging learners needs through workshops, interviews, training, information sharing sessions and any other form of cooperation; postgraduate students' progress on their research programme could be supported and monitored.

5.5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The small sample of the participants in this research study was MEd postgraduate students registered in 2010 at rural and urban campuses only. The focus was on exploring research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate student. Therefore, further research can be carried to investigate postgraduate research supervision from the perspective of the supervisors. Further study with a larger sample recruited from different universities would be significant in presenting a more comprehensive picture of Masters postgraduate students lived experiences in South African Higher Education Institutions. Specifically, comparing the postgraduate supervision experiences between South African Higher Education Institutions is suggested to understand the unique lived experiences of postgraduates and what can be said to be the universal experience of South African Higher Education Institutions (SAHEI).

5.6. SUMMARY

The discussion so far has focussed on responding to the question of individual supervision experiences of Masters in Education postgraduate students. Such a focus has been around supervision process. Conclusions were presented in this chapter in addition with findings emanating from thematically constructed data analysis and the literature study. Recommendations were made related to the findings of this research report.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Letter requesting permission to conduct interviews

38 Jennings Road

Amalinda

5247

13 September 2010

The Registrar

University of X

P.O. Box 123

Dear Dr TY

Re: Request for permission to conduct interviews at the University of X

I am a Masters in Education student at the University of X urban campus. I kindly request for permission to access the University's MEd postgraduate students to participate in my research project. The working title is: **"Research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students at a South African University"** under the supervision of Dr D. The research proposal has been presented for the Dry Run and the before the Higher Degrees Committee on the 23rd of August 2010. I would like to use the institutional documents to carry out the interviews at both rural and urban campus. The data will be gathered for academic purposes only. It is not intended to bring any disrepute to the participants nor the institution.

Thanking in anticipation

Your student

N.H.Ganqa (20050933)

Appendix B: Letter from the supervisor to Ethics Committee

27th September 2010

The Dean of Research

Research and Development Centre

Urban

Dear Prof

Re: Request for the permission to conduct research at the University of X.

One of my MEd postgraduate students, Ms Ncumisa Ganqa, student number 200508933 is planning to conduct research at the University of X. Her proposed working title is: "The study of research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students at the University of X". I hereby request permission on her behalf. The research proposal was accepted by the Higher Degrees Committee on the 23rd of August 2010. Methodologically she plans to make use of the institutional policies and procedures, and carry out interviews with postgraduate students in both rural and urban campuses. Strict ethical principle will be adhered to. Kindly grant her permission to collect data at the University of X.

Kindly receive attached Chapter 1 of the proposed study.

Regards

Ntombozuko Duku (PhD)

Research Promoter

APPENDIX C: Letter of approval from Ethics Committee

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR:

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND RESEARCH

Private Bag X

Tel. 04006022403

Fax: 0866282944

REC-270710-028

Application for clearance from the University of X Ethics Committee

Project Title: "An investigation into research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students at a South African University."

Chief Researcher: Ncumisa Hazel Ganqa

Supervisor : Dr. N.Duku

Date of application: 22 February 2011

Having consulted the Dean of Research, I hereby grant permission to conduct the research.

Deputy Vice – Chancellor

Chairperson of the Interim Ethics Committee

Prof VVV

2nd March 2011

APPENDIX D: An invitation to partake in pilot study

38 Jennings Road

Amalinda

5247

02 March 2011

Dear colleague

I am Ncumisa Hazel Ganqa, a part-time Masters in Education student registered in 2010 at the University of X Urban campus. You are kindly invited to participate in my research project which is titled as follows: “An investigation into research supervision experiences of MEd postgraduate students at the University of X. Can you kindly avail yourself for an interview for my pilot study? Any location, date and time that will be more convenient for you will be acceptable.

Thanking in anticipation

Yours in service

N.H.Ganqa (200508933)

Contact numbers (Cell) 0760144224 (H) 043 741 2409

email address 200508933@University of X.ac.za

APPENDIX E : INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are kindly asked to participate in a study investigating supervision experiences of postgraduate students in the MEd programme. Your participation is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you will not be putting your name on anything except your signature on this form. Should you feel any kind of discomfort or wish to draw your participation during the research interview you are free to do so. If you have any queries regarding this research project, you may kindly contact Dr N. Duku my research supervisor and MEd Programme Coordinator at the University of X urban campus or call 0722600656.

Participant's signature……

Date…….

Researcher's signature…….

Date …….

APPENDIX F: PILOT STUDY

1. Introduction

The researcher conducted a pilot study with two participants using written reflections, face to face interviews, audio taped, unstructured interviewing technique asking open ended question about MEd postgraduate students' lived experiences on supervision. The other instrument used for this pilot study was a previous study by Reid (2006) which explored characteristics and experiences of Durban University adult part-time B. Tech Somatology learners and Grant's (2005) phenomenological investigation into lecturers' understanding of themselves as assessors at Rhodes University. This pilot study included a brief description of research design and data collection methods followed by data analysis, findings, methodological considerations, limitations to the study discussions and conclusion.

2. What is a pilot study?

A pilot study is a small experiment designed to gather information prior a larger study in order to improve the latter's quality and efficiency (Sampson 2004:p,383). Also, Wojnar & Swanson (2007:p,172) see a pilot study as a preliminary trial of research which is essential to the development of an extensive training programme. While pilot studies can be used to refine research instrument and interview schedule; they have greater use in data collection in foreshadowing research problems and questions (Sampson 2004: p,383). Not only can a pilot study reveal deficiency in the research design but it may also check the validity and reliability of results and these can be addressed before time and resources are spent on a large scale study (Ibid).

Stevens (2003:p,236) argues that a preliminary study is mandatory in order to reach an informed choice regarding the most appropriate form of data collection for the main study. It is against this notion that for the purpose of this research project; a pilot study as a pre study of the fuller study seemed necessary. Fewer subjects than planned for the full study were sampled. This study sought to answer the research question: How do MEd postgraduate students experience research supervision at a South African Universities?

3. Research Design: Phenomenology

Postgraduate supervision is a phenomenon to be explored in a qualitative manner (Dietz, Jansen & Wadee 2006: p, 37) and the phenomenological qualitative research method was used to collect descriptions of postgraduate students' lived supervision experiences. Husserl's (1998) descriptive phenomenology was chosen for this pilot study.

4. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

4.1. Sampling

Employing purposive sampling, two participants who experience the phenomena under investigation were chosen. Purposive sampling is the sample chosen on the basis of the purpose of the study (Leedy & Ormrod 2005: p, 206). The participants sampled were 2010 part-time postgraduate students studying MEd at University of X urban and rural campuses; one male MEd fulltime student from rural campus and one female part-time student at urban campus.

Van Kaam (2005: p, 307) proposes that the first requirement when selecting the research participants is that:

- The subject has to have the experience of the phenomena under study.
- The research participant must be willing to participate in lengthy interviews and follow up interviews.
- The research participant must be able to provide a rich full description
- The participant has to grant the researcher the right to tape record the interviews.
- The participant has to be verbally fluent and able to communicate his feelings, emotions, thoughts and perceptions in relation to the phenomena under study.

Participants for this study were approached with the above criteria in mind. Each participant had either lived the experience or was in the process of living through it. In my quest to find the willing participants; colleagues and friends were approached. The research participants who made themselves available were initially contacted

through written invitation letters (see Appendix D), followed up telephonically and a convenient location and time were determined for the interview.

4.2. Ethical issues

The ethical implications of the research were an important consideration in this study and the researcher was aware of ethical obligation to the participants (Van Kaam 2005: p, 309). Approval for this study was obtained from the Education Faculty Ethics Committee. Adherence to ethical criteria, avoidance of disruptions, and informed consent from the participants was attempted by the researcher. When the participants' interests and willingness was confirmed, they were briefly informed of the research design, the nature of the research as well as the purpose of the research. A consent form ensuring them of anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation and a right to withdraw from participating was signed (see Appendix E).

4.3. Interviews

Phenomenological studies tend to make use of unstructured interviews. Leedy & Ormrod (2005: p, 109) confirms that the phenomenological unstructured interview is an informal open ended conversation where misconceptions can be clarified as they occur. During the phenomenological interviews the natural language of the participant is used while the description is transcribed and serves as data (Ibid).

Following Fourtounas (2003), Grant (2005) in their phenomenological studies that make use of written descriptions; the initial request to the two volunteers was for written descriptions of situations regarding their supervision experiences on the MEd programme. The descriptions varied in length and revealed a fairly organised depiction rather than a lived account of their experience. The written reports received also appeared somewhat distant and reflective in nature. To reduce bias and misinterpretation the opportunity for the participant to speak for themselves had to be created. Therefore rather than to accept a written report, the story of the experience had to be told.

4.3.1. Follow- up Interviews

Van Kaam (2005:p, 241) firmly believes that it is helpful to conduct follow up interviews and indicates that this procedure of having the subject read his original

description helps the participant to recall finer details of the situation that was experiencing. It is for this reason that the participants were invited to a face to face interview. The researcher listened carefully to their verbal account of their experiences. During the follow up interview the researcher was careful not to include any additional information from my own interpretations which could influence the participants' original mean.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was applied in this research study in the manner proposed by Giorgi & Giorgi (2003). Wertz (2005) and Grant (2004) have employed similar ways of analysing data. As part of implementing bracketing, a list of researcher's beliefs and expectations that might have biased the interview and data analysis was compiled. These included

- The experience the researcher had on postgraduate supervision as she is currently experiencing the phenomena under investigation.
- Thoughts that the participants may try to give the researcher information they expect was sought.

For the purpose of this study the following steps for data analysis were used:

The transcribed language from the interview served as data. The data was read and re read to obtain a sense of the whole as the transcribed interviews in Giorgi (2008b) view require a number of readings. While attempting to contain the experience to the specific situation identified by the participant; the researcher engaged in the phenomenological (epoche) the first level of bracketing by resisting any temptation to contribute to the original meanings presented. Then each interview script was read more than once and colour coded with a highlighter the various themes for each interview. With the aid of bracketing the essence of the phenomenon began to reveal itself. Giorgi & Giorgi (2003) advise the researcher to adopt a phenomenological stance by neither questioning nor making explicit the general sense.

STEP 2: NATURAL MEANINGS

From the readings of the data natural meanings unit emerged. The whole sense of meanings was differentiated into manageable coherent units where partial meanings make up a whole. Bracketing in this level also continued. While retaining the narrative sequence in the participants' home language, the initial description was rewritten in the second language that is English. Table 1 indicates some of the natural meanings extracted from the data.

Table 1: UNITS OF GENERAL MEANINGS

RESPONDENT: P1

1. I was told about my supervisor
2. Who never contacted me telephonically, by e-mail or otherwise
3. I was anxious to know why
4. I was allocated another supervisor
5. Who told me he is too busy, he has many PhD postgraduate students
6. That made me angry
7. I had to go back to that supervisor who showed no interest in me or my work
8. I was helped by the MEd programme coordinator
9. I became involved in group supervision with other postgraduate students
10. When my research proposal was accepted, I went back to my supervisor
11. She showed interest this time
12. I did not like the feeling of being alone with her,
13. I lack research skills and I needed support
14. She had little support, I was helped by other postgraduate students
15. She seemed to be too busy to contact me
16. I showed up in her office uninvited every time, she was not there.

RESPONDENT P2

1. What was it like? I was over the moon when I was accepted
2. Little did I know the stress of juggling between work and studies.
3. Shame, my supervisor became so sympathetic to an extent of neglecting me
4. I wanted this promotion at work; I pushed myself into working hard

5. If it was not for those postgraduate students I met, I would have dropped out long ago

6. My supervisor thinks I'm smart because of the high position I'm at work

7. I was the one who made contact, he gave me less time

8. I enjoyed group supervision; some postgraduate students were very helpful

9. He motivated me by congratulating me every time I moved a step forward

STEP 3: CENTRAL THEMES

Each meaning unit was re-examined in terms of its relevance and significance to supervision experiences. Central themes were established in an unbiased manner. Attempts were made to identify the dominant meaning of each unit. From a psychological perspective, the participants' descriptions were rephrased in a simple language.

STEP 4: SITUATED CONSTITUENT

With respect to phenomena under investigation, the essence of that situation for the participant was revealed. Repetitive themes and descriptions that were considered irrelevant to postgraduate supervision were eliminated. The remaining themes were addressed and transformed in psychological language thus making the meaning of the participants clear. The remaining themes that were considered relevant for the phenomena under study are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: ESSENCES

1. I was told about my supervisor
2. Who never contacted me telephonically, by email or otherwise
3. told me he is too busy with PhD postgraduate students
4. I was helped by the programme co-ordinator
5. I became involved in group supervision with other postgraduate students
6. She showed interest this time
7. I did not like the feeling of being alone
8. I lack basic research skills and I need support
9. She had little support
10. I was helped by other postgraduate students.

11. Over the moon when I was accepted
12. Supervisor became sympathetic
13. I would have dropped out
14. I made contact, he gave me less time

STEP 5: SITUATED NARRATIVE DESCRIPTIONS

The meaning units transformed into psychological language were tied together to form a consistent description. The individual situated structure included the concrete aspects of the situation that answer the research question. Table 3 indicates the clustered units of relevant meanings that form a consistent description.

Table 3: Clustering units of relevant meaning to form a consistent description

1. Being told
    - I was told about my supervisor
    - Told me he is too busy
2. Sense of belonging
    - Over the moon when I was accepted
    - I needed support
    - I did not like the feeling of being alone
    - He neglected me
    - I would have dropped out
3. Lack of communication
    - Who never contacted me telephonically, by e- mail or otherwise
    - I made contact, he had less time
4. Group supervision
    - I became involved in group supervision
    - I was helped by the programme coordinator
    - I was helped by other postgraduate students

STEP 6: GENERAL SITUATED STRUCTURE

Having completed the Individual Situated Structure, a general level description was developed from each protocol. At this point the aspects of postgraduate supervision became the central focus while the particulars of the specific situation were omitted.

Table 4: Determining themes from clusters of meaning

Clusters of meaning	Central theme
1. Being told	Feelings of belonging to co supervision
2. Sense of belonging	
3. Lack of communication	
4. Co supervision	

STEP 7: GENERAL PROTOCOL STRUCTURE

The general structure of postgraduate supervision is the descriptive answer to the main research question: How do MEd postgraduate students experience research supervision? The general description of the structure of the phenomenon required the above steps. Each protocol was analysed individually as bracketing was applied to allow for emerging themes. In moving towards general protocol structure what is implicit as Husserl put it in the original description is made explicit Van Kaam's words (2005:p,305):"By explication , implicit awareness of a complex phenomena becomes explicit formulated knowledge of its components".

6. FINDINGS

6.1. Biographical results

To obtain diversity, the sampled participants were middle aged adult male studying full time at rural campus and female part-time postgraduate students registered for Masters in Education in 2010 at urban campuses. While the male participant was married with two children and employed as a fulltime professional teacher; the female teacher was a single mother of three children who also has full time employment in teaching profession. Working fulltime and studying part-time can pose challenges and power struggles as the person juggles between being a student and a worker.

Furthermore, a gap was identified in that respondent 1 graduated his Honours degree in 2009 in the same institution he is pursuing his Masters degree. But respondent 2 last studied Honours degree in 2007 at Nelson Mandela Metropole

University. Their home language was Xhosa and the interviews were conducted in their home language as suggested by van Kaam (2005). Although the interviews were transcribed in English, an attempt to stay as close as possible to their lived experiences was made. However, the translated interview may not flow as well as the transcribed interview of those who reported directly in English.

6.2. Emerging themes

Being told

One of the findings in this pilot study was that the participants spoke of how the experience happened to them. There seem to be a contrast between what they did and what they were told to do. They continuously mentioned that they were told of something. It was not that they chose to do. By implication, it was as if something happened to them. In a sense, “being told” seem to have power over them hence they became passive and receptive. In other words they allowed the experience to take control over them.

Sense of belonging

Initially, the participants reported that they had struggled in their supervision experiences to attain a sense of belonging as one student was thrown from one supervisor to another with different experiences from each supervisor. After admission to MEd programme the participants claim they felt disconnected. This initial lack of support from supervisors led to discouragement, frustrations and loneliness. They cited several reasons for this lack of engagement such as “too busy, spending less time with the supervisor, lack of support in research skills”. Yet, a sense of belonging might contribute to positive experiences**.**

Lack of communication

Another theme to emerge from the data was lack of communication. The volunteering participants reported that they communicated less with their supervisors. This led to poor communication skills which can be perceived as diminishing the quality of supervision. In the absence of communication with their supervisors, the participants reported that they felt lonely and insecure. Somewhat, their feelings of distress, anxiety and frustration and helplessness were likely to be

unnoticed by supervisors. For these postgraduate students part-time study was a lonely process where they felt physically, emotionally and socially cut out.

Group supervision

Furthermore, a major finding was that the participants were helped by other researchers who were more supportive both academically, and emotionally. Postgraduate students in the group provided their peers with a sense of belonging. Peers have been the most group part-time participant resorted to in the absence of support from their supervisors. It is in these groups that the participants claim they felt they belong to the MEd cohort.

7. Discussions

This research study was useful in developing the researcher's interviewing skills and in applying data analysis technique. In essence, what emerged in this pilot study was that postgraduate students' experiences of supervision were viewed according to their hopes, frustrations, intentions and their histories of learning. For these piloted postgraduate students, it can be said their part-time study was experienced as a lonely process where they felt physical, emotional and socially cut out. In the absence of communication with their supervisors, they felt lonely and insecure.

8. Methodological considerations

Since a preliminary study is mandatory in order to reach informed decisions regarding the most appropriate form of data collection (Stevens 2003:p,237)); Giorgi's phenomenological psychological method was useful in this pilot study because it took subjective experiences as its main focus. Furthermore, Giorgi's method clarified the essence of being a part-time student in a Higher Education Institution. The pilot study greatly reduces a number of unanticipated problems. Of course, selecting the most suitable method can be challenging. Wojnar & Swanson (2007:p,179) suggests that descriptive phenomenology is more useful for those who tend to seek similarities in human experiences, look for patterns, seek universals and ultimately aim to develop interventions may be more suited to a descriptive mind set. Alternatively, those who tend to relish nuances, appreciate differences, embrace ambiguity and seek uniqueness in contextualised lived experiences may be more given to an interpretive mind set (Ibid). While revealing their stories the participants

made sense of their lived experiences and communicated meaning, it's then that my phenomenological choice of descriptive method became clear to me.

In the phenomenological study the researcher is presumed to be a participant observer whose presence is meaningful to the subject (Husserl 1998). Inherent to phenomenological attitude is the understanding that the presence of the researcher inevitably influences the form and the content of their findings (Giorgi & Giorgi 2003). But, Wertz (2005:p,177) ascertains that during the interview the researcher cannot be a mere spectator but must experience with the respondent in order to study experiences. However, phenomenological studies require suspension of bias so that the studied phenomena can be regarded with an openness that allows aspects to be revealed from the subjects' viewpoint. Thus, this pilot presented me with an opportunity to practise bracketing.

9. Limitations to the study

Pilot studies are recommended for qualitative studies in order to focus on particular areas which may be unclear (Sampson 2008:p,385). This may provide an indication of the possible responses of the participants and of the appropriateness of research design and method. However, Reid (2006) questions the value of pilot studies for qualitative research approaches because it is extremely limited in terms of data obtained to the findings of the main study. It is for this reason that the researcher considered it not appropriate at this stage to answer a specific question with each respondent prior the main study. It is understood, however that there is most often than not, a bias during the analysis and interpretation of a qualitative research study (Wojnar & Swanson 2007: p, 175).

10. Conclusion

Throughout data analysis, rather than to attempt to translate or interpret the experience, the researcher tried to constantly to apply what Husserl (1998) calls eidetic epoche. The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim. Each of the 2 participants provided a written reflections, face to face interview audio taped describing the experiences of postgraduate supervision. Data collected was analysed using Giorgis descriptive phenomenological method. Protocols of analysis

included categorising of significant statements, creating individual situated structure, developing general situated structure and developing a general description.

APPENDIX G: Sample of the phenomenological interview responses

Researcher: "Can you describe for me in as much detail as possible how it is feeling like to be supervised in your MEd project?"

Respondent: "I undertook Masters degree at University of X because I wanted to improve my career, to further my studies and have better employment opportunities. I did my Honours degree at NMMU it was quite far from me as I had to travel now and then from East London to Port Elizabeth. University of X is one of the universities that I obtained most of my education. I chose University of X as it is the nearest university and I wanted to have contacts with my supervisor for my research. University of X is one of the best known universities for its reputation of excellence that had produced good leaders in South Africa. It is always my first priority university especially it was amongst the universities that entered into partnership to offer the training of teachers the learning area that my investigation is based on.

I felt I will not have a problem in receiving a supervisor who will be able to assist with my field of study. But things are done differently at University of X than in NMMU especially in research. I was given books to review during my mini dissertation that I did at Honours degree and I felt quite comfortable often obtaining high marks. But I think University of X seem to more tightly in its schedules on research programmes. I do not know how to define supervision but I am sure it something that has to do with someone assisting you to reach your goals of attaining your degree. My experience on supervision at first was quite distant and confusing and I felt discouraged. Although I met familiar faces during the induction programme, I felt uncomfortable to be among strangers. The postgraduate students looked old, sophisticated, well learned and professional but I never made friends easily.

On sharing our experiences with the programme coordinator I never felt ashamed when I told her that I was confused I was not sure of how to conduct research on my own. We were shown library and its facilities and the previous postgraduate students of University of X were more conversant with the lecturers as well as with the university, I felt like a stranger in an island. Although the librarian showed us how to google and look for electronic journals it took me a while to be able to do that on my own. I then decide to buy a laptop and internet access at home to assist me with my

research studies. I got the support I needed when I first came to enquire about MEd before I was even admitted. I followed the necessary procedures on how to do the proposal and I was guided and encouraged by the Programme Co-ordinator. Although I had fears when I submitted my proposal, I was relieved when I received the news that it was approved. Yes, I did sign a learning contract that indicated that I will receive guidance and supervision during my studies and that both the supervisor and I are bound by this contract during my studies.

I was not familiar with the University of X style of supervision. It is not easy to select your own advisor because as a student one is not always aware who is responsible for which area of study. There are always fears of the unknown whenever one is to meet a person that you have to work with for a long duration. It takes some time to understand who you will be working with. Unfortunately we only had a few meetings with my first supervisor before we could understand each other. My supervisor was a foreigner who was not even friendly with me; he seemed to be too busy and had not much interest in my research topic. Although the guy was a workaholic but he seemed incompetent in my research field. He told me he knew less about the curriculum issues but more on researching skills. He would give a list of books and journals that I will have to go find in the internet and in the library. He would tell me to go and read 10 articles and summarise them and I find it difficult to do. I was just not sure of where we getting to or what he actually wanted.

Being supervised by a male was kind of intimidating. I was not sure if I seated correctly, spoke fluently, or expressed my desires in an acceptable manner. He always looked at me suspiciously as if I was an incompetent student. He was too much sure of himself. I would sit in his office not knowing what to say to me or what to do with me. He would call me into his office and we will sit for hours talking less to each other but watching him does his own university work.

I was not on ice for a period of 3 months not knowing where my supervisor was as he never returned my calls nor was he available in his office. I felt frustrated as the time was moving without making any progress. I was told the supervisor has left the university and I was allocated to another supervisor. I was a bit relieved that I would not be seeing him again because my first supervisor made uncomfortable in so many ways. I was disappointed that my second supervisor was also a male but he had less

male ego than the first one. By the way he was more like a father, a role model and a coach. W e clicked at once as he was an expert in the field of my study.

I expected to get guidance about research skills, constructive criticism, to be advised and that is what I experienced throughout the stages of my research. On my part I tried to always work ahead of my supervisor, to be motivated and dedicated to my work, to plan, to be organised at all times, to always submit work before or on due dates, be devoted to what I do, to be positive and motivated, allow guidance at all times from those who are always willing to support. As a result I have learnt research skills but the most difficult aspects of research supervision I have experienced so far were analysing data.

Both my first and second supervisor contacted me through e-mails and I was also told by the co-ordinator of MEd programme that she made an appointment with my supervisor to meet each other. There were regular meetings with my supervisor who offered constructive criticism through stimulating discussion. The supervisor showed consistent interest in the research topic. My understanding is that both the supervisor and the student should always have regular meetings on agreed periods (e.g. once a fortnight). If that fails both must try to contact each other to enquire if one has a problem.

Fortunately my second supervisor always ensures that we meet regularly. If he was not going to be available he informed me in time and we schedule the appointment to a later date. He is patient and when I fail to meet the deadline he checks if I am not having a problem. He goes out of his way to give assistance. He guides and gives advises at all times. We have a good supervisor-student relationship. He has the ability to communicate and is there to make sure that I will achieve success. We contact each other through e-mails and telephone. I meet with my supervisor once sometimes twice per three weeks. Both the supervisor and I took between two to three hours of supervision. In supervision sessions I ask questions for the purpose of knowing more about the research expectations for each chapter. He comments on the hard copy and discuss the corrections.

Oral feedback is supported by written feedback I write down the comments whilst discussing them although at times I become confused when it comes to e.g. how to write quotation. Previous supervisor had a different way of doing it than the present

supervisor. I make use of the University Support Services such as libraries, internet etc once a week. I receive full support from the supervisor because every time we meet there is not a single day that I leave without having discussed any problems that I encounter. The librarians when I need assistance are always available. To my colleagues they go out of their way and do not want to leave me behind in every chapter even though at times they are ahead of me. They are very encouraging and motivating and try by all means to assist even though we are not under the same supervisor. I contact the University for Support by e-mail, phone and most of the time we meet face to face. I do seek assistance from elsewhere besides my supervisor e.g. postgraduate students, librarian because at times I need to know how others are doing things and learn from them, e.g. with computer at times I need assistance technically, Other MEd postgraduate students are very supportive .

I never received a postgraduate guide neither from registration nor from my supervisor. It was only through a friend that I was aware that there was such a guide that tells you all about your roles expectations, supervision and other university practises. I found it so valuable and helpful. Through being motivated by a fellow researcher I attended one training workshop on postgraduate supervision organised by GMRDC. It was quite informative and I was excited about it. However, as an assistant manager at work, I can no longer be absent from work every time there is an organised workshop for postgraduates. Moreover my leave days have expired, I find it difficult to attend training sessions held during weekdays. I am worried because I am losing out on a lot of skills and knowledge. That the university assist with funding in the form of fee waiver is helpful although I am disappointed that we have to pay registration fees".

Researcher: "What can be done by the University to improve on your supervision experiences of mEd programme"?

Respondent: "I suggest team work amongst supervisors so that they agree on the same requirements in terms of research procedures for postgraduate students...e.g. supervisors tend to differ when it comes to which quotation method to use. I appeal to supervisors to be patient with postgraduate students who come from other university who have less research skills than University of X postgraduate students".

Researcher: "Thank you"

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES